

# Bytes & PCs

## Don't Leave Shul Without It

By Yitzchok Adlerstein

**M**y first computer column for *Jewish Action* whimsically recalled the *shul* where people *davened* to a computer. OK, they really didn't. The PC was part of a library of Torah material in a forward-looking *kollelin* Melbourne. They just happened to park it right next to the *Aron Kodesh*, but it didn't really figure in their silent devotion.

That has all changed. Today, I *daven* staring straight at the screen of my Palm PDA (Personal Digital Assistant), upon which the words of *Maariv* are electronically emblazoned. More of us are becoming dependant on some kind of hand-held computer which combines the former functions of address books, memo pads, and assorted scraps of paper stuffed in our pockets.

The Palm OS (operating system) line is clearly one of the most popular choices, especially for people who can forgo things like downloading music. Thanks to an American *oleh* the Palm user can integrate his general needs with his religious life and multilingual capabilities, and stuff the resultant mix neatly in his shirt pocket.

It was a major decision for Howie Hirsch to give up his day-job in software development and put all his energy into his own creative invention under the **Penticon** banner. But he had spent time learning the Palm OS from the inside out, and was betting that he could

do a better job than others to fill the needs of the observant user. While there are competitors to his products (**Tamar**, a popular Jewish calendar is freeware, and can be downloaded by going to <http://www.pda.tucows.com/cesoft.html> and searching for "Tamar"), they don't have identical features. Penticon's Hebrew memo book, for instance, is truly integrated. With other products, you must exit the standard memo book, look for the Hebrew date in the auxiliary program, and reenter. Penticon's puts everything where it belongs.

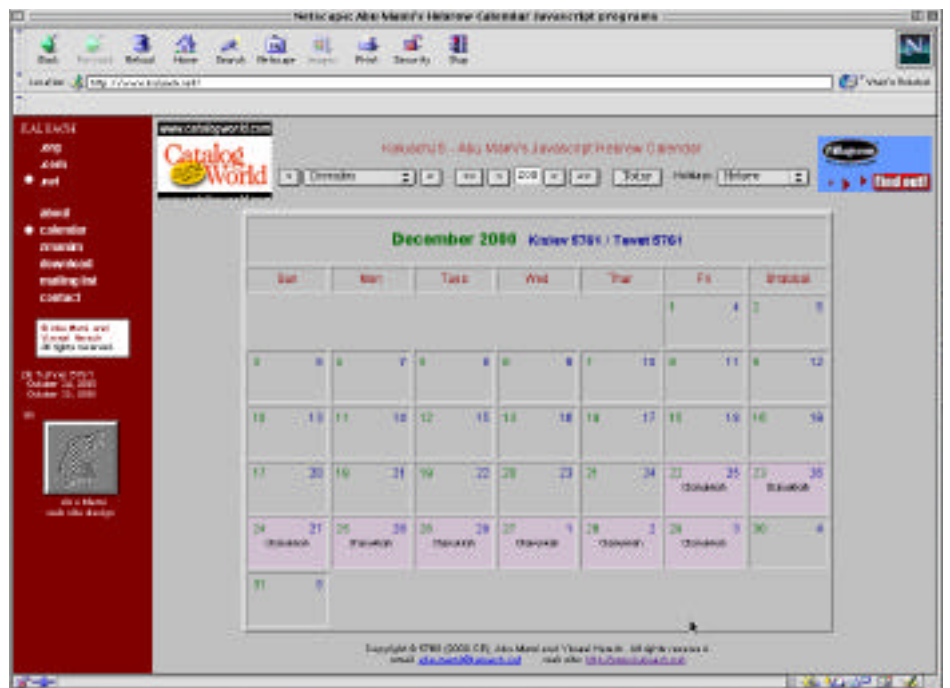
I have been using the Penticon products for weeks, and can't find anything to complain about! Entering Hebrew is very intuitive with *HebrewSupport* +(\$65; comes with *Luach*), especially if you are used to the idea of using the special Palm

