

Challenge of the Times

Prepared for the
Kinus Klal Yisrael

Citi Field

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ברוכים הבאים בשם ה'!

Welcome to what promises to be the most
momentous evening of your life!

It is no coincidence that Klal Yisrael has gathered as one to unite in facing the challenges of modern technology at precisely this moment. We stand in the final days before our annual renewal of *Kabbalas HaTorah*. Our unanimous declaration of “*יגעשה ונשמע*” over 3,300 years ago was our defining moment as a nation. Yet *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 88a) point out that generations later, Klal Yisrael was moved to reaffirm their dedication to Hashem and His Torah.

Throughout our generations of wandering since we entered this long and bitter *golus*, our nation has been faced with many trials. Only by standing together and remaining firmly entrenched in the faith of our fathers have we persevered. Yet today we find ourselves threatened by a test of frightening magnitude, one that has already done untold harm to our people. It is an unseen adversary that jeopardizes our very existence.

Once again we are standing at a crossroads, a defining moment in the history of our nation. Our *Gedolim* have risen to the challenge and called upon us, the rank and file of Klal Yisrael, to join them in taking up the fight. And on a personal level, this is a defining moment in the lives of each one of us. By joining the *asifa* we are reaffirming our dedication to the principles of the Torah, and we are renewing our proud rallying call of “*יגעשה ונשמע*.” We are showing the world yet again that through our dedication we are truly worthy of being the nation of Hashem and the bearers of his Torah.

In the words of the *Navi*: “*כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ וערפל: The darkness will cover the land and gloom over the nations, but on you will Hashem shine and His honor will be visible upon you.*” We are at a time when the world is covered with darkness, when it eagerly embraces a harmful and destructive path. Yet Klal Yisrael is prepared to stand apart, to buck the trend and fight the current. For this,

the *Navi* promises us, we will earn that our paths be illuminated by the light of Hashem and we will merit that His glory will rest upon us.

To place this evening in its proper perspective, the following critical points must be underscored:

Internet Solutions

It must be made clear before we introduce the various solutions that will be offered for the internet, such as filters and blocks, that these are not true “solutions.” They do not solve the internet problem. The only real “solution” is to ban all access to the internet. And that, in fact, is what each of us who can do so must do.

A *yeshiva bachur*, kollel fellow or a *melamed* Torah, all of whom are not required to have internet for their job, should not own or come in contact with any devices capable of accessing the internet — with or without filters.

There is no excuse for using the internet where it is not absolutely necessary.

Internet access must be viewed as a “*b'dieved*,” an absolute last resort where there is no other possible means. The only reason we discuss filters and other solutions altogether is to accommodate businesspeople and the like

Special Thanks!

We wish to thank **Zman** magazine for researching and writing this very informative and important publication, produced especially for this historical *asifa*. **Zman's** well-deserved reputation for in-depth, quality, riveting articles is plainly evident in this work and is the reason we chose them to represent our interests at this ground-breaking event.

who are forced by their situation to use the internet. For them, there are various possibilities that will be discussed in detail to minimize the risks associated with going online.

Anyone who need not expose himself to a dangerous and highly contagious disease is forbidden by the Torah to do so, even if he takes all possible precautions.

Uniting Against the Threat

The *Gedolim* have urged Klal Yisrael to gather as one to fight a common enemy. The problem is truly universal, and requires a united front to deal with. At this historic *asifa*, we must establish a basic standard for everyone to adhere to in their relation with the internet.

The purpose of our gathering together is to unify Klal Yisrael in recognizing the problem that affects all of us. Every Jew in every community must commit to dealing with it. The *asifa* will help us all understand what *daas Torah* dictates as the minimum safeguards that must be in place when we use the internet.

Of course, each *kehillah* must have its own Rav, Rosh Yeshiva or Rebbe to serve as its guide in all areas of life. This issue is no exception. Every *kehillah* may build on these basic standards according to the needs of its members. Praiseworthy are the communities that are able to implement even higher and better standards!

A Unique Opportunity

We are one nation and our gathering together tonight was intended to emphasize this point. Many of our actions and decisions are directly affected by those around us. For example, most of us have little temptation to work on Shabbos or eat non-kosher food, because we draw strength from our peers and the community around us.

This can be a powerful tool in the service of Hashem. At the same time, however, it makes our observance of the Torah and *mitzvos* much less personal. How much reward do we deserve for a

mitzvah we may be keeping largely due to peer pressure?

The trial of the internet is entirely different. This is a very personal *nisayon*, a test of the individual's character. Most internet use takes place in private. As such, the temptation to visit unsuitable sites is rarely tempered by a fear of discovery. It is a fight that goes on within the person and it is entirely between him and Hashem. This is an area where one's *Yiras Shamayim* is of overriding significance.

We must recognize this uniquely personal *ni-sayon* as a golden opportunity. Perhaps more than in any other area of our Torah-based lives, the internet gives us the opportunity to display our love for Hashem and our determination to fulfill His will.

Each time a Jew holds himself back from visiting a website that he knows is not appropriate, from one wrong click, he is acting out his pure love and fear of Hashem. It is a moment to be tapped in to; a moment that calls out for reflection and prayer. We are declaring through our actions: "Hashem, I am Your son! I love You and I want You to be proud of me! Help me overcome my *yetzer hara*, help me fulfill Your will!"

Maintaining our purity when dealing with the internet is a supreme expression of our dedication to and love for Hashem!

In Conclusion

The Torah states, "וְיִקְרָא יִי"א" — Make yourselves holy and you will be holy." *Chazal* derive from the seeming redundancy a lesson that, "אדם מקדש עצמו מלמטה מקדשין אותו מלמעלה" (יומא לט). — If a person makes himself holy below, he will be made holy from above." In other words, if we invest our effort to purify ourselves and rise above the spiritual pollution that surrounds us, we will merit Divine assistance from above.

May your participation in this once-in-a-lifetime event carry you through all the trials you will face in life, and may this merit earn you unlimited blessings from above, for good health, abundant wealth and happiness for you and all of your family! ■



Family Security And Issues Of Lifnei Iveir



Question

I have internet in my home and office, and a friend of mine claims that if I do not filter or monitor the content, I could be violating the *issur of lifnei iveir lo sitein michshol*. He argues that my allowing unrestricted internet use by my family and employees will no doubt cause them spiritual harm, and the responsibility for the damage will be partially my fault. This concept is new to me. Is it indeed necessary for me to install the proper filtering software, or is it merely a suggestion for those who want to be *machmir*?

Answer

We are going to discuss an issue that might seem like an old topic, because there have been many gatherings to address the issue. Much to my surprise and chagrin, however, the message does not seem to have hit home. The security

we will discuss is that of the sanctity of the family, which is currently suffering from the most insidious and dangerous attack ever leveled against it: the internet.

If you are about to turn the page because you feel that you have heard all there is to say on this subject, please bear with me for a few pages. First of all, I doubt that you have heard everything. Second, even if you do not think that the subject pertains to you, you might learn in the course of the essay that it does. In my years serving the *frum* community, there has never been a burning issue that affects the community at large as profoundly as this one does. If I may borrow a term, the internet is the “silent killer” of the *neshamah*. It is very silent – it can be used in the privacy of a closed room in the home or office – and it’s very deadly. One can commit spiritual suicide, and those around him will be none the wiser, until it is far too late. No one can



know whether this problem affects a neighbor, a tablemate in *shul* or a *chavrusa* sitting across from you. As we will see, if it affects someone in your close circle of acquaintances, then it affects you as well.

Yet, people are either oblivious to the danger or are deliberately choosing not to focus on it.

Years back, when the initial gatherings regarding the internet took place, the Lakewood *mash-*

In discussing this topic, I will present an approach toward the internet geared to those who either absolutely need the internet or don't have the courage to get rid of it. Before I do so, however, I must issue a disclaimer: If you are among the lucky members of *Klal Yisrael* who do not have internet in their homes, please do not change that because of anything I am about to mention. Ultimately, the best response to the internet remains, and always will remain, not to have any access to it. If you don't need it, then don't have it. Not at home, not at the office, not on your cell phone and not anywhere else. That is the best security policy of all. Many people convince themselves that they need internet access, but if they would honestly assess the reasons that they are connected to the internet, they would realize that they could get by without it.

A case in point: some claim they save \$30-\$40 per month shopping online rather than going to the mall. That claim is debatable. Many husbands who track their expenditures have told me that the built-in shopping mall at home actually costs a lot more than it saves, because shopping becomes so easy that it encourages over-consumption. But even if the savings were significant, it's difficult to justify the danger of having the internet at home just for the convenience and possible savings of shopping online.

The Torah states that when we go to war, the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) joins us in the battle and enables us to be victorious. But the Divine escort is contingent upon one factor: "*V'hayah machanecha kadosh* – your camp shall be holy" (*Devarim* 23:15). The Torah warns, "*V'lo yir'eh b'cha ervas davar, veshov mei'acharecha* – He shall not see a shameful thing among you and turn away from behind you" (*ibid.*). Ultimately, then, one *ervas davar* costs us more than all of the savings and benefits we have from the internet. If we don't have the *Shechinah* with us, we cannot succeed in any of our endeavors. And the internet does

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giach, R' Mattisyahu Salamon, *shlita*, would travel from one community to the next and warn people about the danger. I would take the opportunity to “interview” friends and members of my *shul* who attended those gatherings. I would ask people what steps they would take based on what they had learned at the gatherings. To my dismay, a common response was, “I’m sure that this problem exists in other people’s homes, but *baruch Hashem*, my home is safe.” Another response that I would hear is, “I think that the *Rabbanim* are exaggerating in order to scare us into action.”

Unfortunately, the real story is no exaggeration. *Rabbeim*, *rabbanim* and community leaders will tell you that not a week goes by without having to deal with an internet-induced *shalom bayis* problem, *chinuch* problem, or with a very fine *bachur* – or at least what’s left of one – who calls crying and begging to help him extricate himself from the tentacles of the internet.



not come with the potential for only one “*ervas davar*.” Rather, it affords access to thousands of them each hour.

My first plea is, therefore, that every person who has internet access should reevaluate the decision he made when he brought the internet into his home. He should determine whether he truly needs it, or if he can dispose of the potential pitfall – at least in the home, where it is most dangerous.

The rest of the advice in this essay is addressed to those who must have internet access.

No One is Immune to Harmful Influence

Before we move onto the practical realm of how to deal with the internet, it is important to address those people who feel that their families are impervious to the temptation provided by the internet.

In *Parashas Vayeira*, the Torah relates that Sarah Imeinu saw Yishmael interacting with Yitzchak in an inappropriate manner, and she implored Avraham Avinu to banish Yishmael from their home. The Torah states, “*Vayeira hadavar m’od b’einei Avraham al odos b’no* – The matter greatly distressed Avraham regarding his son” (*Bereishis* 21:11). Simply understood, “his son” refers to Yishmael – i.e., Avraham was greatly distressed that he would have to banish his son from his home. The Chasam Sofer explains this verse differently, however. He says that Avraham was greatly distressed because of his son Yitzchak. *My Yitzchak, the holy Yitzchak, is susceptible to the influence of Yishmael?* Avraham wondered. *There must be something wrong with him if he cannot withstand the likes of Yishmael.* But Sarah Imeinu knew better. *Hashem told Avraham, “Kol asher tomar eilecha Sarah, sh’ma b’kolah* – whatever Sarah tells you, heed her voice” (*ibid.* 21:12).

Sarah Imeinu taught us an invaluable lesson. No matter how pure and holy a person is, when he is exposed to temptation he is liable to fall prey to it. And if that is true about the relatively innocuous temptation embodied by the presence of Yishmael in the otherwise spiritually uplifted environment of Avraham and Sarah’s home, how much more true is it about the presence of the internet which contains temptations that are so powerful and incredibly accessible.

One lesson we learn, then, is that no one can claim that he is impervious to the temptation of the internet. We must all seek ways to protect and distance ourselves from this threat to our spiritual security.

But there is another important lesson that we can learn from the story of Yitzchak and Yishmael. All of the forms of security we are about to discuss will help only for our own homes. The safeguards we put into place will not help if we do not know where our children are at all times, with whom they are associating, and what those children are exposed to and able to access.

While the problem of harmful influence from bad friends has always existed to some extent, a decade or two ago we could suffice with the knowledge that our children weren’t playing with “real bums.” But today, even the most innocent looking children, from the best families, may have access to the worst images imaginable.

Your son will tell you, “I’m just going to Motty’s house.” Sounds safe enough. *Motty’s a nice boy, you tell yourself. He doesn’t watch movies or hang out with the wrong people.* Little do you know that within minutes of being in Motty’s house, your son can sink to the lowest depths of *Gehinnom*. It is still an unfortunate fact that many Jewish homes have internet connections that are unfiltered or unmonitored.

Parents naively supply their children with media devices (such as iPad and most MP3 players



sold today), without realizing that they all come with full internet capabilities via their wireless connection. It is the parents' responsibility to thoroughly investigate the phones, media players and games that they are providing to their children. One can download damaging content to be viewed with incredible ease, and erase the evidence shortly after viewing, thus leaving no visible trace of the damage that has been caused.

I will present an approach toward the internet geared to those who either absolutely need the internet or don't have the courage or fortitude to get rid of it.



A fellow I know once came running to me, frantically seeking my advice. "My son went to his friend's house," he said, "and they saw some very inappropriate things. I thought it was a good home. I can't understand what happened to this generation!"

"Did you check out the home before you allowed him to play there?" I asked.

"Check out the house?" he asked incredulously. "I sit next to the father in shul. My son is in a wonderful yeshivah, and this boy is his classmate. I already checked out the shul we *daven* in and the yeshivah I send him to. I know the father personally. How much more checking must I do?"

"I'm sorry," I countered, "but you have to start asking whether a home is protected from the dangers of the internet before sending your child to play there."

"I can't ask that question," he insisted. "I'm

afraid to hurt people's feelings. I don't want to step on anyone's toes!"

This response was astounding, considering what this fellow does for a living: he's a trial lawyer. All he does all day is step on toes. He breaks a few, injures others... but for his son's sanctity and safety he's afraid to step on toes. He spends his workday being aggressive, but when it comes to this subject, he's afraid to be branded a "*frumak*," so he'd rather blame it on the generation than face reality.

The reality today is that part of your job as a parent is to make sure you know which houses are protected from the internet and which are not. It is a very delicate issue, and it *can* cause bad feelings, but if you are not willing to check into what your child's friends can expose your child to, you are not doing your job as a parent. If you are in doubt, then it's better to err on the side of caution. When you consider the grave damage that can be done to your child in seconds, you will probably agree that it is better to disassociate from those who are willing to take a risk, rather than have your child caught in the "Net."

So while we will discuss what can be done to protect our own homes, it is equally vital that you know where your children are going each time they leave the house. It sounds wearisome, but a momentary lapse in your vigilance can introduce them to a *yetzer hara* that is extremely difficult to fight.

The Case of Shloimy

A *bachur* – we'll call him Shloimy – once called me to request an appointment, several days before he was scheduled to return to yeshivah after *Pesach bein hazmanim* (intersession). Shloimy entered my study, closed the door, sat down and began to cry. He spent the next 25 minutes crying. I couldn't make out any intelligible words from what he was saying, but the torture that he was going through was expressed clearly with-



out words. When he finally drew himself together, he told me that less than half a year earlier, on Thanksgiving weekend, his parents went away for a *Shabbos* and left him home alone.

The word “downhill” does not do justice to Shloimy’s trajectory over the eight or nine weeks that followed. His interest in learning went into such a tailspin that his rebbi called the parents to discuss it. “What happened to my star *talmid*?” he asked in concern. “I ask him questions during *shiur* and I realize that he was daydreaming; he hasn’t been doing *chazzarah* (reviewing).”

The parents didn’t know what to make of Shloimy’s downturn. Rather than investigate the possible causes, they reasoned that children have their ups and downs, and they figured that Shloimy would eventually come out of the rut on his own. Shloimy – by his own admission – continued to spiral ever-downward for the rest of the winter.

Shloimy comes from an amazing family, and their entire home is run *al taharas hakodesh*. There are no magazines in the home, no television – nothing that can lead a person astray – except for one thing. Shloimy’s father is a businessman, and he feels that he needs a computer with internet access in his home. And on that fateful weekend, Shloimy began a descent on the slippery slope that has felled so many.

A while after my conversation with Shloimy, I managed to have a conversation with Shloimy’s father without betraying to him that his son had spoken to me. Shloimy’s father mentioned that he had been to two of the gatherings discussing internet access.

“What action did you take after you left those gatherings?” I asked him.

He said that he understood that it was important for other families to have the systems that I encourage people to install, but in his family it

was absolutely unnecessary. “You have to know your kids,” he said. “Each one of my children is a bigger *tachshit* (loosely translated: *gem*) than the next.”

“Besides,” he added, “I once installed a filter for a few days, and it blocked out too much, so I removed it.”

I add this last detail because aside from the naïveté regarding how powerful a *yetzer hara* we are dealing with, I found the lack of patience in this case to be a bit odd. When we are talking about the spiritual success or failure of our children, is a system that blocks too much so bad? And if it is too much of a pain, why go without any system? Try another one, and then another if you must, but don’t go without anything!

Finally, with Shloimy’s permission, I told his father what had been going on for the previous five months. “It’s a shame that you didn’t accept the message from the *asifos* that you attended,” I said, “because now we have a broken person to deal with, and we can only *hope* to get him back.”

I said we could only *hope* to get him back because, as Shloimy told me during his “confession,” not only did he feel terrible guilt for the *aveiros* he had already done, but even as he tried to do *teshuvah*, he simply couldn’t concentrate because of the images floating around in his head.

Certainly, *Hashem* gave us a gift called *teshuvah*, and just as a computer has a delete button, *Hashem* can help a person delete those images as well. However, if the proper precautions are not taken, a relapse is possible at any time. An integral part of the *teshuvah* process is ensuring that the proper steps are taken to help mitigate the possibility of transgression.

Issur Yichud with a Computer

I have had tens of cases just like this one. Young, budding *talmidei chachamim* who were at the top of their respective classes in yeshi-



vah became broken and dispirited because they were left in a vulnerable position by parents who were too proud, or too naïve, to acknowledge that their son might be tempted by the impurity that is so readily available on the internet.

For those who feel that they or their children are immune to the temptation posed by the internet, a quote from *Rambam* should dispel that notion. The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Issurei Biah* 22:18–

I know that this last statement will sound outlandish to some people. After one gathering regarding the internet, I asked someone who attended, “What do you consider the most powerful line you heard at the gathering?”

He smiled and said, “I know what the most powerful line was, but I think it was a great *chiddush*. HaRav Mattisyahu Salamon said that if the internet was around in the times of *Chazal*, they would have enacted an *issur yichud* upon it. How can there be an *issur yichud* with a computer – it's not a living being!”

The *Mashgiach's* words were certainly not novel; in fact, they reach the crux of the issue. He understands how powerful this *yetzer hara* is because he has dealt with the fallout. Dealing with the fallout has shown that being with a computer, alone, leaves a person very vulnerable. In fact, we might argue that in an ordinary *yichud* situation, we are typically dealing with two people who can have a variety of reasons for resisting inappropriate behavior: pride, fear, etc. In the case of the internet, we are dealing with one person, with no culpability. The computer will not protest or say anything to anyone later on. If the person's conscience is unable to stop him – as unfortunately seems to be the case in an overwhelming number of instances – he is in a serious predicament.

On the very morning that I delivered a *shiur* on this topic, *Hashem* sent me yet another case. This time, a father called me up and said, “I have a very open relationship with my son, and he discussed something with me that I think you can help us with. We need to talk to you together.”

I spoke to the father for a few minutes, and then I asked him whether I could speak to his son privately. I knew that the situation would cause an untold amount of embarrassment to the boy, and I wanted him to be able to face his father afterward. The father agreed, and when the boy entered the room, the first question he asked

Finally, with Shloimy's permission, I told his father what had been going on for the previous five months. “It's a shame that you didn't accept the message from the asifos that you attended,” I said, “because now we have a broken person to deal with, and we can only hope to get him back.”



20) writes, “There is nothing as difficult for the majority of the Jewish people as [the *mitzvah* to refrain] from illicit relationships... Our Sages taught that theft and illicit relationships are sins that a person is drawn to and desires... Therefore, it is worthwhile for a person to subjugate his *yetzer* in this area, and to train himself to act in a holy manner and have only pure thoughts, and to plan properly to save himself from [such sins]. One should refrain from *yichud*, because it is the greatest cause [for sins of this nature].”

The *Rambam* is teaching us that the *yetzer hara* that people are falling prey to on the internet is the most difficult one to withstand. It is foolish to try to fight the most difficult *yetzer hara* on its “home turf.” We must try to avoid this *yetzer hara* altogether by getting rid of the internet, or at least diminish the possibility of falling prey to it by having the correct systems installed. Indeed, we must treat the computer with the *issur yichud* that the *Rambam* names as the greatest cause of sins in this realm.



was whether I had ever heard of the problem before. This boy was under the impression that he was the only one with this problem. I assured him that he was far from the odd man out. "You are *very normal*," I said. "What makes you different is that you told your father, and I am very impressed that you did. Otherwise, you are unfortunately a prototypical case of a person left alone with unlimited access to the internet."

I could see that it took a load off his shoulders. That doesn't mean that I caused him to view the situation lightly – far from it. But it was comforting to him to know that he was struggling with a normal *yetzer hara*, and that he was not crazy.

This boy explained that when he started failing in this area, he sank into a deep depression, certain that he was depraved and that no one else was struggling with this desire. Once I explained that it was normal, he felt that he could deal with it.

Realize, however, that what I told him was the truth: the sort of honest relationship he has with his father is *extremely* rare. Most parents will have no idea of what their children are up to at all, and even if they do find out, it will be at a stage at which it will be very, very difficult to undo the damage. *Bachurim* come to me many times to discuss this problem on the condition that I not tell their parents. After hearing the extent of the damage and the frequency with which they have been falling prey, I often ask, "Don't you parents know *anything*?" The answer is invariably, "They have no clue."

The good news in those cases is that these boys are seeking help. (I can just imagine how many other boys are in similar situations, but are too ashamed to seek help.) The bad news is that I can't tell the parents afterwards, because I have been approached in confidence, so I just have to hope that they attend a gathering on the subject and decide to eradicate the problem from the home without my intervention. Unfortunately,

even when parents of boys that I have met with do attend a gathering, their reaction to what they hear is usually, "I think that it was a very important *d'rashah*. I'm going to tell my neighbor about it the next time I see him."

If the situation I portray seems frightening, it's only because it is. We must make internet security a community priority and a societal norm, to the extent that no one would consider having unfiltered and unreported internet access.

Filtering and Accountability

Let me outline the system that I feel *must* be in place on every computer that has internet access, whether at home or in the office. Again, the best solution is still to have no internet access in the first place, but in cases where that is not an option, we need to have a two-tiered security system comprised of filtering software *and* reporting software.

There are dozens of programs available, with varying levels of efficacy. Interestingly, many well-meaning non-Jews realize that the moral fabric of this country is decaying because of the terrible impact of the internet, and they are inventing software to combat the problem. So concerned are they about the problem that they are making their software available for free or for a nominal fee of \$10 or \$20 a month – a small price to pay when we realize what is at stake. Some programs do both filtering and reporting, and some do only one of the two; you can install more than one program on your system to provide comprehensive coverage.

Let me explain the purpose and operating method of each of the two types of software.

Filtering Software

The purpose of filtering software is to block inappropriate material from reaching your computer screen. Most filters will allow you to



"white list" the websites that you need to use, so that you can confine your internet access to the minimal number of websites that you really need. You can also "blacklist" specific sites that you don't want people in your home to access. Aside from the white lists and blacklists, the filters use frequently updated information and advanced technology to scan websites and block those that contain offensive language and objectionable material.

HaRav Mattisyahu Salamon said that if the internet was around in the times of Chazal, they would have enacted an *issur yichud* upon it.



Unfortunately, though, the people who are attempting to spread *tumah* are very determined to get their filth through the filters, and they will stop at nothing. They create thousands of sites each day, many of which are designed to "out-smart" the filtering systems.

In addition, a determined child (or adult) can figure out a way to work around a filter so that he (or she) can get to the inappropriate material, or he can stumble on the password for the filter and disable it.

It is therefore imperative that you add the second layer of protection: a reporting system.

Reporting Software

Reporting software can track anything on your computer, down to each keystroke and click of the mouse if you set it up to do so. Its most important function, however, is to track website visits and searches. The software then gener-

ates a report and sends it to you and someone else via email. It is imperative that you send the report to someone who you will have difficulty facing if the report is unfavorable – a *chavrusa*, a Rebbi, or a rav.

I have made the following offer in public, and it stands for anyone reading this essay: if you cannot find someone with whom you are uncomfortable enough to send the reports to, I am willing to read your reports, as long as you are willing to accept some warm *divrei mussar* if I find something troublesome on a report. I already receive numerous reports each morning, many of which are for internet use of people I don't even know. Each report takes me only a few seconds to read, because the first few lines of the report contain a brief synopsis – something to the effect of "looks good," "report needs review," or "report needs close review."

Employing this two-tiered system is the only way to have internet access without presenting a clear and present danger to the sanctity of our homes. Many people who have suffered from an internet addiction have been cured after installing such software and being forced to face a rav or Rebbi who actually took the time to read the reports and contact their *mispalles* or *talmid* and discuss it, thus successfully weaning him off of the addiction.

A case in point is a fellow who came over to me after *Maariv* one night and asked to speak to me in private. He waited until all the other people who were waiting finished asking their *sh'eilos*, and then he sat down and said, "I am a regular, card-carrying member of the *frum* community. My children attend good yeshivos, I'm professional, I make plenty of money, I learn *daf yomi* each day, and... I have been addicted to the internet for several years."

"I'm a lawyer," he told me. "It is not considered strange for me to stay in the office until 11 or 12 o'clock at night. Little did anyone know that I



usually finished my work much earlier (due to the downturn in the economy) and I spent the rest of the time tearing apart my *neshamah*."

Quite a résumé. I had to give him credit for coming in person. Most people with this problem call and discuss it anonymously over the phone.

"I need your help," he continued. "I want to have the reports of my internet use sent to you."

"I'll be happy to have you send them to me," I said, "but only on the condition that if I call you up and give you *mussar*, you'll listen to me. If you are going to hate me for it or avoid my phone calls, then we are not going to accomplish much by having you send me reports."

"I'm aware of the consequences," he replied. "But I've heard from others using the system that it works very well, and *I need help!*"

This man has been on the filtering and reporting system for two months. The good news is that many of the reports were good. That bad news is that several weeks ago, the headline on the page read, "Report needs close review."

I sent this man an email, "Please contact me ASAP!"

He wrote back, "I am having tremendous *bi-zyonos* (embarrassment) because of this, and it's going to get better."

I'm happy to report that it did get better. The last few reports have been much better.

Does this mean that he won't cave to his *yetzer hara* ever again? No. But he knows that if he does slip, he'll have some explaining to do, and that is a very powerful deterrent. It is a perfect application of R' Yochanan ben Zakkai's blessing to his students, "*Yehi ratzon sheyehei mora Shamayim aleichem kemora basar vadam* – May it be [*Hashem's*] will that your fear of Heaven should be akin to your fear of a human." Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to muster up enough *mora Shamayim* when it comes to

this *yetzer hara*, so we had better employ 'the fear of getting caught' (*mora basar vadam*) to boost our immunity.

