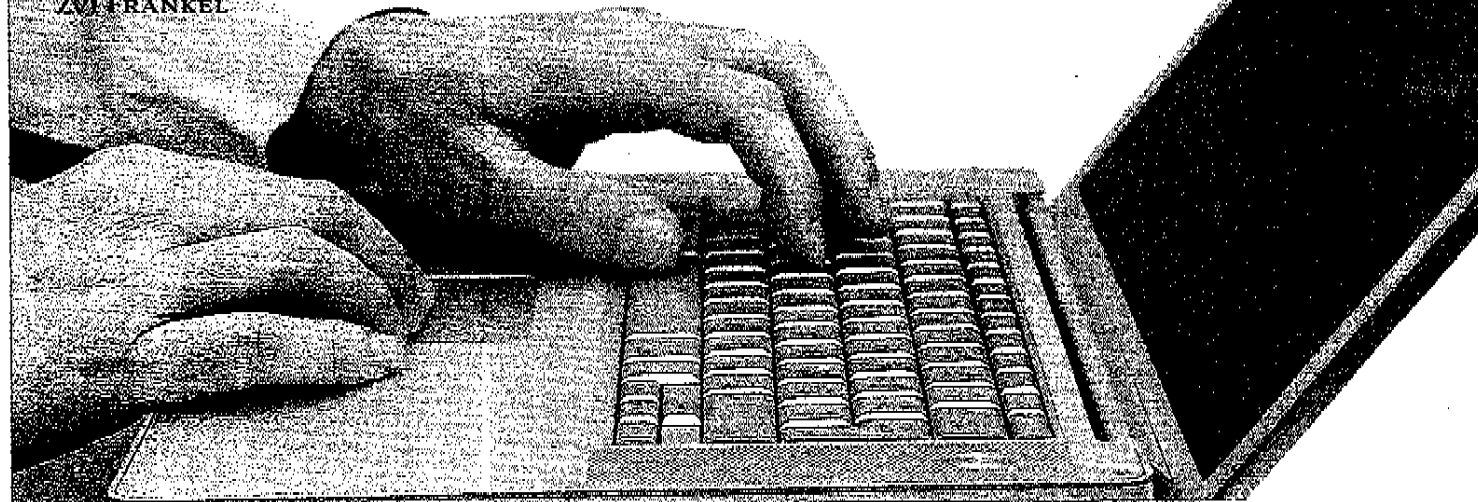


ON THE AGENDA

ZVI FRANKEL



Blogs: Transgressing a Major Sin "In the Name of Heaven"

POSSIBLY A LACK OF CHINUCH?

ENHANCED TECHNOLOGY, A GREATER THREAT

A wave of horror and anger washed over me. I anxiously typed the following words: "Don't you realize that it is forbidden to write any of these posts or add comments on this website? This page is being mevazeh (scorns) gedolim and talmidei chachamim!"

The response of the "blogger" sent a shiver down my spine: "It's a mitzvah – everything on this page is lesheim Shamayim."

LESHEIM SHAMAYIM? *My heart sank as I realized this blogger was using terminologies that revealed his affiliation with the Orthodox segment of Jewry. With a feeling of shock and disbelief, I watched as dozens of additional bloggers began lambasting my post, saying that this page is "the emes" and again "completely lesheim Shamayim." I sat stunned by the computer for a few moments. One thought echoed in my mind: "Frum Yidden? Lesheim*

Shamayim? What is happening to our people?"

Some may label these words controversial and provocative. Others may claim it to be obvious and known. I wish to categorize it as an essential and crucial topic of discussion in our rapidly evolving world. What is clear to all is that the faster the world progresses in the area of technology, the more tests and challenges are hurled upon those striving to raise their children with the same Torah-true values and beliefs with which they were raised.

It is therefore no wonder and no surprise that our leaders – the *gedolim* – have homed in and focused upon one of the most troubling modern inventions of our days – "blogs." Rabbi Avrohom Schorr recently spent his allotted time during The Chofetz Chaim Teleconference Program discussing the "spreading disease" in *Klal Yisroel*, called blogs.

We all know and understand the "deadly" potential of these blogs. Rabbi Schorr emphasized that never in history was there such a vehicle with the ability to mass-disperse absolute *hotza'as*

sheim ra (slander) and *lashon hara* (gossip) anonymously – instantaneously, with the touch of a button. What is most frightening is the self-evident fact that many of these bloggers are *frum Yidden* – who seem to be possessed and entranced in a quest to smear other *Yidden* and portray them in the most negative light. And it doesn't stop at our fellow "*stam*" *Yidden*. These "*frum*" bloggers criticize and heap scorn on our *gedolei Torah* and *manhigei Yisroel*.

