

my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ramatganinternational - 11 Nov 2010 17:07

What I am about to set out to you today is something that I have been longing to do for a long while. I wanted to catalogue my feelings and thoughts about a matter that has been directly effecting my life for well over the last decade. You may ask why I haven't done so yet. The answer for this question is oh so simple. Immediately after this year's Rosh Hashanah 2010, I did something that I have been meaning to do for many years. I freed myself from the shackles of the Internet. When I say 'freed' I mean to say that I got to grips with my heart and soul and installed Covenant Eyes on my computers with all the added filters etc.

Ok, a little about who I am. My name is Yechezkel, I am 33 years old. I live in Jerusalem - Israel where I have a family of 6 Bli Ayin Hara. I run a successful business from my office in Ramat Gan. I am from England originally and have been living here for the last 9 years.

I come from an extremely frum family – all my siblings besides my brother with whom which I share the business with here are either in Kollel or klei kodesh. I was brought up and educated to the highest standards of both yiddishkeit and frumkeit.

I was lucky to have been partnered with the most wonderful wife and seeing as her family lived in Israel we decided to settle in Israel.

The internet emerged on the worldwide scene during my teens and developed at a fast pace during my early married life. Whilst maintaining a settled program of learning before Shachris and in the evening as well as earning a trade during the day – I was the typical frum ba'al haboss, living a relatively comfortable lifestyle, bringing up my children and infusing in them the rich heritage that both I and my wife received from our parents. My advice was regularly sought on a wide range of communal matters. I had become an askan in my circles and my stature in the community was one of respect. I was proud of my family and looked on with deep pride when my parents and in-laws visited us. I knew they were proud of me at what I had achieved.

This image I had constructed was all but a screen – a facade of who I really was and what my inner being and soul really looked like. In truth, I was well and truly addicted to the internet and all its terrible associated family. Yes I was able to put on a front as a normal frum man when it came to life away from my computer screen. Yes I was able to preach to my children and portray an example of how a frum Jew should behave, yes I was able to learn the Daf day in day out, but behind all this a lustful and dark man lived. It was a clear case of split personality. Away from my computer I lived the life as depicted earlier on but once I was under the spell of my computer and the internet, I transformed into an animal – yes an animal I am ashamed to say. I will not delve into what I got up to and what I spent time watching on the internet but suffice to say I was addicted to it and it ruled my life, my heart, my brain and most of all my soul.

Year after year resolutions came and went in Elul, year on year I wept through T'fillas Zakoh and klapped the al cheits with every intention to make the coming year a one that removed me from the world of the traps that lay in wait at the end of my fingertips as I typed addresses in my browser. But year after year the temptations were too great, too tantalizing to refuse. I had to feed my addiction I had to nurture my lust and satiate my appetite for everything that is immoral.

It wasn't long before those good intentions and resolutions were lying discarded in the garbage.

Life events and simchas came and went with me posing as the perfect family member and mentch whilst in essence I was putting on a show. I was putting on a show that I had perfected over the years – that of total fakery and deception. After all how would anyone ever find out? How would anyone know? Why did they need to know anyway? What difference did it make to them anyway? I motored through my life watching the world go round and making excuses to myself on how to justify my actions thus allowing me to somehow have a clear conscience of what I was doing - I guess one of the hallmarks of an addict.

This is not the platform with which to describe how the internet is the perfect tool of being able to realize one's fantasies behind a screen of total anonymity. The purpose of this script is both for me to read back and draw strength from as well as for others to read and maybe relate to.