I cannot overemphasize the need for the reporting software. Filtering is simply not enough. The people who invent these reporting programs consider it so vital that when you set up the options for the frequency at which the reports will be generated, you will notice that one of the options is to have a report sent every *hour*. If the team that created this software realized how dangerous the internet is, how much more so should we.

A Word on Passwords

One more important point regarding filtering and reporting software:

In order to set up these systems, you have to apply a password that allows you to control the level of filtering, the websites that you want to enable access to, and other features. It is *imperative* that the people most susceptible to this *yetzer hara* not be the ones to set up the password. If a lonely husband spending summer nights alone in the city finds himself in the vulnerable position of having access to a computer on which all he must do is enter a password and change the filtering levels, then we haven't gained much by setting up the filtering system. One possibility is to have the husband and wife each enter a few of the characters in the password, so that neither of the two can make a change to the password without the other one's knowledge. If that is not practical, have a neighbor or friend set up the password.

Toward Greater Productivity: Internet at Home

The art of "killing time" has been perfected through internet use. A simple search often turns into hours of nonsensical activity. It should be obvious that as *frum yidden* we must real-



ize that our job in life is to utilize all the precious time given to us for the *avodas Hashem* that we were created to do. Wasting time surfing the net, even if nothing improper is viewed, and no *lashon horah* is read, is akin to committing suicide with an installment plan. It is a crime to waste precious time on endless net-browsing for men who have

time also involves serious issues of *g'neivah* as well as loss of potential revenue for the firm. And if these sins are not in the realm of *Even Ezer* (which includes the sins associated with viewing improper sites), then they will be in the realm of *Choshen Mishpat*, because employees will waste company time surfing the net if they are left to their own devices.

This boy explained that when he started failing in this area, he sank into a deep depression, certain that he was depraved and that no one else was struggling with this desire.



precious little time for their daily learning, and for busy women who struggle to find time for their children, *davening* or *chessed*.

Toward Greater Productivity: Internet in the Workplace

One fellow who came to discuss the problem of the internet with me is a lawyer who owns a large law firm. I told him that aside from the internet security system he must set up in his home, he must also put a security system in place in his office. If an employer has a computer system (for *Yidden* in the office), he may be transgressing, "*Lifnei iveir lo sitein michshol*" if he does not have a filtering and accountability system in place.

Although *lifnei iveir* applies only when it is certain (or very likely) that another person is going to sin because of your actions, in the case of the internet it is almost guaranteed that those working on an unprotected system will be misusing the computer. The misuse will not only be limited to improper viewing. Wasting company

It took a few weeks of intense nudging to convince the managing partner of the law firm to install an elaborate security system on his computer network. But once the system was installed, it took only a few days until he called me and said, "Rabbi Viener, I don't know how to thank you."

"*Baruch Hashem!*" I said. "You have the *tz'nius* under control?"

"Not yet," he said, "but I already fired three people. They were caught spending over 30% of their time on the internet—on my dime!"

I don't see why the CEO of any company — *frum* or not — wouldn't rush to install a filtering and reporting system on their computers. If for nothing else, it keeps honest people honest, and productivity will naturally go up—hopefully to the levels that it should be at in the first place.

Similarly, if you are an employee in a firm and you sit alone in an office with a computer that is not filtered, make sure to get the computer technician in your office to place a filtering and reporting system on your computer. If it is impossible to make such changes in your office, perhaps it is time to reevaluate your working there. Remember, turning the *Shechinah* away from you will only hurt your *parnassah* prospects.

A Note to Women

Chazal teach that women lead the way when it comes to maintaining the sanctity of the home. In *Parashas Bo*, Pharaoh offers to allow the men



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to go serve *Hashem* in the wilderness, as long as the women and children would remain in *Mitzrayim*. In *Divrei Aggadah*, Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv explains that Pharaoh realized that if the men were allowed to serve *Hashem* on their own, they would not last long. They could only succeed if the women were backing and supporting them in their efforts.

Harav Elyashiv cites a *Midrash* as proof. The *Midrash* states that a righteous man was married to a righteous woman, and they did not have any children. They decided to divorce and they each married another person. The man married a wicked woman and he became wicked. The woman married a wicked man and she made him righteous. We see, concludes the *Midrash*, that "everything comes from the woman."

Women: I cannot overemphasize the difficult *yetzer hara* that the internet presents for your husbands and children. I don't want to cause *shalom bayis* issues, but trust me it is far easier to prevent the problem than to deal with it when it turns into a real issue, *chas v'shalom*.

Please do not assume that you are not in danger as well. Although women are generally not as susceptible to the *yetzer haras* that plague men, the enticing nature of the web can (and unfortunately does) ensnare both genders.

Nashim tzidkaniyos! Insist that the internet be removed from your home if it does not need to be there. If you must have internet access, see to it that a filter and reporting system be installed on all computers, Blackberries and iPhones. If your husband is resistant, speak to his Rav as soon as possible, because your husband may already be in trouble. If he doesn't have a Rav because he frequents too many shuls, make sure he finds one. Very few can win the battle without the help of a spiritual mentor.

Finally – and I address this exhortation to both parents and children – *daven*. *Daven* that your

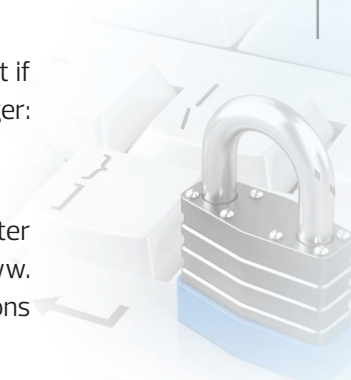
efforts to maintain *k'dushas habayis* by protecting yourselves and your families from this terrible danger should succeed. Only with *tefillah* can our *hishtadlus* to raise *frum ehrliche Yidden* be met with *hatzlachah*.

I will end on an optimistic note. The fact that the *yetzer hara* has grown so strong in our time, in large part due to the influence of the internet, is a sure sign that *Mashiach* is on his way. Just before the time comes for the *yetzer hara* to be eradicated, *Hashem* is allowing him to unleash every tool in his arsenal to try to lead us astray. It is up to us to neutralize the *yetzer hara's* most powerful weapon, so that we merit to greet *Mashiach* with pure eyes, hearts, and minds.

A small sampling of the many filter and reporting programs available:

- **WebChaver:** www.webchaver.org
- **Jnet** – filter for computer, Blackberry and other mobile devices: www.thejnet.com
- **Eblaster** – very thorough reporting system: www.eBlaster.com
- **NetNanny** – www.NetNanny.com
- **Accountable2you (free):** www.accountable2you.com
- **WebSense** – an enterprise level product if you run a medium size business or larger: www.websense.com

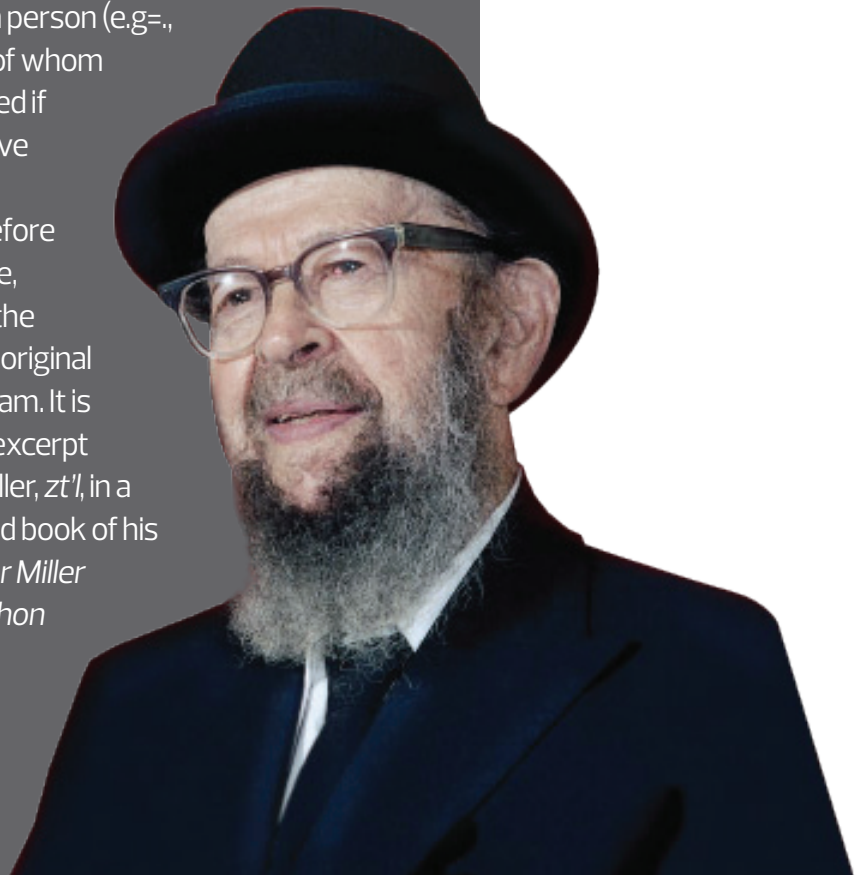
For a rundown on these and other filter programs, see internet-filter-review at www.toptenreviews.com. Also, see the Re-Solutions section of this publication. ■



The Best “**Accountability**” Program

We know that everyone who needs the internet needs ways of protecting themselves from unrestrictive use, and one of the best weapons in this battle

is an “accountability” or “reporting” program. This is when all the websites one visits are recorded and sent to a person (e.g., friend or Rav) in front of whom one would feel ashamed if they were found to have visited inappropriate websites. Well, long before the advent of software, and even computers, the Jewish people had the original “accountability” program. It is presented here as an excerpt from Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l, in a new, recently published book of his teachings: *Rav Avigdor Miller On Emunah And Bitachon* (Judaica Press in conjunction with the Simchas HaChaim Foundation).



QUESTION

When saying *Shema Yisrael*, what should you think about?

ANSWER

The first thing is *kavanah p'shuta*. You have to know the "simple translation" of the words and think about the words you're translating. But I will give you a good suggestion [to go beyond *kavanah p'shuta*]. Every day you can add in another *peirush*, another layer of "meaning," to that.

Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokainu Hashem Echad—*echad* means He is "One." What does One mean? That if you will travel to the North Pole, *Hashem* is there. If you travel to the South Pole, He is there too—and in between, by the way. You can go all the way to the west or east—wherever you go you will find *Hashem*.

If you travel to Tokyo and are all by yourself in a hotel with a lot of money to spend and a lot of leisure time, know that *Hashem* is looking at you. You have to behave. If you go all the way to Hungary, in a hotel in the mountains, and have a lot of money—behave, because *Hashem* is looking at you. If you're in the North Pole all by yourself—behave, because *Hashem* is looking at you. If temptations come your way, behave like He is on the spot—which He is. Think this thought every day. *Mizrach, maariv, tzafon, darom, maaloh umatah* ["East, west, north, south, up and down"]—He is One everywhere.

That is one *kavanah* [one meditation]. Do this for homework one day—and the next day think about the next *kavanah*: *Hashem Echad*, "*Hashem* is One"—there is only one interest in our lives. We have a lot of interests, but he is the One interest. When I go to work, it's only *Hashem* that I am thinking about. When I get married—only for *Hashem*. When I am raising children—only for *Hashem*. When I eat—only for *Hashem*. Even when I *daven*, I am *davening* for *Hashem*. (It's

a good idea, by the way, to remember *Hashem* when you *daven*.) And therefore, *echad* means: In all the things I do in this world, He is the only interest I have.

The next day, add a new *kavanah*, a new layer of meaning. Think *Hashem Echad* in the following terms. *Hashem* is in this world—*Atah hu b'Olam Hazeh, v'atah hu b'Olam Habah*, "You're He who is in this world; and You're He who is in the next world." *Hashem* is in both worlds, this world and the next. Be aware of Him in this world and fulfill His *mitzvos*, because in the next world we will be together with Him too. You can't take a dive off the Empire State Building and get rid of Him. No. *Im esak shamayim sham atah* — "If I will go up to the Heavens," King David said in *Tehillim* (139:8), "there You are. If I will go down to the depths of the sea, there You are."

Another layer of meaning you can have in the word *echad* is as follows: *Hashem*, You're the only One that exists. Nobody exists in this world. Nothing exists. It's all *Hashem's* imagination. *Hashem* imagined the sun and it came into being. If He would withdraw His imagination there would be no sun. Think about that. When you look at the sun or moon you're seeing only the *dvar Hashem*, the "word" of *Hashem*. *B'dvar Hashem shamayim nasu*—it's only His word that you see (*Tehillim* 33:6). When He said *yehi*, "Let there be" (*Bereishis* 1:6), it came to be. That is all you see, the word of *Hashem*. There are no trees... no people... no houses... nothing. There is only *Hashem*. He is the only One that has real being, as the Rambam says in the beginning of *Hilchos Yesodai HaTorah*. *Hashem Elokim emes*—He is the only true being. *Hu levado emes*—He is the only One that is true. All the rest in the world is only imagination. [See also: *Sing, You Righteous*, para. 470–476.]

That is another meaning of *Echad*. In this manner, you can add another *kavanah* ("meditation") every day in the word *Echad*. I gave you a few things to think about. When you finish with them see me for further homework.... ■



True Stories...



As told to the
Rabbonim and Professionals
who deal with victims
of the internet

The following is a selection of some of the many stories of people who have fallen victim to the internet. They are far from the worst stories, but they reflect the broadest spectrum of people, experiences and communities.

The greatest problem with the internet epidemic is that it is a relatively invisible one. Yet, the destruction it leaves in its wake is often all too visible.

There are numerous tragic cases of those who shed belief in *Hashem* due to the internet's pernicious influence or whose addictions led them deep into the darkest abyss. Others seem normal on the outside but live behind a façade; they walk among us and dress like the typical *frum* person, but are corrupted to the core. For some, it is not enough to have become corrupted but they must spread their disdain through conversations and blogs posted on the internet (in English and/or in Yiddish), expounding upon demoralizing or heretical thoughts of their own making simmering inside them. Many who have not succumbed to this treacherous virus are infected nonetheless, some mildly and others more severely.

And yet, bad as we may think it is, the destructive influence of the internet is worse than people imagine. It is chilling to think about. Yet, this is the reality we live in.

The first step in dealing with this reality is... realizing that it is the reality—and just how profoundly it has affected lives. Therefore, we present a series of real-life stories about others who have fallen into the internet trap. One cannot imagine how many families have been affected. Aside from the spiritual dangers – which a person can mistakenly take less seriously because they are less tangible—these stories testify to the very real physical and financial perils also posed by the internet.

Please note that these stories have been cho-

sen for their relatively "benign" content. They are far from the worst. Yet, they reflect the experiences of all types of people, from all communities and from all walks of life.

How the Internet Ruined Me Financially

A chill runs up my spine as I recall the dismal levels to which I had sunk before *Hashem* guided me to the help I desperately needed in the nick of time.

It is unnecessary to relate the entire chain of events in all its gory details. It is enough that I describe to you just the tip of the iceberg, enough to help you imagine just how destructive this technology can be, sans the proper precaution.

It all started when I entered into a partnership with my friend, opening an online business together. I was delighted that I no longer had to haul heavy boxes or answer to a demanding boss. I was the luckiest person on earth, or at least that's what I thought.

At first, I would share an office with my partner as we worked together. After a while, however, I found myself alone in the office. While my partner was preoccupied with other activities, I was responsible for the computer work. And we became quite friendly, him and me, and by "him" I mean the internet. A bit too friendly, as I realized only much later.

I gradually became more and more hooked on this miracle technology, and I would spend hours upon hours in its tentacles. Everything fascinated me and I left nothing unexplored. It came to a



point that I simply did not have enough hours in my day to visit all my favorite websites, to chat with all my electronic friends, read all the interesting blogs and surf around the endless sea of the internet. I just had to spend every spare second I had in cyberspace. I would often tell my wife that I had to return to the office in the evening to finish up some business, and then I would sit there well past midnight, clicking my way through the great wide cyber world.

I had often heard *drashos* and read about the dangers of the internet, and I had always assumed that the only peril was accessing decadent and immoral sites. Now, however, I realize that just being addicted to the “benign” parts also posed serious problems. With my addiction to the web, I was only one step away from ruining my life. The *shalom bayis* in my home was adversely affected, I did not have a spare minute to spend with my children, and I had no peace of mind. I lived in my own isolated, fantasy island.

But I finally had my rude awakening when I was struck with a heavy financial blow. My partner eventually realized that I was fooling around and my part of the work was not getting done properly. One dark Wednesday, after an acrimonious exchange, I found myself without a partner and without a job.

I was stunned and shaken. My world had turned black, but I decided to keep the news from my family for as long as possible. Meanwhile, I still hadn't lost my other, more important partner: the internet. And this partner afforded me a full-time job. This was now my official occupation all day long. I fooled myself into thinking I would find other employment shortly. Obviously, however, you find nothing by floating through cyberspace, except for more problems.

My financial situation continued to go from bad to worse, as did my emotional equilibrium. I went through some terribly trying times I wouldn't wish on anyone, and I became embroiled in many other trials and tribulations that I would rather not talk about. I will only tell you the fortunate



It came to a point that I simply did not have enough hours in my day to visit all my favorite websites, to chat with all my electronic friends, read all the interesting blogs and surf around the endless sea of the internet.

conclusion to my story, which took place when a relative got involved and helped me find employment. The new job did not come with the greatest salary, and was pretty similar to my first job—hauling boxes, but I was happy. Yes, I still had that powerful yearning to sit in front of a computer, but in my heart I knew that this was the only way to keep from falling into the trap again. The suffering I sustained was enough to convince me beyond a doubt that the internet was no game, and it could totally ruin an entire family forever.

Dear friend, if your job necessitates sitting at a computer, do everything you can to ensure you will not get addicted and lose yourself to



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the world of the internet. Don't let yourself be trapped or you might just end up paying for it with all that is near and dear to you. And you will have no one to blame but yourself.

Hitting Rock Bottom

Undoubtedly, we have all heard and read about the evils of the internet with its inherent pitfalls and dangers. And, quite likely, there are those among us who are tempted to think that these "alarmists" are surely exaggerating. They must be taking things way out of context!

Well, as someone who has learned the hard way, I am now painfully aware that these "alarmists" are in fact realists – with one caveat: If anything, they are *understating* the perils of the internet, probably because most of them have not been personally exposed to it, and therefore cannot possibly know all the sordid and gory details. Otherwise, they would surely leave no stone unturned to eradicate this dreadful plague.

Allow me to share my story with you:

It all began with a BlackBerry back when I was a *kollel yungerman*, fully supported by my father-in-law, unencumbered by any burden of *parnasah*. I am by nature an inquisitive type and my BlackBerry, with its ready access to the internet, swiftly opened new vistas for me. All my free time (as well as my not so free time) was spent searching and surfing the web. This was a big, broad new world and I just couldn't get enough of it.

Eventually, I found the BlackBerry's small screen rather inadequate. In order to satisfy my insatiable desire to experience ever more, I approached a friend of mine who had a small office that he only used for a couple of hours a day and got permission to use it. I ended up spending so much time there at his computer that my friend once remarked jokingly that he almost felt like an intruder when he came by to conduct his business there. That clinched it for me. I couldn't con-

tinue to abuse my friend's goodwill and take advantage of his kindness. I would have to get my own office!

And so I did. I rented a tiny cubicle of an office – just enough to accommodate me... and my computer. It goes without saying that now I was able to spend unlimited time at my beloved computer. So much so that that diminutive office soon became my second home. Or, better said, my primary home.

It was as if I was glued to my chair in front of the computer and nothing could entice me to leave it. And when I absolutely had to leave, i.e. to go home for dinner or the like, it was always with much reluctance, and I impatiently schemed how I could quickly return to the magic of the screen.

Not surprisingly, this addiction came at a cost. It is of course impossible to spend so many hours on the unfiltered internet, no holds barred, without becoming ensnared in the web – both figuratively and literally. For a long time, its influence remained subtle. I still recited *berachos* and still *davened* (more or less). But, my heart and soul were not in it. I was but a shell of the man I had once been, and I did everything by rote without any real feeling.

Initially, I wanted desperately to believe that I was still the same *ehrliche yid*. It was a long time before I realized the stark truth – that the *tumah* of the internet and *kefirah* are intertwined. For after all, when one allows his eyes and heart to wander after the depravity of the net while he is safely ensconced in the privacy and solitude of his home or office, he is essentially expressing pure *kefirah*. He is intrinsically denying the presence of a much higher force, *Hakodosh Baruch Hu*, because if he would be aware that *Hakodosh Baruch Hu* sees and hears everything, he certainly would never have had the guts to click on that mouse. But, at the time, I was so bogged down in filth that such reasoning was beyond me.

Slowly but surely, I lost every vestige of *yiras shamayim*. At first I would only miss a *mincha* or



a *maariv*, and then a *shacharis*. Eventually, it got to the point where I did not step into *shul* from one *Shabbos* to the next. My wife, of course, was blissfully oblivious to this tragic turn of events. As far as she was concerned, her husband's schedule included *shacharis*, *mincha*, *maariv*, as well as several hours in *kollel*. I felt myself sinking deeper and deeper into a quagmire of decadence and deception. But I was too powerless to extricate myself. Every now and then I would experience fleeting pangs of remorse, but my behavior continued unchanged.

This went on until *Rosh Chodesh Elul* when my brother made a *bris* for his newborn son in *shul*, which I absolutely had to attend – my absence would have been too obvious. After *davening*, the *gabbai* took out the *shofar* and blew *tekiah*, *teruah*, *tekiah*. Somehow, the sound of the *shofar* struck a chord in my heart, and I was gripped by an almost palpable *pachad*. Where was I headed? What would become of me? How low could one sink? But sadly, the *yetzer horah*, tapping into the power of my addiction, quickly quashed these thoughts.

And then came *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year. At one point in the middle of *davening*, I paused to take stock of my *ruchnius*, or lack of same. I was overcome by a sudden surge of profound regret. I let my tears flow unabashedly as I thought about my abysmal state. Would *Hashem* ever forgive me? By *motzei Yom Kippur* I felt cleansed. I experienced a measure of tranquility that had eluded me for months.

I wish I could tell you that I then turned over a new leaf and never looked at the internet again. But sadly, the fact of the matter was that the very next day, one day after *Yom Kippur*, I was once again seated in front of the computer surfing the internet. It was as if I was part of the internet.

I'd rather not detail the anguish that my family and I suffered because of my addiction. Suffice it to say that after a long and painful odyssey, I did recover, but only because I had the *siyattah dish-*



Somehow, the sound of the *shofar* struck a chord in my heart, and I was gripped by an almost palpable *pachad*. Where was I headed? What would become of me? How low could one sink?

maya to encounter a group of people who dedicated their time and resources to helping people like me overcome addictions.

Today, I spend much of my time doing *teshuvah* and being *mispallel* that *Hashem* forgive me for all that I have wrought. But I know only too well that the decadence and indecency that I have imbibed will not soon dissipate and will always come back to haunt me. I no longer have a computer, but I do have a BlackBerry, albeit with a J-net filter.

If only I could turn back the clock, I would know now that internet addiction is not to be taken lightly. It is as corruptive as it is addictive, and it is far easier to be ensnared in the "net" than to extricate oneself from it. Trust me. I know.



When I Lost My Husband

It is not easy to talk about it, but it is crucial for people to hear about the havoc that the internet can leave in its wake. Until recently, I would never have believed that the internet could so effectively destroy someone. Even today, I do not entirely comprehend the powerful grip it could extend to the point that a normal intelligent person loses complete control of himself. But, simply put, it happened to me.

Ever since my husband acquired a computer with internet connection, I basically lost him. In the beginning, I didn't realize how far matters could go. I didn't want to nag him about it and always pull him away from the computer. I thought I was being nice, but as time went on, however, things only became worse, to the point where I couldn't pull him away even when I desperately wanted to.

When I sometimes took it upon myself to look into just what he was doing on the computer, I realized that pursuits in cyberspace were simply endless: he would search for information on various products, scroll through dozens of news websites, peruse politics (both within the Jewish community and in the world at large), view all kinds of clips (i.e., weddings of Chassidic Rabbis, silly tricks and stunts and other nonsense), chat with pals he befriended on the internet (for which he even set up a microphone system), play games for hours on end, manage bank accounts, do computer-related favors for family members like finding the cheapest prices for anything they might want to purchase, Googling any phone number or address they needed, and providing them with computerized directions to any destination. And last but not least, checking for new emails every few seconds and then forwarding them on to others.

I felt he was interested in everything in the world except me. I simply did not hold his interest. On the rare occasions that he wasn't sitting at the computer, he was playing with his iPod.

He just had to be connected to technology every second of the day. I already knew that "I'll be done in five minutes" often meant endless hours. Even when he said that at midnight, I knew that he still had countless websites to browse before he could part with his computer.

Strangely enough, he didn't at all consider himself an internet addict, since he was always busy "getting things done" on the computer. But someone who is familiar with addictions once explained to me that an addict cannot bring himself to stop what he's doing for any price. And it was clear that this was my husband's reality. It had taken over his entire life – and I remained alone.

I felt helpless. I had no idea how to deal with it. You sometimes hear the term "living orphans." I was a married divorcee. I was alone in the world. I had no one to share my life with – no one with whom to share the pleasure of seeing our child take his first step or saying his first words. My husband just wasn't unavailable. He was like a piece of wood, an inanimate object, with the exception that he ate and slept.

And if you think this was the worst it got, read on.

My husband's addiction quickly spiraled out of control. It might have started innocently, but after a while he began visiting "unacceptable" websites, to put it mildly, and that was when his addiction reached its climax. He simply couldn't tear himself away from the screen. He was so attached to the internet that he neglected his job. Needless to say, it wasn't long before he was fired.

But if you think that was enough to jolt him out of his addiction and make him realize the dire straits he was in, you are mistaken. In fact, it was just the opposite. Now he had nothing to keep him from his addiction. He stopped supporting the family altogether. We subsisted completely on government assistance, which was obviously not enough to feed a family, pay the rent, elec-



tricity and water bills. But he didn't care. I pleaded and cajoled, but to no avail. It was as if I was talking to the wall.

He kept a crazy schedule. He woke up in the morning, rummaged through the pantry and the fridge, looking for food. Then he went into his computer room, locked the door and remained inside all day. He browsed the most depraved of websites and watched a host of immoral films. In the evenings, he came out and gruffly demanded dinner. After devouring his meal in solitude, he returned to his dark world and once again isolated himself from his family and the rest of the normal world. There was no "good night" to the children, no questions about how their day had been. Nothing. Zero.

I cannot begin to tell you how many tears I shed during that period of my life. I wept and grieved, but kept my pain to myself. I was ashamed to speak to anyone about it, and I tried my best to ensure the children didn't feel they were lacking something because they didn't have a father.

And so I suffered in silence until it came to a point that I could no longer keep quiet. One day, my husband apparently forgot to lock the door of the computer room, and one of the children abruptly pushed the door open.

My husband leaped up and tried to cover the screen, but it was too late. To this day, I don't know just what the child saw. But, my husband lunged out of the room, ranting like a madman. How come I couldn't take proper care of the children? Why couldn't I teach them not to bother their father when he was busy? That was when I fell apart. The fact that it had come to a point where my children's spiritual and physical well-being was in jeopardy because their father was addicted to the worst of the internet broke me completely, and I decided that the time had come to demand a divorce.