*Graffiti* alphabet to enter text through "writing" on the screen with a stylus. If you form a Hebrew *ayin* in the writing area, you toggle to Hebrew *Graffiti*. Write a "W," and you revert to English input. Forget how to form one of the letters? Go to Menu/Edit/Graffiti Help, and you will find the familiar cheat sheet, only now in both Hebrew and English versions. If you prefer entering text through the on-screen keyboard, a Hebrew one pops up where the English one usually does, which is exactly where you want it, and another example of the superior integration of Hebrew and English offered by this product. If you only need to read Hebrew without making any entries at all, you can purchase *HebrewLite* at reduced cost (\$40; also includes *Luach*).

Trying my hardest to find a chink in

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the armor, I created mixed Hebrew-English text with both *DavkaWriter* and *Dagesh*, pasting the results to *Palm Desktop* and creating memos for my Palm. I wish all attempts at multilingual cutting and pasting with ordinary PC applications worked as well! After the HotSynch, the memos turned up just fine on the Palm, with the Hebrew letters running in the proper direction. (For *Dagesh* use regular, not “copy visual” setting; for *DavkaWriter*, choose the “copy for Hebrew program” option.)

Download *Luach*, and you will never again question when Shabbat begins in your destination city, or how early you can *daven Shacharit* before catching your plane in Bangkok, or whether it is late enough to *daven Minchah* between appointments in Manhattan. Besides adding a Hebrew calendar to the secular one, *Luach* gives you a completely customizable halachic times generator. While the format is, of course, much more compact than calendar programs for the PC, the author did not skimp on halachic punctiliousness, offering you enough options to satisfy the discerning demands of your local *mora d'a-tra*.

Before Palm, observant users who wished to keep certain religious texts within easy and constant access had to deal with halachic obstacles. It is inappropriate to bring these texts into rest rooms and the like, unless contained within two surrounding wrappers. Carrying around even the smallest print *siddur* or *bentchen*s usually bulky and clumsy. Now, you can just store them electronically in the PDA you carry with you, without any halachic qualms, as long as you don't display them where you shouldn't. Once you have some level of Hebrew support installed, Hirsch offers these selections gratis, along with some other shorter documents like the weekly *Parshah*, *Tehillim*, *Tefilat Haderech* and more.

To use them, though, you will need a document reader. Hirsch suggested *TealDoc*, because it allows you to skip to different points within the document (like different bookmarked points in the *davening*) without scrolling. Forever the skeptic, I decided not to take his word, especially since *TealDoc* takes up more room than some of its competitors. So I trekked off to Zdnet, and read their reviews on document readers for the Palm. A few were highly recommended, but the one whose features matched the need best was – *TealDoc*. *TealDoc*'s shareware, which means that the owner expects you to pay \$16.95 for it if you continue to use it. You can download it at <http://www.tealpoint.com/>.

Once you have Hebrew support and the ability to read documents, you will also want to check out **Pilotyid** (<http://www.pilotyid.com/collection.html>) for an incredible assortment of programs and documents of interest to the observant user. Purchase information and downloading instructions for all the Penticon products can all be found at Hirsch's very attractive and very handy web-

site, [www.penticon.com](http://www.penticon.com). There is a 30-day free trial period, so you have nothing to lose. He is betting (and I will too!) that if you are a serious Palm user, you will not last long without these products.

## KALUACH

The tribute plaque in the *shul* in Ginot Shomron may be the only one in the world that acknowledges a URL, rather than a human donor. The rest of us might very well thank the man behind that URL for giving us the niftiest full-featured Jewish calendar around.

PDA's like the Palm are great for easy transportation, but they don't match the power of the PC, and certainly not the elegance of the full-screen display. For the moments in life that we remain stationary, *Kaluach* is the sliced white bread of calendar programs. Its attractiveness leaps beyond anything else out there.

