



Bet Horaah בית הוראה Shaarei Ezra שערי עזרא

Parshat Nitzavim Vayelech

Zmanim for New York:

Candle Lighting: 6:58pm

Shabbat ends: 7:57pm

R"T 8:28pm

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THE LAST STRONGHOLD: SACRED PROFESSIONS RESISTANT TO AI

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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The rapid and ongoing integration of AI (Artificial Intelligence) across industries has raised the possibility of a future where AI could potentially replace a substantial portion of jobs. A report by Goldman Sachs suggests that AI has the potential to replace the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs. This finding, highlighted by the Goldman Sachs report, underscores the magnitude of potential job displacement that AI could bring about.

To make it very clear, this transformation is not projected to anticipate in the distant future such as 20 or 30 years from now; rather, it is expected to transpire in just a few short years,

as global powers compete in a race to achieve a breakthrough in intelligence that will exert dominance on a worldwide scale.

Another crucial point to emphasize is that this is not mere speculation; it is a certainty that AI will soon replace a significant number of jobs.

The impact of AI on work tasks is also a significant consideration. According to the Goldman Sachs report, AI could replace up to a quarter of work tasks in the US and Europe, highlighting the breadth of sectors that could be influenced by automation.

Consider the music industry as an example: AI has the potential to make a substantial impact by automating various tasks, potentially reducing the reliance on manual labor. Here's an illustration:

AI-powered algorithms and machine learning models can analyze vast amounts of music data, including popular songs and trends. AI can generate original music compositions, melodies, and lyrics based on this analysis. This can reduce the need for human composers and lyricists in creating music, especially for background music, jingles, or repetitive commercial tunes.

AI can also personalize music composition for individual users or specific demographics, further reducing the requirement for human composers to create customized music.

Additionally, AI-driven tools can automatically gen-

erate sheet music or transcriptions from audio recordings, simplifying the work of music composers.

The Influence of AI on the Jewish Workforce

Interestingly, perhaps one of the few work fields worldwide that remains entirely impervious to automation is the domain of Jewish religious professions. Consider, for instance, the intricate tasks like inscribing sacred texts such as Sefer Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzot. These items must be meticulously written by a Jewish sofer and cannot be substituted by any other means. Another example pertains to the intricate processes involved in slaughtering

animals, which may only be performed by a shochet possessing the requisite qualifications and intention.

Similarly, the same applies to the preparation of Tzitzit, which necessitates the intention to fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzit. Furthermore, the craft of making Matza (shmura) for Pesach serves as another prominent example that must be carried out by a Jew with very specific thoughts in mind during the preparation process. The absence of these intentions and thoughts renders them invalid.

There are numerous additional examples, including the blowing of the shofar and the practice of brit milah, among various others.

The resilience of these fields can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, those engaged in these professions must be observant Jews who adhere to Torah law. Secondly, they must infuse their work with intention, particularly the intention required to prepare the mitzvah object "lishma," meaning solely for the purpose of the mitzvah. This level of dedication is a quality that AI lacks. While artificial intelligence may display remarkable intelligence, it doesn't possess the spiritual commitment and intention that are integral to these sacred practices.

Can machines prepare the Mitzvah items?

When machines were first invented, rabbinic authorities (poskim) grappled with their us-



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age in the preparation of mitzvah items, including the ones mentioned earlier. Numerous poskim maintained that machines are not valid for this purpose due to their inability to meet the two conditions we previously discussed; furthermore, they lack the capacity to prepare them "lishma" since this requires intention, which AI lacks. Some poskim, however, argued that it's sufficient for the person to have the necessary intentions before initiating the machine, and when the machine begins preparing the items, it's considered as if it's done "lishma."

The poskim derived this concept from the teachings of the Rosh, who maintained that it is permissible to instruct a gentile to begin a task with the intent of fulfilling a mitzvah (lishma). This perspective contrasts with the opposing view of the Rambam, who asserted that any involvement of a gentile in the work would render the item unfit for a mitzvah.

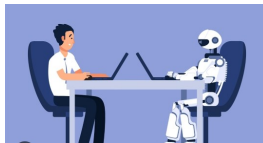
In accordance with this understanding, just as one may direct a gentile to perform an action lishma, similarly, one may also guide a machine's operation by specifying that it should perform its task with the same lishma intent.

However, the Chazon Ish clarifies that this principle applies only when the person performing the task visibly appears to be doing it on behalf of the sender. In typical cases where there is no suspicion of a change of heart, the task is still considered lishma because it consistently appears as if it is being performed for the sender. For example, in the case of writing a get, where the husband is likely to change his mind and reconcile with his wife, it does not appear that the gentile is writing it for the husband's benefit.

Is AI less proficient than machines in the torah aspect?

Understanding the novelty of AI and how it differs from traditional machines is crucial for our discussion.

