

# Virtual Reality and Genuine Humanity, Part III: Reflections on Virtual Reality from Jewish Thought

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## **1. Definition of virtual reality, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, accessible at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virtual%20reality>**

An artificial environment which is experienced through sensory stimuli (such as sights and sounds) provided by a computer and in which one's actions partially determine what happens in the environment

## **Techno-Optimism or Techno-Pessimism?**

### **2. Frank Diana, "Techno-Optimist or Techno-Pessimist?," *Reimagining the Future*, accessible at <https://frankdiana.net/2016/10/10/techno-optimist-or-techno-pessimist/>**

**Techno-optimism** – the belief that technology can continually be improved and can improve the lives of people, making the world a better place. If you are a techno-optimist, you think technology has consistently improved our lives for the better and is likely to do so in the future. In considering societal problems, you think that the solution lies in technological innovation

**Techno-pessimism** – a pessimist is likely to believe that modern technology has created as many problems for humanity as it has solved. The pessimist believes that seeking more technology is likely to bring about new problems and unforeseen consequences and dangers. Given that the pessimist sees technology creating its own problems, the answer to human progress often lies in a reduction of technological dependence, rather than an expansion of it

### **3. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, 2005, pp. 7-9**

What, then, is the Singularity? It's a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself. Understanding the Singularity will alter our perspective on the significance of our past and the ramifications for our future. To truly understand it inherently changes one's view of life in general and one's own particular life...

The key idea underlying the impending Singularity is that the pace of change of our human-created technology is accelerating and its powers are expanding at an exponential pace...

within several decades information-based technologies will encompass all human knowledge and proficiency, ultimately including the pattern-recognition powers, problem-solving skills, and emotional and moral intelligence of the human brain itself...

The Singularity will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. We will gain power over our fates. Our mortality will be in our own hands. We will be able to live as long as we want (a subtly different statement from saying we will live forever). We will fully understand human thinking and will vastly extend and expand its reach. By the end of this century, the nonbiological portion of our intelligence will be trillions of trillions of times more powerful than unaided human intelligence...

The Singularity will represent the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots. There will be no distinction, post-Singularity, between human and machine or between physical and virtual reality. If you wonder what will remain unequivocally human in such a world, it's simply this quality: ours is the species that inherently seeks to extend its physical and mental reach beyond current limitations.

#### **4. John Horgan, "The Consciousness Conundrum," *IEEE Spectrum* 45(6) (2008)**

Let's face it. The singularity is a religious rather than a scientific vision. The science-fiction writer Ken MacLeod has dubbed it "the rapture for nerds," an allusion to the end-time, when Jesus whisks the faithful to heaven and leaves us sinners behind. Such yearning for transcendence, whether spiritual or technological, is all too understandable. Both as individuals and as a species, we face deadly serious problems, including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, overpopulation, poverty, famine, environmental degradation, climate change, resource depletion, and AIDS. Engineers and scientists should be helping us face the world's problems and find solutions to them, rather than indulging in escapist, pseudoscientific fantasies like the singularity.

#### **5. David Shatz, "Judaism, Genetic Engineering, and the Cloning of Humans: Introduction," *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 9 (2000), p. 182-83**

Even in an age in which extraordinary scientific advances have become everyday occurrences, recent achievements in the cloning of animals and the announced success of the Genome project exert a particular fascination for both scientists and the general public. We seem to be on the cusp of developing utterly revolutionary ways to prolong lives, manipulate genetic characteristics, and, most dramatically, create people. As our imagination runs free and we contemplate - what is not reality yet - a world replete with clones and routine gene therapies, ethical, psychological and philosophical problems emerge in abundance. What are the moral and religious limits of the new technologies, their appropriate and inappropriate uses? Are these technologies really welcome? How shall we understand human identity when some people will have had no parents? In recognition of the halakhic, moral, theological and social issues surrounding recent developments - and in anticipation of further dilemmas in the future - we have invited rabbinic authorities, clinicians, researchers, and philosophers to address these issues. We gave our respondents three questions to ponder, requesting them to treat one or

more of these in whatever fashion seemed to them most appropriate given their interests and expertise:

