

Back To Stone?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Got a Kindle, a Nook, an iPad? Will the new technology ruin reading, or concentration, or devastate literacy and turn the young into illiterates? The argument is not new.

In Hugo's "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," the university's official bookseller, Maitre Andry Musnier, says, "I tell you Monsieur, it's the end of the world. The student's behavior has never been more outrageous. It is all these damnable modern inventions that are the ruin of everything. Artillery, serpentines, bombards and especially printing, that other plague from Germany. It's the end of manuscripts, the end of books! Printing is killing off the book trade. The end of the world is at hand!"

Things are always getting worse. E.M. Forster said that as he grew old the two things he heard from his contemporaries is that nothing ever changes and the young people today were worse than ever.

Judaism kept the old form of the Torah scroll. But there is a vast trove of Jewish learning on the web. And young people, worse than ever and better than before, will continue to learn in new, different and unprecedented ways. Doubtless our ancient ancestors mourned the obsolescence of stone carving; no matter the vehicle, words in any form will continue to, well, kindle young minds.