

# The Use of a Remote Audio/Video Monitor on Shabbat and Yom Tov

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*This paper was written as a dissenting opinion to Rabbi Gordon Tucker's responsum, "The Use of a Remote Audio/Video Monitor on Shabbat and Yom Tov."*

I was surprised by my own vote in opposition to Rabbi Gordon Tucker's paper, *The Use of a Remote Audio/Video Monitor on Shabbat and Yom Tov*. After all, the paper was thoroughly researched and beautifully expressed. It provided a cogent halakhic basis for the use of audio-video technology to extend religious opportunities to those who might otherwise be excluded from them. With Rabbi Tucker's considered *heter* (permission), a Conservative synagogue may now serve otherwise unreachable constituencies: Shut-ins, whose health keeps them from the supports and benefits of prayer and community; college students, military personnel, transients, and poor Jews who might otherwise be prevented from being part of a davening community on the High Holy Days.

Then why did I oppose the paper? To my mind, the paper was simply not clear enough in indicating that this solution should be a last resort. I certainly have no quarrel with the need to reach out to those who may be excluded from a synagogue's main service. Nor do I object to employing the high-tech solution if there is truly no other way. But let us be clear: this solution violates much of what we hold most dear in our religious lives.

A colleague on the Law Committee expressed it best when he cried out in the midst of our discussion of the paper: "For the people in this overflow service, their *שליח ציבור* is a machine!" I was moved and persuaded by the conversation that followed. We live in a world in which human dignity is every day subjugated to the ever-growing hegemony of technology. We serve communities in which science is more devoutly

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*The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.*

worshipped than the קדוש ברוך הוא. We live with congregants and loved ones who are more comfortable with the VCR than with a very sad friend, who know their software far better than their soft feelings.

To offer a technological facsimile of a שליח ציבור in place of a living, breathing, hurting, dreaming, praying leader and role model is a degradation of Jewish worship. It is a violation of Jewish beliefs about the holiness of God and humanity. And it is an affirmation of all that is worst in Conservative Jewish life: worship as vicarious experience, prayer as spectator sport, religion as theater, choreography and show rather than inner work and transformation.

Let us be glad that Rabbi Tucker has shown us how to think halakhically about the use of audio-video equipment. But let us remember to employ it only when there is truly no other choice, lest we compromise that which is most valuable to us.