Dear mothers and wives, don't let it come to that. Don't let your family go to ruin because of

the poisonous internet. It is bitter and painful. Save your *shalom bayis* before it is too late.

Little Anecdotes of Internet Victims

A businessman relates:

We once encountered a problem with our computers at the office. Everything began going ever so slowly and freezing. I needed to call an internet technician. His diagnosis was that a virus had entered through one computer and infected the entire network. He found the computer that had started it all, which belonged to a certain young man who had been working at the company for many years.

After taking care of the problem, he showed me the history of that computer, which included everything our employee had been up to. It emerged that this employee had been spending hours on countless websites that had no connection to his work duties. And I had only become aware of this after he had been working here for three years! (As an aside, according to the computer technician, the virus had entered the computer through one of the decadent websites.)

I was surprised that I hadn't caught onto it earlier, and I couldn't even say that I would've guessed it from the young man's demeanor. I had never even suspected him.

I immediately summoned the culprit and summarily informed him that he was no longer welcome to work at our office. I also told him that he might want to ask a Rav if he wasn't required to compensate us for the many hours he stole from the business. He broke down, crying and pleading with me to give him another chance. I did not have the heart to refuse him, and I agreed to give him another chance. But I immediately limited his internet access by creating a whitelist, which only allowed him access to specific, pre-approved sites. I only regret that I hadn't done it three years earlier.





I felt he was interested in everything in the world except me. I simply did not hold his interest.... He just had to be connected to technology every second of the day.

A woman relates:

Years ago when I was in school, we had computers on which we learned to use various programs like Word, Excel, etc.

Several students, 16- and 17-year-old girls, came up with a way to connect the computers to the internet. Incredibly, this occurred in one of our *heimishe* schools.

They didn't get very far with it and they did it more for the thrill of it, not because they were actually bent on searching the internet. But it was enough to demonstrate that even in school, where one would imagine that our children are most secure, the girls managed to access the internet. The school administration is probably still unaware of this incident.

A young man relates:

Years ago, my father had a computer in our house. After hearing so much about the havoc such a hazardous piece of technology could wreak on a home, he decided to throw it out. I tried to convince him that it wasn't necessary, that we only used it once in a while to play games, but he persisted. That night, he followed through on his word, and discarded the computer in the trash.

I was still a young *bachur*, but I knew enough about computers to understand that I could get "my money's worth" from this. The following day, I awoke at dawn and retrieved the computer from the trash and brought it into our cluttered, rarely-used basement.

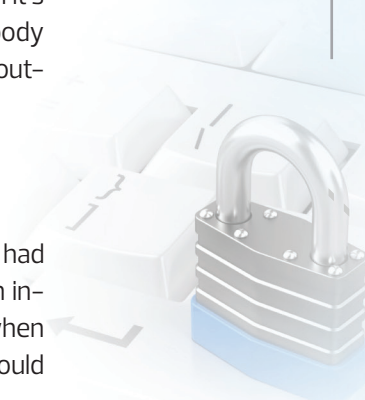
Now it was all mine. Over the next few years, I wasted countless hours sitting at that computer. I spent many hours with that old computer and tried to fix it myself on countless occasions, and with time I became a real expert in computers. Today, my skill has led me to become a computer technician.

My father did not dream, at least not until after my wedding, that this is what his actions had brought me to. But for me, it was a real lesson about how one can never be too careful. Though he had decided to take the warnings to heart and throw the computer out, it was already too late. I had found a way to outsmart him.

Another lesson I learned from this story: if there is something I don't want my children to have, I discard it in a dumpster *far away* from my house.... Seriously, in my home today, though it's not easy, we don't have a computer at all. Nobody has to convince me that children can often outsmart their parents.

A man told us:

I always wondered about my neighbor who had teenagers in the house and a computer with internet access. I actually liked the fact that when I needed internet access from time to time I could



go to his house and use his computer. However, I often took the father to task, warning him about the dangers of the internet, and questioning his awareness of the perils it posed in a home.

He always waved my concerns away, assuring me that he knew all about how to protect his children. He was himself computer-savvy and controlled the amount of time they spent on it. He would also explain that his children were good, *ehrllich* and obedient and were not even interested in the bad stuff. In short, they would not be hurt by the computer.

After a while, I moved away from the neighborhood, so I don't know exactly how events unfolded. But I do know that today, all those good, *ehrlliche* children look very different these days. Some of the boys have fallen far away from *Yiddishkeit* and the daughters do not bring much *na-chas* to the family, either.

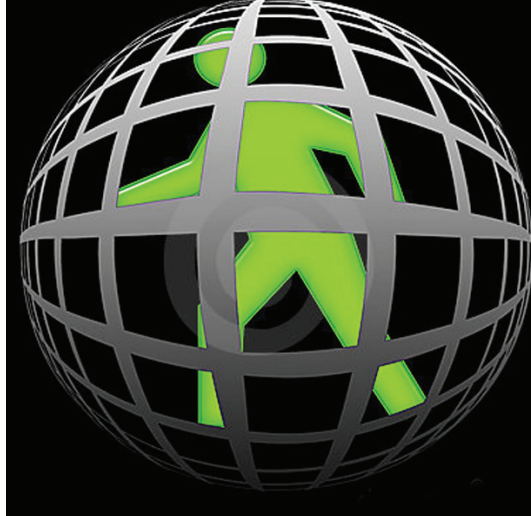
Every time I see these adult children and the state they are in, it breaks my heart. I remember the father's self-assurance and I can't get over how drastically they have changed. Sometimes I even blame myself for not being more persistent in my warnings to the father. It is a vivid, painful lesson for me every day.

A father relates:

We had a laptop in our home which we used for various things, but it wasn't connected to the internet. At least that's what we thought.

Imagine how stunned we were when our young *bachur*, part of a new generation that knows much more about technology than we do, discovered the fact that the laptop can pick up internet signals from the neighbor's internet service. (WiFi.)

We caught him red-handed several weeks after his discovery. He really is an innocent kid and only used it to play around and for harmless nonsense. But the potential for danger was not lost on me. I couldn't throw the computer out because we really needed it, but we locked it up very securely and also asked the neighbor



One Sunday, with her parents away, the girl invited a classmate and friend to join her in her activities on the internet. This went on for a year and a half....

whose internet my son had been able to tap into, to do something about his internet connection.

I don't want to think about what could have happened if we hadn't caught on in time....

A man tells us that his friend, a *ben Torah* in his fifties with a large family of older children, once asked if he could come up to his office to download *Shas* from the computer onto a CD. The man readily agreed.

So this *ben Torah* arrived at the office around 5 o'clock in the afternoon and began downloading. The downloading process was supposed to take about two hours, and our man had to leave the office. He told his friend he was leaving and that when he was done he could shut the computer and lock the door.

The next morning, at about 6 AM, when the owner came back to work, he noticed that the



light in the window was on. He was sure that his friend had left it on by mistake. When he entered the office, his shock knew no bounds when he found his friend still sitting at the computer, glued to the screen. The *ben Torah* blushed and mumbled some excuse about having problems with the downloading and how everything took much longer than expected. He excused himself and left the office.

Curious, the owner checked his computer and discovered that the *Shas* had finished downloading at nine o'clock the previous evening. When he searched the history to see what his friend had been busy with for so many hours, he was shocked. Apparently, his *ehrlische*, middle-aged friend had spent a whole night prowling the internet and visiting sites that were far from appropriate for any *yirei shamayim*.

He decided to be frank with his friend and ask him about it. His friend shamefully admitted that he did in fact have serious problems every time he found himself with access to the internet....

"It shook me to the very core to realize that the internet can entrap even people of his caliber," the man told us. "I would never have believed it. I had always wondered why people were making such a hullabaloo over the internet while it didn't pose any serious problems for me. But today, I understand it all too well. I asked my son-in-law to put a good filter on his smart phone and in return promised to pay his entire cell phone bill. I can tell you this much, that if I were a wealthy man the first thing I would do with my money would be to sponsor J-net or any other good internet filter for every single Jew. I would even fund the telephone bills of those who put filters on their phones. It is, in my opinion, the greatest mitzvah one can perform with his money today.

A family had a computer at home, locked in the father's private room. The parents were completely secure with the knowledge that none of the children had any access to it. The reality, however, was very different.

One evening, the parents left for a *simchah*, leaving their older daughter home to babysit. After a while, she became bored and entered her father's private room. It didn't take her long to locate the key, and she sat down to spend some time at the computer.

The next time her parents left for the evening, she had already formulated her plan and quickly made herself comfortable at her father's computer. Gradually, the enjoyment of it began to grow on her, until she actually began looking forward to the times she would have to babysit. The girl was 15 at the time.

One Sunday, with her parents away, the girl invited a classmate and friend to join her in her activities on the internet. This went on for a year and a half, with the girl spending every second she could on the internet, and her friend joining her whenever possible. The friend also began bringing along CDs she had picked up somewhere. Then, the father took the computer out of the home, not because he suspected anything but because he had switched jobs and needed the computer at work.

The parents never discovered what had happened until she revealed it to them after she was married. They found it difficult to believe that their young daughter was able to pull that off. "But they would find it far more difficult to believe the kinds of things I did on the internet," the woman tells us. "I have never told them the details; it would break their hearts. But it would certainly help them understand some of my behavior at that time for which they didn't have any explanation then. They can now also understand why I always urged them to go out at night because 'I just loved babysitting.'"

"Believe me," she concludes, "not only do I bar any computer or internet from my home, but I was against my husband taking a job with internet access. In the end, I was forced to give up my battle and J-net was installed at a very high, restrictive setting. Even with all that, it still bothers me. I know all too well what the internet is all about." ■





Every epoch has its challenges. Every generation has its demons. When thinking about a terrible era such as the Holocaust we may think that we have it easy. And we may... in many ways. But that only makes the challenge of our times that much more deceptively difficult. Make no mistake about it: today's challenge in many ways is the most difficult in history. Certainly, if we don't recognize the challenge for what it is and do something about it, it threatens to sweep us away like a tsunami. Yes, that challenge is the internet – the easy connectivity we have to the world, including its worst influences. No one can uproot the internet from our lives, but working together we can neutralize the threat...



In the course of our wanderings over the last two millennia, the Jewish people have been beset by the most brutal enemies: Romans, Crusaders, Inquisitors, Cossacks, Czars, Emperors, Sultans, Nazis, Palestinian terrorists, Ahmadinejad.... Did I leave anyone out?

Over the past two centuries, particularly in America in the past 50 years, Jews were faced with a new challenge: assimilation. Gone are Pharaoh, Haman and Hitler. In their place is emancipation and freedom. Rather than cowering from the stick, now we are enticed by the carrot.

With emancipation, the Jew was offered enticing opportunities to partake of the greater culture. He sat at Achashverosh's table, so to speak, alongside the other nations, being wined and dined on the delights of the modern world. To the early assimilationists, it was the dawning of a new era, a dream come true. They were proud to become lost in the new European culture and then in the American melting pot.

However, eventually Jews realized that in partaking of this newly found emancipation, they slowly began to lose their sense of a unique destiny, their special role in the larger world. Moreover, the emancipators turned out to be not as sincere and not as friendly as they first thought. The more the Jew succeeded in the Gentile's world, the more he became an object of scorn. And then came the Holocaust.

Our rise from the ashes has indeed been astounding, unprecedented in the history of the world. A small core of dedicated and sincere Jews became the seed of a new beginning. *Gedolim* and leading layman fought valiantly to create a comprehensive infrastructure of Torah institutions to educate the next generation. They oversaw the implementation of guidelines for behavior in our newest home in America. They strove to rebuild the sense of a Jewish

community, an identity that would protect our distinction as the nation of G-d.

Instead of collapsing, our people have thrived like never before. *Yeshivos*, *kolelim*, *Bais Yaakovs* and shuls sprouted up all over, and Torah study and observance are on a scale perhaps not seen for over a century. It was all over. Attempts to break the Jewish people failed miserably.

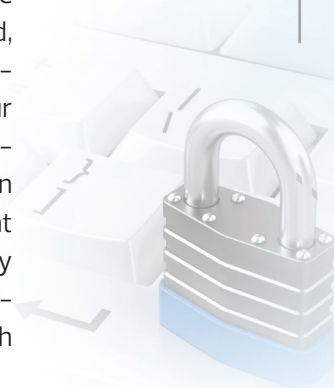
Until the internet....

Instead of beguiling the Jews to leave the safety of their homes and blend in to their surroundings, the surroundings are being brought right into our homes! Remain in your own home, in a separate Jewish community. No need to change your clothes to fit in, no need to give up your *Shabbos cholent*. Keep lighting your menorah. Keep going about every aspect of your life as a fine Jew. No need to go out and buy a television, only to have to hide it from your neighbors. No video screen, not even a computer! We have it down to a palm-sized device, right there masquerading as your innocent cell phone. No one will ever know. Just keep it safely in your pocket until everyone is out of sight. Now, take it out, look for that info you needed to find and....

Bam!

Got you!

Every sin ever invented all wrapped up in one pocket-sized device. Even if you're discovered, you can always excuse yourself with the argument that you absolutely must use it for your business. And there are so many Torah-oriented activities and sites that you want to visit. In fact, who said you will ever need to misuse it at all? Just mind your own business and look only at what you need. Outwardly, you may resemble a Jew, but inwardly there is nothing Jewish about you.



Of all the many traps facing the Jewish people in its long trek through history, none has come close to this latest ruse. The best has been saved for last. Just as *Mashiach* finally seems to be perched on the doorstep, the most potent poison of all is released. And the devastation it is leaving in its wake is absolutely horrifying.

Challenging Times

Hashem, in His infinite wisdom, saw fit to allow the internet to be introduced in our day and age. It is our weak generation, battered by the tests of so many centuries, that is being confronted with the *nisayon* of modern technology. Yet the Torah response is timeless. There is no question that unfiltered use of the internet is completely forbidden, no ifs, ands or buts.

Why then is it that we don't automatically wrinkle our noses in disdain whenever we see it? Why don't we avoid it with the same implicit disgust with which we would run from pork? The answer is that the internet question has been settled *de facto*. The internet has already wended its way into our daily lives, into our conscience, and it is no longer possible to simply uproot it from our midst.

The internet not only exposes things going on around the world, but also creates virtual realities that do not exist anywhere else. It is estimated today that there are around 366 million websites. If only 1% of them were *treife*, that would still mean more than 3.5 million forbidden sites. In reality, the overwhelming majority include forbidden text, images and ideas. How then can we in good faith walk around with such

a powerful tool for *aveira* without the slightest bit of protection and still consider ourselves responsible Jews?

Even those who are compelled by their work to access the internet must treat it with the proper caution it demands. Would anyone choose to stand in a bull ring for one second more than necessary if there were a wild bull raging? Or, in the words of the late Rosh Yeshiva Harav Reuven Grozovsky זצ"ל, would any person in his right mind remain for one extra second amid the unpleasant stench of an out-house? Each time a person connects to the internet he must realize that he is standing at the edge of a precipice and the fall is so far that the ground below cannot even be seen. "גיהנם פתוח—לו תחתיו—The depths of Hell are revealed beneath him."

Statistics show that a typical browser changes screens every two minutes. Links permit one to connect to new sites tens of times a minute. If one site does not catch you, the next one will. Surfing the web means dodging burning coals as they are falling from the sky like hail. What are the chances of avoiding burns? Of emerging alive?

All-In-One

The purpose of the internet, as envisioned by the technicians who created it and the government officials who promoted it, is to create an "information superhighway" by which all people everywhere can share ideas and information with everyone else. Its very nature then, is to connect diverse elements and bring everything together.

From the perspective of a Jew who knows that his purpose in the world is to serve his Creator, this means that the internet is also a tool to

A Jew who enters this crowd can circulate without his yarmulke, with no identifying features to brand him as a member of the holy nation



provide access to every type of vice to which a human may stoop. The internet provides an opening for each person to fall prey to his unique weaknesses.

Let's take the individual who has a weak spot for gossip. He or she just loves to hear what is going on in the world and in the neighbor's home, and cannot hold back from sharing this gossip with others. One day he discovers the internet and now he has a means of gathering slander from all over the world and sharing it with millions of potential listeners. Business has never been so good!

Another person has a hot temper and is constantly getting into fights and disagreements with others. Words fly bitterly and it is only by a miracle that the fists do not join in. Now that person is introduced to the Word Wide Web. Instead of sleeping on the matter and cooling down by the following day, they can act immediately by sharing their anger with millions of others instantaneously. The flames of *machlokes* can be fanned like never before.

The impulsive shopper no longer has to wait for good weather and the availability of the car to head for the nearest mall and spend a day throwing out hard-earned money on expensive items that will never be used. There isn't even an opportunity to sleep on a decision. At the press of a few buttons they can have the thrill of spending more than they could ever afford without even having to get out of bed!

The person with a weak spot for inappropriate entertainment need not risk exposure by heading to the seedy side of town. It's all avail-

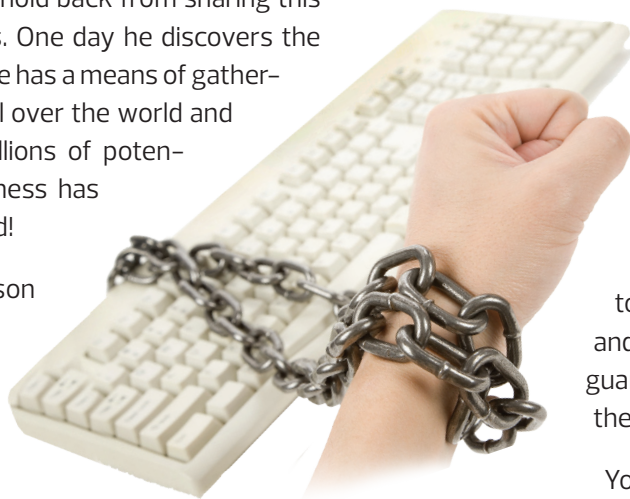
able at any time right in one's own home. And the list goes on....

Because it is always accessible, 24/7, a person need not be entirely dissolute to be trapped. You can stand strong day after day and resist the temptation to sin. The internet is patient and will wait quietly to manipulate you in your moment of weakness. Thirty days may go by without sinning. Don't worry. The internet will still be there for you on day 31. You had a hard day and need something to distract your mind, and just when you let your guard down... everything is there just for you.

You recoil from what you see and pulling yourself together you log off. But the internet is a difficult enemy to shake. The memory of what you saw and the thrill you felt will nag at you. You just have to see it again—but you won't look at anything else. You return to that site, but it doesn't give you the same rush as the first time. One more second, there's something else here that looks really interesting... you are trapped in the web.

Whereas in the past, weak individuals sinned in private, today they drag others along with them. The internet has raised the science of temptation to all new heights.

Look at the prayer we recite after the morning's daily *berachos*: יהי רצון מלפניך שתצילנו היום – “Save us today and every day from the brazen, from brazenness, from wicked people... and from the destructive Satan....” Is there any item on that



list that cannot be found in all its graphic glory on the internet?

The Terrible Virus

If users would contract a fatal disease each time they logged on to the internet, there would be no need for a mass symposium to describe the danger to the public. The internet would instantly be outlawed. Sadly, users are dropping like flies; we just don't see it.

We have all heard individual stories of wholesome youths who became troubled after experiencing the internet. *Shabbos*, yeshiva and the practice of Judaism all fell to the wayside. We have heard even more horrifying stories of families that have been irrevocably destroyed as a result of the internet. We cluck and shake our heads. It's too bad that 1% of our people are being burned.

But wait, is it really just 1%? Or are we lulling ourselves into a false sense of security? According to those who work with troubled youths, the rate is far higher. So say also those who deal with

shalom bayis issues. And the *dayanim* who serve on the *Bais Din* for *gittin*. And the *rabbonim* who are involved in all of these cases and more. It becomes apparent that the true toll of internet casualties is higher, probably shockingly higher, than any of us can imagine. What we have seen and heard is only the tip of the iceberg.

We must realize that to be honest with ourselves we cannot count only those who have openly dropped their former lifestyle as a result of internet exposure. There are many who con-

tinue to go through their daily lives as before, continue to go through the motions of maintaining the Torah observant way of life, yet inside they have rotted completely.

How many boys continue to attend yeshiva, how many girls continue to attend Bais Yaakov, yet their hearts and minds are plugged up by what they have learned elsewhere. The delicacies they are served by their *rabbeim* and *mo-ros* cannot compete with the junk food and pork they gorge in secrecy. The young man who sits next to you in shul with *tallis* and *tefillin* may feel completely estranged from his own actions as a result of tasting from the illicit waters. These people are going through the motions, while on the inside they have hardened into something not Jewish.

It begins with running late for *davening*; next the daily *shiur* is dropped. How many mothers and wives learned only months later that the all-important *shiur* was really a daily *chavrusa* with Mr. Internet? *Minchah* falls to the wayside and eventually the entire façade is dropped. Why bother dressing as a *frum* Jew when there is nothing *frum* about the person anymore?

And that only covers the people who have been destroyed entirely. What about all those who use the internet at work and only "occasionally" come across inappropriate material? If only we could have all internet users fill out a secret poll about how many times they chanced upon disgusting photos, *lashon hara*, immoral movies and clips, we would learn very quickly just how safe internet use really is. Better yet: How many *frum* internet users would willingly submit to having the log of all the websites they visited in the past 12 months publicized for the entire world to see?

The first alarm was raised, in fact, by computer technicians. They are the only ones who have free access to view what their fellow Jews

It's too bad that 1% of our people are being burned. But wait, is it really just 1%? Or are we lulling ourselves into a false sense of security?



were doing in the privacy of their own offices and homes. When they began to realize what seemingly respectable men and women were stooping to, they ran to the *rabbonim* crying, "We are in deep, deep trouble!"

Everyone knows that it is dangerous to log onto the internet without any antivirus protection. There are literally thousands of worms, viruses, Trojan horses and other forms of spyware that are out to get you. They steal your personal information, destroy your computer and expose you to criminals who are there to hurt you and take advantage of you. Does exposing yourself to even worse spiritual dangers deserve any less concern?

Deadly Attraction

107 Trillion.

With a "T."

No, we're not talking about the federal deficit. We're talking about the number of e-mails that were sent over the past decade. That averages nearly 30 billion e-mail messages per day. Admittedly, the vast majority of those are junk mail, receipts and automatic responses, but there are still plenty of messages left over to keep people busy all day.

Add to that 152 million blogs, 25 billion Twitter messages that are sent out per year, 50 billion notices on Facebook per *month*, 2 billion videos viewed on YouTube per *day*, over 5 billion photos already posted on Flickr, another 36 billion pictures that are uploaded to another popular site each year, the over 366 million websites now in existence and millions more that are being added each year.

The above information should give you an idea of how many billions of hours are being spent on nonsense or worse by the estimated 2

billion internet users around the globe. It should also bear witness to the terrible addiction which results from connecting to this universe of information.

These statistics should also go a long way toward explaining why no self-respecting Jew who is aware of his elevated status and purpose in this world has any business wiring his mind to the rest of the world's population. If so many precious hours are being wasted by the general population, how many Jewish hours were lost?

Just how addictive is the internet? Studies have been performed to discover how strong the attraction is. In one such survey, a majority of participants responded that they would sooner give up all of their other interests and pleasures rather than give up the internet. Another study of 20,000 people in 20 developed countries showed that 73% would give up alcohol to keep the internet. 10% were prepared to give up driving to retain internet access. 83% would let go of buying prepared food products....

Let's face it. Plenty of internet users readily skip a breakfast, a lunch or a dinner because they cannot tear themselves away from the screen. That means the web is more important to them than nutrition. That is what we call in English an addiction.

In one extreme case, a couple in Korea would spend 12 hours a day away from home on the internet. They would run home once a day to feed their three-year-old daughter. She died of dehydration and malnutrition. There have been incidents of people who assaulted and even shot others for posting negative comments or embarrassing photos about them. One 15-year-old shot his own father after his internet privileges were revoked. The problem of the internet being used by teenagers to attack and ridicule others and the resulting emo-



tional issues has become so alarming that in 2006 the CDC (Center for Disease Control, a federal agency) called a conference to address the crisis.

While all these cases involve non-Jews, it is important to realize that we are playing the same game of Russian roulette as they are. The consequences cannot possibly lag far behind. It has been documented in the medical world that internet users who are blocked access to the web suffer the same physical withdrawal symptoms as hard-core drug abusers. In one case, students were denied access entirely and 79% reported suffering severe edginess and depression. It would be extremely foolish

for anyone to convince themselves that they are above internet addiction.

The Jewish world has suffered its share as well. In one case, several years ago, a man was spending night and day tied to his screen. His wife complained that she could not go on living with a husband like that and he would have to choose between the internet and his family. By then it was too late. He chose the internet.

But the situation does not have to be so extreme. Even those who do not drop out of life entirely find that the internet has them bound up sufficiently to materially interfere with their lives. When a parent sits down to supper with one hand holding the fork and the other his smartphone, from which he cannot unglue his eyes, that parent may be sitting with the family in a technical sense, but the children realize they are technology orphans. Their emotional needs cannot compete with the lure of the web.

When a mother sits down with her children

in a restaurant and spends the entire time talking on her phone, she is guilty of committing the same crime of abandoning her children. (I only witnessed this recently, but I'm sure it is a daily event.) And if the father must check his phone first thing after arriving home *motzaei Shabbos* before even bothering to wish his family "*Gut voch*," then they are essentially fatherless.

Technology has also reduced everything we take seriously to the mere butt of a joke. This past *Tisha B'Av*, by the time we got up from the nighttime reading of *Eichah*, there were political translations of the *Megillah*, pictures of various rabbis sitting on their stools and text messages making light of the mourning circulating all over.

Imagine what the *Seder* night would look like had the Torah not have forbidden *melachos* that include the use of electronic items. The father in his *kittel* would interrupt his recital to e-mail a clip of the youngest reciting "*Mah Nishtana*" with that cute lisp. The account of our slavery and delivery from *Mitzrayim* would take second place to the texts poking fun at the most meaningful aspects of the evening.

This widespread irreverence completely undermines our *chinuch*. It has eroded our most basic values and created an atmosphere in which nothing we preach is taken seriously. It is destroying us as a nation of servants of *Hashem* in a way that nothing we have ever faced before could have done.

World Fair

Imagine that once each a year a major international fair is held at the Javitz Conference Center in Manhattan. People from all over the world get together for several days to share business ideas, exchange news, meet friends and just enjoy themselves. For the sake of equality, everyone dresses similarly and wears

How many mothers and wives learned only months later that the all-important shiur was really a daily chavrusa with Mr. Internet?



a name tag that may or may not reflect the name they go by at home.

It sounds like a wonderful thing, cultural dissemination and all. But after the first year, the reputation the conference earns is not as rosy as its promoters would like to have the unsuspecting public believe. Sure, there's plenty of business opportunities being exchanged, people find themselves jobs and all, but the breakdown of normal social boundaries has led to an atmosphere of general debauchery that would make anyone from the previous generation blush.

Would a Jew be permitted to attend such an event?

That conference is now taking place every nanosecond and it's bringing together 2.3 billion anonymous people from around the world. You can access it anytime, anywhere (to paraphrase the favored slogan of the US Army's Special Forces). The worst aspects of humanity are being shared and everyone knows that it has a tawdry reputation. A Jew who enters this crowd can circulate without his yarmulke, with no identifying features to brand him as a member of the holy nation. It may take only seconds for someone to forget their inner connection with their people under such circumstances.

