

RESPONSIBLE TECHNOLOGY USE



Many have tried to ban or shun technology, but for the majority of our community this is not viable. This booklet attempts to present a Torah-true *hashkafa* on using technology responsibly, while remaining an *erliche yid*.

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GUARD
YOUR EYES

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קט"ג
ה' אורי תשס"ז לבי
לסגרי / 1710 זי איקס וסנגי קולג
עברתי עם הבודד
יחד עם השליח הוד
(בן שיליון) אשר ירו
כך לו קאניס אלו
ולצד חן קצני ואיקוה
ש' צד לציג נק, מיאל
(שאיטע הימילעס
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נת א

For questions or comments, please write to gye.help@gmail.com

This booklet is based mainly on three shiurim given over by the renowned magid shiur, Rav Shimon Spitzer in 5777 (2016-17), in which he elucidated a clear hashkafa regarding the challenges that Klal Yisroel faces with technology today. As a Stoliner Chassid, Rav Shimon based the Hashkafa on talks that he had with the Admor of Karlin Stolin. (A number of points and comments were added into the booklet by GYE).

It is suggested to listen to the shiurim and not rely only on this summary. To download the shiurim, use the 3 links below:

- gye.org.il/ks1 – First Shiur (in Betar, Yiddish)
מצ"ש פרשת חיי שרה, תשע"ז
- gye.org.il/ks2 – Second Shiur (in U.S, Yiddish)
מוצאי עשרה בטבת, תשע"ז
- gye.org.il/ks3 –Third Shiur (in U.S, English, for Women)
מצ"ש פרשת ויגש, תשע"ז

Important Disclaimer: This booklet does not speak in the name of any kehilah (community). There are kehilos with different hashkafos and different ways of thinking, and everyone should follow their kehila's approach. This booklet can be helpful for people who don't belong to any particular kehila and are struggling to find a good approach to help them contend with the challenges of technology.

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Introduction

We've all heard many times about the great dangers of technology. And yes, the situation truly is challenging and painful. In many kehilos there are attempts to prevent use of certain devices altogether. However, there are two points that it is important to clarify:

(1) **A Big Sakana, Yes. Treif, No:** According to Halacha, something can only be called a חפצא דאיסורא if it's אסור מחמת עצמו (for example, *Treif* food). So while it's true that technology can be used for bad things, it's not halachically correct to call any specific device a חפצא דאיסורא since these devices are also needed for many good and important things.¹ In any event, if there is no need for it, surely someone shouldn't have it because there definitely is a חשש מכשול (as the Gemara in בבא בתרא נו: says: רשע הוא - רשע אחריו). But if someone does need it, then he must constantly be aware of the dangers and set up proper fences, as we'll discuss later in this booklet. And someone who does this properly can still remain an erliche yid. A person's fear of Heaven is not measured by the type of device he has, but rather by what he does.

¹ ראה אגרות משה אבן העזר ח"א סימן נו בענין איכא דרכא אחריתא, where R' Moshe Feinstein writes that a חשש מכשול is not enough to prevent someone from normal day to day needs.

(2) We must learn to *contend* with technology instead of prohibiting it. Imposing bans on certain types of devices won't work and the technology will be used anyway, but with far less preparedness for--and awareness of the dangers. For example, in the early days of the internet, the frum community tried to ignore the issue or ban it altogether instead of pushing for better filtering solutions. (Many frum newspapers even refused to place ads for frum-filter companies, in fear that more people would start using the internet). But this approach backfired. Not only did it not work, it caused us to lose many neshomos! Our dependence on technology is just growing with every passing year, and this approach is proving not to be viable.

The Proper Approach to Technology

A Different Type of Battle

Technology has created a situation where light and darkness mix together. The dangers lurk *within* the good and useful things that we need. And we must do battle like we do with guerrilla warfare, where terrorists are hiding *within* the civilian population. We have to be fully aware of the dangers and the issues that we face and always be on the alert and be prepared. It's a constant battle, and not one that we can just win and be finished with. But this approach of constantly being aware of and avoiding the dangers, is sustainable for the long

term, since it isn't tied to any specific technological situation that we may find ourselves in, today or in the future.