AI differs from traditional machines in terms of its ability to learn, adapt, and make decisions autonomously. Traditional machines operate based on pre-programmed instructions and repeat those instructions without deviation. They lack the capacity to learn from new data or experiences or to make independent decisions beyond their programmed parameters.



In contrast, AI systems, particularly those powered by machine learning and deep learning algorithms, can analyze data, recognize patterns, and make predictions or decisions based on that data. AI can adapt and improve its performance over time as it encounters new information, allowing it to operate in a more flexible and dynamic manner.

Now, let's apply this perspective to AI:

On one hand, it can be argued that AI systems are tools or extensions created and controlled by humans. When a person employs AI to execute tasks or actions aligned with a mitzvah, they are essentially guiding the AI to continue the task with the original lishma intent. In this sense, AI could be considered an extension of the person's will and intent.

On the other hand, since AI represents a groundbreaking departure from conventional machines, it possesses the ability to learn, adapt, and make decisions autonomously, often resembling human cognitive processes. An opposing viewpoint suggests that AI's autonomous decision-making capacity sets it apart. It may not appear to perform tasks on our behalf in the same manner as traditional machines. According to the teachings of the Chazon Ish, if it doesn't seem like the AI is acting for us, it may be considered invalid. In contrast to a non-Jew preparing on our behalf, where we have no reason to suspect a change from the original intention since they have no motive to do so, AI continually learns and enhances itself. Consequently, one could argue that it doesn't appear as though it's performing our task.

This presents a distinctive challenge when evaluating the validity of AI in the context of mitzvot. Even if someone may argue against the aforementioned assumption and assert that AI is equivalent to machines, there remains at least a level of doubt. Engaging in mitzvot with doubt is generally not permitted. Additionally, there is a disagreement (machloket) regarding the validity of mitzvot performed with machines, and most poskim maintain that they are not considered kosher.

WISDOM IN REVIEWS: CHOFETZ CHAIM'S TIMELESS COUNSEL

As we commemorate the 90th yearzeit (anniversary of passing) of the Chofetz Chaim, it is an opportune moment to reflect on his teachings and consider their relevance in addressing contemporary issues.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, also known as the Chofetz Chaim, was a renowned Jewish sage who lived during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His groundbreaking work on the importance of guarding one's speech cannot be overstated. The Chofetz Chaim introduced the world to the significance of responsible communication and transformed the way people spoke.

However, since the time of the Chofetz Chaim, technology has rapidly advanced, and negative speech has taken on new forms. Today, we often encounter lashon hara, or harmful



speech, primarily on social media platforms.

Writing a Negative Review.

Let's address some common scenarios. For instance, is it permissible to write a negative review about a business or service provider, like a doctor or dentist? Is it permitted to write a negative review about a book you didn't like? Is it acceptable to write a fabricated positive review if the company offers rewards?

Let's begin with the dilemma posed by the first questions. On one hand, writing a negative review can potentially harm the business owner and make them feel bad, which would fall under the restriction of lashon hara. On the other hand, it may serve to inform others and potentially

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save them from having a similar negative experience with the business. So, where do we draw the line?

In his work "Pitchei Teshuva" (Chapter 156), Rabbi Yisrael Isser addressed the prevailing focus on the prohibition of lashon hara. Nevertheless, he deemed it pertinent to shed light on another aspect, one fraught with even greater moral responsibility and more commonly encountered. This pertains to individuals who refrain from revealing their neighbor's transgressions, even in situations of urgent necessity to safeguard an innocent party from harm. Their hesitation stems from the fear of violating the prohibition of lashon hara. For example, it could be someone who becomes privy to another person's secretive plot to harm their neighbor or who covertly prepares a hazard in their neighbor's home or business. In such cases, they withhold crucial information or delay issuing warnings, guided by the belief that it might fall under the category of lashon hara. Rabbi Isser strongly asserted that those who act in this manner incur a more significant transgression than simply bearing this burden, as they violate the prohibition of 'You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.' This principle also extends to financial matters. Whether one observes someone stealing from them, their business partner engaging in embezzlement, their neighbor resorting to deception and fraud in a transaction, or an individual lending money to a known dishonest debtor who will not fulfill their obligations.

To address these questions, we can once again refer to the teachings of the Chofetz Chaim, who meticulously outlined the foundations of these prohibitions. By applying these principles, we can navigate our discussion.

lashon hara letoeelet.

The Chofetz Chaim explains the concept of "lashon hara letoeelet," meaning lashon hara with a positive benefit, which is permitted. Such lashon hara is when our intention is to benefit the person we are speaking about, such as a teacher providing a negative report to parents to help the child improve, or when we aim to protect others from potential harm.

The Chofetz Chaim lays out five conditions that must be met to permit such lashon hara for a positive benefit.

Verifying the situation is bad.