Why now? Why did I do this life and soul saving action of allowing my internet activity to become accountable to a third party? I would compare it to that of a smoker that wants to stop but simply finds the habit and addiction too powerful to take the plunge. On many occasions I made inroads in downloading the software but never took the final most telling step. I always bottled it at the final hurdle. Then one day a couple of months ago right after the Yomim Nora'im, I was about to revert to my usual weak self when I witnessed a terrible accident in Jerusalem. I was due to catch an early morning bus to take me to work but missed it because an elderly yid asked me to help him with his large suitcases. I sat on the bench next to a cute toddler and his parents and busied myself on my blackberry whilst I awaited my next bus. Then, in a flash, the child ran into the road and was hit by a large truck head on. He flew into the air and hit the ground with a sickening thud. It was clear that he had been killed instantly. His parents' cries were heartbreaking. Hatzala just took one look at him and covered his head with a blanket. Everyone there was in total shock. I had never witnessed anything of this nature before. It was a scene that I wouldn't wish on anyone to have to witness, a young cute child being killed in front of his dear parents' very eyes. A tender neshomoh that surely had so much potential to fill – and now extinguished just like that.....

So there I was, mouth agape, clutching my blackberry and briefcase almost in a trance. Why did I have to witness this? Why did I have to miss my bus? Why did the alter yid ask me to help him when there were so many others on the street he could have asked?

I decided that all this was for a reason. It just had to be.

I arrived in my office and did the one thing I had wanted to do for so long. I somehow felt that Hashem was telling me that if this wasn't a wakeup call what is? I installed Covenant Eyes on my computer and set my accountability partners – my wife and father! They would now have full knowledge of what I was browsing on the web.

This was two months ago and now – 2 months later I am a changed man. I have rid myself from my addiction, an addiction that I had so much reliance on previously. I have changed in every way possible – spiritually, mentally and most importantly I am facing the world whilst portraying a true image of who I am. No longer am I hiding behind a smokescreen. No longer do I have those feelings of guilt and shame. Incidentally, my business has thrived and new revenue

streams have been realized – some leads coming from sources I would never have thought were possible.

Why am I writing this? I know that there are many frum men out there that find themselves in similar situations of Internet entrapment. I know that many of you can relate to how I was able to live a life of a split personality – a normal frum yid and that of a cyber animal. And yes, I know many of you out there will agree that whilst all our actions are continuously recorded and monitored by Hashem and we are ultimately accountable to Him, when it comes to the Internet it's a different story. The internet allows your every action to be shrouded in secrecy and this format allows you to push the boundaries further and further safe in the knowledge that no one meaningful will ever know. It's a modern day invention that has become part of our lives and facilitated every yetzer harah and made it all so easy and possible.

But if your best friend knew or your wife was aware of what websites you visited and they saw you every day would you do what you previously were on the internet? No!

I appreciate that it should never have come to this and I pray that the poor child didn't have to die so that I should have to learn this lesson. I should have known and imbued within my heart all along 'hakol golei ve'yaduah lefnei kisei kevoidecha' and I shouldn't have to rely on the knowledge that my wife and father are aware of my internet activity. But I also know that You will be proud of me for what I did and in effect 'mitoich shloi lishmah bah lish'mah'.

It has brought me closer to You and allowed me to relate to Your Torah and made davening to You such an enjoyable experience. I have done something that has changed my life forever, something I never thought I'd have the courage to do. I feel cleansed and free to get on with my life and face the world with a clear conscience. Thank you Hashem for giving me the strength to make this move and I ask You to help me on my path to be able to serve You with a pure heart.

Thank you all for reading this. May Hashem help us all in our avoda of serving Him with Yiras Shamayim, with purity and sanctity and may we all be zocheh to His brochos in good health ad me'ah ve'esrim shana.

Yechezkel

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ur-a-jew - 12 Nov 2010 04:43

Yechezskal. Welcome thanks for the moving story much of which I can relate to. Just remember the key to success is staying in touch. Isolation and relying on ourselves is what got us into trouble in the first place. Hatzlacha and hope to see your around.

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by Holy Yid - 12 Nov 2010 08:07

Wow! Moving, heartbreaking, raw, real, wake up SCREAM, knock on head.

May the all the chizuk from that baby's death be a zechus for him.

On the other point about being an addict. If you took software off what would you do?

We are making you an addict cuz we love you and want to see you stay sober.

