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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday December 5, 2025 ~ Parshat: Vayishlach

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

ChatGPT, Copilot, And Google Can't Save Your Soul

I read an article recently in a magazine that caters to the evangelical Christian community. It seems that a new digital awakening is unfolding among the faithful. I'm not talking about using AI (artificial intelligence) to research Biblical topics or discover new truths and ideas about God, faith, or the meaning of life. I'm talking about something far more significant — and far more morally complex.

There are now AI-powered apps that allow you to literally “text with Jesus,” or talk with a variety of Biblical personalities. And they respond. And it seems to be catching on.

What could possibly go wrong?

I must remind you, though, that these apps are not real. Artificial intelligence is a powerful system of computational techniques that imitates human intelligence. It produces language, ideas, and images by analyzing enormous amounts of data. That is part of why we love it. But it does not feel, understand, believe, or take responsibility. It can mimic a person or personality, but it can never actually be a person, or possess a true personality.

And why shouldn't it catch on? As a Rabbi, this article caught my eye because it speaks to a growing American religious trend. But it is hardly the only way people are turning to AI to fulfill deep emotional needs. A recent large-scale study found that when people with smaller social networks turn to AI-based companions, often called “simulated partners,” they report that the [chatbot](#) partially fulfills social needs.

It gets even worse. According to *Newsweek*, 53% of Americans report having some kind of relationship with an AI system. Even more startling, 28% say they have experienced at least one “intimate or romantic relationship” with AI.

These emotional attachments do not come without cost. Research shows that frequent use of AI companions correlates with lower well-being, increased loneliness, and weaker real-world systems of support. For many, especially younger Americans, reliance on AI interactions reduces, and increasingly replaces, genuine human socialization and experience.

This has real consequences for those seeking authentic religious life. AI does not create intimacy; it creates the illusion of intimacy. AI is designed to respond in agreeable, supportive language, which can easily create unhealthy, and potentially dehumanizing dependency. And perhaps most significantly, there is already research suggesting that AI companionship erodes both the capacity and even the willingness to engage with other human beings.

And engagement with other human beings is how we form community, the foundation of all authentic Jewish experience.

Let me share something personal. When I began thinking about this sermon, I did not immediately connect these AI trends to this week’s Torah reading of *Parshat VaYishlach*. I wrestled with it. And then — ironically — AI itself helped me see the parallels I hadn’t yet uncovered. At first, I felt grateful. But then I felt uneasy. Because *VaYishlach* teaches that true spiritual understanding cannot simply be handed to us. It must be struggled for. Wrestled for. Lived for.

And here I was, receiving insight without wrestling for it. It felt too easy. That is exactly the danger.

The heart of *Vayishlach* is Jacob’s nighttime struggle:

Vaye’avek ish imo ad alot hashachar

“And a man wrestled with him (Jacob) until daybreak.” (Genesis 32:25)

This is the Torah’s great story about spiritual authenticity. Jacob does not grow spiritually through a dream, a vision, or a shortcut. His growth comes through real encounter: literal, painful, exhausting, embodied struggle.

This is the exact opposite of the AI-mediated spiritual experience, which offers insight without effort, comfort without struggle, blessing without transformation, meaning without discipline.

Think of your own lives. Where did your real growth come from?

Jacob's identity changes — *"Your name shall be Israel"* — precisely because he refuses to let go until he has wrestled, persisted, and earned the blessing. He emerges transformed, limping, marked by the cost of authenticity.

Vayishlach teaches that there is no shortcut to becoming Israel.

You cannot automate your spiritual growth.

You cannot download your covenant.

You cannot outsource your wrestling.

AI can illuminate Torah. But it must never replace the wrestling that Torah demands of us, even if a friendly chatbot tells you otherwise.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner