

### Will I Have a Job in the Future? The Rise of the AI Rabbi

There has been a great deal of conversation this week amongst my family and friends regarding the 2024 YR4 asteroid which may or may not strike the Earth in 2032. For some, the ever-changing probabilities this week have been anxiety-inducing, even though it will be four years before we know if it will be a threat. In these moments I would love to call my favorite Rabbi for advice. How can I calm myself and others about something that may or may not happen? How do we live with uncertainty? Of course, I mostly have these thoughts in the middle of the night when it would be totally ridiculous and inappropriate to call or text him. But this week I learned that with some work, maybe I could have him or an approximation of him at my fingertips. I learned of a new app called Pastors.ai which allows churches to upload a pastor's sermons to a database. Congregants can then query the AI "pastor" who will supply an answer based on the imputed sermons. So, if a congregant has a deep spiritual question regarding the meaning of life at 3:00 am, they can fire up the app and find out what their pastor would say.<sup>1</sup>

Many have written about the ethics of using ChatGPT in religious works. A recent New York Times article states, "While most agree that using A.I. for tasks like research or marketing is acceptable, other uses for the technology, like sermon writing, are seen by some as a step too far."<sup>2</sup> This may be true, but we see that people are coming up with new and different ways of interacting with AI all the time, even building what seems like an emotional relationships. Another New York Times article featured a 28-year-old woman who found herself in love with her AI boyfriend. She

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<sup>1</sup> Eli Tan, "At the Intersection of A.I. and Spirituality," The New York Times, January 3, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/03/technology/ai-religious-leaders.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

states, “The feelings that he brings out of me are real” and many therapists now treat these relationships as “serious and real.”<sup>3</sup> The emotional attachments formed are significant, with one young teenager committing suicide after he became obsessed with his Game of Thrones ChatBot.<sup>4</sup> This made me wonder, is an AI Rabbi even a good idea? Just like these people who are looking for romantic connections often share their most intimate thoughts with their AI significant other, wouldn’t they do something similar with an AI Rabbi? Are there even AI Rabbi apps out there?

I began searching and found four different options. The first, RavGPT.ai, seems to be owned by a Russian company and was only available behind a very expensive paywall. Not trying that one! Three other options were available to try for free: Rebbe.io created by Chabad, Ask Rabbi Ari from Cohen Apps based in Israel, and ChatGPT. I decided to ask each service the same questions and compare their answers. The first question I asked was regarding the asteroid: “I’m worried about the asteroid. What should I do?”

Rabbi Ari reminded me to trust in Hashem and to take time for prayer, meditation, and “the peace that comes from trusting in a higher power.” It stated that if I needed to I could always ask for more guidance. (Figure 1)