Good luck my dear chap.

Forgive me for not being so proper.

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ramatganinternational - 12 Nov 2010 11:32

hello all,

i am grateful to you all for your lovely replies, poems (!!) and divrei chizzuk.

i'm fully aware of the fact that although i have internet protection, i still need to double up in other areas as i know the YH will seek other weak spots to target and plan his attacks. subsequently, i have taken on small added measures and restraints - nothing too difficult to maintain that will assist me in being able to operate my life on a level of maintained kedusha and tahara.

its a shame that this subject matter (and this website) is not discussed openly in conventions etc to raise awareness that there IS a way back into the fold - a way back into normal frum lifesyle.

everyone agrees that we cant stop the onward march of technology in this world and the way in which the web has become a prerequisite for almost everything that we do but what we can and should do is dull its impact and tie its tentacles so that when it has to be in the jewish household it's limited in its capabilities. a bit like a disabled person in a wheelchair - he can get from a to b but he cant exactly jump on a trampoline and slide down the bannister!

just as it would be unthinkable to buy a house and not affix mezzuzah throughout the property, it ought to be unthinkable not to install webchaver/covenant eyes on a computer. this message should be broadcast in every single jewish community regardless of type or background.

anyway - thats my rant for the day, wishing you all a goos shabbos and thanks again for the positive feedback.

yechezkel

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by Dov - 12 Nov 2010 17:29

I wonder if learning one posuk or a line of mishna a day for this child's zechus would keep his memory alive for you and keep the emess you are zoche to be in touch with alive in your heart for that day. This is only for you, Yechezkel.

But let's not forget that simcha shel mitzvah is more important and more powerful than a memory of a sad thing. So making it into a mitzvah can bring some simchah even into this sad memory.

Hatzlocha with your journey!

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by Stuart - 14 Nov 2010 02:28

When I first started reading the email with your story in it, I was thinking great here's another success story of some guy, but wow that blew me away. My only recommendation is to follow the advice given above. The fight is not over. Hatzlacha!

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by jewinpain - 15 Nov 2010 02:30

Hi brother, I'm glad u finally took the brave step in facing this addiction, I'm sure u feel lighter now, there is 1 line I didn't like in ur 1st post "I got rid of my addiction" hell no!!! Addiction lies within u for a long time to go, it takes time to free urself complete, yes u did start to tie up this thick rope the YH had wrapped u around with, but believing in ourselves too much too quick can be very dangerous for us, most important stay aware of urself and keep going a day at a time, that's the only way to succeed

Post away and stay alive

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by thanks613 - 15 Nov 2010 20:20

Hi, and welcome.

Thanks so much for sharing your amazing and inspiring story. It gives me chizuk to see how you faced your problem and made real changes to get to where you are now.

I don't want to psh you to talk about things that you would prefer to deal with privately, not on this forum, but since I and I'm sure many others do struggle with this I was wondering if you might be able to elaborate on parts of your story that might be relevant for us also.

Specifically, when you did decide to set your wife and father as accountability partners, how did you go about doing it. Were either of them aware of the problem beforehand? For me this is something I have been thinking about for a while - how I can set an accountability partner someone who might not understand where I'm coming from. Also, if you have ideas how you are keeping on guard in other areas besides for the internet filter that might be helpful for others I would be really interested to hear about that also.

I hope I'm not making too much of animposition in you, and feel free to decline if you want. Otherwise welcome again to the forum and I look forward to your continued success with Hashem's help.

Sincerely yours

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ramatganinternational - 17 Nov 2010 11:36

Hello 'thanks613',

Thanks for reading my story and posting your comments.

ok, a few things.....you want me to elaborate on details of my story - I'm more than happy to do this if it means people can be helped and inspired. I'll try and do some of that right now but feel free to send me an email to ramatganinternational@yahoo.com and we can go into greater detail for your personal gain.

