

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 *upsherin* 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 Citi Field 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





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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 name 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.

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

¹In 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.”

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





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his office, where he could sit and oversee his online operation in peace, Yitzzy 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” Yitzzy 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.”

Yitzzy 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, Yitzzy 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, Yitzzy 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 Yitzzy 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

[4] <http://pewresearch.org>
“By 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.”

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 Yitzzy 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 Yitzzy directly in shul, and broached the subject of Yossi, but Yitzzy never seriously considered the warnings about his son. When his wife suggested that there may be something up with Yossi, Yitzzy brushed it off and told her to let it slide. Time and again Yitzzy 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





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 Yitzy learned only that all lines would remain closed until after *Yom Tov*.

No problem for a man like him. In another millisecond, Yitzy 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!?" Yitzy 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."

Yitzy 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 Yitzy 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

[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."

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





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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.”

Yitzzy 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,” Yitzzy 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, Smartphones 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.

“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, “Yitzzy, 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!”

Yitzzy 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 Yitzzy 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, Yitzzy, 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, Yitzzy 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, Yitzzy’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 Yitzzy they dropped those distributors like hotcakes. Now Yitzzy could no longer find cheap suppliers for his products.

With the gray market effectively closed, Yitzzy 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.”



[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.”



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, Yitzy 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

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 hador*, 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 Sivan*. 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!" ■

[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 land lines go the way of the old rotary phones."

[11] <http://www.brighthub.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.newsfuture.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.





KINUS KLAL YISROEL FOR OUR GENERATIONS

וְתֵהָא הַשְּׁעָה הַזֹּאת
שַׁעַת רַחֲמִים וְעַת
רְצוֹן וַחֲיִזּוּק הַיְסוּדוֹת
לָנוּ וּלְדוֹרוֹתֵינוּ

”וּבְאוּ כוֹלֵם בְּבִרְיִת
יַחַד נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמַע
אִמְרוּ כְּאַחַד”



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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” (*Devorim 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, “שמענתא בענא 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: Internetaholics. 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" דאית לי—*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 Wosner, 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:

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 *minyán* 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

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.

[2] For example, see <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2011/08/04/needily-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.

[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*

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,

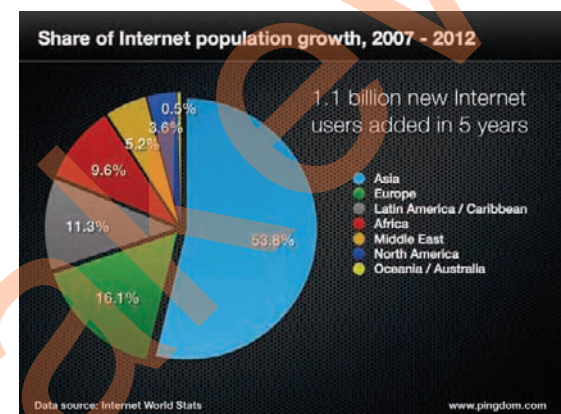
and the resultant metamorphosis is not limited to the online world. In fact, he described the process as a kind of "hijacking" of our personalities.

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 Online 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



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

[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.

[8] Suler, J. "The Online Disinhibition Effect." In *The Psychology of Cyberspace*. 2004. <http://users.rider.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, Michoel's boss can now stare at the computer screen, reading and re-reading the note, percolating with anger, and imagining the worst intentions behind Michoel's impulsive words.

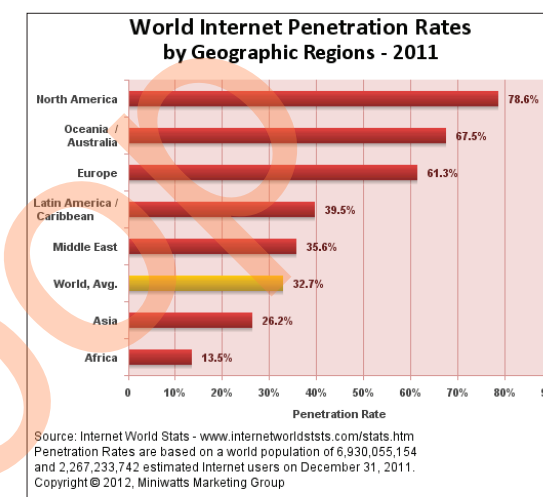
In three months, after all has been forgiven and forgotten, his boss could be browsing through a “search” of Michoel's e-mails looking for some important information. When his eyes fix on the preview of that e-mail, it will all come flashing back to him. It is forever preserved for posterity.

