



RATIONALE: Social Media

Social media is an expansion of all the things that we, as Jews, have done so naturally and well throughout the ages – telling stories; producing writings and commentary; creating venues for arts and culture; collaborating on worldwide scientific and academic projects; encouraging creativity and innovation; and reaching out in times of challenge and struggle to support one another.

Social media deepens relationships. Social media starts and expands conversations. Social media is – by and large – free (although one could argue that it costs us privacy and time). Finally, every one of us can have a pulpit, deliver sermons at the frequency and on topics of our choosing, and engage with as many virtual congregants as we wish. And it enables us to play our favorite game – Jewish geography – with unprecedented precision and broadcast-able joy.

Since the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem, the Jewish People – especially those who live outside Israel – have been largely defined by exile and dispersion.

While the Temple has not (“yet,” some add) been rebuilt, what has been constructed – both organically through the growth of technology and communication tools, and intentionally, by those who toil professionally to cultivate community and nurture conversations – is a framework for global connection and a potential for expanded Jewish Peoplehood that we could have never imagined 20 years ago.

Today’s communication is instant; connections happen across time zones and great geographical distances; and we know much more about our worldwide Jewish family, in modern Israel as well as in the widespread but increasingly interconnected micro- and macro-communities of the Diaspora.

Our community of practice has gone global, and although not all techniques work in all communities, the tools are at our disposal and are helping us build networks of support and connectedness across thousands of miles, dozens of languages and hundreds of countries.

Social Media and Jewish Education

As in many fields, technology is having a huge impact in the field of (Jewish) education. The daily increase in online content – from TED talks that have people thinking outside the box on many subjects, to G-dcast and Bibleraps – works towards helping us re-imagine what connection to and interpretation of Jewish texts looks like.

With a myriad of new tools available at the type of a keyboard (while the keyboard is still a thing, that is), today's educators, in addition to practical experience navigating a classroom and a series of academic subjects, must also have vast knowledge of what's available online. They must also possess the imagination that enables them to use the tools in formal and informal settings.

Today's teachers must be master facilitators and curators of information, and they must achieve and maintain a high level of literacy in online tools and resources. In other words, it's less important that they have all the knowledge and more important that they know where to find it.

Today's educators encounter a new genera-

tion of digital natives – children who grew up using devices and having access to endless information (word, image and video), but who may lack discernment or an ability to curate the overabundance to find specific information and filter out the noise (and other influences) that distracts or corrupts them.

To reach these digital natives, educators must learn to speak their language, which is more than mere slang, but a complete upheaval of modes of communication. (See Pew Internet studies that discuss how younger populations understand and use technology.)

In addition to serving as a content curator, a censor or a facilitator of information, today's teachers can use social media tools as a unique window into the contemporary lives of both teens and adults. This is a tremendous opportunity even as it is profoundly unnerving. Being well-versed in social media tools and culture enables us to better advise today's students on everything from privacy and personal exposure issues to effective and targeted content navigation.