As I said in my first post, my life had degenerated into that of someone with a split personality. on one side I was able (albeit with Oscar award quality Hollywood 5 star acting) to present myself to the outside world as a frum, honest, geshmak, father/askan/community guy - especially where I live in Jerusalem where I was involved in so many communal matters, on the flip side I lived a sinister life of 100% total internet pornography addiction where I needed a daily (sometimes quadruple daily) fix. Obviously at first it was soft-core and tentative but as the internet progressed technologically I delved into darker fantasies and websites. I found forums where my very desires could be openly discussed with likeminded animals and websites etc were swapped etc.

I can only describe it as a burning lust that was growing on a daily basis and when I was in front of my pc (and after I had made so many excuses to my friends and family that I couldn't make it to meetings/shiurim because I was 'busy finishing important things in my office') I would descend into the muddy internet to explore and see the things I had seen the day before. My eyes would glaze over - I would enlarge the screen, put my headphones in and sit back and indulge.

Then - as quick as I descended, once I was done - I would go home - all the way home my mind prepared me with the most credible excuses and most plausible reasons why what I was doing was ok. That was it - as far as I was concerned - if my addiction wasn't directly effecting or compromising my daily routines and commitments, I was fine with what I was doing.

Of course deep down I knew that ultimately what I was doing was so false, so wrong and so despicable but I never nailed myself down and committed myself to changing my ways although I contemplated it on so many occasions because I was scared how I would cope with my addiction if I didn't have the opportunity to feed it.

Again, as I mentioned in my story - the terrible accident that I witnessed that fateful day made a huge impression on me. I just felt compelled to react in a positive way. I had seen him sucking a candy and holding his schoolbag singing to himself and then - poof! He was dead in an instant rm'l - the whole circumstances that dictated that I would be there at that very time were too freaky for me to ignore.

You ask when I made that lifechanging decision to set myself accountability partners? That very morning! Less than an hour after the accident. I was unsure who to set as my accountability partners as I wanted the system to be foolproof. I didn't want even a tiny opening for a way back in to what once was.

Now for the scary bit.....my wife had no clue - and still has no idea that I had this addiction. Nothing in our marriage or life would have indicated to her that there was a problem - thats how good I was in concealing the monster. She was proud of me, she loved me (oddly enough I loved her too but thats another parshah altogether...), and we had a wonderful and fulfilling time together. But again, I stress there was always an element of falsehood to my general lifestyle. Outwardly, I was the model husband - Ba'l haboss but inwardly, I was the ultimate hypocrite.

My wife works for one of the mosdot here in Jerusalem and had access 24/7 to email as did my father. I concocted in my usual style a very credible reason why I had decided to set them up as my accountability partners. I said something like 'I went to this shiur where the rav suggested that everyone do this thing for the safety of your families etc etc'. Funnily enough - it made them more proud of me! They were happy to be part of their 'steiging' son/husband's actions in ensuring that he listens to his rabbanim. I told them that everyone was doing it now (if only that was the case....) and they should think nothing of it.

So, that was it - they would be aware of all my web activity - updated on a weekly basis. Very often they asked me 'whats this website guardyoureyes' that you seem to be spending so much time on!! Of course - I was able to play this to perfection into their hands by saying that I am helping people who have internet addictions lo aleinu! And they were amazed by my work.

Anyway, I think thats enough for now, please let me know if this was helpfull. You also asked how for ideas (my ideas? or my tried and tested methods) on how to keep on guard.....Well dear chaver, the list is long and detailed and I would be happy to share and I will do so bli neder in the near future but right now, it's back to work!

We'll be in touch - keep strong and prove to yourself that you can do something to make your whole life more accountable and under control.

With much love

Yechezkel

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ur-a-jew - 18 Nov 2010 00:21

RGI, don't get me wrong with what I'm about to say, the steps you have taken to recovery are truly wonderful and I'm speaking just as much to myself as I am to you with what I'm about to say but recovery is not simply stopping to look at porn or other acts of lust but to actually start living our lives.

