

THE “CELLEPHANT” IN THE ROOM: ADDRESSING ULPANA’S PHONE POLICY

Yael Diena

The 2023-2024 school year brought in dozens of new changes that affected Ulpana students, including new teachers, new shlichot, and new renovations. But perhaps the most drastic change of all was the advent of the much-anticipated, much-dreaded phone policy. The policy was announced last year by BAS administrators as a response to the rising number of social media addictions and other issues among today’s teenagers. It mandates that students are prohibited from using their phones in the school building. Although some of the evidence that admin used to support their claims was shaky (for example, citing a study that allegedly showed a causal relationship between social media use and teen mental health, which did not mention the words “mental health” once in its 76 pages), they nevertheless decided to go ahead with enforcing it this year. The policy brought about mixed opinions from the school, with some students enjoying the uptick in face-to-face interaction, some mourning the loss of their devices, and some apathetic. A survey was sent out to Ulpana by the author of this article to gauge students’ reactions to the rule and ask them their opinions.¹

When asked to list advantages of the phone rule, participants listed several aspects (though 29% of respondents said there were no positives to the policy). A large number of participants said they found that it increased communication with their friends during breaks and lunches. One Grade 12 student notes that “We interact with each other more and are more present because there’s no way to hide behind your phone and be antisocial.” When asked, 32% of girls said they communicated with their in-school friends more than last year. Some people also said that not having their phones made it easier to focus in class. An anonymous student remarked, “I have found my focus is so much better in class as I have less distractions and no urge to go on my phone.” Of those surveyed, 13% said they focused in classes more than before the phone policy was in place (though 11% said they

actually focused less). It is important to note that phones have never been allowed out in classrooms; however, this rule is certainly observed much more this year. A few students also said the phone rule diminished their anxiety of being photographed or filmed without consent. A Grade 12 Ulpana student stated, “I’m not worried about being accidentally posted on social media ... or filmed in class.” Again, recording people without their explicit permission has always been banned in Ulpana, but the phone rule takes away any possibilities of that happening.

As always, though, there are two sides to every coin. Survey responders also entered their grievances against the cell phone policy. The most common complaint was not being able to take pictures of notes or slides in classes, with 92% of students saying that they used their phones to do so before the policy was put in place. Senior Ruthy Cantkier says, “I can’t take pictures of any notes or slides in class ... I wasn’t at all opposed to the phone policy before it went into place ... but I didn’t realize how vital my phone was for functioning academically.” Clearly, for people having trouble keeping up with classes, banning phones may be detrimental to their academic success. Several students also noted that before this new policy, they used to use their phones to check their schedules (84%) and as a planner or agenda (63%). One freshman remarks, “I don’t always have my schedule on me and I’m late to classes because I don’t know which classes to go to.” Though not having access to an online schedule or planner may seem like a minor inconvenience, these annoyances add up.

Obviously, not having phone access means it’s much harder to reach friends and family outside of school, which is especially important now, when students are anxious about how their loved ones are managing during the terror attacks in Israel. The survey indicates that 78% of students communicate with out-of-school friends less than before and 65% of students said they communicated less with family. A Grade 11 girl noted, “I can never text my dad a quick message to pick me up, and the teacher won’t allow me to leave to go to the office to call my dad.” Interestingly, not having a phone actually limits

communication with in-school friends for some. 19% of survey-takers said that they communicate with in-school friends less than last year. One senior professed, “It’s also hard to reach friends in school to see where they are. RIP to the ‘Wya’ [where you at?] ‘room 9 come join!’”

Many survey-takers noticed that the phone rule disproportionately affects less wealthy students. Students with Apple Watches or similar devices are able to contact their friends and family just fine, as pointed out by a senior who claims, “Some people are way more affected than others based on ... if they have apple watches.” Additionally, those with more cell phone data can afford to frequently leave the school to check their phones without wi-fi. Student Robyn Freiheit observed, “I’d also like to raise the point that this current policy is much less inconvenient if people have data, which is pretty darn expensive.” Certainly, having a rule that particularly impacts less-well-off students is extremely problematic, and steps should be taken to address this.

