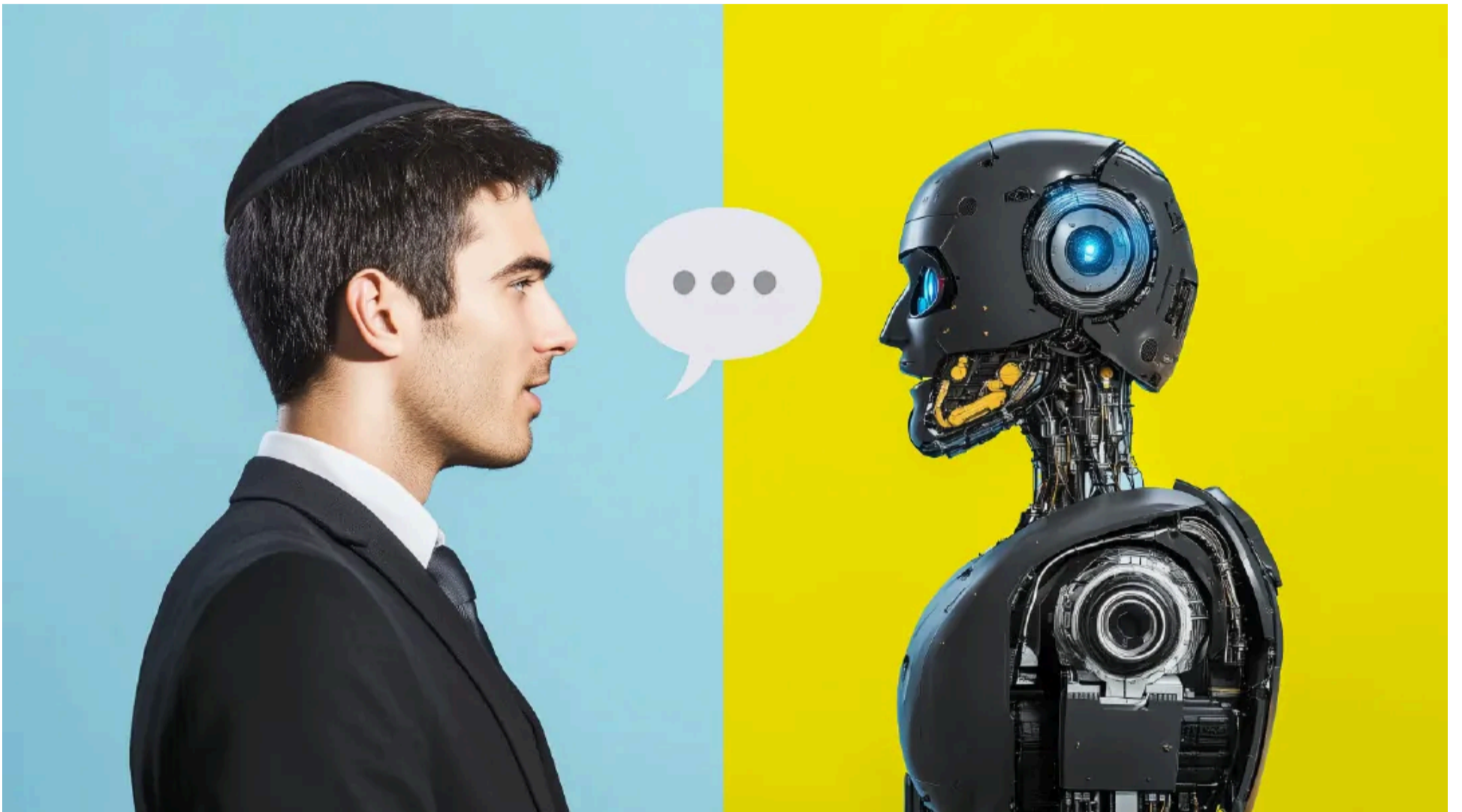


| GUESTLINES |

WILL CHATGPT REPLACE US?

By [Rabbi Aaron Lopiansky](#) | FEBRUARY 18, 2025

Pressing buttons to produce writings will rob a person of the ability to connect to his own soul, and to another *tzelem Elokim*



When computers came out, people marveled at their ability to compute so fast and so flawlessly. But although humans pride themselves on their thinking abilities, no one really felt intimidated by computers. After all, they were just machines.

Even when their capabilities surpassed simple mathematical calculations and they began synthesizing information to provide predictions and assessments, we were still not terribly concerned. We recognized it as nothing more than a higher-level application of the same type of computation.

But then ChatGPT hit. And now suddenly computers are talking to us. And preparing speeches and writing letters that sound frighteningly human-like. The grammar and language usage are excellent, and the phrases and content sound reassuringly familiar and appropriate. Professors must use increasingly sophisticated programs to snag papers produced by ChatGPT. Some schools even mandate that written assignments can only be done in school, in front of staff. Many companies will now routinely reply to their mail using a chat program.

Suddenly, we are not so sure of ourselves. Speech, which is our most defining human feature (see Onkelos [Bereishis 2:7](#), and quoted in many seforim; see Maharsha and Maharal, [Shabbos33a](#)), is being generated by a machine. This seems to undermine our very sense of humanness. It is not only a disconcerting feeling, but also, it tests our core belief in the existence of the *neshamah* and the concept of *tzelem Elokim*.

So let us start by understanding the concept of “speech” from the Torah perspective. At first glance, the concept of speech as the defining quality of man seems puzzling. Don’t we value wisdom and intelligence above speech?