The setting encourages some to display their knowledge, others their sense of humor, and yet others their ability to mock authority. The irreverent attitude is all-pervasive. And since no one knows who you are, there is nothing to worry about, no one to be embarrassed of.

Studies have shown that the written word is often taken at face value when the same idea would have been rejected outright had it been presented orally. The articles, observations, notes and blogs read on the internet come from people whose opinions would mean nothing to

us if we met them in person and knew who they were. Yet every wild statement posted on the internet sears itself into the mind of its viewers.

Nor are the "Jewish" news sites any better. Perhaps they are far worse, as they present the opinions of the infamous self-haters, the drop-outs from our community who are not satisfied to leave the *frum* life behind them but must take cheap pot shots at the community as well.

We are so careful not to eat food until we see at least some sort of *hechsher*. We may even refrain from buying a *sefer* until we see a *has-kama* (approbation) from a familiar rabbinical name. How is it then that we can trust ourselves to study the words of people whose beliefs and guiding principles are directly at odds with everything we hold dear?

Assimilated Jews— You and Me?

We have read the stories of the impossible trials of keeping *Shabbos* in America during the early part of the previous century. The greenhorns who came from Europe were immediately mocked by the established Jews who told them there was no future for religion in the New World. Those who ignored the derision, the daring few, soon discovered that the words they had been told were a reality. There was no way to find a job if one insisted on keeping *Shabbos*.

And so a new Jew developed, Jews who would wear a yarmulke and keep kosher but go to work on *Shabbos*. There were *hashkama minyanim* for the workers to finish the longer *Shabbos* morning prayers early enough to reach their jobs in time for the opening of the doors.

Looking back with the hindsight of over 50



When a parent sits down to supper with one hand holding the fork and the other his Smartphone, from which he cannot unglue his eyes, that parent may be sitting with their family in a technical sense, but the children realize they are technology orphans

years, we find it difficult to comprehend. We understand that the temptation was overwhelming, but how could a person consider themselves an Orthodox, practicing Jew if they were transgressing *Shabbos*?!

Imagine what future generations will say of us in 50 years. "I can't understand it. How could you consider yourself a respectable Jew when you were using the internet without a filter? I understand that the temptation was unbearable, you could not support yourself without it (?), but still—a *frum* Jew on the internet?!"

Stop and think about it. Are we not guilty of allowing ourselves to lose the most important aspects of our Jewish identity, even as we keep *Shabbos* and *kashrus*, even as we *daven* and learn, even as we support a Torah infrastructure on a scale the world has never seen before? Are we not turning ourselves into assimilated Jews?

And if we are to look at the barometer of history, mustn't we be concerned that our children will soon be lost to the Jewish nation as a result of the internet, just as so many thousands of Jewish children were lost in the melting pot of America as a result of *chillul Shabbos*?

At the time, most Jews probably did not even realize that they were sealing their children's fate by accepting the fact of *chillul Shabbos*. But we know that there was no hope for Jewish continuity when such a basic mitzvah was being trampled upon, however extenuating the circumstances may have been. Dare

we be guilty of making the same mistake, of ignoring such a basic division that protects our unique identity and still believe that somehow the glorious tradition of our past will continue to blossom through our children? Can we afford to be so naïve?

So much of our nation was lost during the Holocaust because of their refusal to stare the danger in the face and respond appropriately. "It won't happen to us. It can't be as bad as they're making it out. Come on, this is the 20th century. Who really believes such medieval stories today?"

Instead of taking the eyewitness accounts for the truths that they were and seeking any possible means of escape, these people walked blindly right into the trap that had been set for them—sadly, the very trap they had been warned about by the few survivors who had made it out.

So long as we dare to deny the facts, to deny the seriousness of the situation, to ignore the many fatalities that have already occurred, we are allowing ourselves to be drawn blindly into the trap set for us.

The secular world has already woken up to the fact that the internet is not all fun and games. In China, where internet addiction plagues millions of youths, over 200 boot camps have been set up under military-style control of active soldiers where children are prevented from accessing any technological device whatsoever. They must follow a strict daily regimen that includes labor and difficult exercises. Those who broke camp regulations were beaten or subjected to lengthy shock treatment, until several accidental fatalities aroused a storm of protests and the government was forced to crack down.

While we do not propose setting up a similar



rehabilitation system, the intensity of the response by the non-Jewish world should tell us something about the severity of the problem and how it is meant to be handled. We stand to lose much more than any other nation if our identifying features are erased from the next generation. Should we be any less serious than they in our response to the crisis?

We must begin to admit to ourselves the nature of the disgusting and horrendous trap set for us. We must evince at least the same horror we show when confronted by a harmless spider regarding internet use in our midst.

Technology is a potent tool. While we have concentrated for the most part on the internet itself, much should also be spoken about the problems inherent in the universal access provided by e-mail, in the constant connection created by cell phone use (without internet), and especially the dangers of text messaging. Perhaps in no other area have the guidelines of *tznius* between living people been crossed, trampled upon and entirely removed. These are all points not only to consider but to act upon.

Acting individually will get little done. I can keep the internet out of my home, but that doesn't guarantee that my children won't enjoy using it at their friends' homes. If we work together, however, spreading the message that unfiltered, unrestricted internet is absolutely not an option for anyone, that unnecessary access will not be tolerated, then we can begin ridding our community of the terrible terror network that operates in our midst.

Our *rabbonim* have spread the alarm. It is up to us, however, to face the reality and respond accordingly. The fire is burning out of control; it is spreading quickly to our own homes. When we arrive in the World of Truth and are held ac-

countable for our apathy, we will not be able to say that we had not been warned.

Conclusion

We are standing at the threshold of *Mashiach*. Our *gedolim* have been saying for generations that America would be the final *galus*. The dramatic, exponential increase in the *nisyonos* is perhaps the best oracle that prophesies the imminent arrival of the *Geulah*.

The *Mashgiach*, Harav Matisyahu Solomon שליט"א, has emerged as a top general in this battle. He has repeated innumerable times that the internet is the final and ultimate test, the last hurdle we will have to jump to earn the redemption we have awaited for 2,000 years. We have withstood every trial of our faithfulness until now; now is not the time to shrink back in fear and satisfy ourselves with platitudes.

Behind the terrible test, we can feel the *Shechinah* looking to us, begging us to stand up to the final and ultimate trial. "You have shown your loyalty through thick and thin. You have continued to study and uphold the Torah as I originally handed it to Moshe; you have adapted the *halachos* to each new circumstance I have led you through. You *daven* to Me, celebrate My Shabbos. Now show Me: Are you truly ready to set aside everything materially important to you for My sake? בבקשה ממך עמוד לי בזה הנסיון שלא?—I beg you, for My sake, don't buckle under now!"

If we tackle the challenge of our generation with the earnestness it needs, if we stand together as a nation united in its resolve to work together for the glory of *Hashem*, then we will have earned the Divine assistance and protection that *Mashiach* will bring us as we are removed once and forever from our exile among the nations of the world ■ "ובא לציון גואל"





Future e-Ramifications

Sunday, May 20, 2012

Yitzy was having a bad day. Perhaps “bad month” would be more accurate. For weeks, all Yitzy heard about was the upcoming *asifa*, the gathering where over 40,000 Jews from all walks would unite in a baseball stadium to listen to the call of the *gedolim* about the challenge of technology today.

What's so bad about that?

“Like it or not,” Yitzy would declare brashly to anyone who would listen, “the internet is here to stay. It's been a fact of life for the past 10 years, and there's nothing anyone can do to change that. And let me tell you, it's doing a lot of good for the world. Filters? Those are for kids. I'm a responsible adult. I don't need to have my life filtered. The last thing I need for my fast growing online business is a filter that's going to block whatever I need to access. You can't operate a serious business like that.”



"Didn't you see the fliers and brochures?" Yitzy's childhood friend Yonah asked him innocently. "Every *gadol* has joined in decrying the internet and is warning of the terrible danger it poses. They say we have to unite to uproot its terrible influence. Countless people have already succumbed to the harmful effects of the internet. It's worming its way deeper and deeper into our lives, and if we don't halt its advance in time it will be...."

"Don't be a fool!" Yitzy cut off his friend. "You want to tell *me* about the internet? If anyone in our crowd knows the internet, it's me. And let me tell you, they're blowing the whole thing out of proportion. So what if there have been a few cases of people who went off? That's because they didn't know when to stop. Everything in this world can be abused. Why, you can die from drinking too much tap water!"

"But it's taking over our lives more and more."

"Come on. That's a conspiracy theory. They're saying that to scare you into following their agenda. And their agenda is to make sure *klal Yisrael* remains in the Middle Ages! To use the internet you have to have a computer. All parents need to worry about is that their children don't use the computer irresponsibly. I don't need to sit in a stadium for hours to hear speeches about a non-existent problem."

Judging by his words, one might believe that Yitzy is some sort of expert on internet. Truth be told, his highly touted online electronics retail business was altogether a few months old, and so far he hadn't made enough sales to cover even his minimal start-up costs. He wasn't such an expert on the internet either, or he would have learned by now how to link his website to others in similar fields so people would learn the well-kept secret of its existence.

But Yitzy made sure to keep the hard facts carefully hidden from others. As far as his friends and acquaintances knew, he was successfully

manipulating the opportunities offered by the internet to advance his fast-growing business.

"What would I do without the internet?" was his oft-repeated refrain. "My bread, my future is thanks to the internet."

While *klal Yisrael* was gearing up to wage its battle against the internet, Yitzy was preoccupied with a personal milestone. His oldest son, Yossi, was going to turn three immediately after *Shavuot* and they would celebrate his first haircut in a manner befitting an up-and-coming businessman. What a party this *upsheerin* was going to be! Both sets of proud grandparents were going to participate and Yitzy had to make sure that everything was going to be just right.

There was no time for Yitzy to waste on such foolishness as a mass symposium in baseball stadiums to counter the perceived "threat" of the internet.

"I'm not a pessimist or alarmist. I'm a realist. I don't live with false illusions. The internet is here and we might as well make peace with it!"

Yitzy had promised his wife that he would be available that Sunday to help with the preparations.

When Yitzy put his two precious young children to bed the night before, it had been with a sour face. That *asifa* was coming out of his ears. All people were talking about wherever he went was: "the tremendous *kiddush Hashem*," "all the *gedolim* are going to be there," "it's the event of a lifetime; we can't afford to miss it!"

After *mussaf*, the *gabbai* had reminded everyone to go to the *asifa*, and at *shalosh seudos* the Rav had spoken about the significance of the *asifa*. *Asifa! Asifa! Asifa!* Had everyone gone mad? Didn't anyone realize that the Citifield event was nonsense built on fantasies?

Now Yitzy made a firm decision to push the business out of his mind and attend to the really significant matters waiting for him. First he would get a good night's sleep, though. He was





“Like it or not,” Yitzy would declare brashly to anyone who would listen, “the internet is here to stay. It’s been a fact of life for the past 10 years, and there’s nothing anyone can do to change that.”

just about to drift off into a blessed rest when the phone rang. Who could be calling at his hour?

“Hello, it’s Avrumi. Listen, I hope it’s not too late to call, but I’m really stuck. I’m looking for a ride to the *asifa*, but everyone seems to have full cars already and....”

“I’M NOT GOING TO THE ASIFA!”

“Huh?! Um, ok....”

“THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE INTERNET! I USE IT ALL THE TIME! YOU PEOPLE ARE ALL CRAZY!”

“I’m really sorry....”

But Yitzy didn’t wait to hear the rest. He slammed down the phone and buried his head deep in his pillow. “The entire world has gone crazy!”

Five Years Later...

May 2017

“Reb Yitzchak,” as Yitzy was now known, had earned something of a reputation despite his youth. He was proud to share his earnings with the *mosdos* in town and everyone knew they could come to Reb Yitzchak for a loan.

The source of Yitzy’s newfound wealth was no secret. He had learned to harness the potential of the internet and had discovered ways of making his business known to all. To boost his earnings, Yitzy had entered the gray market, a secretive but highly lucrative field. He contacted electronics retailers in Third World countries where major

companies sold their excess stock for a pittance. He purchased their entire stock at a significant reduction, leaving the suppliers with a neat profit.

When Yitzy resold the brand names products in the US at a deep discount he was still coming away with a tidy sum. He was using their own brand name products to compete against the manufacturers themselves at a price they couldn’t beat. The producers gritted their teeth, but there was little they could do. Yitzy’s operation was in full compliance with the law.

The nature of many gray market deals is that they must be kept under wraps or else the manufacturers will take steps to protect themselves. They could not know how their own products were arriving back in the US or they would stop dealing with those Third World merchants.

“And that’s why I can’t afford to use a filter or any other such ‘Big Brother’ software,” Yitzy made sure to let everyone know. “I can’t allow anyone out there to take control of my business.”

And, as always, Yitzy adds his favorite refrain: “Where would I be if not for the internet!”

By now, though, his motto had begun to take on new meaning. The internet had advanced rapidly over the past five years. The number of websites had topped the 5 trillion mark and new programs were available that nobody had dreamed of five years earlier. The internet was more a part of people’s daily lives than ever.

Meanwhile, Yossi was turning eight. Yitzy had chosen the best yeshiva for Yossi, dutifully sign-



ing that there was no computer in their home. Yitzy had always been a strong proponent of banning computers from the home to protect the family. Strictly speaking, his signed statement was entirely true, but it belied the fact that the home was full of devices such as Smartphones and iPads that offered complete, unfiltered and unadulterated internet access. Over the years, thousands of new apps had become available, many of which could be downloaded for free, and Yitzy's devices were constantly updated accordingly.¹

Looking back, Yitzy could laugh out loud about the time he had felt himself at the pinnacle of success after purchasing the brand-new iPad, his very first. Today iPads were about as "in" as leashes for dinosaurs. They had long been replaced by iWatches that offered fully integrated internet and other services in a small device on a wristband. Touch screens were also relegated to museums. The new generation of technology meant all you had to do was voice your command and the iWatch would play your favorite music or read the latest news out loud.

Of course, Yitzy's home sported all of the latest devices, each fully connected to the internet. Among the most useful was the children's new gaming system that updated itself periodically with new levels and games that downloaded from the internet.

"When I was a kid we used to badger my parents regularly that we were bored with our old toys," Yitzy says proudly. "Now it will take months—if at all—for the kids to lose interest!"

Still, Yitzy was careful to keep to his word. There was not one computer to be found in his home. None of the primitive hard drives, keyboards and processors were wired up together. That would be exposing his children to unnecessary risk.

Five Years Later...

May 2022

Yitzy is as busy and excited as he could ever imagine. In just two weeks, he would be marking a momentous occasion: his precious Yossi's bar mitzvah. What an exciting time!

Yossi was a good boy who well deserved the lavish attention he received. He had a good head and easily grasped his lessons. He learned studiously and was well-behaved in school. His parents were very proud of him and had every reason to look forward to years of *nachas*.

As a mainstay of the community's Torah institutions, Reb Yitzchak was making sure to celebrate the occasion in style. His dear wife Sarah had booked the largest and most elegant hall in the city and had spent months attending to the myriad details that would ensure the evening would be one long remembered.

Sarah used her iShop to order her gown and jewelry for the evening.

Nobody would have dreamed 10 years ago that someday you could sit in the comfort of your living room and view a complete catalog in 3D, just as if the item were right in front of you! The caterer, decorator and musicians were hand-picked, based on who had earned the best internet ratings.

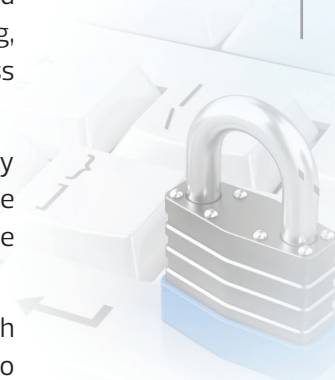
For his part, Yitzy didn't have the time to deal much with the preparations. He was too preoccupied with his booming online business. New products were being developed all the time and with the speed of the internet always increasing, he was able to double the size of his business every year.

"What would I do without the internet?" Yitzy continued to ask rhetorically. "I'd probably be schlepping boxes in a basement warehouse somewhere...."

Fortunately, he knew he could rely on Sarah to arrange everything perfectly. On his way to

[1] <http://mashable.com/2010/01/24/internet-of-tomorrow-column/>

"In ten years, computers will only be a small percentage of how we use our web. We're going to be accessing it from nearly every device and appliance we own."





Today iPads were about as “in” as leashes for dinosaurs. They had long been replaced by iWatches that offered fully integrated internet and other services in a small device on a wristband.

his office, where he could sit and oversee his online operation in peace, Yitzy reminded his wife to see that the invitations they had finalized the previous evening would be mailed to all his friends and clients.

Of course by “mail” Yitzy was referring to what had once been known as e-mail. As regular postal deliveries were phased out (after the Postal Service spent years in decline eating up taxpayers’ money until the public protested its continued existence) the ‘e’ of e-mail had been dropped and electronic mail had taken its rightful place as the standard.²

Sarah had found the most talented graphics designer to produce an interactive 3D invitation with a holographic monogram that changed form and color constantly. The invitations were accompanied by a slide show depicting Yossi’s development from birth and climaxing with a photo of the boy, face shining, in his new hat and suit. Sending along such a large file was no big deal considering the incredible speed at which the internet now operated.

Still, Reb Yitzchak made sure to order a special, custom-written *pshetl* for his son from an outstanding *talmid chacham* in *Eretz Yisrael*. Yossi, with his sharp head, had gotten the hang of it quickly. He reviewed it numerous times with his virtual tutor and could recite it verbatim in his sleep.

“And it’s all thanks to the care I took not to have a computer in my home. Yossi’s head is full of Torah, and he is living proof that as long as you don’t have a computer in your home there is no need to worry about modern technology ruining your children.”

Yitzy was reminded of the massive *asifa* of 10 years before when the rabbis had made such a big deal about the internet. Now they were arranging a follow-up *asifa* for the public to renew its commitment to avoid unnecessary use of the internet in any form. Over 100,000 Orthodox Jews were expected to participate this time around.

“The situation is only growing worse,” the leaders announced repeatedly. “Thanks to the unified stand we took 10 years ago we were able to put the brakes on some of the most negative effects that internet was having on our community. But since then its presence has grown many times larger and its involvement in every aspect of our lives has grown much deeper. We must renew our battle with firmness and resolve that we will stand or die! Enough *korbanos*! Let’s stand strong and together we will bring *Mashiach*!”³

Just like the previous time, Yitzy looked down contemptuously at the tumult going on around him.

[2] Steve Case, Co-Founder of AOL: “Someday it would be great if instead of being e-mail, it would just be called mail. Instead of being e-commerce it will just be called commerce, just because it is so ubiquitous that it is just taken for granted, much as we take for granted electricity or water or other kinds of utilities.”

[3] <http://mashable.com/2010/01/24/internet-of-tomorrow-column/>
“Nationwide Wi-Fi is the more exciting prospect, though. In 2008, the FCC had an auction for the 700 MHz wireless spectrum... A nationwide Wi-Fi network is still very possible and, in fact, seems logical given the direction of web technology today... More devices will have access to these networks and... these networks will be more prevalent as time goes on. Ten to twenty years down the road, people will wonder how we managed with laptops disconnected from a Wi-Fi or 4G signal.”

"The whole business is ridiculous. There is no need to get everyone worked up. If anyone doubts that you can raise decent children in an internet world, let them speak to my Yossi!"

Once again, Yitzy ignored the overwhelming turnout for the *asifa* and stayed at home to help his wife prepare for their upcoming *simchah*.

"If Yossi says his *pshetl* well, I'm going to reward him with the latest MP-7 micro-player. It can carry a limitless number of *shiurim* and lots of music for him to enjoy in his spare time."

Sarah readily agreed to the idea. After all these years she trusted her husband implicitly on matters of modern technology. Yossi could record all of his *shiurim* in yeshiva, as well as the music he had enjoyed so much at the *Chol Hamoed* 4D concert.

Just the mention of the latest players made Yitzy wax nostalgic.

"Do you remember how excited people were when the first MP3 players came out? Ha, ha, ha! You had to worry about whether it held one gigabyte or two and your memory might run out after just 60 tracks. Who even thinks about the memory today? Who even remembers what a hard drive is? Nobody looks at file storage anymore; everything is stored online on "the cloud." You can store all of your files at one secure location and access it all from anywhere in the world!"⁴

Five Years Later...

May 2027

"איפה יוסי?—What happened to Yossi?"

Looking back, nobody could figure out what had gone wrong. Yossi had once been such a

delightful boy; a prodigy who took his studies seriously and was a pleasure to have in class. He had been friendly and outgoing and used his good head not only to grasp the lessons himself but to explain them to the weaker boys as well.

All that had changed. Yossi had turned into a pensive, introverted boy. He was embittered and demoralized. Something had happened, but nobody could figure out what.

While Yossi's friends debated the topic, they slowly learned to stay out of his way. In time, he had begun acquainting himself with lower elements and he soon developed a bad reputation. Yossi was not only brash and quarrelsome but he was exerting a bad influence on those around him.

Perhaps Yossi's parents should have picked up on the subtle changes in his demeanor, but they were too confident in their pride and joy to notice. The yeshiva sent many "mails" to Yitzy to come to the yeshiva to discuss Yossi, but he never had the time and didn't think there was any value to it anyway. Yossi was fine. On several occasions, the *mashgiach* approached Yitzy directly in shul, and broached the subject of Yossi, but Yitzy never seriously considered the warnings about his son. When his wife suggested that there may be something up with Yossi, Yitzy brushed it off and told her to let it slide. Time and again Yitzy downplayed that there could be any serious problem, at least one that needed intervention.

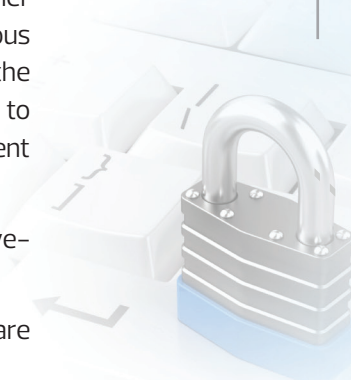
When he finally received a typical-looking message from his son's yeshiva before *Pesach*, he naturally assumed that it was just another thank you note acknowledging his generous contributions that were keeping the doors of the yeshiva open for everyone. He was shocked to read the message and find an entirely different communication.

Yossi would not be welcome back in the yeshiva after *Yom Tov*.

"What?! Are they out of their minds? How dare

[4] <http://pewresearch.org>

"[B]y 2020 most people will access software applications online and share and access information through the use of remote server networks, rather than depending primarily on tools and information housed on their individual, personal computers... Cloud computing will become more dominant than the desktop in the next decade. In other words, most users will perform most computing and communicating activities through connections to servers operated by outside firms."





Nobody would have dreamed 10 years ago that someday you could sit in the comfort of your living room and view a complete catalog in 3D, just as if the item were right in front of you!

they! After everything I did for them they send me this slap in the face as a *Yom Tov* gift?!"

A curt command to his iWatch had him connected to the yeshiva line instantly, but Yitzzy learned only that all lines would remain closed until after *Yom Tov*.

No problem for a man like him. In another millisecond, Yitzzy found himself in a virtual face-to-face conversation with the yeshiva principal.

"What's this all about?!" he demanded angrily. "How dare you! I will never send you another donation!"

To his utter shock, the principal didn't seem particularly perturbed by his threat. Little did "Reb Yitzchak" know that the yeshiva had been closely observing his son for the past months and had done its best to deal with the problematic situation. Their attempts to contact Reb Yitzchak for a friendly conversation regarding Yossi had found him too impatient and self-assured to create the frank atmosphere they needed to address an issue of such import.

The staff of the yeshiva had waited until all other avenues had been exhausted and—fully cognizant of the repercussions—had made the fateful decision to not invite Yossi back into the yeshiva before he could destroy it completely. The threat of loss of funding had been considered calmly and paled in comparison to what was being done to the institution by holding on to the rotten apple in their midst.

Now the principal proceeded to share with Reb Yitzchak the unpleasant news he had not bothered to listen to before.

"I'm sorry to inform you, but we can't allow Yossi back. For a long time now, we've struggled. We tried our best to help him get back on the right path. In the last few months his behavior and scholastic efforts have dropped precipitously. He's become a very bad influence on the others. We were forced to expel several of his friends. Other parents are furious and threatened to withdraw their own sons from our yeshiva if Yossi was permitted to remain. We can't continue to let him influence the others. While we greatly appreciate your past support and nothing that happens now will change that, there is no way we can let Yossi stay."

Here the principal looked deep into Reb Yitzchak's eyes: "I have my suspicions as to what kind of influences could have such a drastic effect on such a bright young man--"

"What are you talking about!?" Yitzzy blurted out. "My Yossi ruining other boys?! He's one of the brightest boys in the whole class!"

"I understand that this is hard for you and of course we're prepared to aid help in any way possible, but there is no way Yossi can return to our yeshiva."

Yitzzy could tell the issue was closed and there was nothing further he could do. Fuming, he cut off the image of the principal without bothering to say goodbye.

The *Yom Tov* passed in a blur and Yitzzy frantically tried to find a new yeshiva for his son, but it seemed that they were all in communication with each other. Whomever he spoke to re-



sponded politely but firmly that there was no room for Yossi in their yeshiva.

Weeks passed and there was no improvement in the situation. Yossi was sitting at home wasting his entire day, from night until morning, with the newest device his father had given him a few months before. It was a fantastic phone, toy, player and much more all wrapped in one. Of course, it was powered by continuous online interaction, but who was still concerned about that?

After observing the change in his son, though, Yitzy was forced to face the sinking feeling that perhaps the yeshiva principal had been right after all. He sat back and thought the matter over. There was no other choice. He would have to find a way to get Yossi back into the same yeshiva. But if the principal was dead set against it, how could he accomplish that?

After mulling it over, Yitzy's thoughts turned to the Rosh Yeshiva. Although he had not dealt with the man much in recent years, the Rosh Yeshiva was none other than his childhood classmate Yonah. Now known to everyone as the learned Rav Yonah, he often *davened* in a nearby shul. Yitzy would find him one evening, appeal to his heart and ask the man, for old times sake, to overlook whatever it was that was bothering the staff and let Yossi back in.

That night Yitzy went to the other shul and sure enough he could see Rav Yonah in the middle of *davening*. He waited in the anteroom and passed the time by reading the ads. "Limited number of appliances available w/o online connection. Enjoy a washer/dryer like your parents used! First come, first served!"⁵

As he read the flier, Yitzy's mind went back to a conversation he had shared 15 years before.

The internet is worming its way deeper and

deeper into our lives, and if we don't halt its advance in time it will be....

You say the internet is taking over our lives more and more? Come on. That's what we call a conspiracy theory. To use the internet you have to have a computer. All parents need to worry about is that their children don't use the computer irresponsibly!

How off I was with my predictions, Yitzy thought to himself.

"Reb Yitzchak?" Yitzy suddenly heard a voice calling his name. He turned around to face Rav Yonah, now a mature man with a long beard, shining countenance and respectable bearing. Rav Yonah was surprised to find himself standing face-to-face with his childhood friend, the father of his former *talmid*.

"Rav Yonah, you must save me and my reputation. They refuse to let Yossi back into the yeshiva. Now no one wants him. I had such high hopes for him—we all did! You must take him back. I'm sure this was all some sort of mistake and I'm willing to overlook it if you'll just help me now."

Despite himself, Yitzy burst into tears. "Rav Yonah, what happened? What happened to the shining boy who studied Torah with such gusto? How can it be that no one has room for such an outstanding student?"