*Kaluach's* look is clean, uncluttered, and bright. Yisrael Hersh, an *oleh* from Pittsburgh and Silver Spring, was so determined to accomplish this, he designed his own fonts to fit neatly into the format. You can change almost everything about the look, and the most important changes – year, month, and day – are made easily and intuitively with buttons a-plenty. Reminders about birthdays, anniversaries, and other important events are easily added.

The first step in using *Kaluach* (or any halachic calendar) is setting up location information. You can either pick from a large list of presets, or supply longitude, latitude and offset from Greenwich for any location on the globe. (The first two are available at <http://www.indo.com/distance>). You then must make some decisions about how the calendar will calculate various halachic options. *Kaluach* can do this pretty quickly and simply, but if you are the obsessive type who always explores all the features available in a new program, you will probably get *Olam Habah* for the effort! That's because in order to really understand all

the options, you will need to acquaint yourself with enough calendar *halachah* to make you a *talmid chacham*.

For example, you can “define” night-fall as a certain number of minutes after sunset, or specify degrees below the horizon. Surprisingly, little *Luach* offers more flexibility than big *Kaluach*! The former allows you to plug in any values you want, while the latter forces you to choose from the options that the author thought were the most common, a decision that certainly makes sense for most readers. Help files provide enough background to the different halachic choices to enable you to further research your choices. In my case, though, the sun reaching 7.9 degrees below the horizon is the figure I generally use for the end of Shabbat. It is a few minutes earlier than the very defensible figure of 8.5 degrees offered by *Kaluach* as one of the options. It was a cinch to switch it in *Luach*.

Hersh was especially kind to the rest of us he left behind in *galut*. Unlike other programs, *Kaluach* will retain your preferences for two cities at the same time – one in Israel, and one in the Diaspora. You can switch with the click of a mouse between your two “homes” – the one in Israel, and the other one, which is especially convenient when making international travel plans.

The program has met with huge success, as word has gotten around. A while back, Hersh was contacted by a rabbinical figure in Kazakhstan, imploring him to add 25 more locations within his country, to make it easier for people in his far-flung *tzibbur* to get accurate calendar information.

One of the attractions has certainly been the price. It's not available in stores, but it's not exactly freeware either. When you download *Kaluach* from its site (<http://www.kaluach.org>), you learn that Hersh asks each user to make a voluntary contribution to his *shul*, Beit Knesset Heichal Rafael. Hence the tribute plaque. Hersh hopes that people will like his work enough to make their contributions

rich – and timely!

## NOTED IN PASSING: WINDOWS UPDATE

The Big Question concerning Microsoft has nothing to do with the Federal government's threatened breakup of its monopoly. The Torah consumer waits with baited breath to find out whether Windows' new multilingual capacity will coordinate with the latest versions of Word to produce an instant, full-featured Hebrew-English word processor. There is finally a definitive answer, in the form of good news, bad news, and good news again.

The good news, as reported in a previous column, is that Windows 2000 will do it. The bad news is that most of us will not be upgrading to Win2K, since it is designed primarily for networks, and lacks some of the functionality we are used to in home products. As I discovered in several months of testing, Windows ME, released just this past September, will not produce the desired results with Word 2000. (I will, however, add my voice to those who have reported that Windows ME is considerably less likely to spontaneously crash than early editions, and has several other delightful enhancements.)

The final good news, though, is that Windows ME was only meant to be a way-station on the road to the new Windows platform, which might arrive as early as the beginning of 2002. This new platform, based largely on Windows NT (the real backbone of Windows 2000), will mean the end of the old DOS-based Windows we have known all along. The new Windows will integrate the much more rugged stability of NT with the features that tickle the fancy of the home user who devours games and multimedia. This new Windows will in fact be able to team up with Office to give you true multilingual word processing in many languages.

In the meantime, get comfortable with one of the excellent Hebrew-English word processors we have reviewed in the past. It looks like you are going to need them for a while. 