The Maharal (*Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Halashon*) explains that the unique significance of speech is that it is the only human faculty that is “double layered.” When a person speaks, the words are physical realities that define physical items. But we also may hear the person’s soul projecting through the words. A person may describe to us his plight or his joy. The words describe the physical realities of a particular event, but his “speech” in its holistic form conveys to us how the person is experiencing that event.

This ability to express our essence through speech is due to the *tzelem Elokim* (Divine image) in which man was created. Hashem’s “words” created the world; every act of creation starts with the words “and Hashem said.” However, the creation of man has a unique description: “And He infused in man’s nostril a living soul.” The *Zohar* famously emphasizes that the breath emanates from the very essence of the person. Thus, in creating man, Hashem infused

him with some part of His own Divine essence. While the concept of the Divine spark in man is a very deep kabbalistic concept, we do understand from this that the breath inherent in every spoken word carries some of the speaker's essence.

This is true of Hashem, and because we are created in the Divine image, it is true of us in our own world. When we speak, we are engaged in a double-layered activity. We articulate words that are physical descriptions of some matter or other, and to some degree we infuse those words with a soul, a spark of our own essence.

We also see this dynamic at work in the transmission of the Torah on Har Sinai. The first word of the Torah that Hashem uttered was *Anochi*. Chazal teach ([Shabbos105a](#)) that *Anochi* is an acronym for "My Essence did I put into this writing, and I gave it to you." This means that not only do the words of the Torah describe spiritual reality, but also, by hearing and studying the Torah, our souls connect on some level to the Divine Source of the words.

People who possessed that quality were able to infuse the simplest words with extraordinary *neshamah*.

The Kotzker Rebbe's gabbai once came running to him, warning, "Rebbe, Rebbe! Someone has just stolen the Rebbe's coat!"

The Rebbe roared, "What do you mean *stole*? Does it not say *lo signov*?!"

The gabbai writes that for years afterwards, the Rebbe could just not understand how anyone could steal (*HaRebbe Mi'Kotzk*, Yitzchak Alfasi, p. 191).

At the hesped for Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, Rav Wolbe said, "When Rav Chatzkel said Bircas Hamazon, as he said, '*b'chein, b'chesed, uv'rachamim*,' one could feel palpably the *chein*, the *chesed*, and the *rachamim*, with which Hashem feeds a hungry world."

Rav Wolbe himself, in his introduction to *Alei Shur*, describes the profound influence that his rebbi, Rav Yerucham Levovitz, had on him. He describes his rebbi as someone "whose very words infused life into... a mere corpse [*mechayeh meisim b'maamaro*]." He writes that his rebbi's teachings permeate the sefer. He then adds, "If someone feels particularly uplifted or moved by any part of the sefer, it is an echo of Rav Yerucham Levovitz's voice reverberating in those words."

This is the world of speech in its Divine perfection: a sharply defined body, infused with a spirituality that emanates from the core of the human soul.

But we can misuse this ability terribly and destroy it. The Gemara ([Pesachim113b](#), and other places) defines insincere speech as "one [thing] in the mouth, one [thing] in the heart" (*echad b'peh, v'echad b'lev*). This does not necessarily mean that the words are technically false. Rather, that they are not sincere. They do not emanate from the core of the person's essence. They are hollow and void of any element of the soul. Words that are flattery, prattle, mindless, and so forth, are examples of that phenomenon.

A machine has no soul and will never have one. It can recycle lovely phrases from a vast pool of words and writings, but it cannot do more than that.

So if we were to ask ourselves what's wrong with ChatGPT, we would be remiss in going to the *kefirah* and *shmutz* explanations. Far more important is that it robs us of our core humanity, our very *tzelem Elokim*. Expressing ourselves is an exercise in coming to grips with inner feelings on the one hand, and on the other hand connecting to our fellow man "essence to essence."

We need to educate our children day in and day out that they are robbing themselves of their greatest human faculty by resorting to ChatGPT to write their assignments and essays. Just as a child who would be forced to use only mechanical devices to get around would soon experience atrophied muscles and lose his ability to walk, so, too, pressing buttons to produce writings will rob a person of a faculty even more important than walking: The ability to connect to his own soul, and to another *tzelem Elokim*.

Let us return to our original question: "Will Chat GPT will ever replace us?" It all depends: If we express our spiritual essence through speech and writing, there isn't the faintest chance that it could replace us in any way. But if we learn to mindlessly repeat platitudes and pro forma statements, niceties and hollow words, then the machines will certainly replace us in short order.

And they will do a much better job of it.

(Originally featured in *Mishpacha*, Issue 1050)

RELATED CONTENT



| RABBI PAYSACH KROHN |

BROKENNESS LEADS TO BUILDING

In the spiritual world, brokenness can be an asset; it signifies humility, resilience, and a drive for growth



| RABBI DOVID GERNETZ |

SQUARING THE CIRCLE: DO YOU EAT MACHINE MATZAH?

There is hardly another topic in halachic literature of the last centuries for which so much ink has been spilled



| RABBI ARYEH KERZNER |

SHARING IS NOT ALWAYS CARING

This new mindset of openness and sharing, and whether or not Yiddishkeit embraces it

[+ SEE ALL](#)

SIGN UP TO OUR NEWSLETTERS

Email Address

SIGN UP NOW

[ABOUT](#)
[SUBSCRIPTION](#)
[ADVERTISE](#)

[HELP CENTER](#)
[CONTACT](#)
[LOGIN](#)