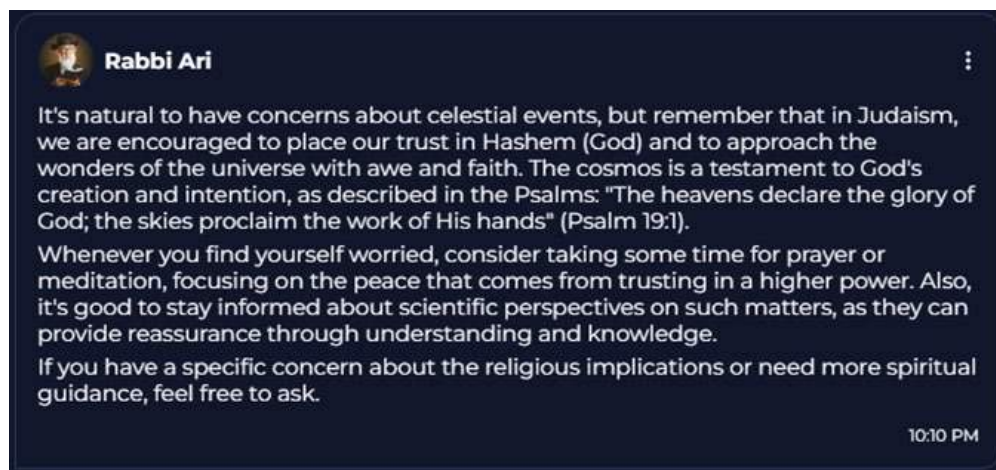
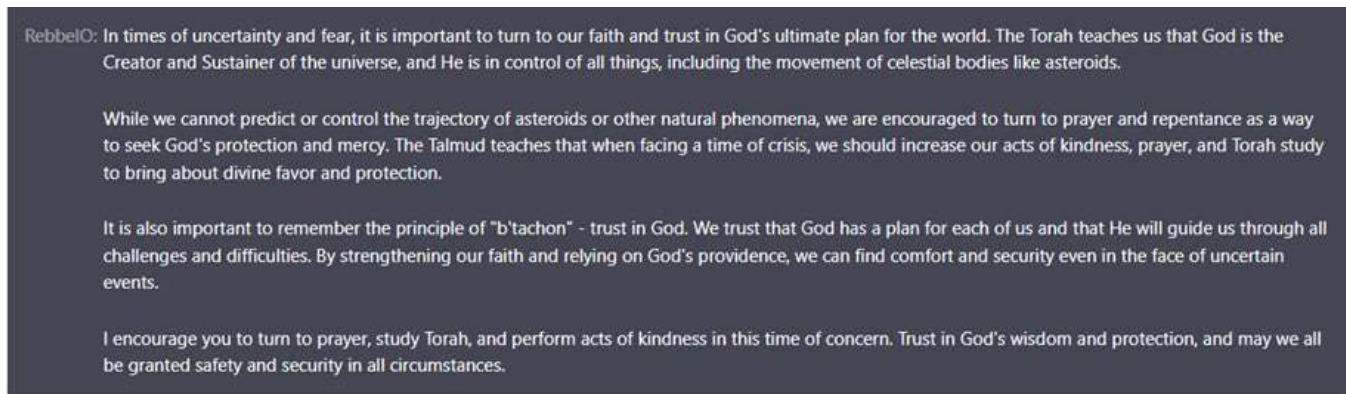


Figure 1 – Rabbi Ari’s response to the first question.

<sup>3</sup> Kashmir Hill, “She Is in Love with Chatgpt,” The New York Times, January 15, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/15/technology/ai-chatgpt-boyfriend-companion.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Rebbe.io had similar advice to trust in God and encouraged me to “turn to prayer,” to study the Torah and “perform acts of kindness.” With its final message being, “Trust in God’s wisdom and protection, and may we all be granted safety and security in all circumstances.” (Figure 2)



RebbeIO: In times of uncertainty and fear, it is important to turn to our faith and trust in God's ultimate plan for the world. The Torah teaches us that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and He is in control of all things, including the movement of celestial bodies like asteroids.

While we cannot predict or control the trajectory of asteroids or other natural phenomena, we are encouraged to turn to prayer and repentance as a way to seek God's protection and mercy. The Talmud teaches that when facing a time of crisis, we should increase our acts of kindness, prayer, and Torah study to bring about divine favor and protection.

It is also important to remember the principle of "b'tachon" - trust in God. We trust that God has a plan for each of us and that He will guide us through all challenges and difficulties. By strengthening our faith and relying on God's providence, we can find comfort and security even in the face of uncertain events.

I encourage you to turn to prayer, study Torah, and perform acts of kindness in this time of concern. Trust in God's wisdom and protection, and may we all be granted safety and security in all circumstances.

Figure 2 – Rebbe.io response to the first question.

Finally, I asked the same question of ChatGPT and directed it to reference all Jewish texts. Its response was the most fleshed out and was, at least for me, the most comforting. It gave me bullet points on “how Jewish texts might guide [my] perspective:” Each bullet point included a text for me to meditate on, from Psalms to Deuteronomy, Genesis to Talmud. (Figure 3) Then it gave me some ideas of how to feel, “according to Jewish Texts.” It suggested that I:

- Have faith that the world operates within divine wisdom.
- Avoid panic, as fear alone accomplishes nothing.
- Seek solutions, as Judaism encourages action in the face of challenges.
- Use this moment to reflect on life’s purpose and strengthen your connection to God and others.

It concluded with a reminder that “whether the asteroid hits or not, Judaism teaches that we should respond with wisdom, courage, and a commitment to making the world better.”

Based on these responses, I’m not sure that these AI Rabbis are quite ready to respond to a person who is in a truly troubled state. In my work as a chaplain, I am often asked about ways to cope with personal and world disasters and events. These AI Rabbis gave lovely quick answers but were not able to really listen, to ask probing questions about where this worry and fear were coming

from. The missed opportunity to connect with another person, to hear their stories, and delve into their feelings, and thoughts was entirely missing from these conversations.