What can we learn from cars?

Technology can be compared to driving a car. Just as cars are dangerous and have killed many people over the years, so has technology wreaked havoc and destruction on untold millions. But in spite of the dangers, we don't ban cars. They are a necessity and make our lives so much easier. Everyone knows that driving carefully and responsibly is a matter of life and death, and the same approach needs to be applied to technology.²

Three things make driving safer:

1. **Safety Features:** Many features are installed in cars today to enhance safety, such as hand-brakes, seat-belts, air-bags, warning lights, etc. Do these things eliminate the dangers altogether? Of course not, there are still many accidents r"l. *But it helps.*
2. **Education & Awareness:** No one gets a license without first learning the laws, rules and safety precautions. And even after the initial training, we make constant campaigns about the dangers like "Don't drink and drive", "Don't Text and Drive", etc.

² Of course, spiritual dangers are different than physical dangers. The point is only that the precautions we need to take are comparable to a car, which is a necessary tool and a fact of life.

3. **Being Licensed:** People who are underage, crippled or have lower mental capacities are not given a license to drive. And even those who *are* granted a license can **lose it** if they don't drive safely and responsibly.

Applying these strategies to technology:

1. **Safety Technology:** We must use the best technology available to protect our devices, to the very best of our abilities. This includes putting in good filters, using reporting software, and using passwords so that children don't have access. These precautions are never foolproof and there are often loopholes, but devices without a filter cannot be *compared* to ones with a filter!
2. **Education & Awareness:** All those who use internet and smartphones must be aware of the many risk factors (see the 12 issues below) and wage a constant battle against these problems through self-control, campaigns, awareness, and by taking responsibility for ourselves and for our future generations. (*Halevai* that using technology would require a license, just like driving.³)

³ It is highly suggested that before someone begins using internet on their own for the first time or before getting a smartphone (after marriage), they should read this booklet thoroughly and **discuss the precautions that they will be taking** with a parent or *moreh derech*, as well as with those who understand technology well. (See the section called "Practical Help with Filters" below).

3. **Maturity & Sensibleness:** Unmarried bochurim and girls should not have access at all. And if an older person sees that they are unable to use internet in a safe, responsible and *erlich* way, they should not have it *at any cost*.⁴

GuardYourEyes.com

Regarding point #3 above, if you know someone who struggles with inappropriate internet use and wants to be helped, they should contact the GYE organization confidentially at gye.help@gmail.com or call their hotline at 646-600-8100. GYE has helped thousands of people regain control, and it's free and fully anonymous.

⁴ Filters are important because people tend to stumble when it's easy and when it doesn't take much to fall. However, most filters are '**only as good as the person who wants to be good**'. If someone is looking for trouble, filters aren't going to stop them. And that's why technology--even *with* a filter, should only be used by those who know they can use it responsibly.

12 Risk Factors

The saying goes: “Know thy enemy”. The following are **12** risk factors that require constant awareness to contend with, while using technology. (The order below is not necessarily indicative of the level of risk). A few suggestions are also offered below, to help us ensure that we remain in control of the technology and that it doesn’t begin to control *us*.

1. **ראיות אסורות**: The danger of seeing (or reading) inappropriate material. This is the greatest danger and has caused great churbonos and destroyed many lives and families.⁵ See below for practical help with installing good filters.
2. **Time wasting**: Some people give up their whole lives with emptiness and נערישקייטן as a result of technology. Wasted time never comes back again!

Suggestion: Use these innovations to utilize time even more wisely, for example by downloading and listening to shiurim while traveling, etc.

3. **Loss of ריכוז**: Technology gives us the ability to be updated about every little thing, but this can make a person lose their ability to focus and no longer be מיושב. People are

⁵ There are chemical processes in the brain, that occur from looking at certain bad things, which mirror real drug addictions. These things can pull a person into dangerous dependencies that not only destroy their ruchniyus, but also their lives and marriages.

always checking and being updated. There's a time and place for everything, but technology can take over our entire concentration. Studies show it takes 20 minutes to regain full concentration after being distracted. It's impossible to שטייג in any area without ריכוז.

