

BS"D

Man Hath No Advantage Over Machine?

On the Existentialist Implications of Generative AI

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Who hasn't heard of ChatGPT?

Who heard about it but hasn't used ChatGPT?

Who used it but hasn't been stunned with how creative ChatGPT is? (מי לא נדהם)
(מהיצירתיות שלו)

Anyone who answered "no" has some homework to do after Shabbat. In any case, we all need to realize that we are in the midst of a huge REVOLUTION. A revolution called Generative AI (bina melachutit yotzeret).

Today it is no longer a question if machines can be creative, the only question is when they will take over all of human creativity?! Even this drash that I am giving could have been generated by Generative AI (bina melachutit yotzeret). And soon there will be humanoid robots that will look like me, act like me, speak like me and *deliver* the drasha like me! The question that machines are forcing us to ask, to paraphrase Kohelet, is: What is the advantage of Man over machine?

ומותר האדם מן המכונה אין?

Now, the answer to Kohelet's original question – What is the advantage of Man over **beast** (min **habehma** ain?) – can be found in this week's parasha. In parshat Vayakhel we read of the building of the Mishkan and the command to keep Shabbat. From this juxtaposition (smichut) we learn that all the creative activities used to build the Mishkan – melachot – are the things that we are to refrain from on Shabbat. The message being that just as God created for 6 days and rested on the Shabbat, so too are we to emulate God, to express our creativity for 6 days and then rest on Shabbat. Our uniqueness is in our ability to be creative, like God. RSol explains that it is exactly our creativity that gives expression to our Tzelem Elokim:

“There is no doubt that the term **"image of God"** in the first account refers to **man's** inner charismatic endowment **as a creative being**. Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a **creator**. ... He engages **in creative work**, trying to imitate his Maker (imitatio Dei).” - R. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*

”**אין ספק שהמונח "צלם אלוקים" ... מתייחס ... [ל]אדם ליוצר**: דמותו של האדם לאלוקים
מתבטאת בשאיפתו וביכולתו של האדם להפוך ליוצר. ... הוא עוסק בעבודה יצירתית בניסיון
להדמות ליוצר”

So that is the answer to Kohelet's *original* question – What is the advantage of Man over **beast** (min **habehma ain**)? – we are CREATIVE!

But today our special creative acts, our melechet ***machshevet*** has become melechet ***machshevim*** – we are no longer unique. So again: motar haadam min hamechonah ain?
ומותר האדם מן המכונה אין?

Have we lost our worth? Have we reached the point in evolution as some philosophers claim, that it is time for us to disappear (shenealeim) – like the dinosaurs? The answer is clearly: No. But we need to find what makes us special.

The answer, I suggest, is in the creation story of Adam and Eve. Here we see quite simply that what really sets us apart from animals and machines is our capacity to fall for temptation (lehikana pitui), in short: to sin. In other words, what makes us unique, what sets us apart from animals and machines, is our Yetzer Hara (YH). But is that something to be proud of (lehigaot bo)?!

Well actually, YES! You see, the midrash explains that the YH is not in essence RA, but rather, we make it RA.

מדרש תנחומא (ורשא) פרשת בראשית סימן ז (ז) -

... לא בראו הקב"ה שנקרא "צדיק וישר" את האדם **בצלמו** אלא כדי להיות "צדיק וישר" כמוהו,
ואם תאמר למה ברא יצר הרע, שכתוב בו 'כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו' (בראשית ח)? **אתה אומר**
שהוא רע מי יוכל לעשותו טוב? אמר הקב"ה 'אתה עושה אותו רע'! ... יצר הרע המסור בידך!!

And the midrash goes on to explain that without the YH a person would not get married, have kids, and the world would not exist!

מדרש תהלים (בובר) מזמור ט -

רב בריה דשמואל בשם שמואל אמר וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד (בראשית א לא), זה יצר הרע, וכי יצר הרע נקרא טוב, אלא ללמד **שאלמלא יצר הרע לא היה אדם נושא אשה, ולא הוליד ממנה בנים, ולא היה העולם מתקיים.**

And in fact, the very word YETZER is root of the word YET'ZIRATIUT' – for indeed the YETZER is the root, the very source, of our YET'ZIRATIUT':

מצודת ציון תהלים פרק קג: יז יצרנו - מלשון יצירה ובריאה:

But how are we deal with this dichotomy? How are we to reconcile between this power to be creative on the one hand and the power to do RA on the other? RSol puts these two ideas together (memazeg) and explains that we apply our creativity to do make our Yetzer GOOD. In short, we are to creatively do TESHUVA. But he does NOT simply to do Teshuva (repent) – al chet shehatanu – i.e., in the sense of being sorry, regret (מתחרט) for our past deeds. Teshuva is that of course, but you don;t need RSol to mehadesh you that notion! RSol's HIDUSH is that Teshuva SELF-CREATION (yetzirat ha-ANI). Teshuva is to RETURN (lashuv) to your better self (HaANI Ha Yoter Tov), your BEST self (HaANI Hachi Tov).

Man, through repentance, creates himself, his own "I."

האדם, באמצעות חזרה בתשובה, יוצר את עצמו, את ה"אני" שלו.

So this is done, first and foremost by fixing the RA of your yetzer HaRA. But this is just the beginning, not the end, of creating yourself.

For RSol, creating oneself is what you are to do your whole life. And you need to aspire to your best self, your ideal self. You need to aspire to be a prophet. Now, I have to say that the first time I read this I was stunned; I have always had a lot of aspirations, but I must admit that I never thought of being a prophet! But the reason is because I thought a prophet is a guy who gets divine messages about the future (mesarim al haAtid), and goes about in the streets rebuking people to do teshuva (lehatif musar). While that may be true, that is NOT the point that RSol is making here. Rather he is saying that you need to aspire to be the perfected individual (haadam hamushlam), you need to CREATE YOURSELF, the BEST self possible. And that is the prophet is the model. One cannot get prophecy without being perfected: perfected intellectually (besechel) and perfected morally (bemidot). That is the goal of your creativity, of your self-creation.

The most exalted creation of all is the personality of the prophet. Each man is **obligated** to give new life to his own being by modeling his personality upon the image of the prophet; he must carry through his own **self-creation** until he actualizes the idea of prophecy – until he is worthy of the **divine overflow**.

היצירה הנעלה מכולן היא אישיותו של הנביא. כל אדם מחויב להעניק חיים חדשים להווייה שלו על ידי עיצוב אישיותו על פי דמותו של הנביא; הוא חייב לבצע את היצירה העצמית שלו עד שהוא מגשים את רעיון הנבואה - עד שהוא ראוי להשראה אלוקית. – עמ' 128

And that is the answer to our question: What is the advantage of Man over machine?

ומותר האדם מן המכונה אין?

CREATIVITY! The answer is CREATIVITY. NOT creativity in order to create SOME **THING**, but rather creativity to create SOME **ONE**.

התשובה היא יצירתיות. אבל לא יצירתיות כדי ליצור מה שהוא אלא יצירתיות כדי ליצור מי שהוא.

Shabbat Shalom.