

TORAH TUESDAYS

at Shabbos House

BH. "TORAH TUESDAYS" SPRING 2011

at Shabbos House Rohr Chabad Jewish Student Center serving UAlbany

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ACCESS ANYWHERE

Phones once had cords, or cordless bases, email was once limited to specific computers in physical locations with POP account log-ins.. No more! The magic of the SmartPhone takes communication, basic computing and email almost anywhere. One of the great core teachings of Chassidism and the Baal Shem Tov (based on the Arizal's interpretation of the "Tzimtzum" concealment/contraction necessary in creation of a finite world) is that G-dliness is to be found within everything and accessible anywhere. Tanya Part II (and numerous Chassidic discourses) go into this perspective in depth, crystallized in terms of application in Tanya 33:

"with this great faith, in the real closeness of G-d" to our lives, giving the parable of the king feeling welcomed in the humble home of the commoner (the mission of creating G-d dwelling in this lowest world) especially as juxtaposed with the parable of king and commoner in Tanya 46, where the commoner is raised from the gutter and brought to the innermost chambers of the palace. The Rebbe's Shluchim mission follows this vision, be Jewish, do Jewish build Jewish THERE! - anywhere Jews can be found, even in the most unlikely, remote places. The Baal Shem Tov also emphasized the spirituality to be found in the workplace or on the road (not only in the shul, yeshiva or observant home as then thought).

ICON - ACTIVATED SYMBOL

Before computers, an icon was a symbol or image that represented something. It was a reminder, a thought-trigger. In computing, an icon is more than a mere symbol. It works! You click on that representation, and it becomes activated. Certain Mitzvot are called "OS" (sign) or act as a reminder, like Tzitzit and Tefillin. Now with computers, and especially with Smart-Phones which visually celebrates Icons, we have a better understanding: These are not mere reminders or symbols, by wearing them etc we are activating and fulfilling what they represent!

SMALL SCREEN HI-QUALITY DISPLAY

The Temple's windows were small on the outside, and opened wider on the inside. Looking in - (like a smartphone screen) it was a small window into a larger world, with light emanating from within. Key screen elements are (and they keep improving):

Resolution/Pixel-Density: More info = better picture. Same with our Jewish experiences.

Brightness: Light brings everything into focus, makes images come alive, backlit screens take the visuals to a new level. Light is a basic Chassidic metaphor for spiritual/holy revelation.

Contrast Ratio: White rabbit on white snow has low contrast, too much blending and sameness. Jewish identity requires standing up, being different - not merely melting into the background.

Translucency: LCD or LED screens are composed of layers necessary to produce the image (and allow for touch input) and light it, yet at the same time maintain the highest levels of translucency possible for the best clarity image. We too are vessels for spiritual light, sometimes egos, other interests etc. get in the way.

APPS

APPS are basically mini computer programs. Unlike MS Office, or another program suite, most are designed with a single specific function, they are small, individual tools in a big toolbox. When the Rebbe came out with the "Mitzvah Campaign" in the 1960's and 70's, many Rabbis were against it, or ridiculed it, isn't Judaism a whole program, a package deal? They said: either you are observant or you aren't. The Rebbe insisted that each Mitzvah is an individual opportunity to connect with G-d, and one-Mitzvah-at-a-time is valid and worthy. Hopefully one Mitzvah leads to another, but even if it does not, each Mitzvah has a unique spiritual function and is a holy connection - on its own.



SMARTPHONE SPIRITUALITY

POCKET / PERSONALIZE

When R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev saw the Tanya he exclaimed: "(The Alter Rebbe) took such a great G-d and put Him in such a small book!!" (Tanya is often printed in pocket-size). Like the iPod/Phone phenomenon, literally in the palm of one's hand. (The Talmudic term, B'Yado - "in one's hand" means access or grasp). And like an iPod/Phone, it's designed for personalized preferences and customization. The intro to Tanya specifies that it was written to those with whom the author has a relationship (and Chassidim extend that through the generations), and therefore it is easier to find oneself in it. Of course, on a different level, the same is true of Torah, into which G-d personally invested His Essence, and it was given as a gift and inheritance to each and every Jew.

PROPRIETARY & USER

Windows and Microsoft first achieved dominance over Apple because of its universally compatible software which could be used with any hardware. Apple's stickler for hardware has kept programming and use simpler, more virus-free, but less accepted by the broad user community. Enter the iPod and iPhone age for Apple, which maintains its insistence on proprietary hardware and software but allows users to build for it and on it, creating a vast community of creators and users, without fully opening up the code and becoming vulnerable. Indeed, most Apps come only via Apple and as per Apple. Torah allows for and encourages user input, creative wisdom and application - but only on (G-d designed) Torah's platform.

SKINS & ACCESSORIES

Phone-Skins usually have 2 purposes: (1) to protect the device, and/or (2) to beautify or enhance it. The same (and much more so) is with Rabbinic "fences" around the Torah, (1) they protect (for example) the law of writing on the Sabbath with the Rabbinic law of Muktzah, don't even touch a pen, and (2) they enhance the biblical welcome blessing of Shabbos with the requirement of saying it over a cup of wine, and the custom of using a nice designated cup...

BATTERY LIFE

How long can you go on your own, without plugging in to an energy source? True, we all need to recharge, and rejuvenate by connecting to a source that is beyond our limited internal capacity, but if we are too reliant on repeated charging, perhaps it is a sign that we are not accepting as much charge as we should, or maybe we are leaking or squandering precious resources?

(MULTI-) TOUCH SCREEN TECHNOLOGY

There are various touch-screen technologies, the most currently advanced type is used in most SmartPhones: A field of electrons fills underneath the screen, with sensors and algorithms marking every spot. When an electrical conductor (i.e. a finger, or metal pen, but not a glove or plastic pen) touches a spot, it alters the electrical flow/sequence, triggering the sensors which is measured by the algorithm and matched to the corresponding program. We have to have a connection (be a conductor) to be able to make an impact. The Rebbe points out that the world was created with "10 Utterances", the Torah was given in "10 Sayings/Commandments" and each person is vested with "10 Soul Powers". Jewish

People (your finger) enable the Torah (program) to affect our world (smartphone), by altering/modifying (elevating) the natural existing flow of the 10 Utterances found in Creation. And as we say in Friday Night's "Vayechulu" we can become partners with G-d in Creation, by working with and improving G-d's creation. In the Talmud, a Roman king asked Rabbi Akiva, "If you're born uncircumcised, why change G-d's creation? Can you improve on G-d?" Rabbi Akiva showed him a stalk of wheat and a loaf of bread, and explained that G-d designed the world with the intent that we develop it, (using His blueprint).