

# Introduction

Walking into a contemporary yeshiva classroom, one cannot help but notice the plethora of technological tools that have been introduced to our educational environment. From smartboards to laptops, from tracking our children's homework online to the assignments that require internet-based research, it is clear that the transmission of *mesorah* has entered the Digital Age. Recently, while sitting with a group of esteemed educators, I inquired whether they believed that the technological developments in the classroom were representative of a substantive upgrade in the quality of education, or rather tools that have been designed to meet the same expectations as previous generations, but in a manner that resonates with the youth of today. Are we indeed “progressing” in *limud HaTorah* (Torah learning), or simply making it palatable to a new generation?

The Torah tells us in Parshas Terumah (Shemos 25:15):

בְּטַבַּעַת הָאֲרוֹן יִהְיוּ הַבְּדִים לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ.  
*In the rings of the ark, there shall be the poles, they should not be removed.*

The Rambam records in *Sefer HaMitzvos* (negative commandment no. 86) that there is a biblical prohibition against removing the poles which support the Aron in its mobility. Many commentaries inquire: If the purpose of the poles was to provide a mechanism of portability for the Aron, then why do they have to remain embedded in the vessel when it is in a state of rest?



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R' Shamshon Rafael Hirsch explains that the poles remain connected to the Aron indefinitely because the Torah's substance and message is forever related to our capacity to transport it to the next destination in the journey of the Jewish people. That journey is not only geographic, it is also historical. Different eras of Jewish history have demanded different approaches in how to ensure that Torah remains the eternal life-force in the heart of the Jewish people.

The current technological revolution has produced a generation that relates to information in an entirely new way. The internet has introduced dramatically new possibilities to engage a wide spectrum of our community in Jewish educational projects. The questions that we must explore are how this “progress” can become not only an opportunity to ensure that our timeless values and ideals resonate with a new generation, but a platform for qualitative development in our experience of *limud HaTorah*.

As we embrace *zman matan Toraseinu*, the time in which the Torah was given, we recognize that *kabalas HaTorah*, our acceptance of the Torah, is re-experienced in every generation. In our shuls, schools, and homes, we are

constantly recreating the moment of *kabalas HaTorah*. This issue of Torah To Go includes a symposium that explores the role of technology in enhancing that experience and ultimately propelling the study of Torah forward in its vibrancy and depth.

The symposium contains four articles representing four different perspectives on Jewish education. Rabbi Dovid Bashevkin is the International Director of Education for NCSY. In that role, he develops and oversees many of the educational materials used for NCSY programs. He shares with us his expertise in reaching teenagers through various mediums. Rabbi Efreim Goldberg is the Senior Rabbi at the Boca Raton Synagogue. In addition to being a master adult educator, he has been a pioneer in using the internet and social media to spread Torah and its values. He shares his perspective on the interplay of technology and *limud HaTorah* in adult education. Dr. Rona Novick, Dean of the Azrieli Graduate of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University, and Dr. Laya Salomon, Assistant Professor of Education at Azrieli, are both on the cutting edge of Jewish education, and provide firsthand knowledge of teaching methods in

Jewish day schools throughout the country, and offer researched-based approaches to this issue. Rabbi Ezra Schwartz, a Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS and assistant director of RIETS, as well as rabbi of the Mount Sinai Congregation in Washington Heights, NY, shares his perspective in teaching the “Millennial” generation within the walls of the yeshiva and beyond.

We asked the authors to specifically address the relationship between *limud HaTorah* and technology. What

are the opportunities and challenges for teachers (both for children and adults) and learners? How has technology impacted the formal classroom setting? What impact have sites like yutorah.org — which is used on average by 5,000-6,000 people per day to learn Torah online, without a face-to-face interaction with a teacher — had on the way people learn, both in the classroom and out of the classroom?

The necessity of integrating technology into the world of *limud HaTorah* may be driven by the needs of the generation, but our mission is to discover how these elements of human experience can fulfill their ultimate purpose in elevating the commitment to and engagement in Torah growth for our generation.



# TORAH STUDY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