The first condition is that we should assess whether what happened was genuinely a negative occurrence or if it might be a matter of our subjective viewpoint. It's crucial to recognize that not every service falling short of our expectations should automatically be deemed as bad. Many products or services we encounter may still be deemed acceptable, even if they don't fully meet our high standards. In such cases, it is generally not permissible to write a negative review because the intention behind the review is to express personal dissatisfaction rather than to protect others.

Furthermore, writing a review for something you didn't like, such as a book or a meal at a restaurant, is subjective and may not necessarily reflect the opinions of others, as dif-

ferent people have varied tastes. In contrast, when a business is found to be deceiving customers, the question of ethics and reviews becomes more relevant.

Ensuring the review is accurate.

The second condition is to ensure that one accurately describes what happened in their review without any exaggeration.



The correct intention.

Thirdly, it is essential to have the intention of safeguarding others rather than seeking revenge for a negative service or encounter with the business. Often, negative reviews are written out of anger and frustration rather than a genuine desire to

protect others. The Chofetz Chaim emphasizes that engaging in such behavior, without a sincere intention to benefit or protect, is not in line with the permitted use of lashon hara for a benefit.

No other available resolutions.

The fourth condition is to ensure that there is no other reasonable way to resolve and improve the business's conduct. Often, a direct conversation with the manager or addressing the issue in person can lead to understanding and a desire to rectify any wrongdoing. Most people inherently aim to provide good service and understand that satisfied customers lead to more business. Only after we have exhausted other means of protecting potential customers from harm through the business, and it is clear that there is no alternative, should we consider posting a negative review.

Punishment fits the crime.

Finally, the last condition is that our warning to others should not cause the person more harm than merely protecting others from potential harm. In other words, if writing negative reviews could lead to consequences such as a person's children being denied admission to schools or fellow community members ceasing friendly interactions, we should refrain from posting such reviews. While we cannot always predict the full extent of the impact of our words, there are times when we have a strong indication of the potential consequences, and in such cases, we must exercise caution to avoid causing excessive harm.

Positive reviews.

When a business requests positive reviews, it's important to recognize that this can be viewed as cheating, as others depend on your genuine experiences to make informed purchase decisions. This remains true even if the review accurately reflects your personal opinion. This becomes particularly relevant when the business entices positive reviews through incentives like offering complimentary items.

The concern arises because readers may perceive such reviews as biased and without any ulterior motives.

This action also violates the prohibitions of 'הונאה' (deceit) and 'גניבת דעת' (misleading or deceptive behavior).

EMBRACING TESHUVA AND OVERCOMING DOUBTS

In the middle of our parasha (Nitzavim), the Torah outlines a prophetic scenario where the nation will sin, experience the consequences (curses), and then turn to teshuva (repentance). It says (30,1), "When all these things come upon you—the blessing and the curse that I have set before you—then you will take them to heart amidst the various nations to which Hashem has dispersed you, and you will return to Hashem and listen to His voice." The subsequent verses elaborate on the nation's complete repentance and improvement of their ways.



(chapter 33); "Do you truly think I desire the demise of the wicked? Absolutely not! My aspiration is for the wicked to repent and live."

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer (in the book "Kochvei Or," Article III) raises an intriguing observation. He notes a contrast between our contemporary era, where people have a strong belief in the power of teshuva to erase all sins, and the time of the prophet Yechezkel. In Yechezkel's time, even though the people were at a very high spiritual level, they struggled to fully embrace the concept of

teshuva.

Then, (according to Ramban's explanation), the Torah proceeds with verses that emphasize to the people that they should not perceive repentance as something distant or unattainable; instead, it is readily accessible. It says (30,11): "For this commandment which I command you today- it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, for you to say: who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it, so that we can listen to it and perform it? Nor it is across the sea, for you to say: who can cross the other side of the sea for us to take it?"

The question that arises is: Why does the Torah need to make this point and assure them that repentance is within reach when the nation has already repented?

To gain deeper insight into this matter, let's reflect on an episode involving the prophet Yechezkel, as he offered reassuring words to people who had sincerely repented but still harbored doubts regarding Hashem's capacity for forgiveness. He conveyed Hashem's message, stating

Rabbi Blazer explains that the key difference lies in the understanding of the consequences of sin. In his time, people comprehended the severe damage caused by sin and found it challenging to grasp how teshuva could rectify such profound harm. Conversely, in our era, many individuals do not fully grasp the gravity of their transgressions, leading them to perceive teshuva as a simpler solution.

Now, returning to our parasha, the Torah predicts that the nation will indeed repent, primarily driven by their comprehension of the gravity of their sins and the harshness of their punishment. However, a new challenge emerges. Once they grasp the severity of their transgressions, doubt may creep in regarding the efficacy of their repentance. To address this concern, the Torah proceeds to reassure them that teshuva is attainable and effective when done sincerely and wholeheartedly.

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