



The other day I was trying to make a donation to my favorite charity and I encountered this obstacle- have you also been stumped by one of these puzzles? In the image on the left: are those zeroes, or are those O's? If there's a sliver of a traffic light, in the photo on the right, should we still click on the square, or is it not enough to count? "Yes, I am not a robot. YES, I am SURE I am not a robot!"

Tests like these are so frustrating. They're the bane of my existence. It's no longer easy to prove that we aren't robots. The proliferation and democratization of AI, or artificial intelligence, and resources like OpenAI, are becoming increasingly relied upon, and in the process, I fear we are losing

ourselves, and that our standards for how we connect with one another are declining.

AI is a set of technologies that allow computers to perform tasks that mimic human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and problem solving that utilizes computer science, math, and cognitive science. It analyzes data and makes predictions or decisions based on patterns, and it can also learn from its mistakes to improve accuracy. Even though it was initially created to make our lives easier, the technology is developing so rapidly and becoming so widely used that it has me wondering about whether there should be limits to what we create in order to limit the impact that it has on our ability to relate to each other. A doctor shared with me recently that since insurance companies have started using AI to review claims, most are denied. Leaving her office to resubmit and spend hours fighting with algorithms.

Since the time of our creation, we have wrestled with desire, temptation and the pursuit of knowledge so much so that we even ate from a forbidden Tree of Knowledge.

During our amida tomorrow morning, our liturgy contains the verse:

"היום הרת עולם"

*Today the world is born anew.* The Rabbinic view of Rosh Hashanah is that it's the anniversary of creation and we celebrate the New Year at this time because the ancient rabbis believed that creation was finally complete once Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, on the 1st of Tishrei, or Rosh Hashanah (Rabbi Eliezar, Rav Gedalia Schorr and Saadia Gaon). So humanity can remain relevant, we humans, ought to create a Torah for what some deem to be the greatest creation since the birth of the printing press, AI. Just as God eventually gave Torah to humans, God's greatest creation, we need to create an ethics code for one of our most significant creations, AI, and place limits on it, so we don't lose sight of what it means to be human in our pursuit of knowledge and efficiency.

Some congregations chant from the Torah portion about creation on Rosh Hashanah which includes the incident of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. I think the issue of desire, temptation and eating from the Tree of Knowledge is quite relevant. In the story, Eve, is tempted by the serpent to eat from the tree. It explains to her that she won't die, but her eyes "will be opened", and she and Adam will be like "divine beings who know good and bad."

To "be like a divine being," to play God, to know good from bad- is it so bad? Eve ends up eating from the tree, offering some to Adam, and he eats too. But then their eyes were opened, and they could see that they were naked, so they hid when they heard God in the garden. When God asks why they are hiding, and how they know they're naked, God can tell what they've done.

What makes us knowledgeable humans isn't just our ability to discern right from wrong, and good from bad, but it's also the existence of our moral compass and conscience and our ability to grow and change after doing t'shuvah when we make mistakes. To eat from the Tree is to no longer have a Garden-of-Eden lens through which we understand the world. Leaving the Garden may have been seen as a punishment, but in doing so, we were enlightened because we learned morality and right from wrong. And AI doesn't have a conscience like we do; it's like Adam and Eve before they ate from the Tree of Knowledge.

Even though artificial intelligence *can* learn from its mistakes to improve accuracy, it *doesn't* have a moral compass. Unlike humanity, it *can't* self-reflect on Yom Kippur, or recognize where it went wrong in the past year so it

can be better in the year ahead, it doesn't understand nuance or body language, or see someone's face fall when we say the wrong thing. While it has remarkable abilities like detecting breast cancer years before a mammogram might find a tumor, it is like a tempting Tree of Knowledge and we must be cautious of becoming too reliant upon it lest we become like divine beings ourselves, creating substitutes for humanity that will never truly replicate what it is we crave when do teshuvah, attempt to heal relationships, pursue curiosity or seek human connection and empathy.

Like I said, AI isn't all bad! When photography was invented, it was feared that the art of painting would become obsolete. As households gained access to computers, there was worry people would stop reading books! We just need to be responsible in how we use it. This line between benefitting from it and devouring it, is delicate. In fact, when used responsibly, it can do marvelous things like providing doctors guidance during surgery by mapping out a patient's unique anatomy, it can predict patients who are at higher risk of certain diseases and even synagogues and Jewish life can benefit from it! AI can be used to understand which events attract the most members, which sermon topics lead to higher engagement, and what influences the attendance of prayer services [so that] congregation leaders can provide the

community with more of what it is responding positively to (Jewish News, Lior Shabat, Oct 2023)." In terms of ethical ways it can be utilized, those are just the leaves of the tree.