It seems that most people see both the benefits and the drawbacks of this decision. Although the majority of students do not have major problems with the phone rule, most girls simply believe the phone rule has no real, long-term benefits. Junior Miriam Levine, points out that this policy “does not set you up for life after high school. In the real world, the distraction of the cell phone exists.” Issues like having trouble making friends or having difficulty paying attention in class—both things the phone rule claims will drastically improve—are extremely complex. Proclaiming that simply banning phones will fix these things is, at best, ignorant. Although the student population isn’t suffering from the rule, per se, most are simply irritated by it and some even find it unnecessary.

The phone rule has affected each Ulpana student differently. Some girls enjoy the increased socialisation they now have with their friends, and many agree that this policy makes it easier for them to

¹ Note that this study was only taken by 39 of 151 Ulpana students, and suffers from selection bias (i.e., people passionate about the phone rule were most likely to fill out the survey).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE UNEXPECTED IMPACT OF THE NEW BAS PHONE POLICY

YONI SILVERMAN

On Lag Baomer, the email that everyone had been anticipating arrived, titled “New BAS Phone Policy.” At this point, before even getting the email, everyone knew in some capacity that the school would limit phone use in the upcoming year. But burning questions had remained unanswered until that day: What would the school use as its reasoning? Would it be religiously motivated? For our mental health? To promote social interaction?

Ultimately, the school backed the policy on developing a healthy self and community. What the school could not have predicted at the time the decision was made, however, was that the implications of their reasoning would adopt a drastically new application as the war against Hamas broke out. Suddenly, it was impossible to go to any news site and avoid topics about Israel. Even worse, Hamas terrorists flooded social media with gruesome videos of hostages and other atrocities. Students were encouraged to stay off of social media. Rather than constantly being on our phones and becoming more stressed about every detail of the war, we could focus on our day.

I could end it here, how the phone policy’s reasoning turned out to be more relevant than we thought. But the truth is that it’s very hard for people to detach from their phones. Walk past the front doors of Or Chaim and you’ll generally see a gathering of people on their phones outside of the building. Students I’ve asked generally say the line for the bathrooms has increased, as they turn into private places to use their phones. At lunch, phones are replaced with laptops that have pretty much the same capabilities. However, I cannot lie and say it has been a failure. I’ve found through my own experience and through what friends have told me that it has decreased their phone usage overall, a net positive. It’s nice to walk down the hallway with your head up, and not be checking your phone frequently, resulting in an overall less stressful environment.

Especially in the time we are in now, perhaps it is good for our well-being not to be constantly indulged in media that is designed to make us fearful. That is precisely what Hamas wants, it is a form of psychological warfare. Obviously, you can still check your laptop, and many do. But there is an essential difference between pulling out a phone and a laptop. Phones are designed to pull you in with notifications and suggestions, whereas it takes more effort and will to stay on your laptop. The new phone policy isn’t perfect, and I don’t see a future where it will ever be. If there is a will to be on your phone, there is a way. The phone policy has had an unexpectedly important relevance, but eventually (hopefully very soon) things will get back to normal. ■

Right: Cell phones are now banned from all school programs, including Shabbatons.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

focus in class. At the same time, other students claim that this new ban is impractical, unrealistic, and unfair for less wealthy kids. Perhaps a much more productive approach would be to educate students how to use phones in positive ways. We live in a digital world, and denying this, instead of dealing with it head-on, will not be useful for us in the future. Although social media addiction is a widespread, debilitating problem, we cannot simply solve it by pretending that it doesn’t exist for eight hours a day. Science has shown that a multifaceted CBT-based approach, incorporating constructive dialogue about phone addictions, and one that is intrinsically motivated, is a lot more useful

FRESHIES ARE THRIVING AT ULPANA!

LILY SMOLACK

“I love Ulpana!” “Ulpana is lit!” “RGC class is amazing!”

When it comes to change, finding a sense of comfort can be challenging. However, our freshies this year have settled into Ulpanat Orot seamlessly. I interviewed several new freshie faces and the girls’ contributions were incredible. My pen continuously flew on the paper with their detailed answers. Each of their opinions conveyed a theme of comfort and, of course, love for Ulpana’s breakfast!

The majority of Grade 9 students love the breakfast Ulpana brings to the table. With the fresh bagels along with assorted cereals, who wouldn’t? When asked about one thing that surprised her on the first day of school, Ella Hass responded, “The large breakfast.” Having been a freshman just last year, I completely understand this pleasant surprise.

