

nection dulls, and distance quietly takes hold.

Our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is no different. If we seek closeness, we must speak. We must turn to Him—not only through the fixed text of *tefillah*, but through personal, honest conversation. When we are in need, we ask. When we are blessed, we give thanks. Through our words, we sustain the relationship.

A powerful story is told in *L'hitaneg B'tanugim*: A *talmid* in Poland fell gravely ill. The doctors were unable to help, and in desperation he approached his *Rav*, begging for guidance. The *Rav* told him, "Travel to the great professor in Anapole, he will surely be able to assist you."

Encouraged, the student set out immediately. But upon arriving in the small town of Anapole, he discovered something puzzling: no one had ever heard of such a professor. Confused,

he pressed the locals further, until one villager finally said, "This is a small place—we have no doctors here at all." Perplexed, the student asked, "So what do you do when someone is dangerously ill?" The villager answered simply: "We turn to the One Above—the *Rofeh Kol Basar*—and we pray."

At that moment, the student understood *Rav's* message. He had not been sent to a doctor. He had been sent to *daven*.

*Teshuvah*, the Torah tells us, is not distant. Neither is connection. The gateway is already within us—*beficha*, in our mouths. We often search far and wide for solutions, for clarity, for healing. Yet the Torah reminds us that the most powerful tool we possess is the one we use most casually: our speech. With a few sincere words, a person can bridge the gap between heaven and earth.

As we enter times of introspection and renewal, the message is both simple and profound: speak. Speak with honesty. Speak with humility. Speak with awareness that you are standing before

the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. If we do, we may discover that what once felt distant is, in truth, very close—*karov eilecha me'od*. Perhaps that is the deepest comfort of all: that the path back is never beyond our reach. It is already on our lips. ■

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## 71% OF ISRAELI STUDENTS SPEND FIVE OR MORE HOURS A DAY ON THEIR SMARTPHONE, NEW ISRAEL SCI-TECH SCHOOLS STUDY FINDS

A new nationwide study released by Israel Sci-Tech Schools, Israel's largest independent charter school network, finds that 71% of students spend at least five hours a day on their smartphone—with nearly half receiving their first device before age 8. The study, which surveyed 2,470 students across the network from 7th through 12th grade, examines how smartphone and screen use may be connected to attention deficit issues in the classroom, looking at when students first got a smartphone, how much time they spend on screens, early signs of compulsive use, emotional reliance on devices, exposure to harmful online content, and how much parents know about their children's smartphone activity.

The survey drew responses from students across every grade in the network's secondary schools, with 372 respondents from 7th grade, 312 from 8th grade, 372 from 9th grade, 739 from 10th grade, 551 from 11th grade, and 124 from 12th grade—2,470 students in total.

Smartphone ownership itself is now nearly universal among Israeli teenagers: 99% of respondents said they currently own a smartphone. What stood out to researchers was how early that ownership typically begins. Asked how old they were when they got their first device, 14% of students said before elementary school, 37% said during 1st or 2nd grade, and 34% said during 3rd or 4th grade, while just 9% said 5th or 6th grade and 5% said during middle school. Taken together, a combined 85% of students received their first smartphone before the end of 4th grade, meaning the overwhelming majority of Israeli children are handed round-the-clock access to screens years before adolescence even begins.

The study's screen-time findings point to just how central smartphones have become to students' daily lives. Beyond the 71% who spend at least five hours a day on their phone, 58% said they spend at least three additional

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hours a day on other electronic screens on top of their smartphone use, and 43% said they spend at least eight hours a day in front of screens altogether. Fifteen percent admitted to using their smartphone during class or school hours. Social media dominates that time: 55% of students said social media is the main use of their smartphone, and 81% said they spend more than three hours a day on social media alone.

The survey also probed for early signs of compulsive smartphone use. Ten percent of students said it's hard for them to focus in class or complete tasks because of the urge to use their smartphone, and 18% said they often forget to do assignments or tasks because they were busy with their phone. Twenty-two percent said they feel restless when they don't have their smartphone with them, and 32% said they have used their smartphone for longer than they had planned to.

Emotional reliance on devices was another theme in the data. Thirty-three percent of students said they prefer to distract themselves with their smartphone rather than deal with emotional or stressful situations, and 39% said us-



Raz Frohlich

ing their smartphone simply makes them feel better. Twenty-two percent said they use their smartphone even while spending time with friends or at social events.

The study also touched on content exposure and online safety: 19% of students reported being exposed to bad language, insults, or other negative content on the platforms they use, and 8% said content calling for violent action is common on those platforms.

Parental oversight, meanwhile, appears to be limited. Seventy-four percent of students reported that their smartphone has no parental monitoring application in-

stalled, and 53% said their parents have no clear idea what's happening on their phone.

Students themselves are divided on whether schools should intervene. Nineteen percent said they support limiting smartphone use during the school day, and 24% said they had not yet formed an opinion—meaning 43% of students do not reject the idea of restricting smartphone use during school hours. Still, a majority, 57%, said they are against limiting smartphone use during the school day.

“When 71% of our students are spending five or more hours a day on their smartphone, and 85% got their first device before

fourth grade, we are watching attention, mental health, and real-world relationships pay the price,” said Raz Frohlich, CEO of Israel Sci-Tech Schools Network. “Our role as an educational network is to teach young people to control technology—not to be controlled by it.”

Frohlich added that the network has launched a pilot program to strengthen student attention, in partnership with the Attention Revolution movement. “Every school that joins the program takes on a real commitment—a lead point person to guide the process, management, and staff involved in shared learning sessions, and a clear picture of where students, teachers, and parents stand today. From there, each school builds its own intervention plan, because local leadership knows its own community best.”

The survey was conducted by Israel Sci-Tech Schools Network among 2,470 students in grades 7 through 12 across its national network of schools, examining smartphone ownership, screen time habits, behavioral indicators, and attitudes toward smartphone use in an academic setting. ■

The sound of the *shofar* cuts the stillness, And echoes both far and wide;

An ancient call to proclaim repentance, While time is on your side.

The days are shorter; the leaves start turning

To orange, gold, and red, and brown;

An end of life on all the branches,

As life beneath them settles down.

The little *sukkahs* start appearing,

On all the neighbors' balconies, To remind us of our great salvation,

From bitter Egyptian slavery.

And in the night when stars appear,

We remember how Hashem was near;

And in September's cooling air,

We feel His presence everywhere. ■

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