# *Teaching a CJLS Teshuvah*

## "Wired to the *Kadosh Barukh Hu:* Minyan via Internet,"
## by Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner

### *A Guide for Instructors*
### *Prepared by Rabbi Gary Karlin*

**This lesson plan and the accompanying materials may be used in a number of ways:**

**Option 1 — One Two-Hour Class**

Most colleagues will opt for this format, especially those who want to break up the class into *ḥavruta* and *shi'ur* segments, implementing this lesson plan in one go.

**Option 2 — Two One-Hour Classes**

For colleagues who prefer to break up their teaching into two classes, one possibility is to introduce the topic, continue with the *ḥavruta* study, and conclude the first hour with a brief *shi'ur* on gaining a basic understanding of the *teshuvah* itself. The second session could be devoted to delving into some of the bigger questions and issues raised here, as well as in the grey sidebars in the "Instructor's Edition" of the *teshuvah).*

**Option 3 — One One-Hour Class**

Colleagues who need to limit themselves to one hour should streamline the "mastery" portion of the lesson (i.e., gaining a basic understanding of the *teshuvah*) by providing a brief summary and outlining the key points, and focus more on bigger questions and issues the issue raises. (if a colleague is blessed with participants who are very motivated and willing to read the *teshuvah* before attending the session — *harei zeh meshubaḥ!)*

# *Lesson Plan*

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| **1. Central question of inquiry** | How can *halakhah* speak in the face of unforeseen, sweeping and rapid technological change? |
| **2. Goals and objectives** | There can be two very different parts of this learning exercise:<br><br>[1] Understanding the teshuvah itself as a legal argument -- the first part of Reisner's teshuvah. *(In defining a minyan, Reisner assumes it to be a quorum of ten but does not bring the texts that arrive at that conclusion. You may wish to review those sources (Bavli Megillah 23b and Yerushalmi Megillah 4.4) with your students.)* and<br><br>[2] Understanding the background and ramifications of the *teshuvah* ("Several Philosophical Considerations," through to the end of the paper).<br><br>Some goals and objectives for [1] could include that students will be able to:<br><br>a. …define these terms in their own words (all these are used in the *teshuvah*): שאלה (she'elah), תשובה (teshuvah), *halakhah, minyan, Shulḥan Arukh, Orah Hayim, Mishnah, tefillah, mitzvat shofar, mitzvat megillah, Tosafot, zimmun,* Temple/*Beit haMikdash, d'oraita, d'rabbanan, ma'amadot, Kohanim, sheliaḥ tzibbur, berakhah*/ ברכה לבטלה (berakhah l'vatalah), *shaḥarit*, (*halakhic*) obligation, time-bound obligations, analog/digital signal, CJLS.<br><br>b. …explain in their own words the primary question addressed, and the secondary one<br><br>    • How may one fulfill one's obligation for prayer using technological means?<br><br>    • What is the meaning (the definition, the parameters) of the requirement of Minyan for public prayer?<br><br>c. …explain in their own words how Rabbi Reisner reasons and answers these two questions, and how he uses the texts cited to support his view, or how he refutes them.<br><br>Some goals and objectives for [2] could include that students will be able to:<br><br>a. …explain how metahalakhic, philosophical, sociological, technological and practical issues help shape the approach of the halakhist and influence the outcome of the *teshuvah.*<br><br>b. …articulate how "hearing" and "seeing" enter into the discussion from a *halakhic* and a philosophical understanding of the issues at hand.<br><br>c. …participate in the discussion on the "corollary questions of inquiry" (5., below). |