Next, we focused on the process of settling into the school and the answers were quite meaningful. Rebecca Suissa mentioned that making new friends impacted her so greatly that she quickly felt a sense of familiarity towards Ulpana. As well, Gabby Gordon expressed excitedly that the transition into Ulpana was “so easy”. Yael Silver expressed that the older grades’ friendliness and the school-wide programs have allowed her to settle in without an issue.

Although I did not get the chance to speak to every student in Grade 9, I found that the majority felt settling in was not a concern on their part. However, there is a notable difference between settling into a new environment and transitioning to the next educational benchmark. In the case of our freshmen, shifting from middle school to high school is a significant adjustment. “I thought it would be easier,” one student mentioned. Many also voiced that “transitioning from being the oldest to the youngest was difficult.” However, students did mention that a benefit of being part of high school rather than middle school is that you are no longer obliged to



than a forced phone ban.² Robyn Freiheit suggests, “I think that it would be beneficial to have a time and place at school to check phones ... Or we could just continue sneaking our phones [out], which is fine too.” I am certain that this rule comes from a place of concern—addictions and mental health are real issues that are becoming more and more widespread. However, as Ulpana students have a wide range of opinions about this rule, funnelling this concern into a more moderate approach might be more beneficial. ■

²Hou, Y., Xiong, D., Jiang, T., Song, L., & Wang, Q. (2019). *Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention*. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 13(1), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2019-1-4>

raise your hand before leaving class to use the restroom. Here at Ulpana, the students are given independence and trust, and as Ella Hass mentioned earlier, “[we are] cool and different”. Additionally, Yael Silver notes that “the teachers don’t just teach, they care”, as one of her first impressions of Ulpana. Keep it up, staff!

Of course, changing from a school where you are the oldest to one where everyone is older than you can be a challenge. Nevertheless, Ulpana’s welcoming aura, friendly students, and caring teachers, combined with its sense of independence, unique features, and yummy breakfasts, has made settling in and finding comfort within Ulpana less of a challenge. As a former freshman, these features allowed me to find home within Ulpana. As Grade 9 Elliya Amouyal observed, “We are physically small, though, with our ruach, we appear greater.” ■

REFLECTING ON THE CHAGIM

ELIANA GORDON

**Please note that this article was written prior to the events of October 7, 2023.*

The Chagim make up the wonderful season that begins the Jewish new year. It seems as though there are endless festivities, from Rosh Hashana’s sweet start to the joyous culmination of Simchat Torah. The season is filled with spirituality, celebration and, of course, food! These Chagim represent all aspects of Judaism, from the most serious and holy day to the happiest and most festive. During this time of year, there is a special feeling throughout the Jewish nation of unity and אהבת חיים, and that is something unique to our people.

Rosh Hashana begins the year on a sweet note. Apples, challah, and anything with honey are seen in abundance on every table. One particular highlight of Rosh Hashana is the Shul experience. There is something profoundly moving about joining the entire Kehila in Tefillah, the Shul coming alive with melodies and voices united. It is so special to see people from a diverse group of Jewish backgrounds unite together during this time, regardless of their religious levels and affiliation. This year, because the first day of Rosh Hashanah fell on Shabbat, we only heard the shofar on the second day of Chag. However, this served as a more intense spiritual wake-up call to work on ourselves and become the best we can be in the upcoming year.

Soon after Rosh Hashanah comes Yom Kippur, an extremely powerful

day. It is a day to reflect on our actions and choices throughout the past year, do Teshuvah, and ask for forgiveness from Hashem. It is a designated time to look deep within ourselves and take stock of our lives, our relationships, and our personal growth. On Rosh Hashana, and in the ten days that follow, we do much Teshuva. On Yom Kippur, we begin with a clean slate, and it is therefore an excellent time to improve ourselves and change our habits.

Finally, Sukkot is one of the most festive holidays in the Jewish calendar, with some of the strangest halachot and minhagim. On Sukkot, we live in huts in our backyards for a week, we hold together and shake three species and a lemon-like fruit each day, and on the last day we bang them on the floor. These are just some of the unique things we do, and while it may seem strange, that is the beauty of it. Eating in the Sukkah under the stars with family and friends feels like something out of a movie. It is a special time where memories are made, and even the simplest moments are really nice and memorable.