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.”

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



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.



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

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.

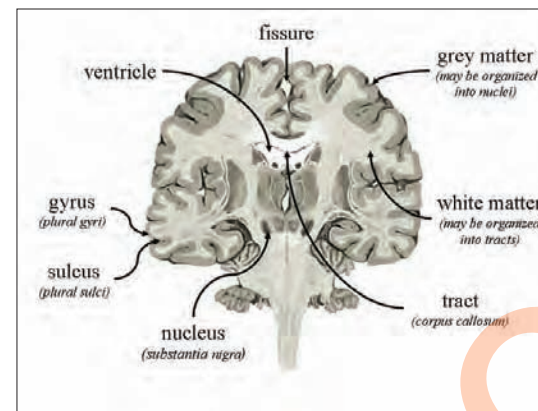
studies have been done so far that specifically target internet usage, "idly browsing" and other common net activities may have the same effects. They consist of often repetitive, monotonous actions that don't engage our thought processes very much, similar to the effect of watching television for hours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

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



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

[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>

[12] Keen, A. "Opinion: We must avoid Facebook's 'creepy' cult of transparency." *CNN.com*, 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 You." 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

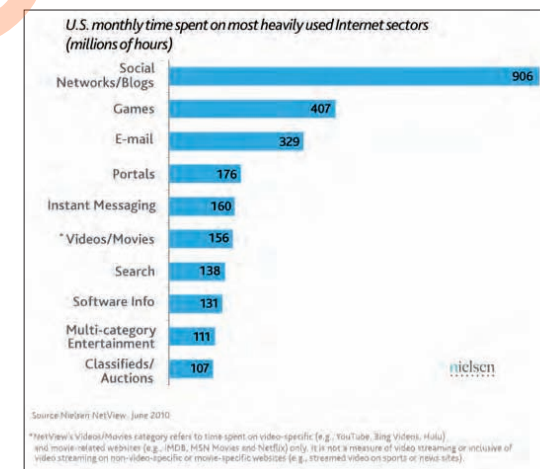
He created an organization called Europe vs. Facebook. On its website, he details exactly what kinds of information Facebook had collected on him. One of the points to consider here is that it's not just one huge mass of unsorted information. Rather, it's carefully and systematically categorized for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

[14] Seenote 35.

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



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-



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-

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
**Nielsen'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.

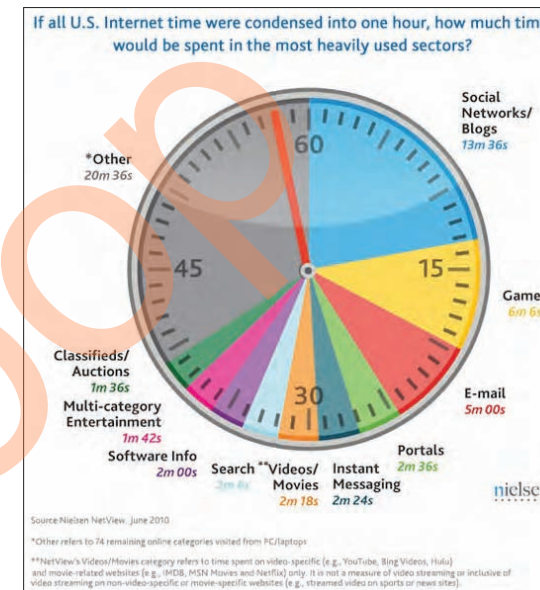
Facebook content is similarly "sticky." There is no way to simply click a button and delete all of the content you have created from Facebook. Says Dr. Aboujaoude: "To truly leave,

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



[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.

[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:

*response 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.

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

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

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.

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-

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

[20] Chapter 10: The End of Privacy

[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](http://zdnet.com).

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

