

WHY IS IT HARD TO HIT THE “OFF-SWITCH?”

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **Digital Overload** through the value of **Mindfulness**.

At-a-Glance

This resource provides an opportunity to contemplate the role of mindfulness as an antidote to digital overload. Mindfulness encourages us to become aware of the present moment rather than losing ourselves in a technological device. The Jewish model of *kedushat zman*, sacred time, provides a jumping point from which to explore how limits might help us seek greater balance in our lives. Learners will have the chance to examine their own technology usage and identify how adding an element of *kedushat zman* might free up space for experiencing more grounding in the present moment – even when it feels hard to do so.



MATERIALS AND SET-UP

Time estimate:

50 minutes

Best Uses:

- For group reflection with an individualized component
- For informal settings
- For more tech-oriented activities

Materials Needed:

- Smartphone for activity section
- Digital device to watch *Technology Shabbat*



FRAME THE ISSUE (10 MINUTES)

Use the prompts below to establish a connection with the topic.

The first iPhone was released in 2007 and it radically shifted the way we communicate – even the way we operate - with access to this powerful device in the palms of our hands. Technology can at once create feelings of connectivity, creativity, and wonder, but in excessive use can also cause us to feel distracted, overwhelmed and empty. It can also make it hard for us to focus on what is right in front of us.

Check it out for yourself here:



Discuss with the full group:

- ▶▶ What do you love most about what your phone enables you to do?
- ▶▶ How do you feel if you've forgotten your phone at home? Free? Anxious?

Yes, there are tremendous benefits to living in this digitally connected world, but too much of a good thing may not be a good thing. We all know taking some time away from our phones and laptops is healthy, and yet, it can be so hard to put them down.

With the constant distraction and bombardment of texts, tweets, notifications and status updates, the ability to be mindful has become increasingly valuable – especially when we consider mindfulness as cultivating both a sense of awareness and a sense of presence in the current moment.

How does a spirit of mindfulness fit into our fast-paced and busy culture? **And if mindfulness is good for us, why is it so hard to power down to limit our distractions and focus?**

We'll explore together how developing a sense of mindfulness can be a helpful antidote to the digital overload we often experience and unpack together why we may find it hard to do so.



ACTIVITY: YAY OR NAY?

(10 MINUTES)

Let's spend a few moments exploring the awareness aspect of mindfulness and bring some attention to our current use of technology - how it makes us feel and how "in control" of it we feel.

As a full group, do this exercise:

▷▷ Take out your phone and pick the three apps that you use the most.

Have three people list their apps and write all the apps that are mentioned on a large sheet of paper or screen for all to see.

▷▷ Go around in a circle and for each app listed, say how it generally makes you feel after using it, tallying all of the responses. The choices are:

- Yay – this app boosts your mood! You are in control of when you check the app and you don't feel compelled to be on it all of the time.
- Yuck – you sometimes have feelings of sadness, jealousy or anger and/or you may feel pressure to continuously be checking it.
- Neutral – it does not change how you feel. You could delete it from your phone and it wouldn't matter.

(Tip: Select one App a time (ex: start with TikTok, and go around the circle, each person just one word: yay, yuck, neutral.)

▷▷ Look at the data. How many yays and yucks did each receive?

▷▷ In small groups discuss:

- It's safe to assume that there are at least some yucks and neutrals in this group. Select one App that makes you feel "yuck" or "neutral" and discuss why you feel compelled to keep checking it?
- What's holding you back from limiting or deleting it? What would you miss if you did?

Summarize by validating all of the reasons why it's hard to limit or delete these apps, even if they don't always make us feel good (e.g. FOMO, pressure.)

Let's now take a look at what Judaism has to contribute to our thinking about cultivating mindfulness through the concept of "sacred time."



JEWISH ANCHOR *KEDUSHAT ZMAN* (SANCTITY OF TIME) AND SHABBAT AS DIGITAL DETOX (15 MINUTES)

Judaism believes in the particularity of time and that certain times have special spiritual properties: that Shabbat has an extra degree of holiness; that Pesach (Passover) is the time of our liberation; that Sukkot is a time of joy but also a time of dependance and vulnerability. But we tend to appreciate these special properties only when we are mindful, when we take time to notice what's happening around us and be situated in the present moment. Such mindfulness requires an awareness of *kedushat zman*, the sanctity of time. We will explore this concept below and reflect upon it together.

Tiffany Shlain is a multidisciplinary artist, writer and filmmaker who explores the relationship between humanity and technology. In her book *24/6*, she advocates for taking a break from technology, particularly smartphones, one day a week. She builds much of her thinking on the Jewish model of *Shabbat*.



Scan the QR code here for an excerpt of Tiffany Shlain's YouTube clip and answer the questions that follow.

Questions for Reflection:

- ▶▶ Tiffany Shlain quotes the great Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel who describes Shabbat as a "palace in time." What does that mean?
- ▶▶ Are there any times in your life that you have protected as "sacred time" - when you unplug or rid yourself of distractions? How does it feel to think about doing that or adding more? What feels exciting about that possibility? What feels hard?

Summarize for the group:

The compelling part of Shlain's approach is that it is not all or nothing. It recognizes that our digital devices are an essential part of who we are, but the downside to their force is that they can consume us, and not allow us to cultivate time for reflection, and allow creativity to flourish. That can only happen by ridding ourselves of distractions. By designating times as distinct from one another - and carving out some sacred time for ourselves - we can try to find some of that balance.



MAKE MEANING & TAKE ACTION (10 MINUTES)

In 24/6 Tiffany Shlain states that “every week we remember that the most important thing about technology is that it has an off switch.” Let’s try to find that off-switch for ourselves using the concept of *kedushat zman* through the action steps below. In the spirit of mindfulness, we’ll focus on both awareness and presence.

If you’re looking to cultivate awareness:

- ▶▶ Look at the apps that you rated earlier. Access your phone’s settings and turn on the screentime tracker to be able to start tracking the time you spend on them.
- ▶▶ Go to your phone’s settings and place a time limit for the use of one of those apps.
- ▶▶ Check in with yourself at the end of the week. Did you miss that time? Any differences? Make any adjustments you want to.
- ▶▶ If you’re giving this a try, take a moment to do so now.

If you’re looking to cultivate presence:

- ▶▶ Choose 30 minutes of the day when you normally check your phone and commit to not checking it. What time of day is it? How will you hold yourself accountable?
- ▶▶ Make a plan for your “sacred time.” What are you going to do instead? Hint; think about what you’re craving more of – e.g. hanging out with a friend, reading, biking. Make a commitment to do more of that.
- ▶▶ If you’re giving this a try, take a moment to set a reminder to power down and fill it with something you’re excited to do instead.
- ▶▶ Make a note to check in with yourself at the end of the week and reflect on how you feel!



CLOSE WITH INTENTION (5 MINUTES)

In the exploration we have just experienced, we took a contemporary issue - digital overload - which is phenomenon we are all experiencing, and explored it through the value of mindfulness. Even as we appreciate the many beneficial aspects of a digital world, cultivating a sense of mindfulness offers an empowering way to make intentional choices about how we use technology in our lives. Today’s conversation provided a chance to explore why cultivating mindfulness might be challenging and exploring how some small shifts can be a simple way to start. We’re excited to see you experiment with this and see how it impacts you.

End with a prompt:

- ▶▶ What are you committed to trying this week?