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THAT'S ONE THING I'LL NEVER DO!

~~IMPOSSIBLE~~
TECH HACHLATOS

GET STARTED

The biggest brick wall we tend to come up against in our love-hate relationship with technology is having a smartphone/WhatsApp/social media without allowing it to control our lives. Sometimes, it is a full-time job! But that's just another form of servitude. Sometimes the only solution is to remove it entirely. This feature is a glimpse into the lives of those who took the big plunge. They live life without social media, without WhatsApp, or without the thing they thought they could never live without. What you may find here is inspiration to make that big move or just inspiration to make a small change that will ultimately be life-changing. Whatever the change is, we wish you *hatzlachah* in making it a permanent one.



JUST A LITTLE HIGHER

Chani Perlman

Chani lives in South Florida and is a mother and teacher.

MINIMIZING PERSONAL TECH

I try not to make technology a focus in my home. I check my email and of course I am grateful to have a landline but that's about it. Because I'm not on WhatsApp or even available via text, I receive personal invitations to *simchos* which means I get to catch up over the phone with every invite. I joke that I have a smartphone so smart you can see me, hear me, and get an immediate response. It's me in the flesh!

I think I would have a very difficult time being home with my kids and having a smartphone. I'm afraid I would feel like I'm busy while in truth... I'm not doing anything. When I'm at a wedding, I enjoy every minute of it, I never have to wish I was somewhere I'm not! I tell my kids that since each year a new iPhone is released, I'll just wait for the best one to come out, and then buy the latest one!

Besides being a mother, I'm also a teacher, so each year at orientation I tell the parents of my students how I can be reached and that I won't be communicating via WhatsApp. They get used to it and understand that I'm a package deal. Sometimes I send home physical pictures or post a few in the weekly newsletter; I know that it's enough for my students to come home with happy faces. I hope the parents know that my not posting pictures is not *chas v'shalom* a disinterest in their children. Quite the contrary! It's because these little *kinderlach* are so precious to me that I don't want to miss a beat. Even just a few minutes a day of snapping pictures is a few minutes too many.

Some may call it extreme but if Yochanan Kohen Gadol became an *apikores* after entering the *kodesh hakedoshim* then how can I trust myself? The Rebbe said many times that Yidden *daven* every day, *v'al tivi'einu lidei nisayon*, and how much more so are we careful not to bring *ourselves* to a *nisayon*! Even Dovid HaMelech brought himself to a *nisayon* and didn't pass with flying colors. Surely we don't expect to be greater than Dovid HaMelech!

I'm afraid that having a loaded smartphone would bring me *lidei nisayon*. Even though it's not something that tempts me now, I understand that it is always a real threat to be wary of and to protect my family from. It's a distraction to a mother, her husband, and her kids. Putting kids in front of a screen is not a solution for me. It would just be laziness.

MINIMIZING TECH AT HOME

Sometimes my kids miss the memo that school was canceled or the bus is late but I hope they know that these little instances of *mesiras nefesh* are worth the price. I tell them: Not every cut of meat we may want is always available in the kosher store, so do we just go to a non-kosher supermarket to get the exact cut we want? Of course not! It's the same with technology. While the bus tracker or the class WhatsApp would be a nice addition at times, if it means we have to make technology more of a focus, it is clearly not an option for us.

It's hard to tell the kids no. Very hard. But when it comes to technology, I hold strong, even when my kids nudge incessantly or when I become almost desperate enough to give in. Why? It's the very opposite of how the *Michtav M'Eliyahu* explains making a tiny opening, the size of the eye of a needle for *teshuvah* and then Hashem opens the rest. I know that if I give in just a little, it's all over. And I explain this to my children with words from the heart because I *daven* that "words that come from the heart enter the heart."

Yes, my kids get frustrated. But as they get older, I hope they will understand. Or at least when they are raising their own children *iy"H*. Sometimes I'll get a comment like, "Ma, how did you do it? Lucky for me that you pulled through." But even if that comment never comes, I don't want to look back with regret. If it turns out that technology is really a healthy thing for us, I can quickly buy iPads for my kids. I am okay with my children growing up and telling me that they felt I was too strict in this regard. But I would never forgive myself if *chas v'shalom*

they would tell me that they wish I would have protected them more, stood my ground, and not allowed them easy access to technology.

