Posting Photos, Casinos, Sunscreen--Rabbi Marc Angel Responds to Questions from the Jewish Press

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Is it proper to frequently post photos of your life on Facebook or Instagram for anyone to see? What about just for your friends and acquaintances to see?

I begin with a disclaimer: I don't personally do Facebook or Instagram. I very much enjoy photos from our children and grandchildren, which we receive via WhatsApp and Nixplay, but I have no interest at all in sharing photographs beyond our immediate family.

Although Facebook and Instagram are not part of my own life, I know relatives and friends who find these social media to be very worthwhile, especially when it comes to keeping up with family and friends who live in other towns. If people find these things to be of real value, they have a right to opt in to these social media.

I'm not sure what positive value there is in posting photos beyond one's immediate circle of family and friends. To me, it smacks of inappropriate exhibitionism. I find it strange that people want total strangers to follow their lives; I find it even stranger that people actually find satisfaction in following the lives of total strangers.

Time is precious and non-recoverable. Before deciding whether or not—or how much—to engage in social media, one needs to be sure that the investment of time is well worth it. Think carefully, and decide on your own what's best for you.

Is it proper to go to a casino and play the slot machines or card games?

The very first verse in Tehilim provides the answer to this question. The Psalmist declares that happy is the person who does not sit in the company of idlers…moshav leitsim. I think moshav leitsim is an apt term to apply to casinos.

Halakhic tradition views gambling in very negative terms. At worst, gambling involves financial dealings of dubious propriety deeming an inveterate gambler as someone with tarnished reputation. At best, gambling entails becoming part of a moshav leitsim, a group of people engaged in frivolous activity.

People go to casinos (or gamble online) not merely to pass a few hours of entertainment…but to win money. Although everyone knows that the odds are stacked in favor of the house, people think they will be lucky to win at card games or slot machines. The casinos offer many incentives to get people to gamble…and the casinos rake in many millions of dollars from gullible players.

Many patrons of casinos lose substantial amounts of money. Some have become "addicted" and keep betting their assets away in the hope that this time they'll hit it big. But very few come out ahead and very many suffer serious losses.

It is best not to get started with gambling. If one already is a frequenter of casinos (or plays online gambling games) it would be best to stop.

Happy is the person who does not sit in the company of idlers, time wasters, gamblers.

Is it proper not to wear sunscreen given the UVA/UVB exposure risks? Should a parent educate young children about the need for sunscreen and require them to wear it?

One of the basic responsibilities of parents is to keep their children as safe and healthy as possible. Would we think it proper for parents to feed children tainted food that can harm them? Would we think it proper for parents to let children play in traffic? Of course not. We would view this as highly irresponsible behavior.

Likewise, would we think it proper for parents to expose their children to bright sun without having protected them with sunscreen? Sunburn—especially severe sunburn—is not only painful but can have long term detrimental impact on health. Responsible parents will see to it that their children are properly covered with sunscreen. They will teach their children the importance of maintaining healthful practices.

Conveying the importance of good hygiene goes beyond the issue of sunscreen. It entails maintaining and teaching a healthy lifestyle. The goal is to inculcate our children and grandchildren with proper behaviors so that they will adopt these behaviors on their own…even when we aren’t there to nag them!