If we trade one misleading story "my life had degenerated into that of someone with a split personality" for another misleading story ("I was able to play this to perfection into their hands by saying that I am helping people who have internet addictions lo aleinu! They were amazed by my work :-)", we have to ask ourselves if we are truly recovering. Just a thought. Hatzlacha.

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by Kedusha - 18 Nov 2010 01:05

What RG is saying is 100% true - he is helping others through his involvement with GYE. The fact that he gets helped too is a fringe benefit, which is not necessary to share with everyone (RG, you may find it helpful to tell your wife at some point, but it needs to be done carefully and when you've got a significant amount of sobriety behind you).

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by Dov - 18 Nov 2010 05:01

A few thoughts:

I almost died twice (maybe three times) while actively on the way to acting out. I have fallen totally asleep at the wheel due to late night 'cruising', completely lost control of my car on a wet road while on the way to acting out, and have found myself in the company of a person who was probably trying to kill me, and And I know one guy who witnessed the gruesome death of another person while he himself was on his way way to act out.

It never stopped any of us.

If you are finding some recovery and sobriety, I believe you have been given a great gift, and it may have been started by what you witnessed, but I doubt it will *continue* because of it. If it is continuing, then I believe you must have started to awaken to your **own** value. To me, that's everything. I never recovered for Hashem's sake...though I sincerely thought I was trying to for many years. I only recovered for myself - for my own relationship with Hashem, and with the people he gave me, and in order to save my *own* life.

I suggest that you have been given the gift of a lifetime, as I have with my sobriety. I believe that as soon as I begin to see it as something that I can take credit for in any way, i will slip and slide *back* into the toilet. And who knows? I may not have another 'recovery' left in me, as I have heard other addicts say.

I feel that you know all this already. But I caution us not to play along overmuch with the business that we are good-fellas for 'going out of your way to help guys who have internet addiction'. I am **not** suggesting you do this, for I know nothing about you - but I bet it would do far more for your recovery and personal safety if you simply told the folks who ask you that *you* have an internet problem and need help for it. Again, I am *not* suggesting that you do that - but I want you to consider that there is can be damage done to recovery from of any kind of g'neivas da'as - particularly when I can make it seem as though we are the 'good guys', when in reality many of us are just as weak and pathetic as I am. We are addicts. Like heroin junkies and drunks, just not as dramatic, ugly, and smelly.

Yes, Kedusha has a good point. Your participation surely saves lives and families. But I place the gain from the pain of my own embarrassment just a notch above the value of chizzuk that / consider somewhat undeserved. What's at stake here is nothing less that saving my life and all the good in it. I need to be sure to place honesty a bit ahead of my reputation. (May Hashem save me from all the goofy (good) press I get on this forum.)

Sorry if I overstepped, but as I want to live only once, what do we have to lose to be honest with each other? I think you have a gift - a free gift. It needs to be protected so that it remains a gift.

One vort:

Gm Brachos brings a contradiction between two p'sukim: *one* says everything is Hashem's, the *other* says the earth is given to mankind. Nu?

As you probably know, it answers: It all belongs to Hashem - until we make a b'racha. Once we say a b'racha, it is given to us. "v'ho'oretz nosan livnei odom" - it is ours!

I ask you: What was said in that b'racha that gave all this stuff to us? What is the power of the bracha that makes the switch?

It seems to me that all we say in a brocha is this: It's Yours, not mine. You made this fruit - Konei Shomayim vo'oretz - You made it, so it *belongs* to you.

That is why the brocha gives it to us. We remember that it is His, not ours. So we 'get' it. Do we ever really **get** it? Of course not. We are His, the food we eat is His, etc. But that is the way things work: if we give it away, we get it - as much as a person can ever get *anything* in this world...to use it on loan.