MINIMIZING TECH DURING COVID

As soon as COVID hit, I told my kids, "There are two *mageifos* [plagues] here. One is the coronavirus. The other is technology. Moshiach is coming and we're not about to give in." My children called in to their Zoom



classes on a landline which meant they got to sit on their beds with their feet up. I had all my single children under one roof and without the constant presence of Zoom, we connected with zero distractions.

The lockdown wasn't an easy time *b'gashmius* for me. I remember coming downstairs one night after bedtime and being ready to sit down and enjoy a book when my big kids said, "Ma, the little kids are sleeping, we can finally relax. Come sit down, we're making popcorn and we'll *farbreng*." I thought to myself, "Wow, so when is my time? If daytime is for the little kids and the evenings are for the big kids, when do I get to relax?" But I told myself that I can do this, I can give this time to them, because in a few years I'll have more than enough time to sit back and I'll wish I had used this precious time wisely.

So we popped popcorn, *farbrenge*d late into the nights and had a real *leil shishi* on Thursday nights. That time, without an overload of technology to distract us, changed my kids. What they learned and how they grew was a huge gift from the Aibershter.

At this point, I hope that my kids are proud of our home. When the going gets tough, I remind myself that, no, we are not being naive. We are not living under a rock. When I'm doing what's right for the Aibershter, it's not called being "out of touch." It's called living *above* the world. Just a little higher.

PROTECTING OUR FREEDOM IN A MORE CONNECTED WORLD

Jacob Katz

Jacob is a proud Jewish student at Vanderbilt University.

Family values are informed by our parents' experiences. My parents are from the Soviet Union: the 20th century's exemplar

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of political and spiritual repression. Indeed, religious freedom was a significant reason why my mom and her mother (Grandma) packed their bags and left their old life behind for a new one in America. But even after 33 years as American citizens, freedom—our family value—continued to shape my parents' worldview and would end up determining mine.

It's difficult to appreciate things until they're gone. Only when COVID overtook Manhattan and the rest of the world did I recognize liberty as a privilege I had once enjoyed. But paradoxically, in a moment when our freedom was limited, I realized how much of mine I had neglected—which is why that March, I decided to get off social media.

Until then, I was spending four to five hours per day on Instagram and Snapchat. I knew it wasn't good for me, but I did it anyway. I'm not the first one to ask why we do what we know isn't good for us. The *Tanya* mentions our ability to "think even what is contrary to the desire of [our] heart[s] and diametrically opposed to [them]" (*Likutei Amarim*, Chapter 14). I needed to find the solution to this seemingly unsolvable, all too common, mystery.

Tanya offers a key to the paradox. Knowing the good isn't always enough to make us *do* the good. To do the good, we require a different kind of knowledge, obtainable through "active service" (*Likutei Amarim*, Chapter 15). Active service is

SMALL (BIG) HACHLATAH IDEAS FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE DONE IT:

- Set time limits for specific apps.
- Turn off all notifications.
- Set a present/focus mode for important hours of the day.
- Leave your phone at home during school/work when you just won't need it!
- When going out with your phone, make sure you have a place to put it besides in your hands (bag, pocket).
- Replace as many apps as possible with the original analog version (calendar, alarm clock, watch, camera, journal).
- Don't use Waze/Maps for places you know how to get to!
- Don't use your phone while on the street.
- Don't open your phone until after you've *davened*.
- Mute WhatsApp statuses and don't open them.
- Keep WhatsApp only on your computer and give it no screen time on your phone.
- Delete WhatsApp and use SMS messages instead.
- Keep your phone out of your bedroom at night.
- Don't use your phone while eating.
- Keep your phone away or at home when out with friends and family.
- Don't use earbuds/AirPods when other people are around.
- Don't voice note when other people are around (they often think you're talking to them).
- Delete all social media accounts.
- Don't use your phone past a certain hour of night.



a deliberate effort to avoid unhealthy behavior. Through leveraging our willpower (*Likutei Amarim*, Chapter 12), we are able to practice restraint: avoiding instant gratification in the short term, and instead opting for greater benefits in the long term.

