

עדת אש קודש

Adass Aish Kodesh



Separating from the Line

By *Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

I have been writing this column for over twenty years. I cherish this opportunity to share my thoughts with so many wonderful Yieden but it hasn't always been without its challenges. In the first years I would send my weekly article into the paper 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 laptop." 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 thru 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 the tachles of the entire exercise, 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 Wi-Fi. 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

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anxious, how do you get this document that I have sweated over to fly thru the wires without having the calming voice of the help desk telling me what to do? Then I hit upon a plan, my neighbor 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 neighbor 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 maneuver 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 lechiam!

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 Hashem's 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.

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 Heinech of Alexander used to say over from the Rebbe Reb Bunim of Pshisch that the passage can be understood as Hashem advising us that if a Yid wants to come close to the Eibishter 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 can't be "on Line" all day, receiving texts, watching messages, being overwhelmed with superficial images that often rot the ability to focus. The constant clamor 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 thru your mind?

The Tzadik is telling us that you must find space in you're 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 favorable 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 possess a real danger for all of us, its incipient nature can capture any one 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 ween 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 of the window of spiritual growth.

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