Suggestion: Always keep the phone and notifications on “Still”, and when learning or davening, turn the phone off altogether (it's *ok* if there are certain times of the day when we aren't reachable). When we want to be updated, we can always look later, but why should we need to be updated every few seconds with beeps and vibrations?

4. **Time for Self-growth and introspection:** By being involved 24/6 with technology, there are always messages to check and new things to see. We end up losing the ability to have time for ourselves, such as the clarity of our heads before davening, the ability to be מתבודד, etc. Why should we give these precious gifts away?

Suggestion: Do we really need to go to sleep and wake up checking our phones? At the very least, let's not sleep with the phones next to our beds (alarm clocks cost just a few bucks!).

5. **Addiction:** Even without the issue of ראיות אסורות, there's a real danger of getting addicted to technology. The brain begins to crave the 'high' of being constantly stimulated with updates, news, drama, and video clips. Even in the secular world this is becoming a recognized problem. Today's tech is being called the new “crack cocaine” since it

stimulates our brains to release constant small dopamine-drips, which we can quickly come feel we can't live without. How much more so for a frum Yid, where this kind of addiction disrupts our learning, davening and family life in a much more significant way!

In addition, getting used to constant visual stimulation trains our brains to be interested only in attention-grabbing, exciting material. This greatly weakens our ability to learn Torah in depth. The ability to find beauty and pleasure in Torah comes through toil and concentration on texts in *Lashon Hakodesh*, delving deeply and looking beyond the surface. Extensive technology usage trains our minds to be stimulated constantly by the flashy glitter of *chitzonius* and *shitchiyus* (externalities and shallowness), greatly chipping away at our ability to study Torah properly. And if this is said of adults, *how much so* this adversely effects our youth. This is unfortunately one of the biggest reasons why so many of our youth today don't have the *zitzfleish* to sit and learn.

6. **כבוד בית הכנסת**: This is an area that needs a big tikkun throughout Klal Yisrael. For example: phones ringing during davening, or people checking their phones during learning. Even a kosher phone, if it rings in middle of shmoneh esrei it's a big zilzul! We all need to have this in mind because we're talking about the Ribono Shel Olam's Kavod! Ideally, erliche Yidden should not take out their phones in shul at all, if not for something very important. This is an area that needs constant chizuk.

Suggestion: Set your phone ringer to ‘vibrate’ at all times, not just when in shul. This way, if you forget to turn off the phone for davening, at least it won’t disturb anyone else.

7. **The risk of becoming shallow and empty:** People’s general level keeps getting lower, such as the level of people’s speech, jokes, etc. This happens because the technology connects everyone to everyone else, often bringing everyone’s level down to the lowest denominator on the groups that we’re connected with. Also, snapping pictures and taking videos of every event turns everything in to a *show*. And if we’re this way, our children will be even worse, c”v! This is both a personal fight and a community battle. We need to feel, “Why does our shul or my community need to be on such a low level? Do we deserve that?”
8. **Eidelkeit:** Watching video clips and other such things can destroy our ‘*eidlekeit*’ of קדושה and makes us מטומטם. It’s not good for our *neshamos* to see violence or to watch people laughing at other people’s misfortunes, not to mention all types of רכילות and הלבנת פני חבירו. Unfortunately, these kind of video clips appear even on kosher news sites and are commonly passed around, and we have to be so careful.
9. **Chinuch:** Whether we’d like it or not, our children see and copy exactly what we do. If we waste time and act נאריש with technology, they will do the same. Even if we tell them not to touch it, if they see us always busy with it, they will be just waiting to grow up and get their hands on it! In addition, they see also how we are not מרוכז and they lose

their ריכוז as well. This ends up costing the parents huge amounts of money and עגמת נפש. But if our children see that we use it בכבוד ראש and not as a toy, this is the best chinuch we can give them. They will internalize that it's a סכנה and it needs to be used with care.

