Children in Synagogue; Putin; Smart Phones; Chat Rooms: Rabbi M. D. Angel Responds to Questions from the Jewish Press

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Is it proper to bring very young children to shul?

Many parents want their children to become accustomed to attending synagogue from an early age. That's fine; but parents must assume responsibility for their children during services. If the children become restless, noisy, and disruptive to others, then parents need to bring them out of the sanctuary until they settle down.

Many synagogues provide child care during services, so that children can spend some time in the main sanctuary and the rest of the morning in child care/youth programs/youth services.

If children are very young, it's very difficult to expect them to stay quiet for a long stretch of time. As they grow older, the time they spend in services can be gradually increased.

It is essential for parents to be extra sensitive to the needs of the entire kahal when they bring their children to synagogue. It is essential for the kahal to be very understanding and patient when it comes to the needs of parents and young children. Striking the right balance isn't always easy. But it can be done with the goodwill of all the members of the community—young and old.

Is it proper to daven for the demise of Putin in order to save lives in Ukraine, and stop him from additional aggression? What about a supporter of Russia davening for victory in taking over Ukraine?

It is proper to pray for peace. It is proper to pray that human beings will all strive to live up to their potential as having been created in Hashem's image. It is proper to seek Hashem's guidance for a troubled humanity…for refuat hanefesh and refuat haguf.

It is not proper to use prayer as a magical gimmick or as a p.r. event. Prayer is not a tool for manipulating the actions of the Almighty, but a humble gesture of dependence on Hashem.

Bruriah taught that it's best not to pray for the demise of sinners…but to pray for the elimination of the sins themselves. Our prayers should seek Hashem's help in showing tyrannical leaders the errors of their ways; moving them to reconsider their destructive policies; guiding all leaders on all sides to genuinely consider what is right and best for their own citizens.

It is proper to pray for peace and human understanding. It is proper—and vital—for these prayers to be accompanied by suitable actions that help make our world a better, safer, and happier place.

Is it proper now to own a smartphone? When is it appropriate to use one and when not? Does using the filter solve the problem?

Each of us has the right and responsibility to make decisions that affect our lives. When we face change—technological or otherwise—we need to be able to evaluate the positives and negatives—and then decide what's best for us.

Smart phones are incredibly useful in so many ways. They are amazingly helpful in maintaining quick and easy communications. They provide instant information on the weather and the news. The apps make it easy for us to drive without getting lost; to order an Uber driver or a pizza; and so many other features that simplify our lives.

Yes, it’s possible to over-use or mis-use a smartphone. But that is true of many things. The question isn’t whether it’s proper to own a smartphone; the question is are we responsible enough to use smartphones wisely.

If you wonder whether or not you should own a smartphone, ask for advice from others who do own one. Find out if this device is something that will enhance your life or be a waste of money. Then make your own decision. Whatever you decide is not final; you can re-evaluate as time goes on and as circumstances change.

Think clearly. Make your own decision. Adjust your decision if and when needed.

Is it proper to click and follow the personal social media accounts of the opposite gender? If so what about chatting socially with them using the platform's direct messaging?

It would seem unwise to click and follow the personal social media account of anyone outside your immediate family and circle of friends, whether of the same or opposite gender. It is also a bad idea to chat with anyone you don’t know personally.

Unfortunately, people are lured into activities and conversations without realizing the long-term (or even short-term) implications. It is all too frequent to hear of people who have been financially or physically harmed due to careless use of social media and chatting platforms. People may think that these things only happen to others and that they can handle things without getting into trouble. But why put yourself at needless risk? Why waste your valuable time?

The yetser hara is very powerful and relentless. It’s best not to give it an opening by engaging in problematic online behavior. Remember: you are answerable to the Almighty Who is fully aware of your actions. You are not alone, even if you are in a room by yourself.