A Word About
the Internet

You've heard about the power of the Internet.

In fact, you are currently holding an example in your hands (or, perhaps, on your lap). The considerable research required for the creation of this entire book was done without getting up out of my chair. The knowledge bases of a number of national and state governments; practical (and usually free) advice from people in a position to really know; and places to search for, and eventually purchase (and order mailed to my home) further resources, all literally lay at my fingertips.

This project, from that perspective, was an awe-inspiring experience. Where I live, it's sometimes very cold and other times very hot. Like most places on earth, it's often wet, too. I'm the type who prefers to admire the wonders of nature from a good, safe distance. From indoors, in fact. Frankly, getting so much done without going outside is a dream come true.

The Internet can be a most useful tool indeed.

But you've also heard about the Internet's terrible risks.

If you haven't been there yourself, you can take my word for it that every description of the traps and dangers that have come to your attention are probably only the small tip of the iceberg. At every

moment, an Internet user is only a few clicks away from suffering serious spiritual — and even social — damage.

Go ahead, call me old-fashioned and narrow-minded (it sure beats some of the other names people have used), but I don't feel I'm exaggerating in the least. Sitting down before an Internet-connected computer should leave an intelligent ben Torah shaking with dread over what could happen. You will need every ounce of the *yiras shomayim* you've accumulated over your life to protect yourself.

It's necessary. It's terrible. Both are true. Neither can be ignored.

More and more jobs and small businesses absolutely require access to the Internet. Acquiring accreditation and finding a job will usually demand some time on-line. That's the way it is now and it certainly doesn't look like things will be changing direction any time soon. So you're very likely to need to be on the net at least sometimes. Here are some common and intelligent strategies to limit your exposure to risk (though none is close to foolproof):

- If possible, keep Internet-connected computers out of your home and away from your family.
- If that's not possible, set up the connected computer in a very public part of the house where people can be constantly expected to walk past, looking over the user's shoulder to make sure the screen is only showing appropriate material.
- If that's not possible, keep it in a room to which children have no unsupervised access.
- Use software protection (for details, see the very important web site www.guardyoureyes.org) which can, if properly installed, restrict a user's access to many of the most problematic parts of the Internet. Don't rely on such safeguards for unobserved children's use, however, as most young teenagers will have at least one friend who can quickly hack through

such software undetected.

- Turn off the download/view graphics feature of your web browser (if you can get by without it...many otherwise useful web pages will not load properly if you do this). Similarly, disable "pop-up windows" in your browser (Firefox, the free browser from Mozilla, does this by default) and graphic-viewing capabilities in your email software.
- Use browser add-ons like Adblock Plus or Flashblock (both for Firefox) to block many unwanted elements of the web sites you visit.
- Be critically honest with yourself: how much time on-line do you really need? If this half hour of browsing isn't necessary, go away and do something else.

הצלחה רבה!