Through active service, I learned to embody the Jewish maxim of *moach shalit al halev*: the mind rules the heart. The positive changes that active service brought forth in my life allowed me to realize a powerful irony: Psychological dependence isn't much better than living in political subservience. My parents left the Soviet Union, believing that life in the U.S. would spare their progeny from having to don the shackles of totalitarianism, yet my habits proved to become another type of shackles. Thankfully, I chose my freedom, our family value, over doomscrolling.

Lessons in Jewish doctrine allow us to understand why our actions often contradict what we know is in our own best interest. Active service provides a valuable piece of the puzzle—swapping the sundae for the fruit bowl so that our minds become a bit stronger in doing the good, rather than merely knowing what is good. Only then do we accomplish *moach shalit al halev*; that is, we choose to become the coach, rather than remaining as passengers in the chariot driven by our hearts.

For more on this topic, please see "Teenagers and Social Media" by Rabbi Michael Gourarie in the upcoming Nissan issue. -Ed.

THE BUSINESS IS ME, NOT MY PHONE

Naftali Handler as told to Aharon Hirsh Cohen, adapted with permission from Hamodia Prime Magazine

Naftali is a real estate agent in Boro Park.

EVERY EXCUSE IN THE BOOK

I live in Boro Park and am a real estate broker. Although I have an office, most of my work is done on the go. My job is all about communication and I spend most of my time communicating with buyers, sellers, and lawyers. Modern technological devices can really help with this. In fact, many brokers post their properties on social media platforms, reaching a much wider audience. There's even a whole market of "smartphone brokers."

But I have a kosher flip phone which is talk-only; I don't even have regular text. If the person needs pictures and I'm not in the office, I tell them they have to wait for me to email them. If the agent is on top of the case, people don't mind if they don't receive their pictures instantly. It works!

After smartphone use became very common, clients would tell me, "Send me a WhatsApp," and I would respond, "I don't have WhatsApp." "So send me a text," they would say. And I'd say, "I don't have text." One person asked me, "So how did you get here — with a horse and buggy?" After such encounters I feared for my image, but I decided that this is just the *yetzer hara* and I have to break through it.

Even if a boss insists, the following story showed me what standing firm can do: I know of someone who is an expediter, who manages many employees. He adamantly refused to have a smartphone despite many requests from his boss. When his boss made a *chasunah*, he took him as one of the *eidei kiddushin*. When push came to shove, he wanted someone he could respect for having a higher standard.

BETTER FOR BUSINESS

I am in the office a few hours every day. That's when I send all pictures, emails, etc. I make sure to compensate for my not having a smartphone by being available to pick up my flip phone whenever I can, and if I can't pick up, I call back at the first opportunity.

This seeming inconvenience is actually to the advantage of my employees and customers: When I'm dealing with someone, he knows he has my full attention. I don't have the distractions of a smartphone.

There is a general perception out there that it's impossible to run a successful business without a smartphone. But I see so clearly how this is not true. *Parnassah* is *bashert*, and I believe I reach whichever clients I need to and see a lot of *siyatta diShmaya*, *baruch Hashem*, without these resources.

IT TAKES A STRONG WILL

One definitely needs a strong will. One needs to truly believe that not possessing a smartphone is a good investment. If one doesn't see anything wrong with it, why not have it?

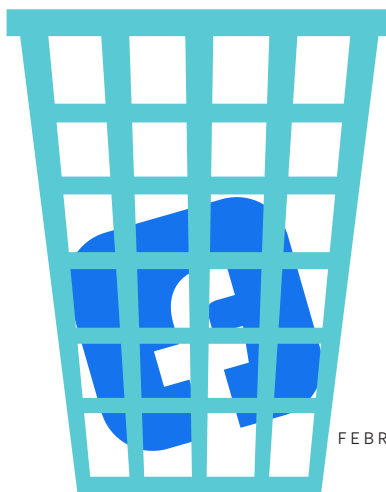
If someone feels that not having a smartphone is admirable, they can be prepared to give up some comfort, which, after a while, becomes natural, and the real comfort becomes not having one.