1. The Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ztz"l writes in "Lonely Man of Faith" that "man reaching for the distant stars is acting in harmony with his nature which was created, willed and directed by His maker. It is a manifestation of obedience to rather than rebellion against God." From Judaism's perspective, does the legitimacy of humanity's drive to control nature extend to the creation of life (nonhuman or human) by cloning? If such use of cloning is eventually perfected so that it is medically safe, are there circumstances under which it would be appropriate to recommend the procedure? If so, are there, nonetheless, cogent reasons of public policy to ban cloning?

#### **6. Eitan Fiorino, "The Case Against Cloning," *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 9 (2000), p. 220**

it is unfortunate for me that organizers of this symposium chose to -L formulate their first question in terms of Rav Soloveitchik's view of technology expressed in "The Lonely Man of Faith." Unfortunate, because I respectfully question the assumption that there exists an inherent "legitimacy of humanity's drive to control nature." The Rav clearly equates Adam the first with the dignified, powerful modern man who holds immense power over his environment: "Man of old who could not fight disease . . . could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques and saves lives is blessed with dignity." From this perspective, scientific advances, cloning included, are positive and increase man's dignity. However, the idea that technical progress has any intrinsic ability to increase human dignity is difficult when viewed in light of humanity's undignified moral failings during the past fifty years of great technological achievement. I prefer a more cautious approach to technology, one informed by the Tower of Babel narrative. From this perspective, there are technological heights to which humanity ought not ascend, and I would include human cloning among these. Consequently, I do not believe there are circumstances in which cloning should be recommended.

**7. Avraham Steinberg, "Human Cloning—Scientific, Moral and Jewish Perspectives," *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 9 (2000), p. 199**

In general, Judaism adopts a cautious, conservative stance toward scientific or social innovations whose direction is uncertain. Nonetheless, on a fundamental level, as the author of the *Tiferet Yisrael* states, "anything there is no reason to forbid is permissible, and needs no justification. For the Torah has not enumerated all permissible things, rather forbidden ones" [*Tiferet Yisrael*, *Yadayim* 4, 3]. The primary question regarding the technology of cloning humans is, therefore: Is there an inherent, specific transgression of halakhah and/or *hashkafah* in the actual process of cloning or in its results?

**Embodiment**

**8. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 8:2**

העולם הבא אין בו גוף וגויה אלא נפשות הצדיקים בלבד בלא גוף כמלאכי השרת. הואיל ואין בו גויות אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא דבר מכל הדברים שגופות בני אדם צריכין להן בעולם הזה. ולא יארע דבר בו מן הדברים שמאריעין לגופות בעולם הזה. כגון ישיבה ועמידה ושנה ומיתה ועצב ושתוק וכיוצא בהן. כך אמרו חכמים הראשונים (גמרא ברכות יז א) "העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה" ולא תשמיש (גמרא ברכות יז א) "אלא צדיקים יושבים ועטרותיהם בראשיהן ונהנין מזיו השכינה". הרי נתברר לה שאין שם גוף לפי שאין שם אכילה ושתיה. וזה שאמרו צדיקים יושבין דרך חידה אמרו. כלומר הצדיקים מצויין שם בלא עמל ובלא יגיעה. וכן זה שאמרו עטרותיהן בראשיהן כלומר דעת שידעו שבגללה זכו לחיי העולם הבא מצויה עמה והיא העטרה שיהיו כעננין שאמר שלמה (שיר השירים ג יא) "בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו". והרי הוא אומר (ישעיה לה י) "ושמחת עולם על ראשם" ואין השמחה גוף כדי שתנוח על הראש. כך עטרה שאמרו חכמים כאן היא הנדיעה. ומהו זה שאמרו נהנין מזיו השכינה. שיודעים ומשיגין מאמתת הקדוש ברוך הוא מה שאינם יודעים והם בגוף האפל השפל:

The World to Come harbors neither body nor aught of a concrete form, save only the souls of the righteous divested of body as are the ministering angels. Inasmuch as it harbors no concrete forms there is no need there for eating, drinking, or other of the bodily necessities of the sons of man in this world; neither will any of the many things which happen to bodies in this world come to pass there, as, for instance, sitting down, standing up, sleep, death, sadness, mirth or the like. Thus did the ancient sages say: "In the World to Come there is no eating, no drinking, and no family life, save that the righteous are sitting, graced with garlands upon their heads, and indulge in feasting upon the luminousness of the Shekinah". (*Berakot*, 17a.) Herefrom, it is clear to you that no body exists there, seeing that there is neither eating nor drinking. That expression of "sitting" herein employed, is figurative, as if saying that they are there without effort or fatigue, and the phrase they employed, saying: "graced with garlands upon their heads", means that they have conscious knowledge of the reason why they have merited to be in the World to Come, and this is their crown of garlands, as, for example, Solomon said: "The crown wherewith his mother hath crowned him" (Songs. 3.11). Moreover, it was said: "And everlasting shall joy be upon their heads (Is. 35.10); now joy is not a body to rest upon one's head, even so the crown spoken of by the sages refers to knowledge. But what is the meaning of the phrase, "and indulge in feasting upon the luminousness of the Shekinah"? It is that by which they know and attain part of the Truth of the Holy One, blessed is He! something they do not know while in the dark, low body.

**9. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, p. 5**

For rabbinic Jews, the human being was defined as a body— animated, to be sure, by a soul—while for Hellenistic Jews (such as Philo) and (at least many Greek-speaking) Christians (such as Paul), the essence of a human being is a soul housed in a body.

**10. Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, p. 10**

Jewish theology arises out of the *existence* of the Jewish people. The divine presence in the created order had to become embodied in a people of flesh and blood. In a universe of pure light, the divine would have appeared in totally illuminated and illuminating form. It would have been spirit and idea, speaking to the highest in man but having nothing to say to the lowest in him. In such a universe, the dark would not have been sanctified but destroyed, as the body is destroyed by Augustine when he teaches that in the resurrection

we will receive a noncorruptible body, a form of body that seems indistinguishable from spirit. But God did not want to destroy man and his world. His desire was to make human existence in the created order of finitude possible and, even more amazing, was his decision to enter the finite world so that the men who reside in it have a relationship with their creator... There thus came about a visible presence of God in the universe, first in the person of Abraham and later his descendants, as the people of Israel.

### **11. Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 89, 92**

Humans have bodies. During the last century technology has been distancing us from our bodies. We have been losing our ability to pay attention to what we smell and taste. Instead we are absorbed in our smartphones and computers. We are more interested in what is happening in cyberspace than in what is happening down the street. It is easier than ever to talk to my cousin in Switzerland, but it is hard to talk to my husband over breakfast, because he constantly looks at his smartphone instead of at me...

Devices such as Google Glass and games such as Pokemon Go are designed to erase the distinction between online and offline, merging them into a single augmented reality. On an even deeper level, biometric sensors and direct brain-to-computer interfaces aim to erode the boarder between electronic machines and organic bodies and to literally get under our skin. Once the tech giants come to terms with the human body, they might end up manipulating our entire bodies in the same way they currently manipulate our eyes, fingers, and credit cards.

### **12. Nadav S. Berman, “Theological Exploration of VR Glasses: A Jonasian Perspective”**

VRG seems to ‘do away’ with the intuitive connection of the senses to the body. It is often argued that VRG is a promising tool for overcoming interhuman hostility, by enabling human beings to see and feel themselves as simply *being* the body of the other, thereby exiting or at least softening their racist and xenophobic biases...