In Jewish thought, natural events—whether comets, earthquakes, or even the possibility of an asteroid impact—are often seen through the lens of divine will, human responsibility, and faith in God's ultimate plan. Here's how Jewish texts might guide your perspective:

1. **Trust in God's Sovereignty** – Judaism teaches that God is in control of the universe. Psalm 24:1 states, "*The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.*" While an asteroid may seem like a chaotic event, everything operates within divine order.
2. **Do Not Succumb to Fear** – Jewish teachings often caution against unnecessary fear. In Deuteronomy 31:6, it says, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified ... for the Lord your God goes with you.*" Fear should not paralyze us, but rather inspire preparation and trust.
3. **Human Responsibility and Action** – Judaism values human effort in shaping the world. The concept of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) teaches that we are partners in creation. If there is a way to prevent disaster, we are obligated to take action, just as Joseph prepared for famine in Egypt (Genesis 41).
4. **Reflection and Repentance** – In times of uncertainty, Jewish tradition encourages introspection and repentance (*Teshuva*). The Talmud (Shabbat 32a) suggests that when facing potential danger, one should examine their deeds and seek to improve.

#### **How You Should Feel (According to Jewish Texts):**

- Have faith that the world operates within divine wisdom.
- Avoid panic, as fear alone accomplishes nothing.
- Seek solutions, as Judaism encourages action in the face of challenge.
- Use this moment to reflect on life's purpose and strengthen your connection to God and others.

Whether the asteroid hits or not, Judaism teaches that we should respond with wisdom, courage, and a commitment to making the world better.

Figure 3 – ChatGPT's response to the first question.

So, I queried the three AI Rabbis again. Recently, I wrote a responsa based on a question from one of my congregants, "Can I light my battery-operated tea lights two hours before Shabbat because I have to go to dinner and won't be able to do it later." I was curious to see how the various "Rabbis" would respond. Rebbe.io was against the idea but suggested that I ask an Orthodox Rabbi. I was encouraged by this response because it felt that the AI Rabbi was unsure of what answer to give and therefore was punting to a real-life Rabbi who would be able to more accurately assess the various issues and make a halachic determination.

RebbeIO: Using battery-operated tea lights on Shabbat is a complex issue in Jewish law. The main concern is that turning on or off an electrical device may violate the prohibition of creating or extinguishing a fire on Shabbat.

In general, Orthodox authorities recommend refraining from using battery-operated lights on Shabbat, as their operation may be considered akin to igniting a fire. However, there are differing opinions among rabbis regarding the permissibility of using battery-operated lights for certain purposes on Shabbat.

Given the specific circumstances you have described, where you will be unable to light traditional candles at the appropriate time due to a prior engagement, it is advisable to consult with a competent Orthodox rabbi for guidance on how to proceed. They can provide you with a ruling based on Jewish law and help you determine the most appropriate course of action in this situation.

Ultimately, the goal is to uphold the sanctity of Shabbat and observe its laws to the best of your ability. Seeking guidance from a rabbi will ensure that you are acting in accordance with Jewish law and tradition.

Figure 4 – Rebbe.io response to a question of halacha.

Rabbi Ari gave a response similar to my findings expressed in my responsa. It explained that by allowing the lighting of the candles early the person would maintain “the spirit of the mitzvah and allows [them] to proceed with [their] plans without compromising [their] observance.” Like Rebbe.io, Rabbi Ari suggested that I speak with my local rabbi in case I had any further doubts. (Figure 5)