Suggestion: Make a גדר not to check the phone at all when in the house together with your children, or at the *very least* during family meal times. There should be certain hours of the day where the smart-phone is put away or turned off, or at least where the “mobile-data” is switched off (allowing only phone calls).

10. **Our Senses:** When we use our senses and feelings for נארישקייט, we lose our feelings and senses for קדושה. It's either one or the other. If we want to maintain a chiyus in a Shabbos, in a davening, in a tisch or farbreigen, we begin to lose it all when we start getting our chiyus from shtusim. The more a person uses their senses for something, the more it enters into them and becomes part of them.
11. **'Es Past Nisht':** Technology is relatively anonymous, so it takes away a lot of the normal inhibitions that we would naturally feel otherwise in regular life. Many things we get used to doing with technology simply don't *'pas'* for an erliche yungerman or woman. We need to be so careful to act online at the same level that we act and want to be perceived as, in real life.
12. **Attention to our children:** After a long day in Kollel or at work, we naturally want to “unwind” with technology and end up expending our attention on shtusim. Children so

desperately need their parent's attention to be emotionally healthy. Are we willing to pay the price of our children's emotional health ע"ו? ⁶

This above list of dangers and issues is נוגע each and every day. It would be כדאי to keep a list of these 12 concerns in our pockets just to remind ourselves what we need to wage battle against. If we lose our awareness, we'll surely fail!

An erliche Yid must wage a strong and *constant* battle against these issues. But someone who has the technology and succeeds to be very careful, is considered a tremendous עובד השם. And there are ב"ה many, many erliche Yungeleit like that today (we may not know because they almost never take out their phones).

General Suggestion: Some people get themselves a “dumb-phone” in *addition* to their smartphone. We have heard from these people how much they actually enjoy this! They feel a certain freedom in being able to switch phones for the times when they are learning or at home with their children. But whether we do this or not, setting certain times for putting away our smartphones (or turning the mobile-data off), is a vital ingredient to the overall health of our parenting, time-usage, and quality of our marriage.

⁶ This also applies to the attention we should be giving our spouses, which is vital to maintaining a healthy marriage. It's tragic to see spouses today sitting together at the table while totally ignoring each other, each one engrossed in their smartphone.

Filters

The number one guideline for safety before anything else, is to have good filters installed. There is no heter to have any device without a very good filter which blocks all מראות אסורות and anything that an erliche Yid shouldn't see. This applies, no matter the age and no matter what kind of device is being used (computer or phone). For an erliche Yid, there is no such thing as having a device for *even one day* without a filter. And it should be a good filter that was made with frum yidden in mind (examples: Gentech, Netspark, NativUSA, Netfree) and not a filter made by goyim that isn't worth much.

The michshol of having open internet is so big that it's almost unnecessary to even mention here the importance of filters. But this inyan needs constant chizuk for two reasons:

- It's easy not to find the time to "get around to it" or we just upgraded our device and didn't put it back on yet (and then we forget to). Some people say they are sure they won't be nichshal, so they push off putting on a filter. But no one can be sure of anything. אין and אל תאמין בעצמך עד יום מותך. אפטרופוס וכו'
- No filters will be perfect and have everything that we want open, open, and everything that we want closed, closed. Filters can be bothersome and are never foolproof (although they are getting better all the time). So yes, it may be a bother, it may cost money, and it may block even things you need. But consider the hefsed against the schar. Filters are a fence against משאל תחתית ממש!

Practical help with filters.

1) **TAG** (Technology Awareness Group) assists people with filters in their offices around the world.

(One helpful thing TAG can do for you, is to help you install all the apps you need on your smartphone, and then remove the browser to protect for any michshol).

TAG's Main Hotline: 718-CALL-TAG (718-225-5824). You can also visit venishmartem.com for a list of all TAG offices around the world.

