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# MIDRESHET TEHILLAH

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## NEVE YERUSHALAYIM

Dear Students,

When you chose Midreshet Tehillah as your seminary, you elected to join a community of young women strongly committed to genuine, integrated, and sustainable growth. This affords you remarkable opportunities for development, but it brings with it responsibilities in terms of maintaining a group environment conducive to everyone achieving her goals.

We, the staff and administration, are challenged to set policies and rules to foster an atmosphere appropriate to achieving those goals. This requires that we set high standards to nurture your past accomplishments and inspire new heights. But it also requires that we give you the space to be yourself. Since both are prerequisites to moving forward in a genuine way our rules and policies are formulated to balance between these two considerations.

### **Music in the Dorm**

Our policy on music in the dorm is a perfect example of trying to strike this balance. Music and why it is such a powerful influence upon us will be a topic of discussion during the year. But we cannot and do not want to legislate what you listen to. On the other hand each person has different tastes and draws the line marking what she will listen to at a different place. To protect both your needs as an individual and those of the people around you we do not make any rules about what you can listen to so long as you are using headphones. On the other hand music played out loud so that others can hear it must fall within the broad rubric of Jewish music.

### **Phones**

In our many years of running Midreshet Tehillah, we can say without exception that the extent of a student's success during the year is directly proportional to her *academic and social* focus in the school. For many students the biggest challenges to maintaining this focus come from the various devices that are now standard equipment for any young adult. In general, those devices are radically altering the nature of social interaction. As regards seminary in particular, they can pull your attention from the school and your fellow students impacting the quality of your seminary experience.

Among these devices the most significant is your phone. Its free access to WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, international texting, internet, video, and gaming etc – places a multitude of escapes and distractions in the palm of your hand. The more your head is in your phone, the more it is



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out of seminary. Your phone, for all the genuine benefits it brings, will also be the single greatest technological challenge to a successful seminary year.

We will have lots of time to discuss the impact of phones on our lives, along with that of other technologies. There will be rules about phones – such as the prohibition against bringing them into the school building. We will go over them once you arrive. But the bottom line is you will have a lot of control over how you use your phone. You should not wait until you get to Israel to start thinking honestly about how you want to handle this device so that it does not get in the way of your growth in the coming year. It is not only an issue of how this effects your own growth. The many things you can do with your phone are often very distracting to the people around you. So before you get to seminary is also a time to think about the responsibilities you take on by joining a community built on the mutual goal of growth.

If you expect to be recording shiurim you will need a dedicated recording device that is separate from your phone since we keep the phones out of the school building. If you want to share the recordings you can download them into the school computers and send them on.

### **Videos**

A primary reason for coming to Eretz Yisrael is to get out of old ways of thinking and open yourself to new ways of looking at the world. Since nothing pulls one out of Torah and back into the norms and values of the larger society more powerfully than a movie or television show we encourage students to minimize watching video at least during their year in seminary.

We want the dorm to be a safe zone where students who want to avoid video feel comfortable. Also, a central component of the seminary experience comes through the social integration of the dorm. The cliques and tensions that form around watching programs compromise that integration.

To keep the dorm free of communal viewing of video and its effects we have found that we need to remove the temptation created by the availability of equipment that displays video on a large enough screen to make it a group experience. This requires that we prohibit students from bringing laptops or tablets to campus. If you feel you need access to your own computer or tablet while in Israel you will need to store and use it off campus. We have a computer gemach for students who have projects to work on or who wish to take notes in class. We also have computers in the school building with internet access during non-class hours. This, together with the laptop gemach should minimize the inconvenience caused by this rule. If anyone in your family has an old laptop that they would like to donate to the gemach please let me know as our gemach suffers some attrition every year.



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If you expect to be taking a lot of pictures we recommend bringing a large memory usb or portable hard drive to store your files. You will be able to use our computers to transfer material from your phone or camera to your storage medium.

### **Dress Code**

As well as in the use of technology, another area where membership in our group brings with it important responsibilities is that of dress. We mentioned the dress code in a previous correspondence but I would like to reiterate it to be sure that it is clear. First, a word about our dress code.

Midreshet Tehillah students come from communities with a variety of standards on the issue of dress. Since we want all our students to feel comfortable in the school we require certain conduct which may be different from what you are used to. By requiring these standards we are not imposing a specific halachic interpretation of tzniut. Rather, we are defining the dress code of Midreshet Tehillah. It is important that you understand that by attending Midreshet Tehillah, you are accepting an obligation to abide by this dress code during the school year just as you are accepting an obligation to abide by all the other rules.

Our dress code put simply is: elbows, neckline, and knees must be covered, along with everything in between, including the waist, and no slits. This is true at all times, whether walking, sitting, or raising you hand. Clothing should not be tight or overly clingy. Shoes should be closed-toe. Since, necessarily, while you are attending the school you will be representing it, the dress code applies both in school and out for the duration of the academic year. For a number of the students attending Midreshet Tehillah this dress code goes beyond their accustomed practice and that of their home communities. But as long as we are all clear on why we have set this particular standard no one needs to feel judged by it or out of place.

If you have any questions on anything discussed in this letter – or anything else, for that matter – feel free to contact us. We are very excited about the group of students coming and we look forward to spending a wonderful and meaningful year together.

Rabbi Jeremy Kagan