iTorah
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As many of you know, I am a bit of a technophile. In fact, our Temple Youth Groupers have nicked named me *Rabbi Gadget* – because, well, I am a rabbi and if it is small, made of plastic and runs on batteries I probably own one, or two.

And so you would think today would be a very big day – because in case you haven't heard –today is iPhone day! Oh you say you may have heard something about that somewhere. The media has termed this new device the "Moses Phone," actually they use the name of a slightly more messianic Biblical personality, but for purposes of this talk I will stick with Moses.

They call it the "Moses Phone" because it can do so many things. Indeed, if you believe the hype, it can do everything; and everything it does, it does really well. Hence, the messianic overtones. One device that does it all – for those with belts and pockets bulging and beeping and ringing, it may seem like the answer to so many prayers.

And so at 6pm today, less than an hour ago, this digital messiah arrived! The iPhone went on sale right here in our little town. As of 2pm this afternoon the line outside the Cingular Wireless store on Ventura was 50 people deep. But I am not standing in that line. At 6pm we lit the Shabbat candles and in case you were otherwise distracted, I have been standing here with you and Rabbi Wissot the whole time.

I am not standing in line for an iPhone, and I have no immediate plans for purchasing one. For as much as I do love technology- and I will admit the iPhone is intriguing and impressive in all that it can do- I already have one device that can do everything,. And while it may not fit exactly in my pocket, I do have it with me wherever I

go. It is always fully charged. It has music, a calendar, holds the names of hundred, maybe thousands of people. It has maps and directions. Indeed, with it I am never lost – I am always found. It has vivid images and miraculous graphics, and the stories – they are not limited by a world wide web, but they surpass time and space – they are indeed out of this world. They are heavenly.

Of course, I am talking about the original heaven-sent device, one that truly has changed the world. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the iTorah.



Where the iPhone is $699 and only has 8megs of memory and comes with a 2 year contract, the iTorah has nearly 6,000 years of memory, it's free for the taking and comes, of course, with a lifetime contract.

All shtick aside – its seems more and more in our world today we think that the answer to all of our problems lies in something new, rather than in re-examining something old. And this worries me, because it is not the Jewish way. The Jewish way is to look backward through our storied history and to find in the events and challenges of past generations insights and mechanisms to cope with the stresses and challenges of this generation. Rabbis have said many times that we are a people of the book, indeed we are, and our book is a history book.

You are not the first person to deal with rambunctious and unruly children: Adam and Eve had Cain & Abel.

You are not the first person to have problems with your in-laws: Jacob's father-in-law switched his bride on his wedding night and made him a virtual slave for 14 years.

You think you are alone as you confront job-loss, infidelity, a troubled marriage, estranged children. Take a look at Abraham and Sarah and their offspring. You'll thank God you don't have their problems. But moreover, we learn from their good example ,and sometimes their bad examples, how to face the challenges of present day. My point is a simple and obvious one, but we so often forget it.

The advantage of being alive now, in this day, is that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. We have the benefit of experience, ours and those of our ancestors, to learn from and draw insight from. Our past is a window into our present, and without it we are blind to the future.

It is not that the future has nothing to offer us. Indeed it does. Even the rabbis of one of our most ancient and sacred texts understood that the iPhone of their day was a lens through which to understand the challenges of modern life.

Rabbi Abraham Yaakov of the *shtetl* of Sadgora, reflected on the nagging spiritual problems imposed by the newly born industrial age and on the mismatch in the marriage of human being and modern machine. The Rabbi remarked that every one of God's creations has something to teach, adding that the things people make also offer a lesson.

> "What can we learn from a train?" One Hasid asked dubiously.
> "That because of one second one can miss everything."

"And from the telegraph?"
"That every word is counted and billed."
"And the telephone?"
"That what we say here is heard there."

Every new invention is an opportunity to stop and reflect on just how far we have come - and also a note of caution, what will we give up, what will we lose as we move forward. Machines that were designed to care for us force us to care for them. Timesaving gadgets ring and beep, and we jump to do their bidding. Now that bodies, possessions and ideas travel faster than ever, our accessories turn us into their appendages, and the old struggle between person and creation grows ever more intense.

In another rabbinic text attempting to explain the ever-increasing demands and hectic schedules of modern society, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once observed a man hurrying along the street, looking neither right nor left, the rabbi approached the man and said to him:

"Why are you rushing so?
"I am after my livelihood," the man replied.
"And how do you know," continued the rabbi, "that your livelihood is running on before you, so that you have to rush after it? Perhaps it is behind you, and all you need do to encounter it is to stand still."

We rush and rush, in a world that is growing ever more impatient, ever more insistent. Where we used to say that one walks through life, strolls down memory lane – now we run. Life is a race, but if we think about it, it is not a finish-line we should be in such a hurry to reach. Life-which, if we are lucky, is a marathon-feels more and more like a sprint, and we are constantly hurrying to run and catch up with the pack.

Well, I have only lived one life, but I have run a few marathons, and as the tortoise said to the hare, "slow and steady, indeed, wins the race."

And so, back for a moment to an old invention, the iTorah. Our tradition teaches about Torah that we should turn it over and turn it over again because everything is in it. I like to read during the summer. I gather a stack of books by my bedside and read them until they are gone. I invite you this summer to pick up a good book-indeed as my Christian colleagues call it, "The Good Book" – read about where we have come from, so you can understand where we are going. Turn off the cell phone. Leave the email for another day. The future can wait. Let's live in the present, and learn from our past.