

HURTFUL WORDS PART 4

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In the past weeks we have discussed the various forbidden ways in which a person can cause harm with his speech. This prohibition does not necessarily restrict itself to causing pain with speech; any form of causing pain is prohibited¹. Below are a number of common forms of causing pain or inconvenience to other people:

1. Waking someone up from sleep for no valid reason.
2. Making a noise late at night when most people are sleeping.
3. Smoking in a place where other people are forced to smell the unpleasant odors. Indeed it is well-known that smoking does far more damage than cause mere inconvenience to those around him. People who smoke should be aware that they are not only harming themselves but they may well be harming their family members or friends who are regularly forced to breathe the polluted air caused by smoking. One non-smoker made a visit to his doctor who, after examining him, saw that his lungs were significantly darkened. The doctor was shocked to hear that this man never smoked. He lived with smokers who regularly smoked in his presence!
4. Dropping unpleasant litter in public places.
5. Deliberately keeping on one's cell phone in situations where it will disturb others such as wedding ceremonies or funerals.
6. Careless Driving.
7. Skipping in front of other people standing in a line.

These are just some of the ways in which pain or inconvenience is caused to other people. We have already mentioned in past articles that the purpose of the commandments relating to interpersonal relationships is to develop a sensitivity to the feelings and needs of other people. The command of 'hurtful words' requires that we develop an awareness that we constantly find ourselves in situations in which we can effect the well-being of our fellow man.

¹ Such acts certainly constitute a transgression of 'Love Thy Neighbor' but they may also fall into the category of 'Hurtful Words' - see Mishpatey Shalom, Ch.7, p.86, Footnote 8.