



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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The Jewish Facebook

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In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אה ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

2nd day Shavuos

The Jewish Facebook

Recently a book came out entitled, "iDisorder: Understanding Our Obsession with Technology and Overcoming Its Hold on Us." In it, psychology professor Larry Rosen deals with the serious problem of people hooked on technology—they check their iPhones every second to see if they got an e-mail or a text message, and they sit on the Internet for hours on end, wasting their days and years on Facebook.

The book tries to provide solutions and advice on how to recover from and counteract this obsession.

For example, Dr. Rosen suggests that everyone give himself a set time every day during which he will not check for e-mail or get anywhere near a computer or send any texts. For example, from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. every day, or one day every week (how about Saturday?) during which the person forbids himself to get anywhere near technology.

Now, this may be a good idea—but experience proves that it doesn't work. That's because every rule that you impose upon yourself, you can violate in a moment of weakness and go right back to your bad habits. As the halachic phrase goes, "ha'peh she'asar, ha'peh she'hitir"—meaning the mouth that forbids is the mouth that permits.

It's sort of like how people resolve with each "new year" to go on a diet—"from now on, I'm not eating cheesecake!" But then they come to shul on Shavuos and there, they are served cheesecakes that to the eyes and palate are complete parties. And so, our hero gives himself a permit that "just this once" he'll break his diet and "just for one little slice"—"and besides, no one's looking..."

Along comes the next year and he think the exact same thing: "This time, I'm going on a diet, and this time, I'm serious!"

However, the most effective way to be free of anything addictive is when the prohibition comes from a higher power—then, it's not me making up the prohibition and so, it's not me who can permit myself to have it.

Somebody who keeps Shabbos can't touch any technology on Saturday from when Shabbos starts until when Shabbos ends. Such a person doesn't touch a computer, an iPhone or any other such detrimental piece of electronics. And he can't allow himself "just two minutes"—it's not allowed, and that's it. Period.

I know people who are addicted to cigarette smoking. And neither doctors nor family members succeed in convincing them to stop smoking. During the week they chain-smoke. They light one cigarette from another. But despite that, when

Shabbos arrives, they have no problem quitting smoking—and all through Shabbos they don't even have the need to smoke. Their body is used to not smoking on Saturday, and that's it.

And so the only way to be free of Facebook or other such addictions is when you accept upon yourself the "ol malchus shamayim," the "yoke of the kingdom of heaven."

And that brings us to the holiday of Shavuos.

Today we celebrate the Giving of the Torah. Now, the last mitzvah in the Torah is that every Jew is obligated to write a Torah scroll for himself. The Rebbe asks (Sichah, Kislev 19, 5742, Hisvaduyos Vol. II pg. 527), "Why don't we see throughout the generations that people made efforts to fulfill this mitzvah?" Indeed, even people who tried very hard to keep as many other mitzvos as possible, even to the point of self-sacrifice, didn't try that hard to write their own Torah scrolls. They would spend a lot of money to get the most perfect esrog, they would buy the finest and most expensive matzos and mezuzos on the market, but when it came to the explicit mitzvah of, "V'atah kisvu lachem es ha'shirah hazos," "and now, write for yourselves this song," the mitzvah for every Jew to write a Torah scroll for himself, they didn't even try. And we're talking about Jews in the financial position to absorb such an expense, but still, they didn't do so. Why not?

As it turns out, the Rebbe came out years ago with "Mivtzah Sefer Torah, the Torah Scroll Campaign. The Rebbe instructed that a new Torah scroll be written within the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem for all Jewish children. The Rebbe said that every Jewish child should "buy" a letter in that Torah scroll for the sum of one dollar—and thus the Torah scroll will be a scroll not donated entirely by one Jew but rather, a Torah scroll that will unite over 304,000 Jewish kids throughout the world.

It was a Torah scroll written for the unity of all Jewish children. And in truth, it is the keeping of the mitzvah of writing a Torah scroll at a higher level—you're not alone in this mitzvah but rather, you're united with thousands of other Jews in this mitzvah.

I remember how over 30 years ago, when the Rebbe came out with this campaign, I was a young student. And I remember how we went from house to house to recruit people to buy a letter in this Torah scroll for their kids. We met people who seemed very far from any connection to Judaism but still, when they heard that this would be a Torah scroll written in Jerusalem for all Jewish children, they wanted their children too to have a part in this special mitzvah.

Now this campaign continues to this very day. They continue to write new Torah scrolls for the Jewish kids who have just been born, and for those who still somehow don't have a letter in the Torah scroll.

Not to compare Facebook to a Torah scroll, but if there is one positive thing about Facebook, it's the unity and sense of togetherness that it creates. It connects friends from all over the world—people who were friends in elementary school or college and then parted ways, having no connection over 30 years, they are now reconnecting thanks to Facebook. And this connection, this unity, is always important.

We are now standing just before the Yizkor prayer, in which we unite with the souls of those for whom we say Yizkor. It's a powerful connection that is created at the time we say Yizkor, one that you can't get on Facebook.

But the best way to unite with the souls of our loved ones is to do a mitzvah for the elevation of their souls—and that, my friends, is the best vehicle for true unity.

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