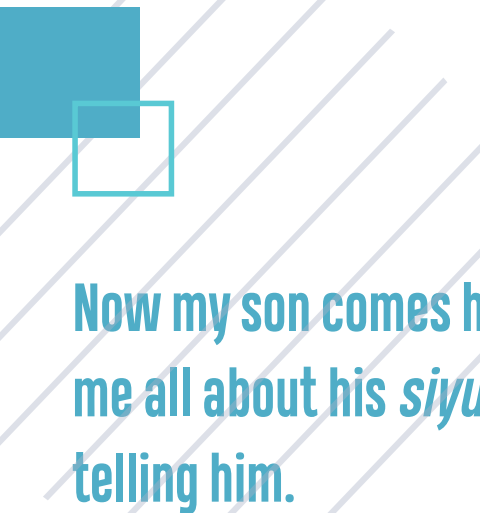
Nowadays, I have to be careful to not become haughty over the fact that I don't have one—I'm so proud! I find that most people respect my decision.

Even if I sometimes get comments, I don't feel that anyone has actually refrained from doing business with me because of my lack of smartphone.

My feeling is that my money is "clean" and has a *brachah*—it brings *simchah* and other good things into my life.

I feel that it's a protection for my children on two levels: number one, as a *segulah* in a world where everyone is concerned for their children's *ruchnius*. Number two, through my children seeing that I'm ready to give up on certain comforts to maintain a higher level of *kedushah*. I definitely feel it has had a positive influence on our entire family.





Now my son comes home and tells me all about his *siyum* instead of me telling him.

THE LEVUSH OF AN EHRliche YID

There is another aspect. Just as our Yiddishe *levush* is a protective measure that separates us from the outside world, I feel like my flip phone is another black hat, beard, and *peyos*. Not having a smartphone is part of my *levush*. It creates a certain image. People refrain from speaking about certain topics with such a person, and he himself refrains from speaking or doing certain things because it's not appropriate for someone who is smartphone-free!

It's very tempting to have a smartphone because of the convenience of having one and the inconvenience and embarrassment of not having one. But we all need to ask ourselves the following: *Parnassah* is one thing, but what is the ultimate goal in life? If one's will is to be an *ehrlische* Yid then this may be a contradiction. Every Yid has to make this *cheshbon*.

MAKING THE WHATSAPP MOVE

Dassie Shneur as told to Chanel Lipskier, adapted with permission from M.U.S.T (Mothers Unite to Stall Technology) Magazine

Dassie lives in Crown Heights and is a proud mother and teacher.

It's been a little over two years since I've gone off WhatsApp.

For a long time before I actually deleted the app, I was scheming. Whenever I met someone who was off WhatsApp I was jealous. I couldn't take it that my phone was always luring me in. I wasn't enjoying the feeling of being in two (or ten)

places at once. If I was at the park with my kids, I felt like I wasn't even there—I was also in a class chat or a family chat.

I was still afraid to actually delete it. I was afraid I'd lose many important things that I had stored in WhatsApp. I couldn't figure out a way to save all the data I wanted—maybe there was a way for me to have it but not be active on it? I was also afraid I would be cut off from every social group in my life. I wondered if I should send out a goodbye message letting people know I was getting off WhatsApp.

One day it got so bad—I think it was right after the Purim class chat season—I picked up my phone and just did it. This hunk of metal was very distracting and eating up all my time.

I lost the conversations, documents, links, pictures, references, resources—everything. It was a very hard day for me. I was in a terrible mood. It felt like a massive plunge.

Little by little, we adjusted. I don't miss the discussions. I don't miss the pictures. Now my son comes home and tells me all about his *siyum* instead of me telling him. If there's a choice for when to make the Chanukah party, I'll go with whatever everyone else chose on the chat. I've learned to be more flexible. It's worth it! I have a text group with my siblings, so I am in the loop for anything important.

I also notice that I take fewer pictures. I stopped snapping impulsively. Ice cream cone, smile. Lego, smile. New dress, smile. Click, post, click, post, click, post. It was too much. And without the school bus tracker? It's amazing. I actually wait for the bus and I can talk to and look at my child.

Looking back, the switch was obvious. I have more time! I feel clearer, detoxed. If someone out there is considering going off WhatsApp, I would encourage you to go for it! You won't regret it. ❄️

To learn about the Rebbe's view on technology, please read the article entitled Lubavitch & Smart Phones by Rabbi Mordechai Lipskier in the Tishrei 5784 issue or at nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives.

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