

DO NOT STEAL PART 17

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

In this series we have seen that many actions that one may believe are permitted, actually constitute a form of stealing. Another form of behavior that fits in this category is cutting ahead on a line. One may recognize that this is not the most admirable behavior, however not that it is actually forbidden.

Some authorities argue that cutting ahead on a line is tantamount to stealing.[2] To do so is not stealing from the other people in the line, rather it is stealing from the owner of the store or the institution. This is because we presume that the owner of the store wants there to be an orderly line so that people are served in an organized fashion. Therefore, one who cuts a line, is using the store owner's property in a way that is against his will - therefore this is considered a type of stealing.[3] Others claim it is a different transgression of 'hasagas gevul', that is, infringing on someone else's rights to a service.[4]

However, the store owner or manager of an institution himself has the right to serve any customer first even if he is at the end of the line. For example, if a bank manager sees a preferred customer standing on line, he may choose to bring him to the head of the line.

One is permitted to hold a place in line for a friend, however he may not hold two places in line, one for himself and one for his friend.

Some people in stores have the practice of placing the items that they have thus far taken, in the line and then continuing their shopping, whilst maintaining their place in the line. If the shopper did not deliberately plan to do this, rather he was in the line, and then remembered that he needed to buy one or two other items, then we can presume that the other shoppers (and the store owner) will not object. However, if a person deliberately leaves his items in the line, and then buys many other items, the other shoppers will likely object to being forced to wait far longer than they initially thought when they came in the line.[5]

[1] Much of the information for this essay is taken from "Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Yisroel Pinchos Bodner.

[2] This is described as 'avak gezul' - translated as the dust of stealing. It means that this act is not exactly the same as stealing but that it is akin to it in some way.

[3] See Bodner, p.78, footnote 219.

[4] The prohibition of hasagas gevul will be discussed in a future series, with Hashem's help.

[5] It is not clear that such behavior constitutes stealing but it is certainly not an ideal way to act.

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