Rav Yonah took his friend's hand and quietly told him, "The internet has ruined so many wonderful people...."

"Internet?" Yitzy spat out bitterly. Everything now goes over "the Grid," Yitzy thought to himself. It's one hundred millions times faster than the internet was just 15 years ago. My business could never have reached its tremendous size if I were still bound to the old-fashioned internet! Yitzy took a deep breath and turned to his former classmate, "What do you mean to tell me



[5] <http://www.cnn.com>

"Larger companies such as LG, Panasonic and Samsung are trying to link up all of the big-ticket household appliances to the internet—with a variety of goals in mind."



Everything now goes over “the Grid”... It’s one hundred millions times faster than the internet was just 15 years ago. My business could never have reached its tremendous size if I were still bound to the old-fashioned internet!

that it ruined so many people? What does that have to do with me?”⁶

Rav Yonah put his arm warmly around his friend’s shoulder. “Sit down and let’s talk for a few minutes. Do you remember 15 years ago when the first *asifa* took place? The *asifa*. Everyone was talking for weeks beforehand about what was going to be done and how *klal Yisrael* was going to unite to deal with the great problem we were facing.”

Yitzy nodded thoughtfully and Rav Yonah forged ahead, “You were very outspoken in your opinion that the whole problem was a fantasy and everything was being blown completely out of proportion. You let everyone know that you were getting rid of the computer in your home and now you were completely protected from the internet, right? But let me tell you, my dear friend, you may have been more familiar with the internet than the rest of us, but you made a fatal mistake. You thought the internet was a problem that would forever be limited to the computer. But who bothers with a computer anymore? Just some office workers who retained desk jobs. Twenty years ago we needed computers to make full use of the internet, but not today. Today we have the Grid and innumerable devices and appliances rely on a constant connection to the Grid. Have you been to a computer store in recent years? They have ceased to exist! Nobody is bound anymore to the keyboard, mouse

and that primitive piece of hardware they used to call a hard drive.”

“Of course,” Yitzy interjected. “You don’t have to tell me that. Today we all use speech-to-text which follows your vocal instructions. Those who still want to type for more accurate data entry use virtual keyboards projected on the office desk, the wall or even your hand!”⁷

“Yes, but think back to how the *yetzer hara* played around with us over 15 years ago. There was a strong movement to evict the computer from our homes. Then the *yetzer hara* came along and brought the internet into Jewish homes by way of unfiltered tablets, Smart-phones and eventually even smaller devices. And many people who removed the internet from their homes still exposed themselves to it at work. They logged on to the worst of sites.”

Rav Yonah stroked his beard and looked deep into the eyes of his former classmate: “After watching one heartbreaking episode after another, our *gedolim* decided that decisive action had to be taken and the internet had to be banned from Jewish society in any form other than the barest minimum each breadwinner needs for his work. You, however, decided that you knew better. You refused to join and you even tried to convince others not to. You and other like-minded individuals failed to take the appropriate steps to protect yourselves and your families.



[6] *London Times*—April 07, 2008: “The Grid” Could Soon Make the Internet Obsolete.

[7] <http://news.yahoo.com>
“The End of Keyboards & Monitors: the OmniTouch.”

"You don't need me to tell you that if it was difficult to give up the internet 15 years ago, it would be next to impossible to suddenly stop using the Grid now. The Grid provides free and instantaneous access to all online services anywhere in America. Just look at the integrated GPS that now comes standard with every car.⁸ Not only does it give you the directions to your destination with constantly updated satellite information, it now provides you with a constant 3D image of the road ahead of you, complete with every tree and building, so you can recognize where to go before you even reach the next turn!"⁹

Rav Yonah patted his old friend on his shoulder sympathetically and then continued, "Yitzy, I'm not sure you even remember how many times I approached you to warn you how all these devices have a bad influence on Yossi. You always scoffed and said that I didn't know what the internet was. Yes, you threw out your computer but you allowed the internet to invade your home in a thousand other ways. Your Yossi may never have touched a computer, but he has experienced the worst and he may never recover. Any cheap pocket-sized device can allow an inquisitive young man to access all of the worst today's world has to offer. Not only that, Yossi ruined other fine boys around him as well. And all because you thought you knew better!"

Yitzy felt his heart pounding. Rav Yonah continued: "While we have not been able to save Yossi—so far—we were forced to take steps to protect the rest of our students from falling victim to the internet, or Grid or what have you. And, I'm sorry to say that even if he would want to return Yossi has no place roaming the halls of a yeshiva in his present state. If there is anything further I can do for you, Reb Yitzchak, be assured that I'm here for you at any time. Meanwhile, I wish you best of *hatzlachah*. Have a good night."

Their conversation was over, but Yitzy could not bring himself to move. He sat in the same place for a long while mulling over what the Rosh Yeshiva had just told him. Hardest of all was to admit that he, Yitzy, the self-proclaimed expert on modern technology, had erred drastically. The rabbis had been right after all, of course, and he of all people had been trapped by the *yetzer hara* into the most pernicious of errors.

His son Yossi had fallen prey to his father's I-know-better-than-you attitude, and at the moment there was no prospect of saving him.

Five Years Later...

May 2032

Even five years later, Yitzy winced every time he thought about his conversation with Rav Yonah. How many times had he found his thoughts wandering back to that conversation? How many times had he found himself walking around in a fog? He was plagued by deep feelings of guilt for having caused so many problems for Yossi, such a promising young man. Yossi himself had continued falling and eventually his contacts with shady figures overtook his life. He dropped out of his parents' world entirely.

At the same time, Yitzy's long run of spectacular business success came to a sudden halt. Sophisticated new technology allowed manufacturers to track every product they produced as they were distributed around the world. This was just what the major brand name producers were waiting for. As soon as they discovered which of their Third World merchants were selling their products back to American businessmen like Yitzy they dropped those distributors like hotcakes. Now Yitzy could no longer find cheap suppliers for his products.

With the gray market effectively closed, Yitzy tried competing directly with the wide range of new products and applications that

[8] <http://news.cnet.com>

"Ford cars to become Wi-Fi hot spots."

[9] Reuters: "Future cars to feature interactive 3D GPS dashboards."





The new I-glasses had become an overnight sensation. Using a wireless connection to the Grid, these glasses provided you with all sorts of information about whatever building or site you looked at...

flooded the retail market in the new Grid epoch. Massive fiber-optic cables now crisscrossed America, replacing the primitive telephone and cable lines that once transmitted messages and data. Now the entire Europe and North America relied solely on the unified cable service to provide VoIP.¹⁰

You could no longer get telephone service without being connected to the Grid. And that same cable delivered television and movies, including the most depraved. All you needed was a small device to access the information that was present. And despite all the efforts by responsible Jews to keep television and movies out of their homes, there was always the worry that one of the children would obtain any of various devices that would allow them to access everything.¹¹

Newspapers, that all-American pastime, had entirely disappeared to be replaced by iPapers that were updated hourly.¹² And virtually any information you needed was now available in an instant using the TalkTalk technology. Anything you needed to know, find or buy could be presented as a verbal query and

TalkTalk would tell you where to find out or whatever you wanted to know.¹³

Recently, the new I-glasses had become an overnight sensation. Using a wireless connection to the Grid, these glasses provided you with all sorts of information about whatever building or site you looked at, such as what was inside and even the history of the building!¹⁴

Even videos were almost entirely on their way out. Now holograms were used to give you the feeling of a live conversation with a person who was actually on the other side of the world. Teleconferences between executives now took on the feel of personal meetings as the real-time image of participants at widely distributed locations joined in holographic unity.¹⁵ When a major event was organized in *Eretz Yisrael*, Jews in America could participate fully sitting in their own auditorium. They watched a live hologram of the speakers as they delivered their message, complete with gestures, from thousands of miles away.

For the first time in his career, Yitzzy was feeling lost by the newest generation of technology. He could not get the hang of the newest gadgets and applications. Clients kept complaining that his stock was outdated and that his prices were out of touch. Sales dropped drastically. Slowly

[10] <http://www.thinksmallcell.com>

"US landlines obsolete by 2025 replaced by cellular and VoIP"

<http://www.times-herald.com>

"With AT&T now basically admitting that the old land line system is obsolete, it might not be too long before those landlines go the way of the old rotary phones."

[11] <http://www.brighthouse.com>

"Imagine it: all your data, your telephone, television, internet, anything and everything done over the same superfast, superefficient line. Fiber optics has already made huge headway on the market, so expect to see only more of it in coming years."

[12] <http://www.pcworld.com>

"LG Display Develops Flexible E-newsaper Screen."

[13] <http://www.newsoffuture.com>

"TalkTalk - the Search Engine of the Future."

[14] Associated Press: "Google glasses offer glimpse into Internet's future."

[15] <http://www.technologyreview.com>

Researchers have made a major step toward a holographic videoconferencing system that would let people communicate with one another almost as if they were in the same room.



his retail empire crumbled and along with it, Yitzy's ego.

Yossi had long since left the picture entirely, and his minimal contact since then had only been to encourage his younger siblings to join his dissolute ways. Unfortunately, more than one of them had been convinced. Yitzy tried spending some time studying Gemara. After years of constant exposure to the ever-changing technology, however, he found that he could not concentrate on anything anymore.

Yitzy had nothing left to look forward to in this world, and he worried that he had nothing to look forward to in the next....

Thirty Years Later...

May 2062

"Internet?" Yitzy croaked to his young grandson. "You want me to tell you about the days of the internet? Let me be. There are things I'd rather not remember, much less talk about. The internet destroyed me; it destroyed my family, my happiness, my life. If only I had listened in time. Oy, where I could have been if not for the internet!"

Yes, Yitzy had changed his tune. In hindsight, he considered his life a failure and it could all be traced to the internet. While other families around him had grown and strengthened themselves, uniting with the rest of *klal Yisrael* in resisting the excesses of modern technology, Yitzy had allowed himself to be ravaged by the monstrous presence that had overtaken the world.

Where he had been given the chance to be the proud father of a potential future *gadol ha-dor*, Yitzy was now completely estranged from his firstborn son who had fallen upon his own hard times. His second son kept *Shabbos* more for his elderly father's sake than because it

meant anything to him. And ever since the Grid had arrived he had never been able to support his family. The internet had deserted him in his time of greatest need.

"If only I had the sense to accept what wiser and smarter people had to say! If only I had let into my heart what the *gedolim* were saying back then about coming up with ways of fighting the negative influences of the internet! If only...."

"Yitzy, Yitzy, what are you shouting about? Are you alright?"

It was the voice of his wife Sarah, who sounded very concerned.

"What... where am I?" Yitzy asked as he opened his eyes and the dreary world around him slowly melted away.

"What do you mean? You're sleeping in your own bed! Did you have a nightmare?"

"One second, what day is it?"

What do you mean 'what day is it?' It's Sunday morning, two days to *Rosh Chodesh Si-van*. Yossi's *upsherin* is coming up soon and you promised me you would be available today to help get ready."

"*Baruch Hashem*—it's not too late! Listen, I'll be available until late afternoon. After that I have to leave for the *asifa*."

"What? You're going to the *asifa*?! But you've been telling everyone for the last two months that there's no need to go!"

"I'm sorry Sarah, forget about whatever I said. I thought I knew everything but now I realize I know nothing. I'm not going to risk my entire future, or the future of our Yossi, just because I think I know better. I'm definitely going to the *asifa*. And if anyone calls looking for a ride, tell them it will be my pleasure!" ■



קריאת מאורי וגדולי ישראל שליט"א

מִי לֵדָה' אֵלִי!

אָרדנוֹ בני יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמַעְתֶּם נָא:
הִנֵּה כֹה־נֹרֵעַ לִכְל גֹּדֶל הַשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר הוֹשִׁבְרוּ שְׁלֹמֹה אֲמוֹנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ע"י הַטֶּעֱמָנָאֲלֵאנִיעַ הַחֲדָשָׁה, שְׁהוֹרִידָה
אֶת יוֹשִׁבֵי תֵּבֶל לִדְרוֹמָא הַחֲדָשָׁה שְׁבַע־מֵאוֹת שָׁנִים וְעוֹמֶק הַשְּׁפִלוֹת, עַד שֶׁגַּם הָאוֹמֹת כֹּה־נֹרֵעַ כִּי צִאֲצִיאוֹתָם
אוֹבְדִים כָּל דְּמוּת אֱנוֹשֵׁי הָעוֹמֵדִים לְפָנֵי הַשְּׁחָתָת עוֹלָם.

ובאשר ידענו נאמנה שכל מאורעות העולם הם אך ורק למען כלל ישראל, מי יודע אם עיקר התחות פיתוי הטעמולאליע היהשים אינו רק למען נמות אותנו האם אורבים או את ה' אלקינו בכל לבבנו וכל נפשנו ומוכנים לחזק את עצמנו שלא להמשיך אחר המצאות היצר המתגבר ומתחדש עלינו בכל יום.

והנה ענינו ראות עשירות המעבא לאינינו נאמין לכל עדה וצידן וכולן וקקום לחיזוק גדול בענין זה. ו"ל כ לעת בואת חובה יתנו לכנס יחד את כל נשתי ישראל כאיש אחד וכלל אחד, לקבל על עצמנו באהבה לעמוד איתנים מנג השחתת המעבא לאינינו.

וכן לזעוק לאבינו שבשמים שיסיר את קושי הנסיון שבאה עלינו ע"י הטענות האלה ויקבע ה' וישמע וגו' ויחיש, וביותר עלינו לקבל על עצמנו גידים של תורה ע"פ דעת גדולי דורנו כיצד להחזיר ולהשמיד בהשתמשות בטענות האלה, לעמוד כצור חלמיש מול פגועי הזמן.

וע"כ חובה גמורה על כל אחד ואחד
לנוח לאספות כלל ישראל

שני"י "אירוד הקהילות לטוור המוחנה" שיתקיים בעזה"י ביום כ"ח אייר תשע"ב
וביחד נשתדל להאזינא את רעד המידע הנעיל את הדורות הבאים. וכן כל כבוד לא ימאס תפלת רבים, ונחמא השעה נחמא שעת רחמים
ועת וקאמ המסירות וכל ולדורונו. ובזכות מסירות נפשיו חיש ספרותו ביבאת נוהל צדק במערה כיסגן, אכסגן.

[illegible]

היום יום ג' כ"ט
ליל חמשה עשר

**Additional Chasima of
Admor M'Pshevorsk**

BETH DIN TZEDEK
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בית דין צדק
לכל מקהלות האשכנזים
שע"י "העדה החרדית"
פעיה"ק ירושלים תובב"א
רח' שכראוס 26/א
ת.ד. 5006 P.O.B.

עורו נא התעוררו נא

הגנו בזה כיחוד ועוד לקרא בצירוף דבדבן לקראתם של הרבנים האדמו"רים וראשי הישיבות של"א ראשי גולת אוראל, בראשות הגר"א אדמו"ר ממקלען של"א והתאבדו ב"מ תתי"ן סלומון של"א ראשי אחד הקהילות והמחנה, אש טעו לעצמם לעורר רבם של חסידים וכו' המשיחית ומכלל כל חלקה הגולה בדבר סכנת הטכנולוגיה האינטרנט והטלפונים הסלולריים וכו' המשיחית ומכלל כל חלקה טובה בכלל ישראל, ובתים רבים מבנים את יקיריהם ור"ל שנפלו לשבי הסומא ורבים חללים הפילו ה'.

והנה התעוררו הרבנים הגאונים הצדיקים שליט"א לעורר את לבות בני ישראל למען המשך דורותינו, ולקראו עצרה בביטוס רבנים ומנהיגי הציבור, ל"כ משטפים אנו לבקש מכל אחד ואחד להשתתף בכינוס הרבנים ביום המיוחד בכ"ד שיחיה נכסיו למען שמים למען טוהר המחנה לטכס עצה ומתחשבה ברוב יועץ לעצור בעד השכחה, וכאמ"ד תחונן הבית חבורתא קדשתא.

וכן קריאתו לכל הציבור בעת האסף לקול קריאת הרבנים הגאונים שליט"א, ודאי יאפוּס אחד מן הציבור לעמוד ליד משמרת חינוך הדורות בקדושה וטהרה, לברך והחזיק והתמיד חומה בצורה שלא יאבד מהמחנה כל בעל תורה חינוך תשוב"ר ובתי ישראל קדשי הקדשים, וזכות הרבים המתאספים לשם שמים ודאי ייעל לחזק ולהתחזק דברים הצריכים תיחקן, ואינו דומה מעיקר תקיעים למרובים העושים, ואל ישתמש שום אדם מחובה בקדושה המוטל עליו להעזר במהרה הדורות

זכות מיטת לשיש' ודאי יועיל לחתברך מלעיל בשיעיתא דשמיא מרובה הצרכים לצורך הענין, וכמ"ל (השמיטה למי) ע"פ (השמיטה למי) ודאי יועיל לחתברך מלעיל בשיעיתא דשמיא מרובה הצרכים לצורך הענין, והוא המסכה להבין להשקפה למי' א' בשמעי דודי חל' כבר שמענו בדברך, וזוהי לרוב תנאי קדושה מכל י"ח זרע בך ה', ורוב השמעות טובות הנשמעות בזכות הקדושה והטהרה, והיא המסכה הנשאר לפליטה קודש לה', עדי נזכה בקרוב לרוח טהרה ממורם כמים לים מכסים בביאת גוא"צ ב"א.

הכרזה זו נערכה בשם הוועדה המייעצת לרפורמה המשפטית, בהתאמה להחלטת הוועדה המייעצת לרפורמה המשפטית, בדבר הקמת הוועדה המייעצת לרפורמה המשפטית, ובהתאמה להחלטת הוועדה המייעצת לרפורמה המשפטית, בדבר הקמת הוועדה המייעצת לרפורמה המשפטית.

**Letter from Beis
Din Tzedek,
Yerushalayim**

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**Letter from
Admor
M'Novominsk**

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**Letter from
the Admor
M'Rachmistrivka**

RABBI YAAKOV HILLEL
 ROSH YESHIVAT
 HEYRAT AHAVAT SHALOM
 45 ARZEY HABIRA ST. JERUSALEM

רבי יאקב הלל
 ראש ישיבת
 חברת אהבת שלום
 45 ארזי הבירה ירושלים

לְאוֹתֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית "יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקְּדוּשִׁים וְהַדְּרוּקִים הַנֵּעִי"

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הכותב התרועע לכבוד מו"ת הרבנים ושומרי החומות של מדינת ישראל

Handwritten signature: יעקב מנחם חזן

Handwritten number: 128425

Official Seal:
 מדינת ישראל
 משרד המבחן
 יעקב מנחם חזן
 יעקב מנחם חזן
 YAAKOV MANACHE HAZAN
 YAAKOV MANACHE HAZAN

**Letter from Harav Ha-
gaon R' A.L. Shteinman,
Harav Hagaon R' Chaim
Kanievsky and Harav Ha
gaon R' Shmuel Wosnor**

יַעֲקֹב מַרְלֹב
קַדְרַת עֲדֵי יַעֲקֹב נְאוּמַנְסֵק
יִשְׁבֵּת נְאוּמַנְסֵק - קֵל יִחְדָּא
בְּרוֹקְלִין, נְי.

RABBI YAAKOV PERLOW
1644 - 46TH STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11204

[illegible]

**Letter from
Harav Hagaon R'
Shmuel Auerbach**

Abbi Shmuel Auerbach
Jerusalem

בית, ירושלים יום ראשון כג ניסן תשעב

הן ידוע לכל אשר אוי לנו שכך עלתה בימינו, הפירצה הנוראה

והאידימה של האינטרנט וכו' וכו' וכל אביזריהו, אשר זה רח"ל עקירת הדת וכל חלקה טובה משרשי ויסודות היהדות, ואוי לנו שהגענו למצב אשר צריכים לבוא ולעורר על דברים פשוטים ואשר צריך להבחיל ממש כל אשר יראת ד' בלבבו.

ואמנם אחרי כך, התעוררו גדולי וראשי ישראל בארה"ב גדולי התורה והיזאה ראשי הישיבות האדמו"רים ראשי אלפי ישראל, להתריע על כך, בראי שחוב קדוש וגמור מאד מאד לבוא ולחזק האסיפה הקדושה לקיום הדת והיהדות.

וזה כמובן א"צ לפנים שזה חובה גמורה על כל החוגים והשכבות וכל עדת ישראל וכל אשר בשם ישראל יכונה, ובוראי ובוראי שזה יבאי בעת"י תועלת עצומה להצלת הדת וקיום היהדות, וכל המשתתפים העושים והמעשים יתברכו בנחת בנחת קודש מכל צאצאיהם שיחיו תוך בריות גופא ונהורא מעליא ונרעם ד' סלה.

הכותב וחותם לכבוד ד' ותורתו, חבר אני לכל אשר יראוך
 אִינְדֶּה פֶּאָרְמַחְדֵּר יִלְדֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל מֹרְמֵר לְפָנֶיךָ אוֹיְצֶפֶק

**Letter from
Harav Hagaon
R' Yaakov Hillel**





Malignancies of the Mind



Malignancies of the Mind. Sounds shocking. There are realities in this world that are simply shocking. They attack every aspect of humanity: Hunger... War... Disease... Violence... Abuse... Internet.

One of the points that make the last entry on our list so distinctive is that in its own unique way it actually encompasses all the others. Even from a purely secular standpoint—which is not the limited view that we as *frum* Jews are expected to take—internet has overtaken and updated every form of evil known to mankind.

The science fiction books and films that present virtual realities in which figures from the computer screen jump out at you and attack in real life are no longer fiction at all. In a very literal sense, all of the vices humans have uncovered over the millennia are now attacking internet users daily, jumping out at them from the screen and in many cases going on to destroy their personal lives.

What's so terrible about the internet?

The science fiction books and films that present virtual realities in which figures from the computer screen jump out at you and attack in real life are no longer fiction at all.

First of all, who says we need to understand what's so terrible about it? If our *gedolim* are saying its unrestricted use is forbidden, that should be enough. And the truth is that they are saying much more than that. They are openly sharing that they have dealt with innumerable stories in which individuals and families have been destroyed by this wonder of the Technological Age. The rest of us learn only about isolated incidents that are spoken of in whispers.

Although the response from *gedolim* should be enough, let's present a step-by-step picture of what internet represents and what it is doing to humanity.

Irreverence

The internet nurtures irreverence.

One of the issues that lies at the heart of the internet problem is the inherent lack of authority it flaunts.

The internet gives every individual his or her say, and that is both its strength and its weakness. There is no one to answer to. Anyone can share his thoughts with impunity. On the internet an accomplished scholar with years of experience can post an authoritative exposé on his area of expertise, only to have someone with not the slightest background in that subject reject the entire edifice with a single derisive comment. In fact, the one who posts a demeaning joke often becomes instantly more popular than the writer of the original piece!

In this context, it can be said without hesitation that the internet presents by far the greatest challenge to the authority of our Torah leaders today. Our nation has been guided throughout its history by our leaders, those individuals who form the unbroken chain of Torah legacy beginning with Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. The Torah commands us to act upon the guidance of our leaders, who take their advice from the words of the Torah.



“לא תסור מן הדבר אשר יגידו לך ימין ושמאל”—Do not veer from what they tell you right or left” (Devarim 17:11).

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (496) comments:

People have views that are different from each other and they will never coincide. The Master of All, may He be blessed, knows that if the interpretation of the writings of the Torah were left in the hands of every individual according to his knowledge, each one would explain the words of Torah according to his understanding. Conflicts would multiply among klal Yisrael regarding the meaning of the mitzvos and the Torah would become dissipated....

Even if it were not an article of faith, history shows that our *rabbonim* have not let us down. The Torah leaders have guided us on how to respond to every attack, problem and crisis that we have faced during our long and often difficult existence. Only in the merit of our Torah and the bearers of its flag have we survived the incredible physical and spiritual dangers of the past 3,000 years.

The internet is an open and limitless domain. Every user potentially puts himself directly in touch with the most depraved minds on the face of our planet. These are people we would be scared to converse with face-to-face, yet in the sterile world of virtual reality they may become teachers, mentors and closest confidants.

A case in point is the “*frum*” websites, where our neighbors and friends chat and share their thoughts on the events and issues of the day. Respect for our elders and leaders disappear in this cyber region. A single pun or “good line” can destroy the work of a lifetime, and eradicate respect for His representatives among us. Derision is commonplace, as is the attitude of questioning and playing devil’s advocate on every issue put forth. Opening up our minds to the ridicule and foreign ideas that pervade the cyber world is the antithesis of the deference that the Jewish nation has held onto throughout the generations.

Superficiality

The internet attacks a person’s depth and inhibits the thought processes.

Scientists have documented that prolonged use of the internet damages the ability of the brain to function properly. The constantly changing text, the stream of images that flit by, the ever-present additional links beckoning to explore new horizons, and the constant stream of information floods the mind.

Users who begin by searching for a specific item of information or product to buy are soon sidetracked by an exciting ad or link, and losing all track of time, suddenly hours have gone by. Even after the internet session ends, the vivid images continue to replay themselves in the person’s mind. They have become a part of the individual’s reality. The person no longer needs to think on his own. His opinions, emotions and principles are now influenced by the internet experience. The mind becomes crippled or even incapable of deeper thought on its own.

If medical experts and professors are alarmed at what is happening to our generation, how much more so must we be concerned about protecting the most precious and vital aspect of our very being?

The Gemara tells us, “שמעתא בעא צילותא”—Torah study requires a relaxed and clear mind” (*Megilah 28b*). How can a businessman sit down to a *Daf Yomi shiur*, how can a yeshiva *bachur* sit down in Gemara class, how can a mother attend an inspiring lecture—when their minds are flattened or destroyed courtesy of the computer?

Addiction

Internet users relinquish control of their minds and actions.

Even if there were nothing inherently wrong with the material available on the internet, its powerful effect on the mind has caused it to



evolve into a potent, dangerously addictive, mind-altering drug.

Psychologists say that an addiction is not just a state of mind, but a pathological disease of the brain. When the brain becomes addicted to drugs, alcohol or certain types of stimulating behavior (such as gambling or overspending), physical changes take place that impel the person to continue his unhealthy behavior. The addiction becomes such an overwhelming force in the person's life that it takes over every aspect of the person's thoughts and behavior. All the person cares about is satisfying that unbearable craving, at any cost.

With the spread of the internet, an incredible phenomenon came to the fore: Internet-aholics. 12-step groups have been formed to treat the problem, dealing with it in precisely the same manner as an alcohol or drug addiction.

Internet addicts find that it takes over their lives. They become so glued to the ever-

withstand the temptation until *motzaei Shabbos* arrives....

Although the internet provides its users with a feeling of freedom, a sense of euphoria at having the world at his fingertips, it is no more than an illusion. The addict is reduced to a shadow of himself, a lost personality, an empty shell. He wastes all his time and energy on the surfing experience and has no strength left for the important matters in his life. He drops out of society and immerses his entire being in a world that exists only "virtually."

Worse yet, internet addiction has driven people to the most destructive behaviors toward themselves and others around them. Much has been written in scientific literature about internet addicts who have been driven to the point of murder!

A study showed that as many as 10 million Chinese youths are so addicted to the internet that they are in need of medical assistance. The

Their jobs, family and even personal care—even eating and drinking—are dropped by the wayside as they spend yet another few hours opting out of reality and into virtual reality.

changing stream of information that they cannot carry on with their lives normally. Their jobs, family and even personal care—even eating and drinking—are dropped by the wayside as they spend yet another few hours opting out of reality and into virtual reality.