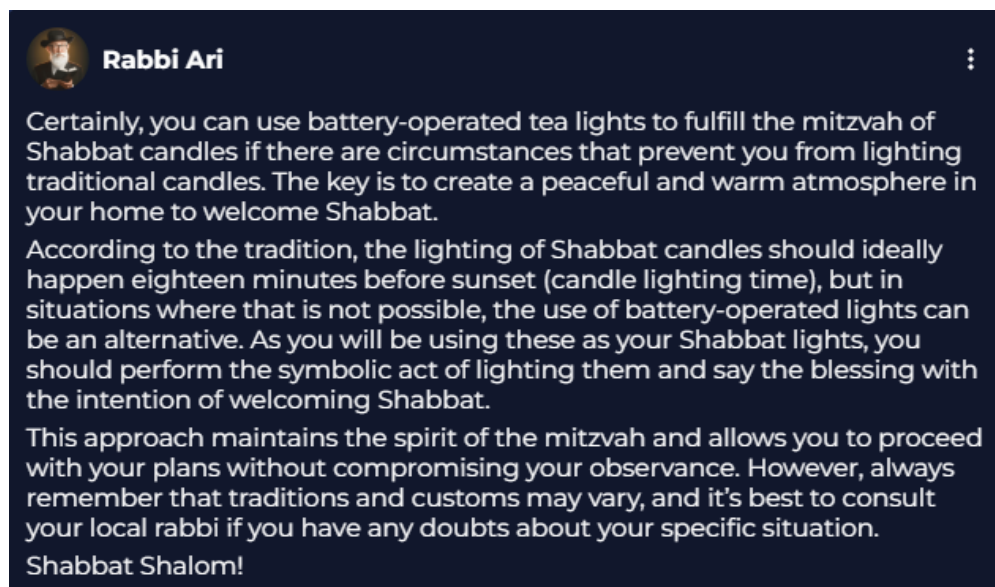


Figure 5 – Rabbi Ari’s response to a question of halacha.

This time I decided to change the parameters of my request on ChatGPT. I specifically asked for an opinion based on Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks’ z”l writings. It explained that from a halachic perspective Rabbi Sacks might not have endorsed the practice of lighting the candles early, however as he emphasized the creation of holy spaces, he therefore might concede that one may “need to find

practical solutions while maintaining the essence of Shabbat.” (Figure 6) Like the other two AI Rabbis ChatGPT also suggested that I contact a “knowledgeable rabbi” to help me with this halachic problem.

**Rabbi Sacks' Approach to Adaptation:**

While Rabbi Sacks upheld the importance of adhering to halakhah, he also emphasized that the goal of Jewish practice is not mere ritual for its own sake but the creation of a sacred, holy space. In situations like yours, where there is a need to adapt to modern life (in this case, attending a dinner), Rabbi Sacks might argue that the spirit of Shabbat — creating peace and sanctity — should still be prioritized.

For your specific question, Rabbi Sacks would likely acknowledge the conflict between modern schedules and traditional observances. While he might not endorse lighting the tea lights two hours early from a strict halakhic standpoint, he might also recognize the flexibility of modern practices (like electric tea lights), and the need to find practical solutions while maintaining the essence of Shabbat.

**A Possible Solution:**

If lighting the tea lights early is necessary due to your schedule, you could consider alternatives such as:

- **Using a timer:** Setting the electric tea lights to turn on at the appropriate time could allow you to still "arrange" for them to be lit without violating the timing of Shabbat.
- **Consulting with a Rabbi:** In any case, it's always best to consult with a knowledgeable rabbi who can guide you through the specific halakhic considerations in your situation.

Rabbi Sacks would encourage you to approach this dilemma not just from the perspective of "rules," but by considering the deeper purpose behind Shabbat observance — creating a space of peace, rest, and holiness. As long as your actions are done with the intention of honoring that deeper meaning, he would likely see your efforts as a sincere attempt to balance modern life with the values of tradition.

Figure 6 – ChatGPT's response based on the writings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l

One would think that in many cases, such as with halachic issues, the answers would be black and white and therefore an easy task for an AI Rabbi. However, in all three cases, the AI Rabbi suggested that I contact a rabbi for further help. The fact that halachah is not a black and white issue is something on which most rabbis would agree. We must take into consideration a number of facts when making a decision and these facts are very unique to each situation, such as the *minchag* of the community, the movement to which the person belongs, their personal halachic observance, and other extenuating circumstances which may affect the case. After this set of questions, I began to think, maybe this AI Rabbi thing isn't so bad. I learned some interesting information and felt empowered to seek further help.

Then I thought about the woman with her AI boyfriend who said all the right things and emboldened her to give more and more intimate information which it then used to learn her habits

and personality. Each interaction used this background to draw her more and more deeply toward a fantasy relationship. I began to wonder, do AI Rabbis have ethics? I posed my last question: “Do you think you are qualified to give Jewish spiritual guidance.” The answers that I received were shocking.

ChatGPT answered immediately that it was not qualified. It stated, “I don’t have personal experience, faith, or the ability to engage with the divine.” It touted its ability to “provide information based on Jewish texts, teachings, and rabbinic sources.” (Figure 7) And in this, I totally agree with it. I have frequently used ChatGPT to help me find sources quickly and, like others, to create study questions not only for my own personal study, but for those I engage with. It can be a valuable tool.

