

Consultation of virtual rabbis on the rise

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More and more ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews are consulting "virtual rabbis" via the Internet, a study sponsored by an Internet and Judaism conference found.

The survey found that 25 percent of respondents regularly consulted a "virtual rabbi," 7 percent checked Internet forums for answers to religious questions, and these numbers are on the rise. Traditional methods were still more widely used, however, with 33 percent consulting the community rabbi and 35 percent researching for answers in books, the Hebrew news site Ynet reported.

Another statistic on the rise was the number of rabbis who surfed the Internet at home. According to the survey, conducted by the First Conference on the Subject of Judaism, Society and the Internet, 74 percent of ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) rabbis had home computers, while a whopping 84 percent of national religious rabbis did, the site said.

The conference dealt with the question faced by traditionally religious people all over the world: Does the Internet undercut the basic values of the faith, or does it help religious communities move one step ahead? The results of conference surveys were also posted on the conference Web site, "Skullcap."

Another survey of 1,000 religious Web surfers presented at the conference found that 88 percent do not use content filters to shield themselves from undesirable material, the news site said. Of those who do, 9.5 percent filter every family member's surfing, and only 2.5

percent use the filters just for their children.

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