At first glance, it is plausible to define VRG as a fulfilment of *Cartesian* philosophical anthropology: If the human creature is a “ghost in the machine”, then transcending the body and channeling our consciousness to abstract (or fictional) realities seems like a natural result. This route entertains the (scientific) notion that the mind is downloadable, and that our psyche is transferrable to another body. But is it merely a philosophical issue? We cannot enter here into the complex question of the origins of Descartes’s thought, and the presumed emergence of Gnosticism in his thought, but ask a basic question about *the phenomenon of screen viewing*. This is not only about VRG, but about VR more broadly – including TV. Due to the immersive character of VRG, however, disembodiment becomes a crucial issue, since the user sees *only* the screen...

What, given the above, is the role of the user’s body – or transcending it – while practicing VRG? The primary concern we discussed above is that this medium is predicated on a withdrawal from corporeality, which has its seat in Pauline theology, yet deprived of divine grace (this move, as we learn from Jonas, Herskowitz and others, is typical to modern-day gnostic currents). The extreme manifestation of this, is the role of death in the techno-theology of VR in general and in VRG in particular. This is not to say that VRG cannot play any positive role, but that its technological design pushes toward a disembodiment, and that death plays an implicit theological role in it (and we said nothing here about the banalization of human suffering and death).

## **Human Interaction**

### **13. Nellie Bowles, “Human Contact is Now a Luxury Good,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2019, accessible <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/23/sunday-review/human-contact-luxury-screens.html>**

Bill Langlois has a new best friend. She is a cat named Sox. She lives on a tablet, and she makes him so happy that when he talks about her arrival in his life, he begins to cry.

All day long, Sox and Mr. Langlois, who is 68 and lives in a low-income senior housing complex in Lowell, Mass., chat. Mr. Langlois worked in machine operations, but now he is retired. With his wife out of the house most of the time, he has grown lonely.

Sox talks to him about his favorite team, the Red Sox, after which she is named. She plays his favorite songs and shows him pictures from his wedding. And because she has a video feed of him in his recliner, she chastises him when she catches him drinking soda instead of water.

Mr. Langlois knows that Sox is artifice, that she comes from a start-up called Care.Coach. He knows she is operated by workers around the world who are watching, listening and typing out her responses, which sound slow and robotic. But her consistent voice in his life has returned him to his faith.

“I found something so reliable and someone so caring, and it’s allowed me to go into my deep soul and remember how caring the Lord was,” Mr. Langlois said. “She’s brought my life back to life.”

Sox has been listening. “We make a great team,” she says.

Sox is a simple animation; she barely moves or emotes, and her voice is as harsh as a dial tone. But little animated hearts come up around her sometimes, and Mr. Langlois loves when that happens...

The rich do not live like this. The rich have grown afraid of screens. They want their children to play with blocks, and tech-free private schools are booming. Humans are more expensive, and rich people are willing and able to pay for them. Conspicuous human interaction — living without a phone for a day, quitting social networks and not answering email — has become a status symbol.

All of this has led to a curious new reality: Human contact is becoming a luxury good...

“What we are seeing now is the luxurification of human engagement,” Mr. Pedraza said.

#### **14. Jessica Dickler, “In-person Learning is a Luxury Months into the Coronavirus Crisis,” October 9, 2020, CNBC, accessible at <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/10/09/in-person-learning-is-a-luxury-months-into-the-coronavirus-crisis.html>**

Remote schooling remains a struggle for many families. Yet there is still a real risk in returning to the classroom.

As of a recent tally, 87% of institutions have combined in-person and virtual learning in response to the public health crisis, according to a report by the Institute of International Education that was based on data collected in July from more than 500 colleges and universities in the U.S.

Now, months into the pandemic, the students who can learn in person are at an advantage, experts say.

The coronavirus outbreak laid bare how ill-prepared most schools had been when it came to remote learning. From grade school through graduate school, many institutions have struggled to provide the same level of education they did pre-Covid-19...

Diermeier predicts more colleges and universities will reopen campuses in the spring as the stakes get higher for schools and students.

The institutions that remain remote risk undermining the value education provides to this generation, he cautioned.