Here are the TAG offices in some of the biggest Jewish communities:

- **TAG Borough Park** 5316 New Utrecht Ave
718-437-1824 ext. 500
- **TAG Flatbush** 1622 Coney Island Ave.
347-878-1824 x 108 | tagflatbush.com
- **TAG Monsey** 19 Main St.
845-371-1824 ext. 125
- **TAG Lakewood** 1221 Madison Avenue
732-730-1824 ext. 104

2) **Venishmartem.com** is an excellent resource for filtering advice: They have a “Filter-Wizard” on their homepage that makes it easy to find the best solutions for any device.

Venishmartem also lists information on all TAG offices around

the world. It is far preferable to go to a TAG office rather than relying on Venishmartem for advice, because TAG can help you set up the filter to suit your precise needs, and also hold the passwords or control the account for you, if necessary.

3) Filtering Help in Eretz Yisrael:

- **TAG Jerusalem:** 1 Touval Street, Romema
077-971-0000 | www.tagisrael.org.
- היעוץ המקצועי שעל ידי ועידת הרבנים לביצור חומת הדת - **Technology Advice Hotline:** A country-wide hotline which specializes in finding filtering solutions in Israel.
Tel: 1599-550-330 (Press 8 for English)
- **OutNet:** A country-wide organization with trained technicians to help you block or limit internet access, free of charge. Call their hotline 0722-613-613 and choose the options relevant to you, or visit www.out-net.org. This will lead you a technician in your area that will assist you. If the technician does not answer, you can leave him a message and he will get back to you.

After Filters: Understanding the מהלך

We must always remember that technology is here to serve **us** and help us live according to **our** values, and not ח"ו that we should become slaves **to** technology.

To navigate the more 'grey-areas' as an erliche yid, it's important to understand the nature of technology. Technology has two objectives. One is to make life easier, such as using Waze to get places faster or using banking apps to deposit checks without having to wait in line at the bank, or using Whatsapp to stay in touch with family or work colleagues. However, the second purpose of technology is simply entertainment, to help people have fun and get excited. All technology and all apps that exist today, fit in to at least one of these two categories, and many times into both of them.

An erliche Yid should train himself to use technology for the first purpose only, in other words, for what's needed and for what can help make life easier, but not for entertainment purposes, or to get excited and become פארנומען (busy) with it. Understanding this basic yesod will answer most questions that come up.

Can teenagers have phones or use internet?

Bochurim and girls have no need for phones at all, even without internet access. And if they are older (after Beis Medrash, Kibutz or at end of seminary) and they do need a phone, then as long as they're not married they should preferably not have SMS (texting), nor should they have access to the internet at all. Even if they want to use the internet just for email, or for divrei Torah or other good things, and even if they have a good filter or the browser is blocked, bochurim and girls should not be using apps that require internet access such as email or Whatsapp. (There can be exceptions, such as an older girl who works).

Can I get a smartphone?

Those who don't need it surely shouldn't get it. And just because someone gets married, doesn't mean they should get a smartphone right away. The younger a person is, the easier it is for them to get excited and pulled into things, and therefore the risks are greater. A 19-21-year-old is not as מיושב as an older person who has slowly gotten more involved in day-to-day needs and it has become more necessary for him, in which case it's Ok. But for those who just want it for little things, **why should we put ourselves into unnecessary temptation and possible downfalls?** (אי דאיכא דרכא אחריונא... וכי')

What is the Geder of 'needing it'?

There are no clear answers as to what's the geder of needing it and at what exact age a person can get a smartphone. Every person should use their own sechel to know if they need it or not, and **how much** access they really need (and which apps are necessary). Each one of us needs to think very well and weigh the potential benefits against the potential loss. For example, a person could want a smartphone because he thinks he will save 5-10 minutes a day by having Waze, but meanwhile he ends up burning 3 hours a day because of the rest of the technology that he introduced now into his life!

Can we read news?

Kollel yungerleit don't need to have access to news on their phones. But someone who already has a more open phone or computer for other needs, can check kosher news sites occasionally to know what's going on. But one should not spend more than a few minutes a day on it and surely not become פארוומען (busy) with it.