Like smokers, who are the first to dash out of shul *motzaei Shabbos* to grab that cigarette they have been craving all afternoon, *frum* internet users will grab their cell or dash to their computer at the first opportunity to satisfy that urge that has been nagging them all day. And those are the ones who are still able to

New York Times reported on a research study conducted in Maryland that found that 200 people who were blocked from their regular access to the web displayed extreme signs of irritability and other abnormal behavior.

Regular use of the internet is being blamed in part for the increased incidence of ADHD among children. Companies have reported that after restricting their workers from spurious access to the internet they saw jumps in productivity of 50%!

From the Torah point of view, our ability to choose is what sets humans apart from ani-



mals. We are to choose subservience to *Hashem*:
 כי לי בני ישראל עבדים ולא עבדים לעבדים והלך זה וקנה אדון—*Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me, not servants to servants. And this one went and acquired for himself a master?!'*" (*Kiddushin 22b*).

Our very purpose in this world is to withstand temptations that would lead us away from *Hashem* and the ultimate goodness He offers. We are enjoined by the Torah, "ובחרת בחיים—Choose life!" (*Devarim 30:19*). Submitting our minds to an outside force that removes our ability to decide on our own is as good as death.

Societal Breakdown

Internet replaces normal societal connections with virtual ones, destroying personal relationships and customary family life.

It is the nature of every human being to thrive on companionship, to need to share one's life, feelings and experiences with those around him or her. When Choni Hamagal awoke after 70 years and found that he could not relate to the new generation, he begged to be removed from the world. *Chazal* comment on this with a classic, pithy proverb that still rings true today: "או חברותא או מיתותא—Either companionship or death" (*Taanis 22b*).

In a healthy society one's closest companion is his spouse. Then come children, the rest of the family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. Each connection adds a unique touch to the sense of belonging and humanity that is essential to emotional wellbeing. Our relationships with those around us are a source of inspiration and life.

The rise of social networking, blogs, chat groups, and even texting all threaten to destroy the traditional relationships that are still so vital to our societal wellbeing. Family and friends are forgotten as people come to rely more and more on the companionship and approval of their virtual

counterparts. But these companions are only a superficial, false substitute for the healthy relationships we still need.

When participating in a chat group, one never knows the identity of the other participants. Their names, locations and positions in society are all hidden. Whatever personal information is shared is often false, a mask created to hide the person's true identity. The relationship established in such a manner is at best weak. In truth, it is non-existent. It is a virtual falsehood.

Bloggers develop split personalities, drifting through life like robots while their true emotions are bound to the ethereal friendships they have developed for their digitalized companions. By filling our emotional "stomachs" with the "junk food" of internet society, we are stunting our appetite for the healthy relationships our psyches truly crave. Where does one's spouse fit into the picture if the opinions of other bloggers are of paramount importance? Where does the time for children and friends go if all one's spare time is spent chatting with other devices?

The internet is presiding over the breakdown of our family, friendships, and society as a whole.

Depravity

Internet makes the most depraved debauchery freely and graphically accessible to all.

What can we say? Everyone knows that the internet has made the filthiest of images and ideas readily accessible to anyone. Pictures and stories that could not be peddled on the streets—even in 21st century America!—without risking a jail sentence are easily accessible and can assault those who use the web regularly.

We are commanded "ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם—And you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes" (*Bamidbar 15:39*), a *pasuk* we recite at least twice every day. The Yerushalmi



comments, “אמר הקב”ה אי יהבת לי לבך ועיניך אנא ידע” —*Hashem said, ‘If you give Me your heart and eyes, I know you are Mine’*” (*Berachos 9b*).

It must be made abundantly clear that the issue is not whether one acts on what he or she sees and reads. Just one glance at a forbidden image is a serious breach of behavior for the spiritually responsible Jew.

The contact with immorality by definition destroys the purity of the *neshamah*. Such material by its very nature distracts the mind and heart from everything spiritual and refined. It is well-nigh impossible to sit down at a *shiur* and follow the discussion, or concentrate on one's *davening* after the mind has been polluted by enticing images and text that the internet purveys.

Because of the dissolute lifestyle of the society that surrounds us, we have largely lost our

To this Torah giant, a forbidden sight was worse than death.

Unfortunately, there have been innumerable stories of people who have not stopped at seeing. These were individuals who would never have dreamed of compromising their lives and characters in such a manner before they began using the internet. In recent years the *dayanim* who deal with *gittin* have begun to deal daily with divorces in which the internet was the root cause.

The element of anonymity that the internet provides allows people to bypass the natural, inborn shame they would normally feel when involved in inappropriate behavior. Therefore, Harav Shmuel Vosner, a senior *posek* of our generation, ruled that one must observe the *halachos* of *yichud*, seclusion with a member of the opposite gender, in regard to the internet.

The element of anonymity that the internet provides allows people to bypass the natural, inborn shame they would normally feel when involved in inappropriate behavior.

sense of propriety. It is no longer such a blot on a person's reputation if he is caught looking at advertisements or magazines that do not belong in Jewish hands.

The great Rosh Yeshiva, Harav Aharon Kotler זצ”ל, once mistakenly glanced at something he considered inappropriate. Witnesses say he instantly turned white as a sheet and began trembling. He went into a private room and was overheard weeping to *Hashem*: “Master of the World, from all those whom You have taken to You [this was shortly after the Holocaust from which the Rosh Yeshiva escaped], You had to leave me behind to face sin?!”

Negative Character Traits

Internet inculcates in its users bad middos by encouraging and publicizing slander, libel and ridicule of others.

The anonymity and instant access to millions of spectators offered by the internet makes it a natural breeding ground for slander. Those who wish to defame others, publicize negative stories and otherwise destroy reputations with impunity, without fear of any repercussions,



have found the internet to be the supreme medium for their debased work.

People regularly post their complaints against others, describing in detail wrongs that have been committed against themselves or just slander intended to destroy another's standing. No one can verify whether the information is true or not, and for the most part other internet users really don't care.

As a result, numerous totally false and baseless claims are posted on the internet where no one can challenge them. Plenty of outcasts, even from our own communities, use modern technology to broadcast their twisted views and opinions to defame and denounce innocent individuals, *rabbonim* and even our entire society.

Reading these stories constitutes the ultimate breach of the laws of *lashon hara* that have been so painstakingly spread throughout *klal Yisrael* ever since the Chafetz Chaim first introduced his magnum opus on the subject. We have taken up the non-Jewish approach that everything goes, that no one can be safe from demeaning information and misinformation; that it is everyone's right to say and hear what they want with no thought of the consequences to others.

Furthermore, by virtue of our participating in this behavior, by reading those blogs and websites, we are directly contributing to the perpetuation of these forbidden activities. We become accomplices to the crime.

Nor does it end when the computer is shut down. The words take root deep in the minds of their viewers, accompanying them in everything they do throughout the day. The slander and atmosphere of ridicule, the utter lack of concern for others' feelings, become a part of the reader's being. The bad traits that are inculcated affect every decision the person makes, everything he does or she does.

Criminality

There is much more that we have not touched on yet in the limited space available here. We have not even touched upon the internet as a gathering for criminals, cults and worse. It is a means by which innocent people are unwittingly trapped, and cheated. Copyright infringement and piracy are a reality every nanosecond. Gambling has shattered the lives of too many upstanding individuals within our own communities. And the list goes on....

Conclusion

It must be underscored that the internet is still in its infancy. The web first became available some 20 years ago and only became popular in the Jewish world more recently, over the past decade. The potential for it to overtake our lives and society entirely in the foreseeable future cannot be underestimated.

We face a very real risk of the disasters that have rocked our communities in the last 10 years becoming not only more prevalent and frequent, but actually devastating our communities entirely. We stand before a real technological Holocaust. It is up to us to stem that tide now—before it is too late.

How can we stand up to and resist the most powerful force that has been unleashed in our times? Only by standing firm and standing together. By following the call of our leaders, our *gedolim* and *rabbonim*. When we make it completely socially unacceptable for people to carry the internet in their pockets, to peddle it freely, to use it unprotected, to expose our innocent children to its dangers—then, and only then, will we be able to tell *Hashem* that with His help we have withstood the test of our generation. ■





Chochma ba-Goyim Ta'amin:

What the Experts are Saying About the New Online Culture

Over the course of the last 20 years, the internet has exploded into our lives. In 1990, a scant three million people in the world were online.¹ At the dawn of 2012, over six times more people across the globe were logging on than at the beginning of 2001, representing a 528% increase over 11 years. Today a huge number of people, an estimated 2.27 billion worldwide, are plugged in to the web. According to <http://www.internet-worldstats.com>, 77% of Americans have internet access. And for a great number of those people, the internet has become an indispensable part of their daily lives.

Simultaneously, the internet has

[1] Dorling, D. University of Sheffield, UK. "Internet Use 1990." www.worldmapper.org, 2006.
http://www.worldmapper.org/posters/worldmapper_map335_ver5.pdf

become a major social and political issue in the world at large. Some voices lament the inaccessibility of the internet in poverty-stricken communities as a civil rights issue.² People who don't have internet access don't have opportunities equal to other Americans. A Federal Communications Commission spokesperson labels not just *internet* access, but *high-speed broadband* internet access as "the foundation for our economy, [and] the foundation for our democracy in the digital age."³

Indeed, the FCC, mandated by Congress, has a special "Broadband Commission" dedicated to ensuring that all Americans have the ability to access high-speed internet. The Commission likens the project to the era when the federal government connected America with the transcontinental railroad, or the electric grid.

Today a huge number of people, an estimated 2.27 billion worldwide, are plugged in to the web.

Last summer, a United Nations special report declared that restricting internet access was even a violation of human rights!⁴ This was partially in response to developed nations like Britain and France who want to punish copyright pirates by disconnecting them from the web.

Although more moderate voices have eschewed such proclamations as over-the-top,

there is no denying that the internet is occupying an increasingly prominent position in the lives of the masses – so much so that many in our communities find that they simply cannot live without it. Can any business today—that wants a broader customer base than the corner grocery store—afford to be without a web presence? (You might be surprised to know that that corner store has a website, too.) Can you leave out the e-mail address on a business card? And for the vast majority of today's professionals, it simply goes without saying that a significant portion of work makes use of the internet's revolutionary benefits.

In a broader sense, access to the web is changing our daily lives. A teacher who needs a last-minute lesson plan on the *parsha* might make use of the extensive resources available at chinuch.org.⁵ Perhaps the tenth *shadchan* in a row has requested an e-mail of your daughter's latest resume... so now you have e-mail. You're on a business trip to Omaha, Nebraska, and want to know when you must *daven mincha*, so you visit or text myzmanim.com. Is there a *minyan* there? GoDaven.com. If you keep *yoshon*, you will want to download a PDF of "the guide." Forgot your *siddur*? Tefillos.com. Can you check this leafy vegetable for bugs? Visit the website of a reputable kashrus organization. More and more, this medium pervades our world.

The internet has seamlessly integrated into many of our lives. Some of us took the plunge willingly, and some were "drawn in" against our will. But now that we are here, we have to confront this brave new world head-on, with our eyes wide open. The same medium that delivers *everything* we need, at ever-accelerating speeds, can deliver *anything* we ask of it. Many people don't even have to seek it out; it's there, in their pockets, beeping and vibrating impatiently, demanding attention. And not only does

[2] For example, see <http://www.schoolnews.com/2011/08/04/needy-families-offered-low-cost-internet-service-computers/>

[3] <http://www.broadband.gov/plan/>

[4] Estes, A. "The U.N. Declares Internet Access A Human Right." The Atlantic Wire. 6 Jun 2011. <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/technology/2011/06/united-nations-wikileaks-internet-human-rights/38526/>

[5] We do not specifically endorse any of the websites mentioned herein, which are used solely to illustrate a point.



it bring us what we want, but it can and does force us to accept things we would never want.

It is already clear from a *halachic* and *hash-kafic* standpoint that unfiltered, unmonitored internet access is literally destroying so many precious *neshamos* of *klal Yisrael*. We don't need to consult external sources to confirm that for us. Nevertheless, it may be useful to know what even the voices of the non-Jewish and secular public, *lehavdil*, are saying about the internet's influence on our lives. Additionally, we should be aware of how strongly internet use can affect us *after we have already taken all necessary precautions*.

It's not only the dirt of the Net that can change our lives for the worse. Everyone who is regularly involved in internet use must take a big step back and look at our new e-reality: how it affects us, how it changes us, and what the future may hold. Additionally, we should be aware of the risks that the dark side of the internet poses to us and our children in its classic ability to expose us to content completely against our will.

By and large, the internet, along with every new gadget and web concept that its technology evangelists (yes, they're really called that) can market, has been consumed with unrestrained glee by the world in general. People are spending more time online than ever before, losing themselves in virtual reality. A British report from March of 2012 claims that the *average* adult in the UK is spending over 15 hours online every week. A *New York Times* headline from 2010 declares: "If Your Kids Are Awake, They're Probably Online." The article goes on to describe that a professor who headed the study on children's internet use was shocked at the results, since in 2005 he had concluded that kids could not possibly spend any *more* time online. He had believed that there were not enough hours in the day to enable an increase.⁶

Some scholars, uneasy with the direction that society has been taking, have issued a wake-up call of sorts. Painstakingly researched books are now appearing, describing in detail what kinds of effects the digitization of our lives has caused, in what direction the general culture is heading, and how we can recognize the changes that are happening within us and in the outside world.

A great many academics, pundits and intellectuals are united in their warnings of the psychological, moral and cultural implications of the internet. A survey of some titles that have been published in recent years is enlightening:

- *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture*, and *Digital Vertigo: How today's online social revolution is dividing, diminishing, and disorienting us*, by Andrew Keen, a columnist and internet entrepreneur.
- *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)*, by Mark Bauerlein, a professor of English at Emory University.
- *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, by Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist and pioneer in the field of virtual reality.
- *Social Networks and the Death of Privacy: I Know Who You Are and I Saw What You Did*, by Lori Andrews, professor at the Chicago-Kent School of Law.

Even statistical studies whose authors are more optimistic about the extensive use of the internet can still enlighten us if we study the raw data through the lens of a Torah perspective. One thing everyone agrees upon: The constant barrage of online information, and the content, quantity and quality of it, is different from anything the human race has ever before experienced.

[6] Lewin, T. 20 Jan. 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/20/education/20wired.html>

In this article we will consult the experts in order to examine the internet phenomenon from several major perspectives: how the internet affects our personalities, changes the way our minds work, promotes unreliable content, does incredible violence to our privacy, and how it pushes unwanted content into our lives. Additionally, we will explore the phenomenon of internet addiction.

The Internet Personality

A new and important book which takes the plunge into examining how the internet has evolved in a relatively short period of time from the domain of a few computer enthusiasts to a medium that dominates how the world communicates is *Virtually You: The Dangerous*

and the resultant metamorphosis is not limited to the online world. In fact, he described the process as a kind of "hijacking" of our personalities.

Dr. Aboujaoude sums up his opinion of the internet's effect on our psyches:

The result of all these online interactions is the unwitting creation of an e-identity, a virtual whole that is greater than its parts and that, despite not being real, is full of life and vitality. Unfettered by old rules of behaving, social exchange, etiquette, or even netiquette, this virtual personality is more assertive, less restrained, [and] a little bit on the dark side.

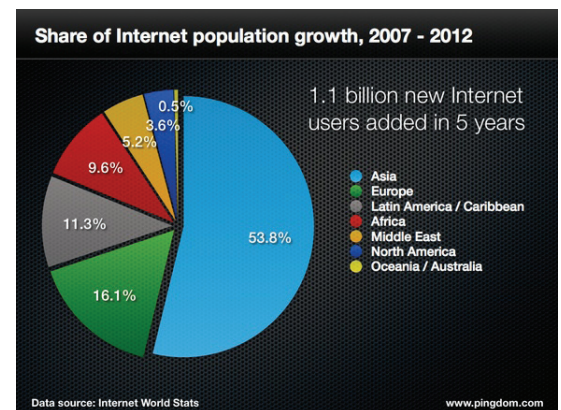
And that e-identity does not tend to stay compartmentalized, only appearing when we sit in front of the computer screen. It manifests itself in our "real life" dealings too – sometimes too subtly to notice. Not only that, but many people are unaware that they are in fact acting differently online than they would in any other circumstance.

He points us to an article by Dr. John Suler, Ph.D., of Rider University, who calls it, "The On-line Disinhibition Effect," which is the phenomenon of people acting in strange and uncharacteristic ways while using the internet, doing and saying what they never would in "real life." He lists multiple factors which contribute to

The internet by nature encourages not only consumption of its content... but participation in and interaction with it. This shapes our psyches, affects our behavior, and is a kind of "hijacking" of our personalities.

Powers of the E-Personality (2011) by Stanford University psychiatrist Dr. Elias Aboujaoude.⁷

According to Dr. Aboujaoude, there is no doubt that the internet is changing the way we think, and even our personalities. The internet by nature encourages not only consumption of its content (like radio, newspapers or television do), *but participation in and interaction with it.* This shapes our psyches, affects our behavior,



[7] This book explores all aspects of secular society's internet use and is not recommended for family reading. Similar caution is advised when consulting all materials referenced herein.



What happens every 60 seconds on the Internet.

this, including "It's Just a Game (dissociative imagination)" and "You Don't Know Me (dissociative anonymity)."

It's well known that people say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel more uninhibited, express themselves more openly. Researchers call this the "disinhibition effect." It's a double-edged sword. Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. Or they show unusual acts of kindness and generosity. We may call this benign disinhibition.

On the other hand, the disinhibition effect may not be so benign. Out spills rude language and

harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats. Or people explore the dark underworld of the internet (...) places they would never visit in the real world. We might call this toxic disinhibition.⁸

Of course, it should be pointed out that from a Torah perspective, even what Dr. Suler terms "benign" disinhibition can often take forms that are inappropriate simply from a perspective of wasting time. Tellingly, a 2009 analysis of Twitter messages by Pear Analytics placed 40% of "tweets" in the category of: Pointless Babble.

Impulsivity

Unquestionably, there is a major trend of internet users who become plagued, to a greater or lesser degree, by impulsive and compulsive behaviors. In *Virtually You*, Dr. Aboujaoude

[8] Suler, J. "The Online Disinhibition Effect." In *The Psychology of Cyberspace*. 2004. <http://users.rideu.edu/~suler/psycyber/dsinhibit.html> (article orig. pub. 2001)

devotes Chapter 5 to impulsivity. A great portion of the chapter is devoted to compulsive gambling, something that is greatly facilitated by over 1,300 gambling websites – many of which are located in offshore gambling havens, like the Dominican Republic, that aren't subject to American legal restrictions.

Dr. Aboujaoude theorizes that it is the instant-gratification nature of the web that allows users to act on their impulses over and over again. This is the key to understanding why people will consistently give in to their impulses rather than their better judgment, in the forms of gambling, shopping, regrettable electronic messages, and other addictive activities.

And that e-identity does not tend to stay compartmentalized, only appearing when we sit in front of the computer screen. It manifests itself in our “real life” dealings too...

Compulsive Buying

Studies seem to show the level of compulsive buying climbing, and especially among the younger generation. Teenagers who have grown up with the internet have shown a startling penchant toward shopping for its own sake compared with adults, and a dramatically high rate of endorsement of materialistic values. There seems to be a compelling parallel between the degree to which the internet encourages materialism and the high rate of it among today's youth.

Dr. Aboujaoude quotes Helga Dittmar, author of a 2007 study published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* about compulsive spending: “Individuals seem **most vulnerable** to compulsive buying tendencies **online**, and would therefore benefit most from... intervention when they believe that a better self is only a button click away.”

Impulsive Emailing/Texting

The “instant” mentality where everything has to be accomplished with dizzying speed can permeate our actions in multiple areas. We lose patience; our tempers get shorter.

Michoel was sick and tired of being pressured at work. Not only that, but his boss had no problem piling on extra assignments, many of which were really his own responsibility, not Michoel's. Upon receiving the latest e-mail ordering him to produce charts for a presentation his boss had to make the next day, his face flushed with anger. This was really the last straw! He angrily composed the following e-mail: “Unlike you, I'm already working overtime and underpaid making this company rich. Why don't you take a shorter coffee break and do the charts yourself?” About a half a minute after he hit the “Send” button, he was regretting his hasty words. He had rent and yeshiva tuitions to pay, and he only hoped his uncharacteristic explosion wouldn't cost him his job.

We can see many of the themes of this article at play in this story. If Michoel was dealing with his boss face-to-face, or even had to talk to him on the phone, would he have said it in quite that way? Perhaps not. But in acting on his angry impulse and clicking the “Send” button, he made an irrevocable decision.



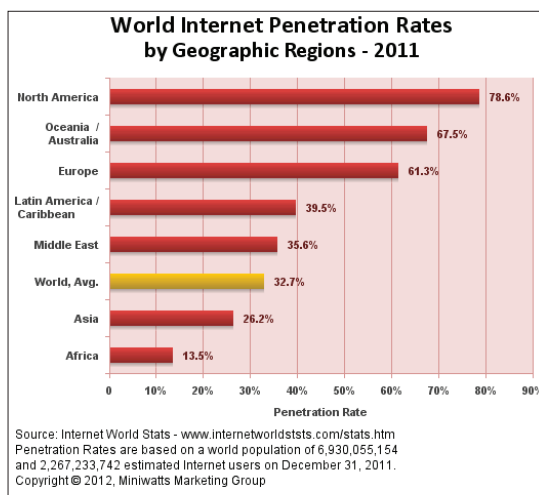
Additionally, the medium of e-mail leaves the intended tone of the writer to the reader's imagination. In person, colleagues can act on cues they get from another person's facial expression or body language. They can change their tone mid-sentence or give a slap on the shoulder and a "Just kidding!" to reduce the other person's unease. In this case, however, Michael's boss can now stare at the computer screen, reading and re-reading the note, percolating with anger, and imagining the worst intentions behind Michael's impulsive words.

In three months, after all has been forgiven and forgotten, his boss could be browsing through a "search" of Michael's e-mails looking for some important information. When his eyes fix on the preview of that e-mail, it will all come flashing back to him. It is forever preserved for posterity.

It's All about You

One of the ubiquitous themes of the internet is: You. Because of the interactive nature of the web, and the ever-increasing competition for your attention from advertisers, the trend of every serious player in the web arena is Personalization. Not only is the internet an ideal tool for self-promotion, but it also delivers everything you want, instantly and custom-tailored.

Social networking is about presenting You to the world, and often marketing Yourself to others. In fact, it actively encourages self-love, also known as narcissism.⁹ Dr. Aboujaoude gives some examples of the slogans that embody this commercialization of self-centeredness. From Yahoo!: "There's a New Master of the Digital Universe. It's Y!ou." EarthLink: "The Earth Revolves Around You." And the "Mi-Fi" technology that "brings you your own portable Wi-Fi bubble."



Dr. Aboujaoude doesn't mince words: "The Internet has the power to transform us into self-infatuated demigods."

Excessive self-love and narcissism are seen by secular society and the world of psychology as antisocial tendencies at best, and pathological mental illnesses in their most extreme manifestation. But intrinsically, plain *gaavah*, haughtiness, and concern only for oneself, are antithetical to the personality that the Torah wants us to cultivate.

The discussion here is not necessarily about some kind of psychosis that will take hold of heavy internet users, although Dr. Aboujaoude's book makes a strong case that our personalities can be significantly affected by this over time. Rather, on a very subtle level, the *ba'alei mussar* and *chassidus* teach us that everything we choose to see, hear, and say, has a definite effect on us. The Vilna Gaon in *Even Sheleimah* says that each action we do in this world creates a "*ruach*," a certain power in the spiritual world that tries with all its might to cause us to repeat this action, whether for the good or c'v for the bad. And we also know that actions, when repeated many times, tend to become second nature for us. It is short-sighted to believe that our behavior while "online" won't carry over into our daily lives.

[9] Shockey, Andrew. "Shockingly Simple: Facebook exacerbates self-interest, reduces meaningful interaction." *The Daily Revueille*. 28 Mar. 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/Shockey-Reveille>

Internet and the Brain

There is a plethora of anecdotal evidence from the case files of psychologists and psychiatrists that the internet affects our personalities and minds. Additionally, there are now peer-reviewed academic studies examining the effect of extensive internet use on various kinds of social and personal problems. But some recent scientific investigations have uncovered an even more startling phenomenon: the very structure of our brains can be affected.

Dr. Aboujaoude describes various studies that have been conducted linking extended video game playing with significant changes in brain usage. He suggests that although few

plications for one's physical health, such as muscle pains and carpal tunnel syndrome.^[10]

In addition to changing the makeup of our brains, internet use can affect us in a more temporary way by providing an almost endless source of distraction. A business research firm called Basex named "Information Overload" as its 2008 Problem of the Year. It defines information overload as, "An excess of information that results in an inability to concentrate on tasks and stay focused. [This] is a massive problem in the twenty-first century; recent Basex research shows that Information Overload costs the US economy ca. \$900 billion per year."^[11]

This means that instead of carrying out whatever task he is supposed to be doing, a typical worker will instead check his e-mail, send text messages, receive cell phone calls, send instant messages, check blogs, and "Google" things. Officials at the technology company Intel estimate that the problem costs each of their employees an average of eight hours a week – time that should be spent working. It also costs the company millions of dollars. They have experimented with various techniques to reduce this wasted time, such as "No E-mail Day."

Scientific studies analyzing the real effects of the internet on users' brains are still in the very beginning stages, and much more research needs to be done. But just perusing the innumerable self-help sites and articles that discuss the distractions and procrastinations that are caused by the internet reveals the double-edged sword of our new plugged-in (or wireless) reality. Academics, psychologists and neuroscientists are advocating caution. Each person should take a hard look at his internet

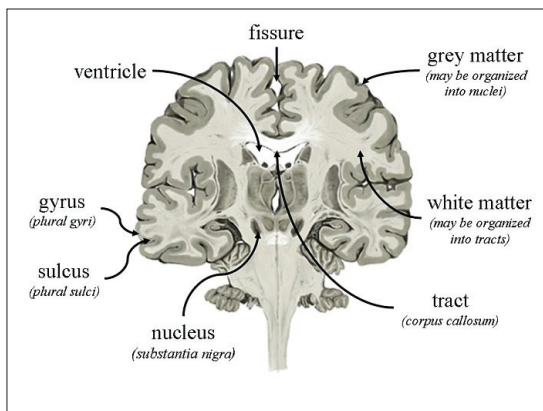
An embarrassing picture, an ignorant comment, a careless insult, lashon hara... all of these things and more can take on a life of their own once they leave the confines of your personal computer and jump onto the World Wide Web.

studies have been done so far that specifically target internet usage, "idly browsing" and other common net activities may have the same effects. They consist of often repetitive, monotonous actions that don't engage our thought processes very much, similar to the effect of watching television for hours on end. (The physical actions involved in extended computer use may also have significant im-



[10] For example, see Bosch, T. *Fatigue and performance in repetitive industrial work*. Doctoral dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam. 2011. <http://dare.uvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/19631/1/dissertation.pdf>

[11] <http://bsx.stores.yahoo.net/inwaroninow.html>



The human brain.



"Information Overload."

use and analyze in which circumstances it is an unnecessary distraction that can lead to many more problems than it solves. Like alcohol, it may make someone feel good in the moment, but its abuse over the long term can have devastating effects.

Privacy: You Are the Product – by Facebook, et al.