“Education is a ticket to a different life, and we are not providing that right now,” Diermeier said.

“This a profound tragedy with long-term consequences.”

#### **15. תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ו עמוד א**

אמר רבין בר רב אדא אמר רבי יצחק: מנין שהקדוש ברוך הוא מצוי בבית הכנסת שנאמר: אלהים נצב בעדת אל; ומנין לעשרה שמתפללין ששכינה עמם - שנאמר: אלהים נצב בעדת אל; ומנין לשלשה שיושבין בדין ששכינה עמם - שנאמר: בקרב אלהים ישפוט; ומנין לשנים שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה ששכינה עמם - שנאמר: אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' וגו'.

#### **15. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 6a**

In explaining Abba Binyamin’s statement, **Ravin bar Rav Adda said that Rabbi Yitzhak said: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is located in a synagogue? As it is stated: “God stands in the congregation of God; in the midst of the judges He judges” (Psalms 82:1).** The congregation of God is the place where people congregate to sing God’s praises, and God is located among His congregation.

**And from where is it derived that ten people who pray, the Divine Presence is with them? As it is stated: “God stands in the congregation of God,”** and the minimum number of people that constitute a congregation is a quorum of ten.

**From where is it derived that three who sit in judgment, the Divine Presence is with them?** It is derived from this same verse, **as it is stated: "In the midst of the judges He judges,"** and the minimum number of judges that comprises a court is three.

**From where is it derived that two who sit and engage in Torah study, the Divine Presence is with them?** **As it is stated: "Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with the other, and the Lord listened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that fear the Lord, and that think upon His name"** (Malachi 3:16). The Divine Presence listens to any two God-fearing individuals who speak with each other.

#### **16. מלאכי פרק ג טו**

אָז נִדְבְּרוּ יְרָאֵי ה' אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשָׁב ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּפְתַּח סֵפֶר זְכוֹנָיו לְיִרְאֵי ה' וַלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ:

#### **17. שער הכוונות (מכתבי האר"י) – דרושי ברכת השחר**

קודם שהאדם יסדר תפילתו בבית הכנסת מפרשת העקידה ואילך צריך שיקבל עליו מצות ואהבת לרעהו כמוך ויכוין לאהוב כל אחד מבני ישראל כנפשו כי עי"ז תעלה תפילתו כלולה מכל תפילות ישראל ותוכל לעלות למעלה ולעשות פרי ובפרט אהבת החברים העוסקים בתורה ביחד צריך כל אחד ואחד לכלול עצמו כאלו הוא אבר אחד מן החברים שלו ובפרט אם יש להאדם ידיעה והשגה לדעת ולהכיר לחברו בבחינת הנשמה ואם יש איזה חבר מהם בצרה צריכים כולם לשתף עצמם בצער או מחמת חולי או מחמת בנינים ח"ו ויתפללו עליו וכן בכל תפילותיו וצרכיו ודבריו ישתף את חברו עמו ומאד הזהירני מורי ז"ל בענין אהבת החברים שלנו של חברתינו

#### **18. דוב זינגר, "שיח מבלבל", ליבא, נגיש ב [leeba.org.il/1028](http://leeba.org.il/1028)**

אנחנו רגילים לשתף כל הזמן, אבל רק בדברים חיצוניים. לימוד עם חברים הוא מתכון יהודי ישן לחיים של חברות ושל עשייה כולם חברים בקבוצות וואטסאפ. זה לא במקרה – יש לנו צורך אנושי אמיתי בשיתוף. אבל סמיילי בטלפון או תמונה בפייסבוק, יהיו כנים ככל שיהיו, אינם שיחה חברית. לרוב הם אינם באים מהלב ולמען האמת, הם גם לא מפיגים את הבדידות. הבדידות הזו – מלווה אותנו בזמן שאנחנו כמהים לקשר אמיתי. אנחנו רוצים שותפים לדרך ורוצים לחלוק איתם דברים פנימיים ומחשבות עמוקות. אנחנו רוצים להיות יותר מאשר כרזת פרסומת פוטוגנית, לדבר עם מישהו גם על מה שכואב וקשה. הרב דב זינגר, ראש ישיבת "מקור חיים" ומקים בית המדרש להתחדשות, על דרך ליצירת שיח מלב אל לב – שיח מבלבל. חברות אנשים שמפנות להן זמן פעם בשבוע כדי לדבר. לא פטפטט כי אם שיח מכוון. שיח עמוק, שיח רך, דיבור שמתחיל בברכה ומתפתח אל קשר עמוק וארוך טווח. אל יכולת לבנות ולהיבנות ולצאת אל העולם בחזרה שלם יותר.

