

“Wired to the Kadosh Barukh Hu: Minyan via Internet,”
by Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner

A Study Guide for Teaching a CJLS Teshuvah by Rabbi Gary Karlin
 Estimated lesson duration: one 90-120 minute session, or two 45-60 minute sessions.

1. Central question of inquiry	How can <i>halakhah</i> speak in the face of unforeseen and sweeping technological change?
2. Goals and objectives	<p>There can be two very different parts of this learning exercise:</p> <p>[1] Understanding the <i>teshuvah</i> itself as a legal argument (the first part of Reisner’s paper), and</p> <p>[2] Understanding the background and ramifications of the <i>teshuvah</i> (“Several Philosophical Considerations,” through to the end of the paper).</p> <p>Some goals and objectives for [1] could include that students will be able to:</p> <p>a. ...define these terms in their own words (all these are used in the <i>teshuvah</i>): ,שאלה teshuvah/תשובה halakhah, Minyan, Shulkhan Arukh, Mishnah, prayer (i.e., tefillah/Sh’moneh Esreh), mitzvat shofar, mitzvat Megillah, Tosafot, zimmun, Temple (i.e., Beit haMikdash), d’oraita, d’rabbanan, Ma’amadot, Kohanim, shaliah tzibbur, berakhah/superfluous blessing (,ברכה לבטלה shaharit, obligation (in the halakhic sense)/time-bound obligations, analog/digital signal, CJLS.</p> <p>b. ...explain in their own words the primary question addressed, and the secondary one (How may one fulfill one’s obligation for prayer using technological means?)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Some goals and objectives for [2] could include that students will be able to:</p> <p>a. ...explain how metahalakhic (or philosophical) issues direct the <i>teshuvah</i>.</p> <p>b. ...articulate how “hearing” and “seeing” enter into the discussion from a halakhic and a philosophical understanding of the issues at hand.</p> <p>c. ...participate in the discussion on the “corollary questions of inquiry” (5., below).</p>

3. Texts, materials, sources	<p>Each student should be provided with a photocopy of the text of the <i>teshuvah</i>, which is available on the RA website. Click here to download a printable PDF.</p> <p>Optional: The instructor can decide what other materials may be provided or made available, depending on the level of the students: study aids (such as <i>Jastrow</i>), the full, original sources cited in the <i>teshuvah</i> in translation or their original languages, etc.).</p>
4. Suggested methodologies	<p>As indicated above, the instructor may want to separate the two different parts of the learning exercise: [1] understanding the <i>teshuvah</i> itself, and [2] discussing the background and ramifications of the <i>teshuvah</i>. These two parts can be offered on two different dates, or in one, longer, extended session.</p> <p>[1] The first part could include classic <i>bavruta</i> and <i>shi'ur</i> components, or a more frontal presentation of the <i>teshuvah</i> text. If the former is chosen, all <i>bavruta</i> pairs or groups could prepare the entire <i>teshuvah</i>, or the instructor could assign the different sources cited to individual <i>bavruta</i> groups, followed by the groups presenting what they have learned with the instructor as part of the formal <i>shi'ur</i>. This latter methodology involves more active learning, and may permit a quicker flow of the session, since <i>bavruta</i> time would be much shorter than if all the groups were responsible for preparing the entire text.</p> <p>[2] The second part of the exercise, “corollary questions of inquiry,” lends itself well to a guided discussion (see 5., below). This might be a good time to demonstrate http://bethetenth.com, a “virtual <i>minyan</i>.” Note, however, that this website is an artistic representation of a <i>minyan</i> only, and not an implementation of the reality of our <i>teshuvah</i>, since all the participants (except, of course, the user) are computer-generated figures.</p>
5. Some other possible corollary questions of inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are 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 <i>halakhab</i>? Do contemporary rabbis have the kind of training and expertise to answer these sorts of new questions?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some might say that Reisner made up his mind even before writing a word, and constructed a legal argument to support his conclusions. If you think he did this, is this a good example of the halakhic process? • How could one use some of these same texts to construct a counter-argument, that a “virtual <i>minyan</i>” can be, in fact, kosher? • 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? • Here, the end result may be seen as very cautious and <i>mahmir</i> (strict)*. How can this process also yield <i>kulot</i> (leniencies)? (* <i>Students might be able to point to the kulot in this teshuvah, too!</i>) • This <i>teshuvah</i> 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 Reisner raises?
6. Suggested summary questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this good or bad for the Jews? For shuls? • What would you do if someone asked you to “rule” on this issue?