Most of us value our privacy. Each person has his or her personal comfort level when it comes to sharing information about himself. Additionally, we may elect not to publicize what we do wish to share to a large audience. On some level, it's instinctual – why should anyone else know about my personal choices, preferences and actions, even if that knowledge wouldn't seem to affect me?

Yet, the internet is a portal to your private self, whether you know it or not.

Information shared on "social networks" can be mistakenly viewed as private ("only my Friends can see it") or semi-private, but in reality just by being a part of these communities, we sacrifice a certain level of privacy. But the not-so-hidden agenda of "data aggregators" like Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, et cetera, is to record every tiny bit of information they can about us in order to sell it. In the words of technology columnist Andrew Keen:

Reid Hoffman, the Silicon Valley super-connector who introduced Zuckerberg [founder of Facebook –ed.] to his first investor, calls this new world "Web 3.0," describing it as a place of "real identities generating massive amounts of data." That data is, of course, all the personal details about ourselves—the billions of photos, updates and videos that we post narcissistically on our Facebook pages.

That data is us. We—you and I—are the company's real product, the oil of our Web 3.0 age. Facebook aggregates and stores all our personal data and then sells access to it to advertisers. That is Facebook's creepy business model and it's why the seven-year-old company realized \$3.71 billion of revenue in 2011.¹²

In the following pages we are going to use Facebook as a case in point and bring many examples of their power over your privacy. In case you think that this information is irrelevant to you because you don't use Facebook, you should know that Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft, and others, try their best to collect just as much information about you. For example, if you are logged on to one of the Google services, like Gmail, your web searches will be recorded, and

[12] Keen, A. "Opinion: We must avoid Facebook's 'creepy' cult of transparency." [CNN.com](http://tinyurl.com/Keen-CNN), 3 Feb. 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/Keen-CNN>

even the ways in which you navigate around the website and where your mouse pointer moves on the screen can be (and is) analyzed. Your email is scanned by Google's software, and ads deemed relevant to the content are displayed on the side of the screen. This author tried to "opt out" of content-based, targeted advertising in Gmail, but somehow the ads on the side of e-mails are excluded from that option. One tech pundit advises, "You can see how much people value their privacy by their willingness to pay for an ad-free service like Fastmail (www.fastmail.fm)."

Someone familiar to this author has a

Dr. Aboujaoude gives some examples of the slogans that embody this commercialization of self-centeredness. From Yahoo!: "There's a New Master of the Digital Universe. It's Y!ou." EarthLink: "The Earth Revolves Around You."

Facebook account that he uses occasionally – perhaps once a month for five minutes – to connect with some distant family members. He has shared a very small amount of data about himself, and even then only to family. But somehow, when he logs on he sees a long and surprising list of "Friend" suggestions pop up on the side of his screen: people whom he barely knew from decades ago, or people with whom he has lost contact, and even people he knows currently in real life – but didn't know they even had internet access.

Facebook, and other "data miners" like Google, will relentlessly pursue any small tidbit of information you provide them with to "connect" you to another person or product, which will likely mean more money for them. They will scan your IP address to figure out your geographical area, compare Friends of your Friends (if, let's say, two of your Friends have the same Friend, they will suggest this Friend for you), and they will monitor your every click while on their websites for interests and spending patterns. All of this data is recorded and processed.

Of course, it's all *strictly private*. At least, that's what these mega-million and billion dollar corporations are advertising. We have to take their word for it that only mindless computer programs and mathematical algorithms are monitoring our every click and keystroke. But the least we can do is inform ourselves about what kind of information we are giving away about ourselves. Just having a Facebook account, no matter how much you try to restrict public access to your information, will give away one very important thing about you to anyone in the world: You have a Facebook account.

We used to have a setting that controlled who can look up your profile (timeline) using your name. We removed that setting because your profile (timeline) could be discovered in other ways in connection with your name.¹³

This means that anyone who knows your name can find that you have a Facebook profile. Depending on your privacy settings, that person can often send you a message directly. Anyone who is a Friend of one of your Friends can even send you a Friend request (there is no way to opt out of this), with the expectations that come along with it.

[13] <http://www.facebook.com/help/privacy/basic-controls>



Facebook never stops its automated data collection about you. For that, you'll have to log off. In the end, you can only limit what other people can view, but Facebook will always see and use all information it has gathered from you.¹⁴ Also, privacy settings are constantly changing, confusing users as to what their options are.

The truth is, even avoiding using Facebook may not be a guarantee of privacy, because if you have an account (or ever had one at any point in history and then reactivate it, resurrecting all of your old data), people can "tag" you in photos, meaning that Facebook software knows you were in that picture. This is meaningful to the platform because most pictures taken by digital cameras carry timestamp information (*when* the picture was taken) and many devices also record the *location* in which it was taken with an internal GPS device! This information is read by the website's software. Alternatively, other users can location-tag their photos that include you.

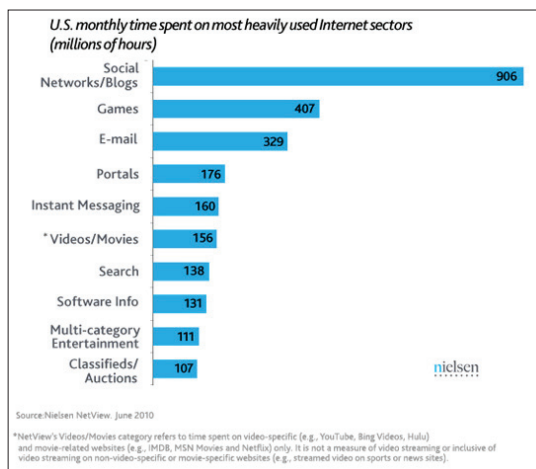
Europe Versus Facebook

A 24-year-old law student from Vienna named Max Schrems utilized a European Union privacy law in 2011 to demand that Facebook provide him with a list of all the information they had ever collected on him. What he received was a CD containing 1,222 PDF files, each one containing different personal information about him.¹⁵

He created an organization called Europe vs. Facebook. On its website, he details exactly what kinds of information Facebook had collected on him. One of the points to consider here is that it's not just one huge mass of unsorted information. Rather, it's carefully and systematically categorized for ease of use by



Multi-tasking on the internet is becoming a common problem



How people are wasting their time on the internet.

Facebook and any business partners who buy information from it.

Additionally, many government agencies can easily investigate you, without a warrant, using this information. Here's a small sample: Address; alternate name; all applications you have installed; every location from which you have ever checked in, including latitude, longitude and altitude, and what you did on Facebook while you were at that location; every "like" you have clicked on; credit card information (encrypted); place of residence, date of birth, and education; every Facebook "event" you have ever been invited to and your reply; all family members and their relation to you if you have entered that information; all friend requests you've ever received and your re-

[14] See note 35.

[15] Donohue, B. "Twenty Something Asks Facebook For His File And Gets It - All 1,200 Pages." http://threatpost.com/en_us/blogs/man-request-personal-data-facebook-receives-1200-pdf-pages-121311 13 Dec. 2011.

sponses; all friends you've ever removed and all friends who have removed you; the last location you have been in; all users who have logged in from a specific computer you've used; all messages you have ever sent or received on Facebook (which they never delete according to their privacy policy); your religious views.¹⁶

What Goes Online Stays Online

Once you post something to the web, any computer that can access it can cache, save or archive it for any length of time. And in case you didn't think anyone was interested in what you have to say, welcome to The Wayback Machine (<http://web.archive.org/>). Writes Dr. Aboujaoude:

A cottage industry of unofficial Web pages has sprung up to help people escape the social network; a popular one is tellingly named “2,504 Steps to Closing Your Facebook Account.”

Some services are intentionally working to make sure Web content is never lost. The mission of the Wayback project, for example, is to copy entire sites for posterity, archiving Web pages, images, and texts forever. Others, such as the Digital Library Project, the Online Computer Library Cen-

| Top 10 Sectors by Share of U.S. Internet Time | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| RANK | Category | Share of Time June 2010 | Share of Time June 2009 | % Change in Share of Time |
| 1 | Social Networks | 22.7% | 15.8% | 43% |
| 2 | Online Games | 10.2% | 9.3% | 10% |
| 3 | E-mail | 8.3% | 11.5% | -28% |
| 4 | Portals | 4.4% | 5.5% | -19% |
| 5 | Instant Messaging | 4.0% | 4.7% | -15% |
| 6 | Videos/Movies** | 3.9% | 3.5% | 12% |
| 7 | Search | 3.5% | 3.4% | 1% |
| 8 | Software Manufacturers | 3.3% | 3.3% | 0% |
| 9 | Multi-category Entertainment | 2.8% | 3.0% | -7% |
| 10 | Classifieds/Auctions | 2.7% | 2.7% | -2% |
| | Other* | 34.3% | 37.3% | -8% |

Source: Nielsen NetView – June 2009-June 2010
*Other refers to 74 remaining online categories visited from PC/laptops
**NetView's Videos/Movies category refers to time spent on video-specific (e.g., YouTube, Bing Videos, Hulu) and movie-related websites (e.g., IMDB, MSN Movies and Netflix) only. It is not a measure of video streaming or inclusive of video streaming on non-video-specific or movie-specific websites (e.g., streamed video on sports or news sites).

How the Internet is (mis)used

ter, and Alexa, are starting to offer access to archived versions of pages after those pages have been removed from the Web. This means that the life span of data online is, if anything, increasing, and the “404–Page Not Found” message we are used to getting when we click on a defunct link will gradually stop being part of our World Wide Web experience.¹⁷

This author, out of curiosity, searched Wayback for a friend's personal website that he had created more than 12 years ago, and whose domain name has been defunct for almost 8. I typed in the address and clicked “Take Me Back.” Although that webmaster has no interest in this content still being available on the web, the Wayback machine obediently took me back in time where various incarnations of it were viewable. I doubt this website got more than 100–200 hits during the course of its existence, but a few of those were from the Wayback machine, so now it is accessible forever.

Facebook content is similarly “sticky.” There is no way to simply click a button and delete all of the content you have created from Facebook. Says Dr. Aboujaoude: “To truly leave,



[16] Europe versus Facebook website: http://europe-v-facebook.org/EN/Data_Pool/data_pool.html#Target

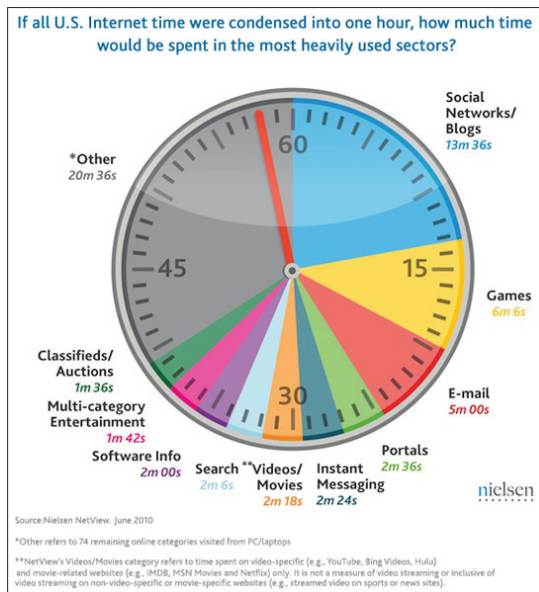
[17] From Chapter 11: Making Time, Making Memories. Full citation: Aboujaoude, Elias. *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality*. 7 Feb. 2011. (Kindle Locations 4032–4033). Norton Kindle Edition.

members have to painstakingly delete, line by line, Wall post by Wall post, and group affiliation by group affiliation, all the profile information that they created over the course of their Facebook life. (A cottage industry of unofficial Web pages has sprung up to help people escape the social network; a popular one is tellingly named '2,504 Steps to Closing Your Facebook Account.)"

"Chaim"¹⁸ had just been redt a shidduch that he was simply not sure about. He had done the research, and asked all the right questions, but he was still plagued with doubts. While making some photocopies in the yeshiva's office one day, he idly typed the girl's name into a search engine on a vacant computer. Her Facebook account immediately popped up. After seeing her profile picture, he made his decision – they wouldn't be seeing each other.

Once Chaim realized that the internet could "help" him with his shidduch research, he didn't hesitate to use it again. Another time he found online information about a shidduch that led him to believe she was too liberal for his tastes. "That material is a few years old!" the shadchan advised him. "She's really not the same person." But he felt uncomfortable enough that he was persuaded not to meet her.

While the appropriateness of Chaim's actions and decisions may be debatable, let us focus on the decisions of the young ladies involved. Regardless of whether or not posting the online picture constituted a breach of *tznius*, the first young woman simply didn't imagine that "just anyone" would be previewing her photograph and making judgments about meeting her based on it (or else she would have provided the *shadchan* with a picture!). Unwittingly,



she is actually inviting literally any person in the world to view it and judge her based on it. This is partially due to the default settings on Facebook, which can be summed up by saying that Facebook will share everything about you with anyone *unless you instruct it otherwise*. The default is to share – and sharing yourself is what Facebook is all about.

And perhaps, like the second young woman, your viewpoints and the personal information you think you would like to make available now simply aren't the picture you want to present to the world in five or ten years from now. People's tastes, opinions, political views, and even *hashkafos* can change radically over the course of a few years. A person can even decide that part of the changes in his or her life will be to quit using Facebook—but without a rigorous process of uprooting content, every tiny bit of old information may be available "virtually" forever.

An embarrassing picture, an ignorant comment, a careless insult, *lashon hara*... all of these things and more can take on a life of their own once they leave the confines of your personal computer and jump onto the World Wide Web. Forgetting can be helpful: it helps us forgive

[18] Based on a true story, name has been changed.

people, it helps us deal with emotional pain and trauma, and it de-clutters our mind from useless details. But the internet has the potential to interfere with that process, bringing up old memories and not letting us move on from the past.

Who Can Get Your Information?

One important question to ask is: who exactly has the right to access your information? The real answer seems to be anyone that Facebook wants.

Of course, if these sites were to sell all of your information, attached to your name, without your permission, they would be subjected to class-action lawsuits. But read the following excerpt from Facebook's 2009 privacy policy very carefully:

*sponse is required by law under the local laws in that jurisdiction, apply to users from that jurisdiction, and are consistent with generally accepted international standards. We may also share information when we have a good faith belief it is necessary to prevent fraud or other illegal activity, to prevent imminent bodily harm, or to protect ourselves and you from people violating our Statement of Rights and Responsibilities. **This may include sharing information with other companies, lawyers, courts or other government entities.***¹⁹

This is a sweepingly permissive statement allowing Facebook to share your information with, essentially, whomever they are afraid of—US courts, foreign courts, other companies, lawyers, "other government entities" (who's that?) and your local police officer. As of the time of this writing, they have made their policy a bit more vague by deleting words like "with other companies" from their policy, although there is no indication that they cannot still do so.

This means that instead of carrying out whatever task he is supposed to be doing, a typical worker will instead check his e-mail, send text messages, receive cell phone calls, send instant messages, check blogs, and "Google" things.

You Are Not Anonymous

Dr. Elias Aboujaoude in his book *Virtually You* gives one example of how a person can be identified and personal information about him/her can be exposed solely through the monitoring of search engine searches that people conduct.²⁰

In 2006, America Online released the anonymous search logs of 650,000 users as a research tool. By analyzing the kinds of searches that people made, reporters were able to narrow down identities so well that they actually found and went to visit one of the people whose searches had been recorded. Thelma Arnold, a 62-year-old widow from Georgia, was shown a record of all the searches she had

To respond to legal requests and prevent harm. We may disclose information pursuant to subpoenas, court orders, **or other requests** (including criminal and civil matters) if we have a **good faith belief** that the response is required by law. This may include respecting requests from jurisdictions outside of the United States where we have a good faith belief that the re-



Using Technology Responsibly © R. Tarsh

[19] http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=%20322339455300

[20] Chapter 10: The End of Privacy

made. "My goodness, it's my whole personal life," she exclaimed. "I had no idea somebody was looking over my shoulder."

Additionally, somebody analyzing the material may come to false conclusions about a person. When Mrs. Arnold was asked about her web searches for "nicotine effects on the body," "hand tremors," and "bipolar," she responded that she was "simply a curious woman trying to educate herself to better comfort some sick friends." But Dr. Aboujaoude points out that if an insurer was secretly researching her trying to decide if the company should give her a health insurance policy, they probably wouldn't be convinced she wasn't hiding some major health problems.

On the internet, you are lulled into a sense of security by the illusion that no one can know who you are. The truth is, your computer's unique IP address is easily tracked by almost any website and anyone who knows a thing or two about computers. Your identity can be discovered very easily, if there is a reason for someone to make the attempt. Every cookie your computer silently downloads is watching your actions.

Once your information is so tantalizingly stored and disseminated on Facebook's servers (it bears repeating that this applies to all online companies who scan your data, not just Facebook), it offers an enticing target for hackers who will illegally access your personal information. On Facebook, the most highly encrypted information is your credit card number. Any other details about your life would seem to be fair game for even mediocre hackers.

While we are on the topic of Facebook, let us ponder a few more points²¹:

- Facebook is cited in one out of every five divorces in the United States, accord-

ing to the Loyola University Health System. (One out of three in the UK, according to a Divorce-Online survey.)

- "Stories of people whose marriages were destroyed by... social networks abound on the Internet."

- "Some parents believe that 'friending' their child on Facebook is adequate to ensure safety," Mike Betron, VP and General Manager of MinorMonitor, said in a statement. "This simply provides a false sense of security as children are still able to engage in private conversations and post questionable material without their parents seeing this as a friend."

- In late March/early April 2012, the first "stalker app" appeared on Facebook, collecting real-time GPS locations of Facebook users so that criminals could find them in real life. The app was removed quickly, but no punitive action was taken and Facebook remains unclear as to how it will prevent such apps from appearing in the future.

- U.S. psychologist Dr. Leonard Sax believes teenage girls who spend too much time on Facebook are more likely to be depressed. Furthermore, the total number of Facebook friends they have can also be a big risk factor for depression.

- 44% of Facebook users wish they had the same body or weight as a friend when looking at photos.

- Only 8% of parents are aware of cyber-bullying events involving their own children.

Signs of addiction: 21% of women age 18-34 check Facebook in the middle of the night, 34% before they brush their teeth in the morning.²²

[21] Protalinski, E. "Facebook blamed for 1 in 5 divorces in the US." [Zdnet.com](http://zdnet.com). 1 Mar. 2011. And other articles in the "Friending Facebook" section of Zdnet.com.

[22] <http://mashable.com/2010/07/07/oxygen-facebook-study/>

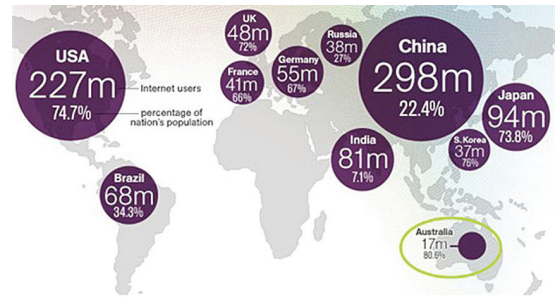
Forced upon Us

Departing somewhat from the main topic of this article, we should be aware that no matter how good and moral we are, and how responsibly we use the internet, and how much we trust ourselves, there is another danger inherent in browsing the web: inappropriate content that is *foisted upon us*.

For the most part, pop-ups aren't a problem anymore; most browsers automatically block them. But there are countless websites with important content that are ruined by immodest advertisements. Not only that, but an innocent entry into a search engine can yield un-dreamed-of results. Some links are deceptive. Image searches for mundane words can return unsuitable results.

Facebook is cited in one out of every five divorces in the United States, according to the Loyola University Health System. (One out of three in the UK, according to a Divorce-Online survey.)

This entire effect is exacerbated when it comes to children using the internet. Children can be exposed to the worst sights and influences purely by accident. They don't even know how to distinguish the warning signs of a bad link. And what they see can have very damaging effects on their undeveloped psyches.²³



Internet users by country

A 2007 study by the University of New Hampshire found that 28% of children aged 10–17 had been inadvertently exposed to inappropriate content that they did not seek out.²⁴ A different study gives a figure of 70%.²⁵ These exposures occurred through websites (misleading links, misspelling web addresses, etc.), chat with friends, file-sharing programs, and online games.

Illusion of Knowledge

One of the pitfalls of internet use is the generally low quality of huge amounts of information available there. The intrepid Googler is often hard-pressed to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources in his research, and many are simply too lazy to verify the truth. What this leads to is the ability for a person to feel well informed on a topic while really being completely misled.

Nowhere is this more perfectly demonstrated than by everyone's favorite Source of All Information About Anything That Ever Existed: Wikipedia.

Wikipedia lures us with its professional-looking design and its 3.95 million articles (in English alone!), many of them exceedingly long, on any topic imaginable. Here you can

[24] <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,25024700.html> (42% exposed x 66% unintentional = 28% of total)

[25] http://www.internetsafety101.org/Pornographystatistics.htm#_ftnref

[23] For specifics, see <http://tinyurl.com/bqaeon>



get a quick introduction and overview to almost any topic you want, or find out biographical information about almost any person who is even moderately well known. It's an increasingly popular destination on the web: the English site had 6.75 billion views in March of 2012 (that's almost one for every person on the planet, over the course of just one month).^[26]

This is boosted immensely by search engine references. For example, over half of the 1,000 most popular Google searches will yield a Wikipedia entry as one of the first few results. "Wikipedia is one of the most powerful sites on the web in terms of shaping public perception. Because Google favors it so heavily, the entries on Wikipedia have become supremely important and relevant."^[27]

At least Wikipedia is fairly straightforward about the nature of the project: its English language main page states right at the top, "Welcome to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit."

In its essence, what this actually means is that anyone – anyone – can add any content they wish to this "encyclopedia." Pause for a brief moment to let the implications of this sink in. The people making entries and edits need claim no credentials, no expertise or special knowledge. On Wikipedia, the information entered by a

Statistics on Internet Dangers

- 47% percent of families said addiction to inappropriate websites is a problem in their home (Focus on the Family Poll, October 1, 2003).
- 86% of men are likely to click on inappropriate Internet sites if no one else will know about it (Journal of the American Psychological Association).
- 9 out of 10 children between the ages of 8 and 16 have viewed inappropriate stuff on the Internet, in most cases unintentionally (London School of Economics January).
- "Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions."—U.S. Department of Justice, Post Hearing Memorandum of Points and Authorities, at 1, *ACLU v. Reno*, 929 F. Supp. 824.
- 38% of Facebook users in the last year were under the age of 13. (Consumer Reports, June 2011)
- 51% of parents either do not have or do not know if they have software on their computer to monitor their teenagers' online navigation and interactions. (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and Cox Communications Parental Internet Monitoring Survey, May 23, 2005)
- A new website is launched every 2 seconds (covenanteyes.com).
- In 56% of divorce cases today, a major contributing factor is one spouse's inappropriate use of the Internet (covenanteyes.com).
- The past 10 years has seen a 162% increase in the amount of time that youth spend online (covenanteyes.com).
- Americans spend over 20 hours a week surfing the internet (covenanteyes.com).

[26] <http://stats.wikimedia.org/EN/SummaryEN.htm>

[27] Catone, J. "Just How Powerful Is Wikipedia?" <http://www.sitepoint.com/just-how-powerful-is-wikipedia/>, 4 Sep. 2008.

high-schooler can seem as accurate and look as clean and professional as that of the most renowned professor. Someone looking for a quick fact he needs for his next business presentation or educational lecture could copy information posted on Wikipedia by a 12-year-old, unsuspectingly present it as fact, and be exposed to ridicule by experts who know better. Of course, it would be his own fault – but Wikipedia actually seems to try its best to convince us that it's a good source of information.

(Fortunately for the author of this article, and his readers, he consulted real sources for the facts!)

The intrepid Googler is often hard-pressed to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources in his research, and many are simply too lazy to verify the truth. What this leads to is the ability for a person to feel well informed on a topic while really being completely misled.

Wikipedia enthusiasts claim that cases of “vandalism” and lies posted on the website will be quickly rooted out by the thousands of editors and millions of visitors the site receives constantly. But what about the case of John Seigenthaler, Sr., former editor of *The Tennessean* newspaper, who in 2005 discovered a false Wikipedia entry on himself that said he had been implicated in the assassina-

tion of John F. Kennedy? The lie had already been on the site for several months.²⁸

There is much more to say about the Wikipedia phenomenon, but the constantly unfolding saga of Wikipedia is but one chapter in the debate on the reliability of online information.

The internet may greatly facilitate real learning and research, but it doesn't provide a shortcut to substitute for the process of learning in-depth. Additionally, it lacks the controls that are in place in many published works. Let the “information consumer” beware.

Addiction

Internet addiction has been a hotly debated topic for years. Whether it's called “problematic computer use” by those who doubt its status as a true addiction, or a full-fledged “Internet Addiction Disorder,” this problem has become very prominent.

An article published in *The New York Times* in 2005 describes the addiction:

[S]pecialists estimate that 6 percent to 10 percent of the approximately 189 million Internet users in this country have a dependency that can be as destructive as alcoholism and drug addiction, and they are rushing to treat it. (...)

Skeptics argue that even obsessive Internet use does not exact the same toll on health or family life as conventionally recognized addictions. But, mental health professionals who support the diagnosis of Internet addiction say, a majority of obsessive users are online to further addictions to gambling or [immodest activities]

[28] Seelye, K. “Snared in the Web of a Wikipedia Lie.” *New York Times*. 4 Dec. 2005. Web.





Internet users doubled in only five years

or have become much more dependent on those vices because of their prevalence on the Internet.

But other users have a broader dependency and spend hours online each day, surfing the Web, trading stocks, instant messaging or blogging, and a fast-rising number are becoming addicted to Internet video games.²⁹

The "most wired" country in the world, South Korea, is also the home of the most

people affected with this problem. According to the "Big Think" website:

Fact: over half the world's population lives in cities. Fact: all developed cities like New York, Tokyo, Singapore and London, are in a race to become 'wired'. Fact: the most wired city in the world is Seoul, Korea with 97% broadband penetration. Ergo if we want to imagine life in a digital city, we should look for inspiration and lessons to Seoul. In fact, journalists, researchers and public officials have done exactly that. What they've discovered is a country which is one of the top investors in technology in the world, but whose population has become infested with 'internet addiction'. Does this mean our children and even us adults are vul-

[29] Kershaw, S. "Hooked on the Web: Help Is on the Way." New York Times. 1 Dec. 2005.

nerable to such a predicament over the next twenty years?³⁰

Various factors have been blamed for this phenomenon, including the fact that culturally Koreans are driven to work very long hours for six days a week, leading to a high stress level and a need to find an "escape" in online games. There are also internet cafes on every corner and connection speeds are faster there than anywhere in the world, making everything so much more accessible. Still, the article goes on to warn that this is the reality all developed nations may be grappling with in 20 years from now.

"Instead of looking at Korea as the ultimate fate we will face as digital nations, we should think strategically to avoid falling into the same traps," the authors recommend.

The Far East is way ahead of the United States in coming to grips with this problem, even considering that the prevalence of Internet addiction is much higher there. Still, in America some symptoms of this growing problem are beginning to manifest themselves:

For \$14,500—WiFi not included—an addict can spend 45 Internet-abstinent days at the Heavensfield Retreat Center [run by the reStart Internet Addiction Recovery Program] and, hopefully, emerge into the real world free of an obsession with Facebook, online gambling or even text messaging. (...)