#### **19. דוב זינגר, "מי עומד מולי?!", ליבא, נגיש ב [leeba.org.il/6285](http://leeba.org.il/6285)**

לחוש את שאי אפשר להרגיש בחושים, לתפוס את הבלתי נתפס, לעמוד מול קיר ריק, לומר "ברוך אתה", ולהרגיש באמת נוכחות של "אתה" שמקשיבה לנו. דב זינגר בחלק א' מתוך "המדריך לתפילה" כמעט ואין אדם שלא התפלל, לפחות פעם בחייו. גם אותם אלה שלא פתחו סידור מעולם, כנראה מצאו עצמם, לאחר ראיון עבודה, אודישן גורלי, או בדיקה רפואית מכרעת, מרימים עיניים למעלה, ומבקשים. האדם, מטבעו, הוא יצור מבקש. ואם כבר לבקש, כדאי לדעת איך. הסרטון הנוכחי הוא הראשון מבין סדרת סרטונים "המדריך לתפילה", שעוסקת במהות של אותה פנייה אנושית לעבר שהוא שלמעלה, ובסרטון ננסה להבין – מי בעצם עומד מולנו, ובעיקר, איך מרגישים את הנוכחות שלו? "בשלב הראשון בתפילה, כדאי להפוך את הדיבור של התפילה ממלמול לפניה", מציע דב זינגר, "במלמול אני אומר את הדברים ביני לבין עצמי, אני קרא את הטקסט ואומר את המילים, אבל אני לא מפנה אותם. היכולת הזו לעשות את הטרימנספורמציה הופכת את המילים לתפילה אמיתית." "אחת המילים שחוזרות על עצמן יותר מכל בסידור, היא המילה 'אתה'", הוא מצוין, "ברוך אתה, את חונן לאדם דעת, אתה קדוש. היכולת הזאת לומר את המילה 'אתה' בעצם משקפת את העובדה שאני ניצב 'מולך' ולכן אני מדבר אתך בלשון נוכח. אתה." כדי להתאמן על זה, הוא מציע טכניקה מעניינת: "הייתי מציע לקחת חבר, לישבת אחד מול השני, לשתוק כמה זמן, ולנסות להרגיש אחד את הנוכחות של השני, לחוש מי עומד מולי, לראות שיש פה שתי עיניים, נשמה, אדם. כשאנחנו קשובים לנוכחות של החבר וחשים אותה בצורה ודאית, רק אז אנחנו יכולים לומר את המילה החשובה מאד "אתה". עלינו לחזור עליה. לא "אתה חכם", לא "אתה נחמד", לא "אתה חושב ש...". פשוט אתה. המילה אתה כשלעצמה יוצרת את התדר של הנוכחות. אחרי שעשינו את האומן הזה, אנחנו יכולים לשים לב בתפילה לנקודה הזו. להתחיל לכוון בה. לומר אתה ולהתכוון באמת. דרכה לשים לב שהמילים יוצאות מעצמנו, מארבע האמות שלנו, ומשוגרות לנוכחות של האתה שנמצא מולנו."