Can children watch things on the phone or computer?

Again, there are no clear answers to this question. When we understand the issues, we can honestly ask ourselves "is it כדאי or not?" In general, children should not be using technology for

entertainment at all, but it could be Ok to show them something kosher a few times a year, such as during vacations or chol hamoed with the parent's supervision. History has shown that children who grow up in a home where technology is used only for what's needed, and only once in a while--at special times--they are shown something on the computer, they actually turn out more healthy than children who didn't have any exposure whatsoever to technology at home, but needed it later in life. (That is not to say one should get involved in technology just for this, but the point is clear. What the children see at home becomes ingrained in their minds).

What's up with Whatsapp?

Apps like Whatsapp should not be used by unmarried bochurim or girls. But for married people who want to use it, they should understand the מהלך and make sure to use it only for good things. There are terrible stories from Whatsapp usage, רכילות, מראות, שפיכת דמים, צניעות between men and women, אסורות, etc. But on the other hand, it can be used for so many important and useful things, as well as mitzvos and chessed.

Groups related to parnassa and chessed, as well as family groups are Ok to join on Whatsapp, but stam groups of friends where jokes, pictures and videos are sent around is not Ok. Once we start using these devices as toys and games, we become shallow and it takes our whole level down. These guidelines are hard to put into words, but we need to

understand the issues.⁷ Once we start slipping in these areas, we can't know how far down we can end up, c"v. If you have a question in your mind whether to send something or not on the groups, it just doesn't pay. The farther back we keep the fence to protect the "standard" of the groups, the less chance there will be of slipping. Don't be ashamed to leave a group that has become shallow, even if they laugh at you! We have to be strong and maintain a high standard for ourselves.

Suggestion: Every family group should have someone older and more מיושב who helps keeps the level of the group on a higher level.

Can we shop online?

If there are מכשולות, then for sure not. But in general, we need to use our heads. There are no clear answers such as אסור or מותר, we need to ask ourselves if it's כדאי. For example, is it כדאי to shop in pritzusdik Manhattan just to save a few minutes or a few dollars? If we have a real sheilah, we can ask Rabbanim, but mostly we just need to use our heads.

⁷ Dovid Hamelech said "ובמושב לצים לא ישב". Does this not classify as a מושב לצים?

Special Notes for Women

When it comes to Yiddishkeit issues, men and women have an equal אחריות. The battle with technology needs to be fought by the women just as much as by the men. But there are a number of נקודות where women have an even *bigger* אחריות than men.

- The רוח of the home is set by the mother. The children see the mother more than the father, and they can “smell” very well (much more than we think) what is truly important in the home by observing the mother and seeing what gives her excitement and chiyus.
- The attention that all children desperately need (see #12 above) is even more important coming from the mother, since she spends the most time with the children. Without this personal attention, children grow up abnormal. Such children can be singled out in an instant by any mechanech. If we are busy with our phones and checking our messages and news even when our children need us, they don’t feel they are important to us. And these emotional deficiencies manifest themselves later in life in many harmful ways c”v. No money in the world is worth more than a mother’s attention to a child! Focus on your children, play games with them, and don’t give this precious attention that they need and crave away to a machine.
- שטשני כרצונו – By nature, women are more connected to Hashem, and they have a special koach of communication, which they can use to communicate with Hashem. But it’s so easy to lose this פנימיות when we are involved in these

things. Women have it already, if only it isn't ruined. What a shame that it should be lost to shtusim! When we're busy communicating 24/6 with apps and constantly getting messages and alerts to keep life interesting and exciting, we lose being in touch with ourselves and with Hashem.

In Conclusion

This booklet was an attempt to give some הגדרות and הסברה on this challenging topic. For more detailed questions and issues, one should ask Poskim and Morei Horaah. All of Yisroel are connected, and we need to constantly be מחזק one another. By being aware of the issues that we are up against, we can all be מחזק each other to stay strong and maintain higher standards.

