

Using a One-time Coupon Code Multiple Times

Rabbi Daniel Dombroff

Question: There are many online shopping websites which offer special coupon codes for new customers with free shipping or discounts. If someone who is not a new customer somehow obtains a new customer coupon code, is it permitted for him to use it?

Answer: The halachic issue that arises in this case is one of *mat'eh Akum*, misleading a non-Jew. The halacha is that *mat'eh Akum* is not treated as an actual act of *gezel* (theft), where the Gemara states (Bava Kama 79b) that it must be similar to the act of stealing described in the *pasuk* (Shmuel II 23:21) “*vayigzol es hachanis miyad hamitzri*,” “he stole the sword from the Egyptian.” Rather, *mat'eh Akum* involves using subterfuge to obtain an object.

Nevertheless, it is the subject of great discussion, and is still problematic according to many opinions (We discussed the issue of *mat'eh akum* briefly in a previous segment on *gezel akum*, concerning whether one may use a different person's Amazon Prime account..) A similar question arises with respect to *geneivas da'as* (deceiving someone in a manner that causes some sort of loss), where all agree it is *assur* for one to do so to Jews and non Jews alike.

There are many considerations to take into account. Some were mentioned, and some will be mentioned in future articles. However, one consideration to take note of here, is whether using a coupon code in this case (or similar cases) could potentially lead to other problematic actions, such as misleading a Jew, which is even more problematic. We should use our best judgment to decide what the proper course of action is in these cases and if necessary, consult a rabbinic authority for guidance.