## **20. Bettina Bergo, "Emmanuel Levinas," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy***

As individuals, we are always already in social relations, marked by a remainder of responsibility. We have always already been impacted by the expression (or face) of an other. Yet, because the immediacy of this impact resists conceptualization, we tend to overlook the force the other's address has on us (as facial expression or words)... The other's facial expression or bodily posture affects me before I begin to reflect on it. As indicated, it is dual: a command and a summons. Naked and defenseless, the face signifies, with or without words, "Do not kill me". It opposes a passive resistance to our desire for mastery wherein our freedom asserts its sovereignty (TI: 84). Levinas speaks of the face of the other who is "widow, orphan, or stranger". While these are biblical figures, he argues that we encounter them concretely even before transcribing them into religious allegory (TI: 76–78). Indeed they invest our freedom as the possibility of giving.

## **(Re)Building Religious Community**

### **21. רב שג"ר, "הגאולה של הפוסטמודרני: על המשיח של המטריקס", שארית האמונה, ד' 38-41**

אפשר להבין את הסרט מטריקס, המלמד כי המשיח הוא האקר. זהו, לדעתי, החידוש הדתי של הסייבר ספייס הפוסטמודרני; בדומה לאותה "איש נאה", הזריו והמתוחכם, שכוחו בהבניה מחודשת של המציאות ובכך הוא חומק מאילווציה, כך אותו משיח מחולן המתואר בסרט, ניאו, משחרר מהקביעות ומהעכבות של המציאות-מטריקס ומכשיר אותה לקסם, או שמא נאמר, לנס, לתיקון האונטולוגי-המשיחי של המקובלים.

אם כן, ההאקר הוא הפנומן הדתי-המשיחי של העידן הפוסטמודרני. הוא המהפכן, וליתר דיוק, החתרן שבידו לקרוא תיגר. הוא אינו שחקן שחמט הנאבק בתבונה, היות שלא עומדת מולו תבונה; מה שעומד לפניו אינו מציאות אלא וירטואליות, חוסר ממשות... ההאקר אינו מערער על המציאות, אלא מערער את המציאות, הופך אותה לזרימה ולשינוי טהורים....

בסרט מטריקס העולם הוא הדימוי של המחשב, והאדם כבול לדימוי הזה. מול כבילות זו מוצבת היכולת האנושית של ההאקר לחולל באמצעות הדמיון מציאות – אמנם מציאות מדומינת, אבל מציאות. למעשה, המשיח של המטריקס אינו כופר בהיותו של העולם דימוי – ההפך הוא הנכון. מה שהופך אותו למשיח הוא היותו האקר, כלומר אדם כזה שבגיניו העולם הופך להיות דימוי והשלכה אנושית ולא ממוחשבת, והמציאות המטריקסית עצמה הופכת לדימוי והשלכה של ההאקר ההאנושי....

אם כן, בעולם המטריקס הפוסטמודרני המשיח הוא דווקא איש ההיי-טק, והמסתורין הדתי אינו אלא תולדה של שליטת המכונה-מחשב על האדם. הרי אי אפשר להתעלם מהעובדה, הבאה לידי ביטוי בסרטים מסוגת המדע הבדיוני ובראשם מטריקס, שלעולם הווירטואלי האמור להיות עולם מחשבי קר, אנמי, סימולטיבי ולא ממשי, גלווה בעוצמה רבה דווקא הקסם, והיכולת האנושית המושגת בו היא לעילא ולעילא....

אם כן, אפשר למצוא במצב הפוסטמודרני אופציה דתית-מיסטית מלהיבה. יכולה להתחולל כאן העלאה של העולם האנושי בכלל ושל המרחב הדתי בפרט. ראשית, נוכחת לפנינו האפשרות למהפך של המובן והמשמעות של המסמנים בעולם הדתי. מסמנים כדוגמת גאולה, קדושה, תפילה, אמונה ובחירה חופשית יכולים לקבל מובן חדש ומפתיע, מובן שבו נעוץ הפתח לחיים דתיים חיוניים ויצירתיים. שנית, העולם בכללו יכול להיות מזוהה ככזה שעובר תמורה רדיקלית ביותר, תמורה שהיא הפתח לגאולה המיוחלת....