QUICKSAND OF SCORN ON BLOGSPHERE

In an attempt to survey the extent of Orthodox Jewry's plunge into the quicksand of the "blogosphere," I searched key religious terms in one of the popular blog search engines. The search utility allows the user to find all blogs that discuss or mention the word or phrase that you provide. When I searched on "yeshiva," it retrieved an astounding 26,888 blogs. Searching on the word "Gemara" yielded a sizable 4,462 blogs. Entering a few different *gedolei Torah's* names in the search

THIS IS ZVI FRANKEL'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN THESE PAGES.

query returned over 200 blogs. With sorrow, I must inform the reader that most of those blogs were full of critiques or absolute *lashon hara* about the revered *tzaddikim*. In addition, these blogs have thousands of readers who comment with their own feedback. It is clear from the displayed summaries of these blogs that many are written and visited by religious Jews. These blogs are a manifestation of a disease that is spreading throughout Torah Jewry at a breakneck speed.

Is this new destructive phenomenon simply an uncontrollable consequence of this generation having such an outlet readily available at its fingertips? Or can one go a step further and proclaim that this growing "disease" represents an unfortunate product of a lack of *chivuch* in our homes and schools? How can thousands of *frum* bloggers write and comment on forums that are clearly forbidden by the Torah, and then rationalize their major sin by exclaiming, "It is all *lesheim Shamayim*," thus falsely convincing themselves of their self-righteousness?

The crux of this unfortunate issue is clearly manifest when one examines the well-known surge of "yeshiva news" blogs. These are the blogs that represent a clear and present danger to those who live by the mandate of halacha. Some are filled with filth and *hotza'as sheim ra*, which can be clearly identified. Others are more discreet in that they publish interesting and relevant yeshiva news, but still represent a very significant danger in that they slip and spread words of *lashon hara* on occasion. These destructive "religious" gossip blogs are authored by a mix of modern Orthodox and Chareidi individuals. In general, the writers remain anonymous due to various reasons, including the realization that upon discovery of their identities, they may be forced to answer to the many whom they have harmed.

"LEGITIMATE" BLOGS?

Many "legitimate" Orthodox outlets are now utilizing the world of blogs. Shuls have begun to create their own blogs for up-to-the-

minute updates and articles, thereby joining the family of bloggers. This unfortunately gives a glowing *hechsheir* to use this very *treife* tool. A rabbi's support for his shul's use of a blog might be compared to endorsing his congregant's wish to purchase cable television to watch his broadcast of *divrei Torah* at their convenience. The rabbi giving his *haskama* (approval) to his shul's blog could perhaps be similar to putting a tremendous stumbling block before those who follow his halachic guidance and, of course, their impressionable children.

The blog is a recent technological creation that has its own area and segment of the Internet. By going to any blog, including the shul's, any child can simply click a mandatory link on top of the page that says "next blog," which thereby brings them to another, unrelated blog. That blog may consist of any material, including, obviously inappropriate content that would be detrimental to one's spiritual health. Based upon the implicit endorsement of the rabbi, his congregants and students may rationalize that the world of blogs is not something to scorn; after all, their rabbi has a blog of his own.

WHEN AN ADULT TAKES THE LEAD

The only way we have a chance of combating and eliminating this spreading plague is to undertake an absolute and unwavering approach. As with all things of this nature, it must begin with action by the adult, which will then give credibility to enforcing the rule upon children. For those who may allow their children access to the Internet, they must incorporate blogs into whatever Internet guidelines they already have (e.g., the children may use the Internet; however, they may not use chat rooms, blogs, etc.). For those that do not have the Internet in their homes, they must simply make it clear that blogs are something detrimental to *frumkeit* and are forbidden in any place and at any time.

The *Maharsha* states that Rabbi

Akiva's 24,000 disciples perished during *Sefira* due to their speaking *lashon hara*. Moreover, the Chofetz Chaim points out from numerous sources that our current *Galus* of two millennia is a result of *lashon hara*. With the Orthodox community's enforcement of a zero tolerance policy towards blogs, it is everyone's hope and desire that it will thereby fulfill the required rectification of our own speech, and we will then be *zocheh* to the coming of *Moshiach* speedily in our days. □

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