

Artificial Intelligence and Genuine Love

D'var Torah for Yizkor 5784



While we all know how the control of fire by early human beings and the invention of the wheel revolutionized the prehistorical and ancient world, we don't have any testimonies on how those who lived at that time reacted to these milestone achievements.

However, we do have testimonies on how people reacted to the invention of electricity.

*Electricity didn't have an easy beginning. While many people were thrilled with the invention, some people were afraid of electricity and wary of bringing it into their homes. They were afraid to let their children near this strange new power source. Many social critics of the day saw electricity as an end to a simpler, less hectic way of life and poets commented that electric lights were less romantic than gaslights.*¹

And what about the automobile? I am sure you won't be surprised to learn that not everyone was happy with the invention.

*Farmers' groups were adamant: The horse would remain King of the Road. Autos are noisy, unreliable, and dangerous, they claimed. "Automobiles may come and go, may puff in and speed out, but his majesty the horse remains monarch of the road against all competition," the Twin Falls Times wrote in 1915.*²

But, as you know, automobiles didn't puff in and speed out. *Perhaps no invention affected American everyday life in the 20th century more than the automobile.*

¹ History of Electricity, from [Intermediate Energy Infobook 2023-2024](#). By [NEED Project](#)

² Hidden History: Cars will not replace horses, by Mychel Matthews.

*The growth of the automobile industry caused an economic revolution across the United States. Dozens of spin-off industries blossomed...Oil and steel were two well-established industries that received a serious boost by the demand for automobiles. Travelers on the road needed shelter on long trips, so motels began to line the major long-distance routes. Even cuisine was transformed by the automobile. The quintessential American foods — hamburgers, French-fries, milk shakes, and apple pies — were hallmarks of the new roadside diner. The social effects of the automobile were as great. Freedom of choice encouraged many family vacations to places previously impossible. Urban dwellers had the opportunity to rediscover pristine landscapes, just as rural dwellers were able to shop in towns and cities.*³

None of us can envision a life without electricity and the automobile, but we don't have to go back to the 19th century. The truth is that most of us cannot imagine a life without the internet either.

*The internet is still relatively young (it just celebrated its 34th birthday) and yet the connectivity has already produced long-lasting effects. It all started with a cable plugged into the phone line, and now we possess the entire world in the palm of our hand. The internet has drastically changed the areas of research, communication, travel, entertainment, financial services, healthcare, education, relationships, marketing, shopping, religion, and employment, among many others.*⁴

Just close your eyes for a moment and think about what life was like before the web. You can barely remember that time if you were born and grew up before the internet. If you are a digital native, this task is simply impossible.

Millennials - also known as digital customers - will never experience a world with no connectivity and mobile devices. Yes, there are still (small) areas of our planet not wired and cabled but - at least for us living in developed countries - it is hard to imagine a life before Google, Amazon, Apple or Facebook.

³ The Age of the Automobile. See: <https://www.ushistory.org/us/46a.asp>

⁴ <https://www.neosperience.com/blog/10-ways-the-internet-has-changed-the-way-we-live-and-do-business>

One of my best childhood friends, Alejandro Melamed, is an internationally renowned lecturer in matters regarding disruptive innovation in Human Resources and the future of work.

In one of his first books published, "The Work of the Future and the Future of Work," the author reminds the reader of jobs many of us knew that are now extinct. I will mention only a few so you can sigh with nostalgia: VHS repairman, switchboard operator, milkman, film projectionist, elevator operator, umbrella repairman, and you can add your favorite one to the list.

Alejandro Melamed's main contribution in "The Work of the Future and the Future of Work" is not about how new jobs will replace the old ones, but how technology and communications in the digital era will change forever the concept of work the way we know it.

"The Work of the Future and the Future of Work" was published in 2017 when even someone as visionary as my friend wouldn't have foreseen how our world would have changed in only six years. The Covid experience not only disrupted our daily lives, but also accelerated exponentially the reliance on artificial intelligence.

For those who don't know what I am talking about, artificial intelligence (AI) makes it possible for machines to learn from experience, adjust to new inputs and perform human-like tasks.

Now, if you think artificial intelligence is only applicable to self-driving cars, think twice. *Modern artificial intelligence is capable of wonders. It can produce breathtaking original content: poetry, prose, images, music, human faces. It can diagnose some medical conditions more accurately than a human physician.*⁵ Today you can use AI to design cities, to operate on persons, and of course to write Yom Kippur sermons, like this one I am delivering now (just kidding).

Yesterday I spoke to you about the importance of change. Today I hope I was able to convince you of the inevitability of change.

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robtoews/2021/06/01/what-artificial-intelligence-still-cant-do/?sh=5fdd513966f6>

The world the way we know it is changing in front of our own eyes. It doesn't matter if we like it or not, or if we would be able to adapt or not. It is happening. Yesterday's science fiction is today's present. Not everybody will be happy, but the faithful and optimistic person in me believes that change not only is inevitable, but it is good.

And now is the moment in which you ask me: this is all very interesting, rabbi, but why bring it up today? What has all this to do with Yizkor? Why did you choose to talk to us about technological and digital change and about artificial intelligence?

You see...in a world of everlasting change and extraordinary artificial achievements, there is something that is unchangeable and genuine, and that is love; the love we share every day, the love we still feel for those we remember today, and the unchangeable and genuine love those we remember today gave us.

Love, by definition, can never be artificial. You can have artificial flowers, artificial sweeteners, artificial colors and artificial flavors, artificial limbs, artificial meat, artificial intelligence, and even artificial breathing, but you cannot have artificial love.

Indeed, we live in a changing world. However, when we feel we are swept by change, when we perceive we are standing on shaky ground, when the familiar becomes unfamiliar, all we need is the memory of our loved ones' love to anchor us back.

Yesterday I translated for you Julio Numhauser's song, *Todo Cambia, Everything Changes*, but I left one stanza out. Let me share it with you right now:

*Cambia, todo cambia
Cambia, todo cambia"*

*Pero no cambia mi amor
Por mas lejos que me encuentre
Ni el recuerdo ni el dolor
De mi pueblo y de mi gente*

Everything Changes, but my love doesn't change, no matter how far away I find myself, neither the memory nor the pain, of my country and of my people.

As we remember our loved ones who walk the earth no longer, we celebrate their pure, and genuine love, a love that doesn't change or diminish as the years pass by. In this sacred moment, we strive even more to honor their memory by passing their love forward.

As we embrace the many blessings that our technological and digital era brings with it, we are mindful that love, genuine love, will never, ever, be reduced to an algorithm.

May the memories of those we remember today be for a blessing, and may Hashem bless each of us and our loved ones with a year of giving and receiving love, with a year of meaningful and genuine relationships, with a year of compassion and kindness, with a year of health and joy, with a good and sweet year.