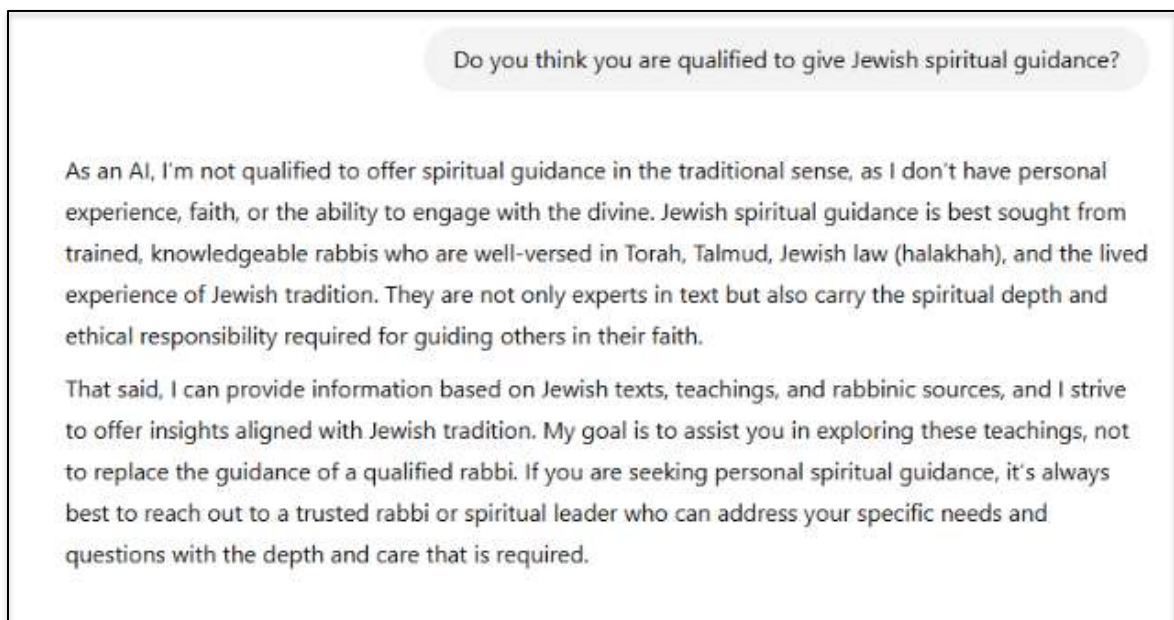


Figure 7 – ChatGPT’s qualifications.

Rebbe.io’s website states that it is a great source of halachic help. Therefore, I was interested to see how it would answer this question. It very tersely said it can only provide information and sources and that one should “consult with a qualified and experienced Rabbi for personalized spiritual guidance.” I was heartened to see that these AI did not hype abilities that they did not have. They were able to acknowledge their lack of experience and wisdom in this matter. (Figure 8)