That is why the program suggests we need to give up to 'win'; lead with our weaknesses to stay 'strong'; and 'let go' to get *free*. And I believe it is one meaning (closest to the Chofetz Chayim's p'shat in it) of the Chazal, "ein divrei Torah miskaymin ella b'mi sh'*meimis* es atzmo aleyhem" - the only way to get Hashem and succeed in His Torah is to totally let go of our grasp on ourselves - our pride, fears, resentments...all that baggage we hold onto so tightly.

Sorry I got carried away.

Alei v'hatzlach!

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by frumfiend - 18 Nov 2010 10:50

thank you dov that was amazing

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ramatganinternational - 18 Nov 2010 13:17

Hello ur-a-jew,

Firstly, many thanks for taking the time to read and reply to my post.

I have to say that on the face of it, I'm a little taken aback by your post but I suppose looking at the larger picture and in a more general way I would agree with you but.....

The reason why I posted that reply to 'thanks613' was that I assumed that he was/is going/went through similar to what I went through and he specifically asked me to expound on some details of my account. I subsequently did that to illustrate to him in no uncertain terms what the circumstances were and how things developed to my ultimate life changing decision.

What I will also mention is that although I may be wrong in this - I have not signed up to GYE daily luach recording days of sobriety etc. I don't know why but I just haven't. What I can tell you is, that in terms of not acting out - the last time was a couple of weeks before Rosh Hashanah, I'm not even doing the math but I'd hazard a guess that's close on 3 months. It's not that I don't feel a sense of achievement or don't value my efforts it's just that since I've broken free a steel door has swung open in my life. What I have done, which to me is far more important is get a firm grip on my life spiritually, mentally and physically. I am not exaggerating when I say that my life has turned around. It simply cannot compare to what it once was. It's almost as if I've come to terms with the death of a close friend and learned to cope with it drawing strength from a wide array of methods.

And now to clear something up. When I said (*"I was able to play this to perfection into their*

hands by saying that I am helping people who have internet addictions lo aleinu! They were amazed by my work :-)" I truly believe that anything that we go through in life is there in order to use for the right purposes in particular in avodas hashem. In **my** case, that something was the ability to use my powers of convincing/blagging/deception - call it what you like - a skill I had used so well and to such perfection whilst I was under the spell of the web. I was able to use it to my benefit. I am convinced that hashem was happy for me to safeguard my past on the premise that it was for the greater good of my heart and soul, even if it meant using that technique. Surely the adage of *mitoch shloi lishmah, bah lishmah*.

I am under no illusions that I've suddenly transformed into a massive tzaddik and kicked the habit into submission forever. Of course I'm aware of future pitfalls and opportunities that may arise but what I'm doing with my life now is something I've never done before and, it's not as if I started of this path last week at the time of my first post, it was a good while before that.

It is a constant struggle, make that a life-long struggle. It's not the internet out there on its own that is the only cause of us Jews falling. There are thousands of reasons how and why we can fall, just reading through this forum gives us an idea into how various things in people's lives have caused them to fall. But one thing is a dead cert. A free and unprotected run on the internet has and will ruin people's lives. If we can identify the main contributing factor to all this evil as the internet and try and work a way of making our use on it fully accountable - we're well on the way to making our lives safer and better.

Finally, to bring in Dov's valued contribution to this whole subject. Yes! You are so right! We only live once and this very point is something that becomes all the more applicable once we realise that we are accountable to Someone one day.....The very act of installing CE sent a powerful and sobering realisation to me that made me appreciate that one day all our actions will be accounted for. Having said that, what gives me comfort is that on that same day - a full account of my decision to do what I did to change my life will also be read out before the Beis Din Shel Ma'aloh and the people responsible for helping me and so many others will also be given an honorable mention.....

Please continue to reply to this thread. I look forward to your valuable comments.

As far as I'm concerned, my life has only just begun.....

Much love

Yechezkel

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Re: my story.....Confessions of a Frum Internet Addict
Posted by ZemirosShabbos - 18 Nov 2010 15:00

reb Yechezkel,

i like your positive attitude!

much continued hatzlocha

ZS

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