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# Believe the Skype

Putting tech to work for you.

By Hillel Kuttler

After her son Larry made aliyah in 1970, Gloria Schlosberg stayed in regular touch. It wasn't easy, though. Conversations demanded dialing the switchboard at Kibbutz Ketura, north of Eilat, then waiting while someone tracked him down. And at 90 cents a minute, calls were expensive.

Now, catching up every Thursday with Larry's widow, Bilha, is a piece of cake: Schlosberg sits down at the computer and eagerly clicks her way to Israel on Skype to talk with — and see — her daughter-in-law nearly instantaneously. Ditto for communicating with granddaughter Sarai, a Tel Aviv-based nursing student; grandson Stav,

who attends Haifa's Technion; and grandson Yarden, who's at veterinary school in Ireland.

The waiting game of yore "is like a whole century ago," Schlosberg (who prefers not to reveal her age) said from her Center City home. "It's unbelievable how everything has progressed. I'm thankful for it."

Like Schlosberg, many Jewish senior citizens rely on technological advancements for clear, immediate and even free communication with loved ones near and far. They also dig into the Internet for sizable helpings of Jewish content.

The American Association of Retired Persons, with 700,000 members in greater Philadel-

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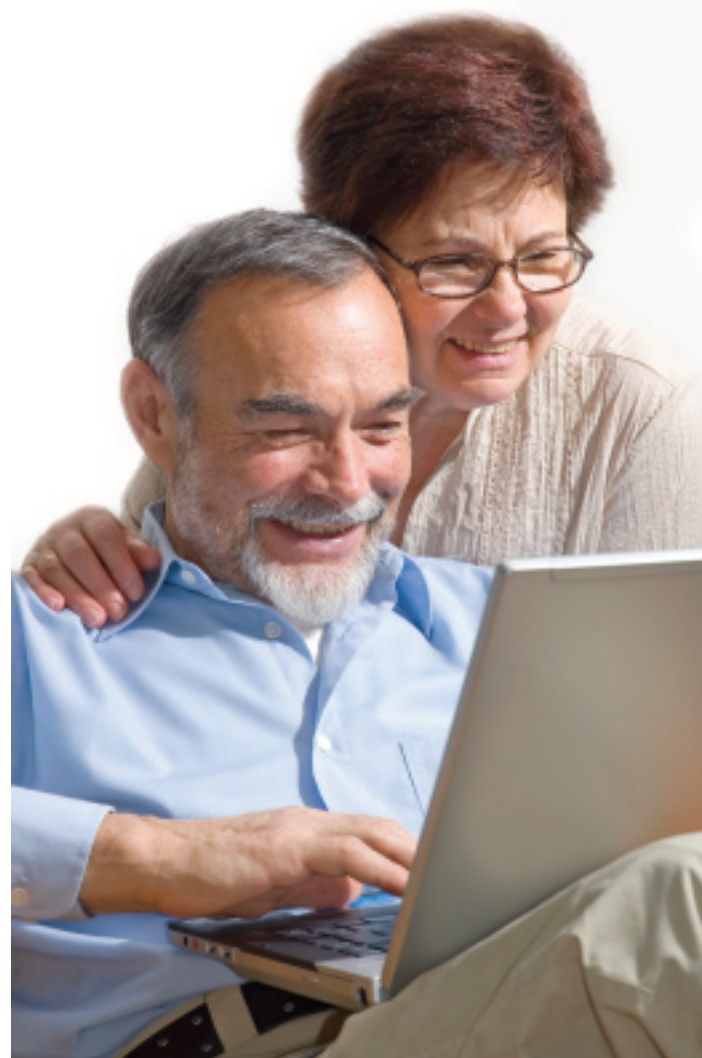


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phia, found in a 2010 national study that 80 percent of its members have cellular phones, 15 percent of which are smartphones, said Angela Foreshaw-Rouse, communications director of AARP's Pennsylvania office. Sixty-five percent of members have desktop computers, 34 percent send and receive text messages and up to 10 percent access Facebook, Twitter and other social media.

"We are seeing a really high usage of technology among our members," said Foreshaw-Rouse, who had just left a meeting on launching Facebook pages for local chapters.

In the Jewish world, seniors' technology usage is increasing, too. Chabad-Lubavitch has seen "an upswing" in the number of senior citizens visiting its Web site, owing to a "beautiful, new trend of carving out a new life of Jewish study," said Zalman Shmotkin, director of Chabad.org.

A "significant proportion" of B'nai B'rith International's members are senior citizens, and their usage seems to correlate more to comfort with technology than to age, said Rachel Goldberg, BBI's director of aging policy.

Many members use iPhones, iPads and iPods, whereas "people in senior positions of our leadership don't use email [who] are the same age," she said.

Some seniors interviewed for this article confessed to having been intimidated initially by technology, but expressed joy at conquering their fears and reveling in familial payoffs akin to Schlosberg's. They noted that they have yet to exploit many available tools, including cellular telephone cameras and social media sites.

Sidney Rosenblum, an 85-year-old Long Islander, retired from the *New York Daily News* newspaper just as his department was making the switch to digital, so he never learned to operate a computer.

But after his son Michael presented a gift of an iPad earlier this year, Rosenblum said, "I'm part of the 21st century."

Rosenblum loves using email for exchanging family news and photographs with his two children and four grandchildren. He uses Skype to talk with grandsons in Boston and New York,

and, when his granddaughters in London and Jerusalem visit in late December, he'll ask about Skyping around their time differences.

David Perlow, a graduate student at Brandeis University, has given his grandfather virtual visual tours of his off-campus house, an experience that blows Rosenblum's mind.

"It's like a Dick Tracy wrist-watch 50 years ago — you'd never think it would happen," Rosenblum said. "It's a tool to communicate. It's a wonderful advance, and I'm getting the

### Some families rely on technology to share Jewish celebrations despite being physically apart.

hang of it. In a couple of months, I should be able to do everything."

Some families rely on technology to share Jewish celebrations despite being physically apart.

In April, Peter Kasdan's daughter Robin and her family couldn't leave their upstate New York home to attend the Kasdans' seder celebrations in Florida.

So, the retired rabbi of a New Jersey synagogue did the next best thing: He propped his laptop computer and camera on a stool at the far end of the table. The northerners did the same. Haggadah readings alternated from site to site. The sensation of an in-person, real-time family gathering was eerie.

"We had the effect of looking down a long table. It was like their table was an extension of our table," said Kasdan, 71. "It was a use of technology that Moses never thought of."

Skype also allows Kasdan and his wife to virtually attend their old congregation's reading of the megillah and acting out of the Purim shpiel every year. When they cannot make it to Shabbat services locally, they watch via streaming video. "It gives you a connection to your congregation," Kasdan said.

Indeed, the range of technology-enabled connections runs the gamut. Goldberg said that a growing number of B'nai B'rith's senior citizens rely on email and the Web for updates

about organizational programming, synagogue happenings and their families. And some use the Internet for dating purposes, she added.

One of B'nai B'rith's Facebook pages is dedicated to communicating with seniors, and anecdotal evidence suggests that "they're using it," she added. Goldberg said that some of her older relatives belong to separate Facebook pages for communicating with kids and grandkids, and for communicating with friends.

Another Florida retiree, Paul Kussner, 73, who has health problems, virtually attended this year's High Holy Days services that an Ohio synagogue broadcast live on the Web.

Kussner, who was raised Orthodox, has been gradually returning to Jewish learning and observance over the past year. He credited both technology and his granddaughter, Rucheli Manville, who works for Chabad-Lubavitch.

Manville, who lives in Brooklyn, speaks to her grandparents on Skype every Friday to wish them "Shabbat Shalom" face to face. Kussner regularly Skypes with other grandchildren in Virginia, enjoying moments like the new earrings that 8-year-old Isabelle tries on for him and his chess games with Jacob, 10.

Kussner relies on Manville's emailed links to articles dealing with Jewish thought and ritual. He also enjoys watching video links she sends to lectures given by Rabbi Moshe Bryski, Kussner's favorite. "For him to find a rabbi he's willing to watch for an hour is awesome," Manville said.

"She has brought back religion to our family," Kussner said of his granddaughter. "Just to see the excitement on her face — her eyes glow. The warmth and glow of her eyes — you can't get that by fax or email. You can only do it by Skype or in person.

"That's why I'd like to tell all seniors: Don't be afraid of change. Put in Skype at both ends so you can see your grandkids and — see the light."

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