The Chagim remind us that life is a mix of seriousness and excitement, fasting and feasting, reflection and celebration. They are a beautiful way to start the year, and teach us the importance of tradition, family, and community. This time of year truly makes me proud to be a Jew. לשנה הבאה בירושלים. ■

THE RIPPLE EFFECTS OF TRUDEAU’S ALLEGATIONS AGAINST INDIA

NOAH BERGER

On September 18th, 2023, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood up in the House of Commons and made a chilling allegation. He announced that Canada had credible intelligence that agents from the Indian government were involved in the murder of the prominent Sikh activist, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Since then, the Prime Minister has refused to disclose the “credible” evidence he received pointing to Indian involvement in the murder. Pierre Pollievre, the leader of the opposition, has not disputed these claims but is demanding that the Prime Minister unlock this information to the Canadian public. Ever since the Prime Minister unleashed these allegations, bilateral relations between Canada and India have rapidly deteriorated. Both countries have expelled several diplomats, and India has halted several services in Canada including the issuing of visas.

I believe that Prime Minister Trudeau has been incorrect in his handling of the situation. Instead of publicly declaring an allegation without showing any evidence, our Prime Minister has misled the Canadian public into believing a narrative that lacks any proof. I am not discounting these allegations, but what I am arguing is that when these heavy allegations are made, they must be complemented with astounding evidence. As well, Trudeau should have had private discussions with Indian officials before making this matter a public affair. They could have discussed both of their perspectives and possibly reached a common understanding of the situation.

As a result of the Prime Minister’s flawed handling of this situation, possible economic, social

and political ramifications loom. India was Canada’s 10th largest trade partner in recent years and has been rapidly increasing as India continues to explode on the world stage. If the tensions between these two countries persist, Canada could be losing out on one of their top trading partners and arguably the fastest-growing economy in the world. In addition, Canada is home to the largest per-capita diaspora of Indians in the world. Canada is home to both Sikhs and Hindus, two groups who share significant tension in India. If the Prime Minister continues to stoke these allegations, tensions between the different Indian-Canadian communities could rise. Lastly, we need to remember that on a global scale, India is a relatively democratic and stable country compared to its counterparts. If Canada, a democratic country, continues to push these fierce allegations against India, another democratic country, Canada could be seen as an outlier in the free world and become isolated from the democracies of the world.

In short, our Prime Minister must tread very carefully when making shattering allegations against another country. He should have tried to resolve this dispute through diplomatic discussions, rather than alerting the Canadian public. As a result of the Prime Minister jumping to conclusions, something he is very prone to, the potential for strong ramifications loom for Canada. We could easily lose one of our top trade partners, create tensions in the Indo-Canadian community or become isolated on the global stage due to fierce allegations towards another democracy. ■

NEW TEAM, NEW SEASON FOR OR CHAIM'S KNIGHTS

BINYAMIN ZAHAVI

This past month, Or Chaim held multiple Junior Varsity (JV) tryouts in the school gym. They were organized by the new JV coach, Mr. Josh Stolovitsky, to add new talent to the team for the upcoming 2023-24 season.

The entire process took three tryouts, each one focusing on a certain aspect of basketball, and each one with a different number of participants: The first tryout had around 32 participants and centred on skills and athleticism; the second one had around 28 athletes and focused on gameplay; and the third had 16 players and concentrated on game scenarios.

Throughout the season, the players who made the team will play 8-12 regular games, and then (we hope) play in the playoffs. Mr. Skarrot, the head of health and physical education at Bnei Akiva Schools, said in an interview that there may be opportunities for other games on top of the season: He usually looks for one-day tournaments here in Toronto, and if there is enough interest, the team can play in a tournament in Montreal in February.

Playing for the Knights is one of the sought-after extra-curricular opportunities Or Chaim offers. With such scarce spots, students try their hardest at tryouts. Zev Karakowsky, a student in Grade 9 who made the team, described how he prepared for the tryouts: he “spent a good amount of time getting ready for the tryouts, practising basics like shooting and dribbling pretty much every day.” After being asked how he was feeling during the tryouts, he responded, “Yeah, I felt some nerves, but I pushed through that. I just tried to keep my head in the game and show what I could bring to the team.” He commented that being accepted to the team “was more

than just making the team, it was a confirmation that dedication and perseverance could turn goals into reality.”

