

# Wired To Community

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SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH WEEK

**W**hen it comes to the Internet, I am a minimalist. Sure, I use e-mail, I get news updates from various sites and I have occasionally purchased books from Amazon.com. But I've never "surfed" the Web, promulgated jokes to my 22 closest friends, or corresponded with strangers I'd "met" online.

Until now. A few weeks ago, I was trying to advertise a service when a friend suggested that I post a notice to a list serving my community: TeaneckShuls@yahoo.com. Enough said, right?

Go ahead, laugh. But this group has changed my life. Ask my husband. Not a day goes by that I don't come home with some tidbit to relate from the list. He claims this is only aiding and abetting my natural predilection for gossip. But there's a reason I'm a journalist, and hey, talk about keeping your finger on the pulse!

The entire array of daily concerns of those in my community is on display for anyone to

see. I now know when a neighbor needs someone to fix their basement, or is looking for a part-time secretary for their medical practice, or has a spot open in their carpool.

At first I found the barrage of messages in my inbox to be an annoyance. By now I'm addicted.

Of course, as much as I laugh about my own sense of voyeurism, the list, on one level, is really just a bulletin board, reflecting the natural ebb and flow of a community.

But the reason I became addicted to my almost constant stream of messages is that I have to come to realize that during these times, it has become something much more.

I happened to join the list the week of the tragic bombing in the Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem. To the extent the Internet can instantly connect you to people and events far away, this list-serve made me feel the tragedy and the pain in real time, and with real names and faces. Every member of the list seemed to know someone directly or indirectly affected by the bombing. People posted messages from eyewitnesses, from relatives of the victims, from friends asking others to pray on behalf of the injured. You could click onto photos of the victims or descriptions from their family members, bringing them to life, even in death.

This sense of connectedness has continued

over the last several weeks. People have posted e-mail they receive from friends in Israel, messages urging concerned citizens to lobby the White House or Congress when criticism of Israel mounts, descriptions of the orphans left behind by one attack or another, who need our assistance. These kinds of details are not available in your local newspaper.



I am feeling so torn during this terrible time for our people, wishing there was more I could do, feeling guilty for wor-

rying about it all from this very safe distance. TeaneckShuls is hardly the answer. But it's not to be totally discounted, either. Just as members trust each other to recommend a reliable handyman, they trust each other to provide a level of understanding and support during these trying times that they know cannot be found elsewhere.

One great danger of the ongoing violence right now is the threat that it poses to the already tenuous connection that American Jews have to Israel. Outside a select group of highly committed people, American Jews are not moving to Israel, are not visiting Israel and are losing touch with the realities of life in Israel today.

My little list-serve is a link. It is like a quiet alarm that goes off every hour or so while I sit at my desk going about my business. Yes, I have problems in the office that I have to deal with, but someone just got shot in Israel today.

Yes, I do have to resolve my childcare issues for the fall, but there's a little girl in Modi'in still waiting for her mother to come out of a coma brought on by being in the wrong pizza-ria at the wrong time.

The truth is there is not that much we can do sitting here in America — although I will put in a plug for the solidarity rally being held in Manhattan on Sept. 23. But we can make sure that Israel is never far from our thoughts. We can be sure to include the injured in our prayers. We can send aid to families who have suffered tragic losses. And we can offer support and connectedness to one another, here and in Israel. We can offer community.

We are now entering the holiest time of the Jewish year, which happens to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the start of this intifada. Last year at this time, many of us thought the violence was just a blip, a distraction on the road to peace. Now, we have all but lost hope for a real peace; we don't even know how the current violence will ever end.

We have much to pray for on this Rosh HaShanah. Those prayers, of course, are between us and God. But there is much comfort and strength to be derived from praying, with our families and loved ones, as a community. This is why we don't pray at home. This is why we go to shul — and not the virtual kind, either. May we be privileged to have our prayers answered this year, for ourselves and for all the people of Israel.

*L'Shana Tova Tikatevu V'Techatemu.* □



Rifka Rosenwein's column runs the first week of the month.