Meanwhile, in China, 400 private rehabilitation clinics and camps tend to some of the estimated 10 million teenage Web addicts, according to CNN. That's about 10 percent of the

country's 100 million Internet users.

*"Both China and South Korea have designated Internet addiction as their number one public health danger," notes reStart in a statement. "The United States, by contrast, has been slower to recognize and respond to the problem but now is beginning to take some active steps. This program is part of that process."*³¹

Internet addiction can literally ruin people's lives. It can seriously harm or ruin a marriage. It can cause people to neglect serious responsibilities, lose their jobs and their homes. It has physically detrimental effects.

"[W]hen Internet use becomes excessive, it can—like other impulse disorders—be distressing and disabling," says psychiatrist Nathan Shapira, MD, Ph.D.³² "Loved ones are always the first to identify this problem—those glued to the screen rarely recognize it in themselves," Shapira told WebMD.com. "Interpersonal relationships are the first to suffer."

The internet, as an engaging, interactive, and often fun medium, lends itself to addiction. As responsible, religious Jews, we must strive to find a balance, using the internet as a tool and not letting it c'v take over our lives. ■

The author of this article advises that anyone who wishes to follow up on the sources cited below should do so with a default browser setting of "Display no images" and only turn them on when necessary.



[30] Khanna, P. and A. "Korea's Internet Addiction: Fate of the World?" Big Think. 6 July 2010. <http://bigthink.com/hybrid-reality/koreas-internet-addiction-fate-of-the-world>

[31] Peebles, L. "Breaking free from the Web: New rehab caters to Internet addicts." *Scientific American*. 21 Aug 2009. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=breaking-free-from-the-web-new-rehab-2009-08-21>

[32] Davis, J. L. "Internet Addiction: Ruining Lives?" WebMD.com Health News. 7 Aug. 2003. <http://www.webmd.com/baby/news/20030807/internet-addiction-ruining-lives>



Using Technology Responsibly. Al Et, Tovah.

eBlaster

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OpenDNS



WEBCHAUVER



Re-Solutions

We've learned all about the terrible problems associated with the internet. We've all undertaken only to use only it if we must, and then only with the proper filters.

Ok, so what do we do now?

The answer is that there is a wide assortment of filtering products available to you today. It is important to be well informed of the options so you can choose the filtering solution that is most suitable for you. A wrong solution is as good as no solution.

The following information is provided by Technology Awareness Group (TAG).

Baruch Hashem, we have reached this point. אילו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה דיינו – Just gathering together with tens of thousands of concerned Jews to make the commitment and proclaim “נעשה ונשמע” – We will act!” is the most empowering step in our newly launched War on Technology. We are prepared to implement the safeguards necessary to maintain the purity of our minds.

Now the question is, “What must we do to protect ourselves?”

If you are thinking to yourself, “Put a filter on the computer,” you are only partially correct. There are a number of products and services, each with their own set of benefits and problems. No single solution is perfect. In fact, the wrong solution may be no better than none at all.

Let's begin with a general overview of the pros and cons of the various approaches to filtering the internet:

1. Using a kosher internet provider does protect your computer from accessing unfiltered internet through a cable or DSL, but if your computer is outfitted with a wireless adapter, it does nothing to protect you from your neighbor's unlocked, unfiltered Wi-Fi. This is a growing problem, as more and more wireless “hot spots” are being set up, such as at public libraries, internet cafes and elsewhere.

2. Installing a filtering software program on your computer may protect that computer entirely, but it will not protect another computer or device you use to access the same internet connection.

3. Some businesses use a router filter that acts as a physical barrier between the internet connection and the workers' computers. This has the drawback that in theory a worker could bypass the router filter and connect his

computer directly to the internet. (We will offer solutions to this problem below.)

There are two general approaches to filtering: whitelisting and blacklisting. Whitelisting blocks all sites other than those specific ones needed by that individual for his work. This makes it extremely unlikely for a slip-up to occur. Blacklisting, on the other hand, seeks to block only those sites that are known to the filter to be problematic. Local filtering software offers a weaker level of protection, since it can be circumvented, especially by those who are computer savvy. In any case, no filter can be considered 100% foolproof.

In the case of blacklisting filters, it must be understood that the filter is no more than a program that attempts to identify problematic sites and then block them. It is only as good as the programmer who designed it. Different filters rely on different algorithms to decide which sites to block, and no system is perfect.

Some filters block the URLs to websites which are considered problematic. They are programmed with a list of which websites to block. The obvious flaw in this system is that it offers no protection against brand new websites that have not yet been brought to the filter's attention. It is impossible for the filter provider to remain fully up-to-date with all of the new websites that are constantly being set up.

A more sophisticated type of system is called dynamic filtering. Under this system each website is first examined by the filter when the user tries to access it. If the filter detects “unkosher” material, it will block that page from opening. Some of the filters do a better job than others.

Even the best of filters are—in most cases—not produced by Orthodox Jews. As a result, not everything that the filters allow through is necessarily in keeping with what we should be seeing. For example, even if a site may not contain any filth, it may carry material from



Christian missionaries. Photos may be permitted even though they would not pass our standards of decency. As has been made abundantly clear, avoiding even partially indecent images is not לפנים משורת הדין – beyond the letter of the law. It is required by basic Torah law.

Even with a filters that does supposedly block 100% of the problems, the following issues may still exist:

1. Most software filters allow the user himself to control the filter under his own username and password. In that case, the computer is technically protected, but the user is not. He may deactivate the filter in a moment of weakness. It is critical that a trusted third party should set up the filter with a password unknown to the user.

2. If the filter does not block an image search and the user can look for pictures, the computer cannot be considered pro-

programs track all internet activity and send a periodic report to an outsider who is appointed to oversee that computer. The knowledge that an outsider will check the log can be a powerful deterrent from accessing filthy sites.

BUT—even a monitoring service has its drawbacks:

1. If the monitor is a close friend, he may not be a sufficient deterrent to prevent the user from visiting inappropriate sites. Even worse, the innocent monitor may now have in his hands a list of non-kosher websites.

2. Monitoring programs can miss some websites. If the user has access to the report, he can discover which sites are immune to the monitoring and then visit them with impunity.

3. It is advisable that the program be able to monitor non-internet activities taking

In light of this, we must point out a widespread misconception in the Orthodox community... an unfortunate number of people continue to walk around with full internet access in their pockets. These people remain as unprotected as they were before

tected. Not only can the user utilize an image search to view inappropriate pictures, he can also use the pictures to reach linked, unsuitable sites that the filter may miss.

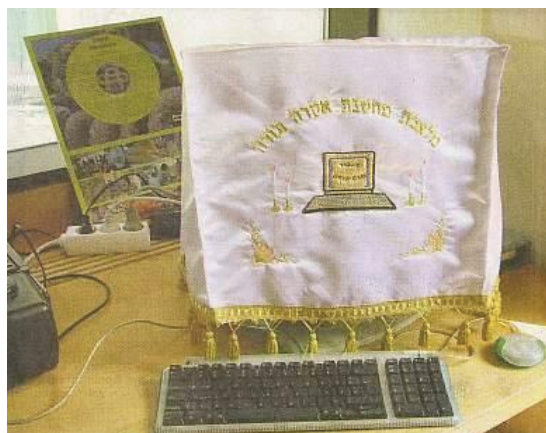
3. Even if the filter does a flawless job of blocking problematic websites, the user can still insert an inappropriate CD or DVD, or even a USB device with non-kosher content.

It would seem that the best solution to these problems would be to install one of the several monitoring programs that are available. These

place on the computer. This is important because the computer can be used to view unsuitable videos or games.

4. Monitoring software should only be considered effective when used together with a filter. This is because the monitor only prevents intentional accessing of improper websites but does not block inadvertent exposure to indecent material. Especially in the case of children, one wrong glance can affect the child for life.

In short, the solution to the internet problem is far from simple. For each situation there is a



different solution, and for some there is no easy solution at all. In such a case the potential user must reassess whether it is worth the risk to use that particular device.

We must emphasize that all the talk about the importance of filters in recent years should not be understood to imply that a filter is an ideal solution. Any technician can tell you that this is not the case. Filters are no more than a backup solution. To properly protect a computer requires far more than just a filter. In this article we hope to educate the public about the different options that are available to make our computers as safe as we can.

*

If we are able to implement a standard of universal filtering of all computers in our community, we will have won a tremendous victory in our battle with the internet. Unfortunately, we will still not even have begun to solve the problem in its entirety. This is because the internet problem is no longer computer-based.

The times when you needed a computer to access the internet are long behind us. It is becoming easier each day to log on with smaller and smaller devices. In light of this, we must point out a widespread misconception in the Orthodox community: thousands have heeded the advice of our *rabbanim* and protected their computers from the internet. At the same time,

though, an unfortunate number continue to walk around with full internet access in their pockets. These people remain as unprotected as they were before.

Many people today have tablets which may facilitate internet access even more than smartphones, and perhaps even the traditional computer. Until recently MP3 players were treated as harmless devices that could only be used to play back recorded music or speeches. (Some have pointed out that because they require computer access to load them, in many cases MP3 players became the villains that introduced innocent youths to computers.) Today, many come with internet access, as well as screens which can be used to watch videos.

It is shocking to discover how many in our community remain uninformed about how dangerous these items truly are. If they are not aware of the problems, they will not employ the available safeguards to protect themselves. The *rabbanim* have ruled that no one should own a smartphone, tablet or any similar device that offers internet access unless safeguards are implemented to prevent their misuse.

Following is an overview of the variety of computers and other devices that offer internet access and the appropriate steps to be taken for each category.



Computers, Laptops, Netbooks

Desktop Computers

For years the desktop computer was the most basic method for accessing the internet. This device, composed of a hard drive, monitor (screen), keyboard and mouse is clumsy to move around. Even recent models which are far lighter and smaller than their predecessors are inconvenient to move.

Recommendations

- Desktop computers should be kept in the most public location available. The more open the area is and the more people that can view the computer, the safer it is.
- These computers should be stored in a way in which they are not accessible to children (e.g. a locked cabinet).

Pros

- Because it is inconvenient to move around, a desktop computer is unlikely to be removed even temporarily by a child.
- At this point in time, the typical desktop does not come with a Wi-Fi option. That means that unless the computer is hooked up to an internet line there is no need to worry about it being misused. **Important Note:** Some newer models do have a built-in wireless connection. Additionally, small USB wireless adapters are very inexpensive and can be covertly plugged in to the computer at any time.

Cons

- Even if the desktop has no internet connection, or it has internet with a proper filter, there is still the potential of it being used to view unsuitable materials on the CD or DVD player. You may need to ask your supplier to sell you a computer that does not include a DVD drive, or you can have the media codec removed to prevent the computer from being used for videos.

Laptop (Notebook) Computers

The laptop came out not long after the PC came into common use, but its popularity exploded in the last 10–15 years when the price dropped. The laptop is intended to provide the same options as a desktop computer, albeit with less power, in a compact and therefore more transportable form. Laptops are particularly popular for those who need to save space or to carry their work with them wherever they go.

Recommendations

- Laptops should be stored under lock and key when not in use so that children or other unauthorized persons cannot access them.

Cons

- Aside from the fact that almost all laptops come with a built-in DVD player, they also usually have a built-in wireless

adapter. That means that even if the internet connection in your home or office is filtered, the computer can still access the internet through an unfiltered wireless connection, particularly when travelling.

Netbooks

Netbooks first appeared in 2008 and they became an instant success due to their much smaller size and price compared to laptops. Netbooks are intended as a lighter and cheaper alternative for those who can afford less computing power than the laptop or find the laptop either too bulky or too expensive.

Pros

- Netbooks are so small that they do not contain DVD drives. **Important Note:** Netbooks can still be used to view videos or movies through an external apparatus plugged into its USB port.

Cons

- Because they are small and lightweight, Netbooks easily lend themselves to being "borrowed" and misused by children or others without the owner's knowledge. It is extremely important that they be locked safely away when not in use.



Kosher Internet Providers

J-net



J-net is the only Jewish company to offer a blacklist filter, meaning that you can access anything on the internet except for those sites that are deemed inappropriate and blocked. J-net also offers whitelist filters that block all access except to those specific websites that are needed by the user. The internet can also be blocked entirely, leaving e-mail access only.

Pros

- J-net's filter can detect unsuitable material even when it is written in Hebrew.
- The internet is filtered before it enters your home or office, meaning that every computer or device using that connection is protected.
- J-net uses real time filtering to filter websites in 4 milliseconds as you open them.
- J-net is one of the only companies to offer the option of blocking any exposed skin or entire images that are deemed inappropriate.

Cons

- Only offered with a DSL connection
- Requires a monthly subscription.
- A wireless connection to a different provider will allow you to access the internet without filtering.

Possible Solutions

It is advisable to disable the Wi-Fi option on your computer. Ask your supplier or call TAG and ask how this can be done. If for some reason you need to maintain your wireless option, such as to access the internet while on a business trip, make sure to install a separate software filter on your computer.

Kosher Internet Providers

YeshivaNet



YeshivaNet offers whitelisting to block out all internet except the specific sites you need. YeshivaNet also offers an e-mail only option.

Pros

- YeshivaNet is extremely careful about which sites it permits. There is no way to open a site that is not on your whitelist.
- Access is filtered outside your home or office, protecting all computers and devices that share that internet connection.
- The internet is filtered before it enters your home or office, meaning that every computer or device using that connection is protected.

Cons

- Only offered with a DSL connection
- Requires a monthly subscription.
- A wireless connection to a different provider will allow you to access the internet without filtering.

Possible Solutions

It is advisable to disable the Wi-Fi option on your computer. Ask your supplier or call TAG and ask how this can be done. If for some reason you need to maintain your wireless option, such as to access the internet while on a business trip, make sure to install a separate software filter on your computer.



Software

K9



K9 is a free filter that is produced by a respected company, Blue Coat, which is a leading provider of Web security solutions. The filter does a reasonably good job at filtering out most inappropriate websites, especially when it is set to a higher security level.

Pros

- The filter is free and can be installed on as many computers as you like.
- The software is installed on your computer, eliminating the possibility of bypassing the filter through a wireless connection.
- Can be programmed to allow internet access only at set times of day.
- Also blocks virus-infected and malicious websites.

Cons

- K9's greatest drawback is that it is designed to protect children, not adults. The computer's owner enters the password and can therefore uninstall the filter at any time.

Possible Solutions

- Have the password entered by an outsider who is not a close friend and will not share it with you. For more details, call TAG.
- A popular method to protect the computer is for two or more people to each know part of the password. That way no single person can disable the filter.
- Although the filter has a good success rate at blocking unsuitable websites even in foreign languages, it is not guaranteed. On occasion, sites that should not be viewed are permitted.

Software

KosherNet



KosherNet provides software that can be downloaded directly to your computer for a relatively low price.

Pros

- Because the filter is installed in your computer, the computer is protected against any internet connection, including wireless.
- The password is kept by the company so it cannot be disabled by any user.
- KosherNet provides separate user accounts when more than one person uses the computer, allowing each user to choose the filtering level appropriate for him or her. A user that needs only e-mail service can block the internet entirely.

Cons

- The filter protects only that particular computer and not other computers or devices that may share the same internet connection.
- The filter employs lists of improper websites and various keywords. There is a chance that an inappropriate site may slip through the filter.
- Requires a monthly subscription.



Using Technology Responsibly. All in Torah.

FilterNet



FilterNet is another company that provides filter software that is downloaded directly to your computer.

Pros

- Because the filter is installed on your computer, the computer is protected against any internet connection, including wireless.
- The password is kept by the company so it cannot be disabled by any user.
- FilterNet provides separate user accounts when more than one person uses the computer, allowing each user to choose the filtering level appropriate for him or her. A user that needs only e-mail service can block the internet entirely.

Cons

- The filter protects only that particular computer and not other computers or devices that may share the same internet connection.
- The filter employs lists of improper websites and various keywords. There is a chance that an inappropriate site may slip through the filter.
- Requires a monthly subscription.

Router-based Software

VocaTech



VocaTech, under Orthodox ownership, provides high-quality PBX, VoIP, filtering and other services for businesses. Since their filter is router-based there is no software to download and it is very hard to circumvent even for a professional.

Pros

- The filter was created by Orthodox Jews in accordance with Jewish values.
- Professional team researches and updates VocaTech's blacklist daily.
- Ability to whitelist as many as hundreds of thousands of websites.
- VocaTech gets an alert if the administrator unplugs the router.
- VocaTech claims its router actually speeds up the client's web-services.

Cons

- Laptop computers are not protected when outside of the office.
- Requires purchase of router and a monthly subscription.



SonicWall



SonicWall offers a line of router filters for both small and large businesses, allowing the business to control the content of the internet that its workers can access.

Pros

- Provides filtering for any computer or device relying on that router.
- Allows different settings for each computer so access can be customized for each individual worker.
- If a worker accesses a site that is not permitted or commits any other forbidden computer activity, the administrator is immediately notified through an e-mail message.

Cons

- Despite SonicWall's good performance rate with its whitelist, its blacklist filter should be considered below par.
- It doesn't apply real time filtering.
- The administrator has the password and can use it to permit unsuitable material to his/her own or others' computers.
- SonicWall will not block outside wireless connections.

Router-based Software

OpenDNS

The OpenDNS logo consists of the word "OpenDNS" in white, sans-serif font, centered within an orange rectangular background.

OpenDNS is a free (for personal use) DNS service that also offers free filtering. When installed in one computer it blocks inappropriate sites and content in all computers and devices that are relying on the same router.

Pros

- Provides filtering for any computer or device relying on that router.
- Protects computers from malware and spyware.
- Blocks phishing websites from loading on your computer. It uses data from Phishtank, a community site that is also used by Yahoo! Mail to determine if some particular website is part of any online phishing scam.

Cons

- The one who installs it knows the password.
- Does not block outside wireless connection.
- If a domain cannot be found or a webpage is blocked, the service redirects users to a search page with search results and advertising unless the user has paid for an upgraded service.



iBoss



iBoss provides router filters for homes, businesses and schools that both filter content and offer time limits.

Pros

- Provides filtering for any computer or device relying on that router.
- Allows different settings for each computer and even different users on the same computer.
- Can be set to send an e-mail or text message in case someone unplugs the router filter. (This does not protect the individual who receives the message from unplugging the filter himself. Solution: Have the message sent to an outsider who does not have access to the router.)

Cons

- The one who installs the router knows the password.
- Does not block outside wireless connections.

Router-based Software

Livigent



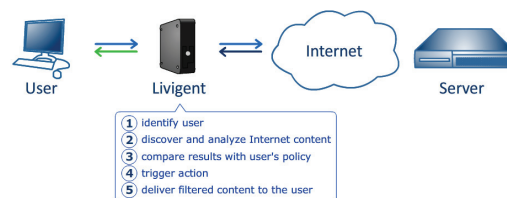
Livigent is designed specifically for businesses. The company uses updated technology to block websites that may slip past other filters. J-net recently partnered with Livigent to sell its products to Orthodox Jewish business owners and homeowners who wish to use a mainstream internet provider and still benefit from a strong filter.

Pros

- Aside from blocking bad websites, the filter uses cutting-edge technology to analyze the text content and images of each and every website, allowing it to block sites that have not been blacklisted by other filters.
- Understands 12 different languages, guaranteeing that indecent material will be blocked in foreign languages as well.
- Permits blocking bare skin or entire images deemed inappropriate.
- Password is kept by the company, preventing individuals from bypassing the filter.
- Optional software installed on computers can block the internet if the Livigent device is unplugged.

Cons

- Does not block outside wireless connections.



Monitoring Software

Monitoring software employs an entirely different approach to the above solutions, in that it does not provide filtering. Instead it provides a deterrent to viewing inappropriate material by sharing a log of sites visited with a designated outsider.

Important Note: Even a computer that benefits from a strong filter must have monitoring software as a backup, since even the best filters will occasionally allow certain unsuitable sites to be accessed. Monitoring compensates for the shortcomings inherent in the filtering systems. At the same time, monitoring without a filter is insufficient for a number of reasons, the primary one being that it does not prevent an unsuitable site from being opened inadvertently.

WebChaver/Covenant Eyes



WebChaver and Covenant Eyes are very highly regarded monitoring software programs that log each site visited by the computer on which it is installed and send a monthly report to a responsible outsider appointed as that computer's monitor.

Pros

- Generally do well at noticing sites that filters may overlook.

Cons

- If the monthly report contains improper sites, it can lead to complications, such as compromising the monitoring individual.

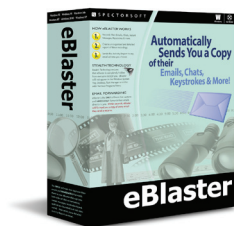
Possible Solution

Choose a responsible, upstanding monitor who is sufficiently removed from the computer's owner and users to present a serious deterrent.

Like filters, monitoring programs only report on internet activity and not the programs, games and videos which may have been used on the computer.

Monitoring Software

eBlaster



This monitoring service tracks other computer activities in addition to internet use, but is also more complicated.

Pros

- In addition to monitoring online searches and websites, it tracks which programs were used, records chat conversations and e-mails as well as every keystroke.
- Separately tracks each user, including exactly when and how long they were on the computer.

Cons

- Reports are complex and difficult for non-experts to follow.
- Does not report on the types of videos viewed on the computer.

PC Black Box



PC Black Box takes screenshots of all activities performed on the computer and sends it to a pre-arranged e-mail address.

Pros

- Saves the standard keys pressed, programs used, websites visited and takes screenshots at selected intervals.



Tablets

(iPads, Androids, etc.)

These devices were specifically designed to provide constant mobile access to the internet, any time and any place. Their extreme portability combined with the increasing prevalence of Wi-Fi present a serious challenge—far worse than the desktop computer. Because of their small size, the deterrent factor of being seen by others while browsing the web is virtually eliminated.

Because they are so new, there are far fewer established solutions for filtering these devices. Purchasers of these devices are urged to proceed with extreme caution. Beware of the fact that there are currently no satisfactory solutions available. The following represents the best recommendations based on what we know at this point in time.

iPad

K9 provides a filtered browser for iPads that can be downloaded for free. The filter blocks unwanted websites, but our technicians have found that on the iPad it can be bypassed. In addition, the iPad can be reset, returning it to its pre-filter state.

Solutions

Until a better filtering option becomes available, be forewarned that the iPad is completely unsuitable for children. Download an apps lock and place a lock on all apps that can be used to browse the internet, excluding the K9 browser and whatever apps

are critical for you. It is advisable that the user not have the password to the apps lock.

A monitoring app can be downloaded to monitor all activities on the iPad and send an e-mail report to a selected address. The monitoring app must be locked so it cannot be deactivated.

Android

K9 has just released a filter for the Android. Our initial tests indicate that this is a strong filter for blocking unsuitable websites. However, it suffers the same issue as all other K9 filters: namely, that the administrator has the password and can bypass the filter. This problem can be solved with one of the solutions we mentioned above in the K9 section for computers.

Another option is the McAfee app which can be used for filtering and monitoring, but from what we have heard thus far, it is not too difficult to bypass.

Solutions

No filter is ideal, so be certain that in addition to K9 you download locks and apply them to all apps that involve internet usage. It is advisable that the password be known only to someone other than the Android's user.

You can also download a monitoring app to monitor all activities on the Android and send an e-mail to a selected address. The monitoring app should be locked to prevent it from being deactivated.

Blackberry Playbook, Windows Tablet

At this point in time there is no filter available for Blackberry Playbook or Windows Tablet. We strongly discourage the purchase or use of these devices.



Cell Phones

Virtually all cell phones today offer internet access, but the greatest danger lies in smart phones, such as the Blackberry, iPhone and Android since they function as pocket-sized computers with full internet capabilities.

Blackberry

The only company that provides a filter for Blackberries is J-net. This filter costs just a few dollars per month, but to use it you have to add a service called Enterprise to your plan. Enterprise is offered by Verizon and Sprint for approximately \$20 per month. The J-net filter for the Blackberry performs well and cannot be bypassed. At the client's request, J-net can also block internet entirely and provide e-mail-only service.

A much cheaper solution is to use the everylock app to shut off the browser completely. Again, though, the bearer of the password has the power to unlock the browser.

iPhone

K9 offers a free filtered browser for the iPhone. Or, for \$4.99 you can download Mobicip, which does a very good job of providing filtered internet service. The browser relies on Mobicip's servers to filter unwanted URLs and search results.

The problem with both of these filters is that they are designed to protect children, not adults. As such, whoever downloads the browser also knows the password and can bypass the filters. In addition, these filters are not foolproof. In short, at this point in time there is no satisfactory filtering solution to protect iPhones from accessing unsuitable websites.

To further protect your iPhone, you should download an app lock and lock the app store,

Safari browser and YouTube to guarantee that unsuitable content will not be accessible.

There is one additional solution for the iPhone: mymobilewatchdog.com provides a good monitoring service, but this service has issues and may be difficult to use.

Android

(See above at Tablets section.)

Palm Pixi

The internet can be used for e-mail only.

Kosher Phones (Voice Only)

Safe Tec (carrier: Sprint. Affordable rates)

Tel: 855-212-SAFE

Meshumar (carrier: Page Plus)

Palm Pixi (carrier: Page Plus)

Purely voice

Important Note

The internet is evolving faster than anyone can imagine. There are many more devices than just computers that can access the internet, including but not limited to MP3s, iPods and gaming devices for kids. Most of them are extremely difficult to monitor and filter. People should be extra cautious about those devices and children should not be allowed to have access to any device that has internet capabilities.

In the coming years as the internet becomes much more sophisticated and internet access will become standard on many more electronic devices, the struggle against the negative influence of the internet will become ever tougher. We have to be on constant alert in the fight against this terrible enemy and to ensure the spiritual and physical safety of our kids. ■



וּכְתוּב בַּסֵּפֶר וְחֶתּוּם וְכו' לְמַעַן יַעֲמְדוּ יָמִים רַבִּים (ירמיה לב)

באותיות של זהב ייחקק כאן, כי זכיתי לקחת חבל במעמד הנדיר והנפלא "כינוס כלל ישראל", כינוס אשר כמוהו לא נהייתה, בהקבץ חמש רבבות יראים ושלמים מאחינו בני ישראל בגולת אמעריקע, בראשות גדולי ומאורי חכמי האומה שליט"א, ביום המיוחס ערב ראש חודש סיון, שנת תשע"ב לפ"ק, בשטח האדיר "סיטי-פיעלד".

זכיתי לקחת חלק, ולקבל על עצמי

זכיתי לשמוע את דרשת

זכיתי לקבל עול מלכות
שמים ביחד עם המון
רבבות אחינו בני ישראל!

הערות ורשימות

חתימה

Souvenir of Attendance

וּכְתוּב בַּסֵּפֶר וְחֶתּוּם וְכו' לְמַעַן יַעֲמְדוּ יָמִים רַבִּים (ירמ' ל"ב)

And record it in writing and seal it...

that it may last for many days. (Yirmiyahu 32)

Let it be recorded for posterity that I _____ עמו"ש
heeded the call of the Gedolim and participated in person at the historic Asifa at which Klal Yisrael, with the Gedolim of America at the helm, gathered together at Citi Field on Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan 5772, May 20, 2012, to unite in committing ourselves to facing the challenges of modern technology.

In the course of the evening I listened to and was inspired by addresses by:

The following points in particular made an impression on me:

I was deeply moved by the following aspects of the program:

As a result of this event I have taken upon myself the following resolution/s:

Impressions/Notes: _____

Signed: _____

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