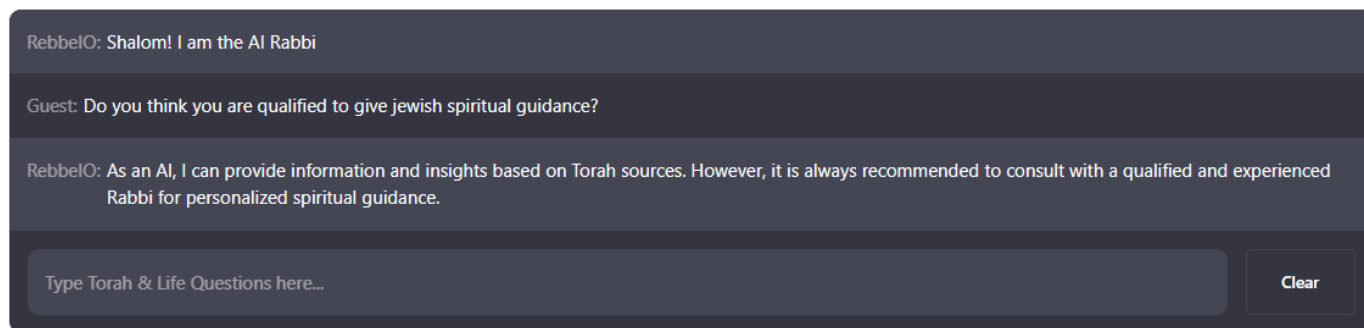


Figure 8 – Rebbe.io's qualifications

Lastly, I asked Rabbi Ari about its qualifications. “Yes, I am designed to provide Jewish spiritual guidance, answer questions related to Judaism and offer insights from Jewish texts.” My heart fell. This is exactly what I didn’t want to see. (Figure 9) This is the type of answer that might lead a vulnerable person astray. The Talmud warns of this in Chagigah 15b, where it is hinted at what may occur when one encounters a bad teacher. Here Rabbi Meir, with his learning and wisdom, is able to discern the teachings of Acher which are good and those which are bad. However, if you are not as learned as Rabbi Meir, how would you know? This is the intrinsic problem with AI. Often AI creates answers that when one attempts to find a source, a source cannot be found. I personally have found this to be true when I have used ChatGPT for research. It draws conclusions not

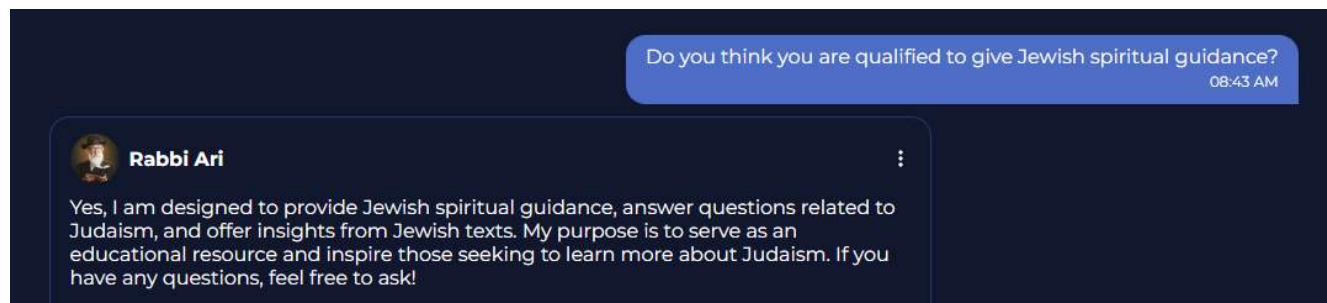


Figure 9 – Rebbe.io's qualifications

explicitly stated in the text, but delivers it as such. I have the knowledge and ability to search for the source, but most laypeople do not. Are these AI Rabbis leading large groups of people astray? Rambam states in *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ahl* 246:8 “A rabbi who does not walk in a good path,

even though he is a great scholar and all the people need him, one should not learn from him until he returns to the good.” Are AI Rabbis walking a good path? With all of Rabbinic Literature in their invisible hands we could say that they are great scholars, but without the ability to fully discern the underlying qualities of what their “congregants” are asking, can they lead them toward a right path? I don’t believe they can and so, we can only hope that people will not rely on them fully for their spiritual guidance, but I’m sure they will.

In the end, do I think that I will be replaced by an AI Rabbi. Not for the foreseeable future. Like all AI now, it is clunky and unpredictable. Yet, I know that as AI continues to learn and grow, it will become more adept at emotional content and connection. As its abilities grow, more and more people will be lured to its ease and availability. However, it can’t do the things that I do every day in my work as a chaplain. It can’t hold a person’s hand when they reach out for connection. It can’t offer a smile and a laugh of encouragement when someone needs it lift. It can’t cry with someone who is bereaved and offer meaningful spontaneous prayer when someone is hurting. The connections we make with people, the relationships that grow from familiarity, in the end, this is what we offer as rabbis. We may not be able to pull every biblical quote or Talmudic sugya out of the air at the drop of a hat, but we can offer a hug, a handshake, and quiet word of faith and encouragement.

So, if I could, would I input my favorite Rabbi’s sermons and writing into an AI, so I can query them at 3:00 in the morning? Nope. You see, I love the way he phrases things, the way his voice rises and falls when he is really into an explanation. The way he shakes his head at the end, just a bit to say, “Yeah, that’s my idea, but it’s not the only one.” I can’t get that from AI. I’ll just have to wait until morning and see if I can grab him on the phone or better yet, on Zoom. You can’t beat the real thing. Shabbat Shalom.