Yonatan Sarna, a JV veteran, described how he was feeling before the tryouts: “To be honest, before the tryout I got a bit nervous, but that is a pretty normal feeling before a tryout or game. Before games or practices I usually focus on my breathing or listen to music so I can calm down and do the best I can.”

Sydney Feintuch expressed his emotions after making the team: “At the same time as me being excited for myself, I also had feelings for others.” He said how happy he was to see Or Chaim taking in ninth graders but felt bad for those who didn’t make it. “And it just makes me appreciate the opportunity that I have even more.”

The junior team this year is full of skilled players, who work hard and give one hundred percent to the game. According to Mr. Skarrot. “We have a strong team that represents the school very well, works very hard, and has nice teamwork and strong sportsmanship, as we have always. Skill-wise, we’ll be competitive amongst the other teams in the league.”

Sarna shared these motivational words: “Everyone on the team to some extent worked very hard over the summer to make the team, but the job is only starting now. The work begins now. As a team, we want to be better, and that takes a lot of effort from everyone ... we’ll put up a fight and by the end of the season I want us to be champions!”

The team this year is strong and competitive, with high hopes and great expectations. What is left to see is if they will follow through and achieve their goals, ultimately becoming champions and making Or Chaim proud. ■

CROSS COUNTRY TRAINING

SHMUEL FISCH

With its rough trails and long-distance challenges, cross-country running offers an experience beyond racing. The endurance sport offers many benefits for competitors. For me, cross-country running has positively impacted my mental health. The peaceful surroundings and therapeutic benefits of nature can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, putting the mind at ease. As well, the sport helps create friendships. The friendship that naturally comes from shared struggles on the trails often leads to bonds that withstand the test of time.

According to a study by the Mental Health Foundation, nature improves mental health.¹ The majority of cross-country running takes place in nature. Earlier this year the team had a practice run through Earl Bales Park, which was really relaxing more so than anything else. Running through the woods improved my mood. Running through trees, with no cars to make noise, and hearing the birds chirped really was peaceful. Another study from Human Kinetics says that running can and will improve your health physically and mentally.² After a nice run, you feel good about yourself. You feel accomplished. You feel satisfied from the effort exerted!

Cross-country can develop close relationships built off the shared struggle we runners experience. When one of us falls, the other one is there to pick him up. We understand each other and motivate each other to keep going. The Psychological scientist and lead researcher Brock Bastian of the

University of New South Wales in Australia says: “Our findings show that pain is a particularly powerful ingredient in producing bonding and cooperation between those who share painful experiences ... The findings shed light on why camaraderie may develop between soldiers or others who share difficult and painful experiences.”³ That is what makes the sport so good, the shared creating close relationships. I remember when I did my sporting life 10 km with my friend Menachem. We did a practice run together and it was really tough because it was after a long day after school. But we connected because we understood each other’s struggle and we pushed each other to our physical limits. Truly, through running, our friendship formed and strengthened!

In conclusion, cross-country running is much more than just a sport; it is a journey that has a positive impact on both physical and mental well-being. The comfortable feeling of nature during cross-country runs provides a relaxing getaway from the stresses that you may have. Also, the bonds made through the shared challenges and hardships on the trails create friendships that are long-lasting. These connections are from the understanding of each other’s struggles and the support stems from those experiences. It is a sport that not only motivates individuals to push their limits but also to build lasting relationships, making it a remarkable and rewarding work. ■

¹ *Nature: How connecting with nature benefits our mental health.* Mental Health Foundation. (n.d.). <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/nature-how-connecting-nature-benefits-our-mental-health#:~:text=Nature%20can%20generate%20many%20positive,particularly%20lower%20depression%20and%20anxiety>.

² *Cross country racing develops your body physically and mentally.* Human Kinetics. (n.d.). <https://us.humankinetics.com/blogs/excerpt/cross-country-racing-develops-your-body-physically-and-mentally>

³ *Shared pain brings people together.* Association for Psychological Science - APS. (2014, September 9). <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/releases/shared-pain-brings-people-together.html>