



SPACE FOR REALITY

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

I have been writing this column for close to twenty-nine years. I cherish this opportunity to share my thoughts with so many wonderful Yidden but it hasn't always been without its challenges. In the first years I would send my weekly article into the publisher by fax. (Remember the fax machine?) The problem was that I wrote in long hand, and so each submission would run into thirteen, fourteen pages of my scrawling, often undecipherable handwriting. After some time the otherwise patient and supportive editor called me to say, "Rav Rubin, please, get a computer, have rachmonus on our staff." Well, put that way, I had no choice, far be it from me to be the source of pain for another Yied. So, one bright day (that alone an auspicious occurrence for Manchester) I wended my way to a major purveyor of computers with the singular altruistic purpose of helping another Yied live an easier life. Walking into the shop, I was immediately surrounded by all sorts of screens, keyboards, boxes, wires, etc. etc. A young sales assistant sauntered over and asked what I was looking for, I had no idea, so I mumbled the one thing I had heard about from one of my more worldly baal habatim, "I want a lap top." There I said it, little knowing what I was asking for, nor what I was about to undertake. An hour later Rubin walked out with a new computer, a head spinning with all kinds of instructions, and most importantly, a phone number to a twenty-four-hour help line if and when I would need any help.

Setting up my new toy was half the battle, I now had to write an article on the screen, using my own fingers, with no prior knowledge on what I was meant to be doing. The operators on that help line must have been having a right old fit, as I kept them on line with my trivial questions for what seemed like forever, but they kindly coaxed me through each phase of the initial stages of my computer awareness. After a long and arduous few days, I was ready for what I understood was

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר מפיאסצנה
הרב קלונימוס קלמן שפירא
זצוקלה"ה



לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
הרבנית הצדקנית
חיה שרה בת הרב שלמה
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the 'tachlis' of the entire enterprise, sending the finished article by email to the publisher. Now my little regarded gymnastic skills were going to be called upon. You see in those ancient times, one had to use their telephone land line to send anything. This was called dial up, and was the way one sent files pre wifi. Problem was, I could not ask for real time help from my now close friends at the help line whilst negotiating this feat of technological magic because my sending of the article was contingent on having the landline free. I was getting extremely anxious; how do you get this document that I have sweated over to fly through the wires without having the calming voice of the help desk telling me what to do? Then I hit upon a plan, my neighbour had a mobile phone, well it was as mobile as one could get then; it was an original Nokia Brick and with a bit of pleading my neighbour handed it over to me for just one call. I wasn't out of the woods yet by a long shot, I needed to physically manoeuvre myself in a way to get a signal, something else I never knew about. I'll save you some of the more harrowing details. After some Olympic level contortions, I found the signal by draping myself halfway out of my second-floor window whilst somehow holding the phone in one hand, and the lap top in the other. With coaxing over the phone (I think the whole help desk staff was now rooting for me) I somehow pressed the right key and with a gentle whoosh, my article disappeared into the ether. I had sent my first email, time for a lchiam!

Well, technology has come a long way since then, almost everyone has a phone that slips into their pocket and I have sent thousands of emails without hanging out of any windows.

Except, well, many of us are spiritually hanging out of the window of our souls, precariously holding on for our very lives. We seek Hashems Signal but instead we sometimes find ourselves spiritually deaf. Technology has become a ferocious beast that feeds on our frailties. With each new innovation comes the sense that without it we can't be whole. Social media gobbles up information, nothing is sacred, and our souls become crushed. I recently became aware of the whole new world of Virtual Goggles, an innovation that truly epitomises the sum total of where the future of technology can take us. For the uninitiated, (and Boruch Hashem, I count myself amongst them) allow me to share with you a manufacturers description:

"A VR headset is a device that you wear over your eyes, like a pair of goggles. It is used to give you a 3D experience, meaning that you can see all around you in virtual reality."

In practice whilst wearing this fetching new eye gear the wearer can be immersed in an entirely different world, one populated by ferocious wild beasts, enemy armies, high mountain tops, or perhaps the deep seas. In other words, anywhere else than in reality. In this wild and weird world, you can fight in far off wars, fly into space, crash your family car, in short, devour hours of time slipping into a world of make believe. Teachers complain about how youngsters come to school hyped up by hours on these things, and literally can't focus on anything as mundane as reading or Maths. Some are fearful that the next generation will be suited for nothing more than sitting begoggled fighting make believe battles.

Parshas Terumah (25;1) opens with, "Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a gift, from every man"

The Rebbe Reb Hanoch of Alexander used to say over from the Rebbe Reb Bunim of Pshicha that the passage can be understood as Hashem advising us that if a Yid wants to come close to the Eibishter

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and serve Him as one should, he must separate himself from others to some measure. "Take for Me.... get involved in seeking to serve Me Terumah separate from every man...."

A Yied cant be "On Line" all day, receiving texts, watching messages, being overwhelmed with superficial images that often rot the ability to focus. The constant clamour of beeps and bells coupled with a vibrator that insists on grabbing your attention adds up. How can one concentrate on davening without all this extraneous stuff floating through your mind?

The Tzadik is telling us that you must find space in your thinking, some clarity, so you can be drawn closer to Hashem. A Yied's value should not be counted by how many "friends" they have on some website, nor if they get favourable comments from invisible nudniks that prowl the internet. A Torah Yied must place filters on all their technology, if for no other reason than to remind ourselves what our goals really are. The enslavement to the Internet poses a real danger for all of us, its incipient nature can capture anyone at any age. Filters remind us of borders we must keep. Cutting down on our media socialising is in terms of our current generation, that which the Rebbe advised all those years ago. To be closer to Hashem, we must wean ourselves off from too many hours of useless chatter on dangerous platforms.

There are many positive outlets to be found in the world of Dot Com, but honesty insists that you realistically admit to which are needed and which are definitely not. Like any other aspect of a Torah life, Shailos must be asked, guidance sought, or else you just may become one of those who slip out the window of spiritual growth.

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