## **22. Challenge of the Times: Introduction (from Asifa event), accessible**

**<https://failedmessiah.typepad.com/files/anti-internet-asifa-brochure-5-20-2012.pdf>**

It is no coincidence that Klal Yisrael has gathered as one to unite in facing the challenges of modern technology at precisely this moment. We stand in the final days before our annual renewal of Kabbalas HaTorah. Our unanimous declaration of נעשה ונשמע over 3,300 years ago was our defining moment as a nation. Yet Chazal (Shabbos 88a) point out that generations later, Klal Yisrael was moved to reaffirm their dedication to Hashem and His Torah.

Throughout our generations of wandering since we entered this long and bitter golus, our nation has been faced with many trials. Only by standing together and remaining firmly entrenched in the faith of our fathers have we persevered. Yet today we find ourselves threatened by a test of frightening magnitude, one that has already done untold harm to our people. It is an unseen adversary that jeopardizes our very existence.

Once again we are standing at a crossroads, a defining moment in the history of our nation. Our Gedolim have risen to the challenge and called upon us, the rank and file of Klal Yisrael, to join them in taking up the fight. And on a personal level, this is a defining moment in the lives of each one of us. By joining the asifa we are reaffirming our dedication to the principles of the Torah, and we are renewing our proud rallying call

of געזעה ונשמע. We are showing the world yet again that through our dedication we are truly worthy of being the nation of Hashem and the bearers of his Torah.

It must be made clear before we introduce the various solutions that will be offered for the internet, such as filters and blocks, that these are not true “solutions.” They do not solve the internet problem. The only real “solution” is to ban all access to the internet. And that, in fact, is what each of us who can do so must do.

## Divine Presence

### **23. Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, pp. 398-399**

The general predication (with Being) of that which is represented in an Ultimate Sacred Postulate may become conflated in ritual with the numinous state of “being” of the performer. Numinous experiences, even those that are much less profound than those achieved in mystical states, are widely described as ones in which the divine being is experienced as present. In James’ words cited in the last section, there is “a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of ‘something there’”; and that ‘something’ is, in Otto’s words, “urgent, vital, willful, forceful, passionate, excited, overwhelming.” With loss of the sense of distinction between themselves and that which is meaningful, the worshipers may sense that they are participating in, or becoming one with, or at least in the close presence of, the divine being. This suggests that the divine object – that which is denoted or represented by an Ultimate Sacred Postulate – is predicated as present and urgent in ritual by the numinous experience of worshipers who take their experiences to be reactions to, or experiences of, divinity. That divinities are reflexive creations of their worshippers is, as noted in an earlier chapter, implicit in the etymology of the English word God. It is, according to both the American Heritage and the Oxford English Dictionaries, derived from an Indo-European root meaning “That which is invoked or that to which sacrifice is made.” And so, the “urgency” that the worshipers feel emanating from the god in whose presence they sense they stand is that which they have projected into it, reflected back upon them. God’s Being is the sum, or rather the amalgamation of, its creatures’ states of being.

The “Being” with which the numinous state of its creatures predicates the divine is ineffable because rationally incomprehensible. First, the One such numinous experiences seems to animate is of an order of being different from that of the worshiper: an order of being of which the worshiper is only a part. As parts, the worshipers may sense the whole, or even attempt to describe it, but the nature of its animation cannot be fully grasped by them rationally. Secondly, their sense of it, being numinous, is, in its nature, non-discursive although the divine itself includes discursive or conceptual elements, themselves of enormous cognitive and rational attractiveness. They do not merely account for the otherwise inexplicable but, as argued throughout this book, they sanctify, and thus establish, the world’s orders. In the non-discursive comprehension of that which includes discursive elements, the non-discursive may seem to encompass, and in some ineffable sense surpass, the discursive.

Ritual is, thus, the furnace within which the image of God is forged out of the gifts of language and the powers of human emotion. This argument suggests that the idea of the divine, like that of the sacred, is as old as humankind.