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| | d. …better appreciate the *halakhic* approach of the Conservative Movement, and the work of the CJLS. |
| **3. Texts, materials, sources** | Each student should be provided with a photocopy of the text of the *teshuvah*, which is available on the RA website. Click [here](#) to download a printable PDF.<br><br>Since all Hebrew and Aramaic sources cited have been translated, the instructor will not need to make the original texts available to participants (with the possible exception of a *Ḥumash* to look up the reference to Exodus 12:46 on pg. 2 of the *teshuvah*). |
| **4. Suggested methodologies** | As indicated above, the instructor may want to separate the two different parts of the learning exercise: [1] understanding the *teshuvah* itself, and [2]discussing the background and ramifications of the *teshuvah*. These two parts can be offered on two different dates, or in one, longer, extended session.<br><br>[1] The first part could include classic *ḥavruta* and *shi'ur* components, or a more frontal presentation of the *teshuvah* text. If the former is chosen, all *ḥavruta* pairs or groups could prepare the entire *teshuvah*, or the instructor could assign the different sources cited to individual *ḥavruta* groups, followed by the groups presenting what they have learned with the instructor as part of the formal *shi'ur*. This latter methodology involves more active learning, and may permit a quicker flow of the session, since *ḥavruta* time would be much shorter than if all the groups were responsible for preparing the entire text.<br><br>A few possible guiding questions for the *ḥavrutot*:<br>• Why is this question relevant today? Why was it relevant when it was written?<br>• What are the multiple problems or challenges that prompted asking the *she'elah?*<br>• How does Rabbi Reisner differentiate between participating in an already convened *minyan*, and helping to constitute the *minyan?* Why?<br>• Why is "hearing" more important to Rabbi Reisner than "seeing"?<br>• Is the "law the law," or should there be a different law for busy lawyers, as opposed to shut-ins?<br>• In the years since this *teshuvah* appeared, have any of these issues changed? Do you think an update of this teshuvah would differ? How?<br>• was written and  does Rabbi Reisner propose<br><br>[2] The second part of the exercise, "corollary questions of inquiry," lends itself well to a guided discussion (see 5., below).<br><br>[3] *An Experiential Approach:*<br>Bring a computer and large monitor into the study space. The instructor leaves the room, where s/he sets up another computer, and Skypes a brief part of the *shi'ur* (no more than 10 minutes) to the class. Return to the venue and ask,<br>• How was the experience of "virtual instruction" different from the face-to-face learning what we're doing now? |

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| | • How does this experiment help clarify some of the *tefillah*-related issues we are exploring? |
| **5. Some other possible corollary questions of inquiry** | o Are Rabbi Reisner's "philosophical considerations" and his "real problem – restated" *halakhic* questions at all? Have these completely novel questions – which the Sages could never, ever, have dreamed of – completely left the realm of classical *halakhah*? Do contemporary rabbis have the kind of training and expertise to answer these sorts of new questions?<br><br>o Some might say that Rabbi Reisner made up his mind even before writing a word, and constructed a legal argument to support his conclusions.<br><br>    o If you think he did this, is this is a good example of the *halakhic* process?<br><br>    o Describe how you think Rabbi Reisner feels about the issue in his gut — is he in favor, uncomfortable, or ambivalent?<br><br>o How could one use some of these same texts to construct a counter-argument, that a fully "virtual *minyan*" can be, in fact, kosher?<br><br>o How do we balance the needs of the community with the needs of the individual? And how do we balance these immediate needs with the danger of future, unwanted consequences?<br><br>o Note that this teshuvah results in both *kulot* and *ḥumrot*. How can this be?<br><br>o Which do you think is more important: hearing and seeing, or physical presence? How do you define "community"?<br><br>o This *teshvuah* was written ten years ago. In the intervening decade, the pervasiveness of technology and the internet has grown quickly to include social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), small devices that can be with us at all times (iPad, smartphones, etc.), and ubiquitous video (Skype, YouTube, etc.). Does this change any of the arguments, concerns, and conclusions that Rabbi Reisner raises?<br><br>o Although the *teshuvah* garnered wide support, two members voted against the teshuvah, and one abstained.<br><br>    o How would you explain the overwhelming support this *teshuvah* garnered?<br><br>    o Why do you think three members did not vote in favor of the *teshuvah?* (Note that their objections could have been with the *pesak*/conclusions, or methodological only. |

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| **6. Suggested summary questions** | o What would you do you if someone asked you to "rule" on this issue? |
| | o Rabbi Reisner wrote, "is there some foreseeable technological advance that would make [praying over the internet permissible]?" What has transpired since 2001 that might change the way we look at the question and the issue? |
| | o How can the community resolve the tension between inclusiveness (which would encourage distance participation) and community cohesiveness and intensiveness (which would insist on a higher level of interaction than the electronic)? |
| | o Is this good or bad for the Jews? For *shuls?* |
| | o How do you compare this *teshuvah* to other where the CJLS sought to expand the community, open access, etc. (e.g., the "driving *teshuvah*," responsa on women's issues and homosexuality, etc.)? |
| | o This *teshuvah* stops short of permitting one to be counted for a *minyan* (or serve as *sheliaḥ tzibbur)* if not physically present. Has technology advanced to the point where this should be considered? If not, at what point would this become a serious question? |