There's a limit though. Checking into services tonight with a machine instead of smiling greeters and ushers would feel cold and impersonal and time and time again, we realize there's no substitute for real human relationships. Perhaps we've been on both sides of this equation: our jobs have us chasing efficiency, but we also realize how much we **just** want a human to talk to when trying to resolve an issue, or doing something as simple as refilling a prescription. Rabbi Mark Glickman said, "What terrifies us most about AI is the notion of non-humans entering realms of activity formerly reserved for humans. One antidote to its dangers, then, would be for humans to strive ever more valiantly to show our humanity whenever we can." Creating artificial intelligence has us toeing a very fine line of "becoming like divine beings" and playing God, and it's on us to develop standards that remind us of what Rabbi Yonah teaches in Pirke Avot: "strive to be human in a place where there is no human."

In his **wildest** imagination, he would've never thought his words of wisdom would be used to describe what it means to show our humanity in a world full of automation- he was simply talking about modeling what it means to live with a warm heart when people can be cold hearted. But on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we focus intently on how to be better in the year ahead, and tonight, we can start by reminding ourselves what it means to be human. Part of which is the acceptance that even though we make mistakes and are not perfect, the beauty of being alive is the resilience that reminds us to get up even after we've fallen, and the grace we must have for others when they do the same.

While we must strive to be human in a place where it is difficult to be human, it's becoming increasingly challenging to discern who is human and who is not. It's not only because robots are becoming more like us, but because it's so easy for us to become like robots and yield to empty conversations when we crave depth, or not be present when the people we care about need a heart, and not just a shoulder to lean on.

There's a Discover commercial featuring the actress, Jennifer Coolidge. In it, she calls their 1-800 number and when the representative comes on the

line, she exclaims, "wow! You robots are sounding more and more human every day!" to which the representative responds, "oh! I am human." Jennifer continues, thinking she's talking to a robot who is pretending to be human, "wow- you're so believable." They get into a back and forth trying to prove they're **not** robots even though they're **actually** humans. And the commercial ends with Jennifer wrestling with a deep philosophical dilemma, "how would I prove I'm *not* a robot?"

It's messy being human- we're irrational, emotional, and fallible. I think our motivation to create automated systems is rooted in the ways we humans make our world complicated through our mistakes, impulses, temptations and desires. However, it might be easier for us to prove that we are *actually* human if we recognize that the positive components of the human genome outweigh the negative ones that so easily take front and center, especially when we make mistakes.

In her March 2023 Presidential address to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rabbi Erica Asch talks about the use of AI for rabbis and explains that if "humans cannot distinguish between a chat bot and a person, it's not because the bots or the robots are brilliant, it's because we've



elevated AI by lowering our standards for ourselves.” She implored her listeners to strive for deeper, more meaningful conversation because too often, the way we interact with one another “mirrors what could be done by a chatbot—oneg chit chat, passive listening, and returning the conversation, over and over again, to what we want to discuss.”

Knowing how to listen is part of being human, and part of being human is experiencing the transformational moments Adam and Eve experienced **all** on the very day they were created. Birth, formation, rebellion, judgment, repentance, and redemption. Rabbi Mark Greenspan explains that “like the first human beings, we are born, we develop, we rebel, we obey, we are judged, **and**, we are forgiven. Each day is an opportunity to create a new universe for ourselves and for others (104).” If God gave humans Torah as an ethics code, then, now that we have created AI, it’s our responsibility to create an ethics code for it. And when we do, perhaps it will remind us of what we *are* and what we are *not*, and shed light on the constellation of emotions that exist within each of us, bringing more definition to the amorphous universe of what it means to be human so that we can be active listeners and have more empathy for others, when they experience the level of transformation that the first humans also experienced on this very day.

Eating from the Tree of Knowledge is tempting and just because the mistake was already made in the Garden of Eden, doesn't mean we can't put pieces in place to prevent us from consuming another tempting tree. One piece of that ought to be the understanding that **we are better than algorithms**. We crave human connection, even with strangers, because we know that a beating heart that has also experienced rebelliousness, judgment and forgiveness is at the other end of the line, and no automated system, no matter how efficient it may be, will ever give us what we need when what we desire is human connection.

AI can be an amazing tool, but we run the risk of cheating ourselves, or lowering ourselves, when we rely on it too much. We were banished from the garden after we took from the Tree of Knowledge, but today, as we stand on the precipice of a New Year, we know that there should be limits on even the greatest of technologies so that it's not only possible to discern who is human and who is not, but so that our humanity may shine that much more brightly *because* of how multivalent it is. It is ***because*** we are flawed, imperfect, argumentative, loving, transformative, and are going to leave here ***still*** wondering if the test at the beginning had zeroes or O's, that we are the *best*

partners for each other as we take on this next year. L'chaim- to life, to knowledge, to creation, and to humanity.

L'shana tova, g'mar chatimah tova.