

SELECTED PESACH INSIGHTS FROM RABBI ZEVULUN CHARLOP ZT"l

Pesach 1965: Wither Automation? Machine Matzos vs Hand- Made Matzos

Yesterday's vision or nightmare is today's reality. Automation is here. It is working profound changes in our society and way of life. And not unexpectedly grave and urgent problems are following in its wake.

The machine is doing our work for us and even our thinking. This has resulted in vast amounts of leisure time and real anxiety over man's future usefulness or obsolescence. In sum, automation — its impact upon the human personality as well as its moral implications — is fast becoming a predominant concern of man.

It boils down to the question: The machine has come of age but has man . . . has he, in his new technology, fabricated a golem, which Frankenstein-like will turn on its creator and destroy him or has he, at long last, fashioned that marvelous and benevolent tool which will finally enable him to relieve

the burden of suffering and love his neighbor as himself?

Two recent stories that have become part of the burgeoning folklore growing around the machine and computer, seem to us, to trenchantly depict the alternatives that lie before man.

In one story, a high ranking general is pictured as asking the computer, "What would happen if the Russians in 1975 directed 200 missiles with hydrogen warheads against our leading urban and industrial areas, 28% of which would be shot down by our defense establishments before they reached their targets, and we, in turn retaliated by sending 200 of our own missiles headed towards their chief installations and of which they managed to intercept 24% . . . What would happen?" The machine lit up, bells sounded, a whizzing noise shunted back and forth, up and down, until finally the answer arrived, "Yes!" The indignant general fed back into the machine, "Yes, what?" Again, after going through all the motions, the machine replied, "Yes, Sir!"

The second story tells about some



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technicians with time on their hands who decided to give their computer a really hard question. They asked it, "Is there a G-d?"

The machine rumbled, lights flashed, and the current whirred through its millions of transistors and memory cells. After a time, it produced this answer, "There is now!" This is automation's challenge to man. Will he become a dehumanized robot, bereft of all freedom, serving his god the machine, or will he bend the machine to do his bidding and say "Yes Sir" to him.

No sector of society and life including religion have escaped the onslaught of automation. Probably its first intrusion

upon Jewish religious observance was the introduction of the automated, mass producing and electrically controlled matzos and machines. The advent of the machine matzo two and three generations ago occasioned heated controversy among the learned rabbis and though, today, they generally and unqualifiedly approve of the machine matzo, the dispute has by no means entirely abated. There remains a hard core of devout Jews who persist in using only handmade matzos.

The argument chiefly centers around the halachic requirements of matzos mitzvah — the unleavened bread which is consumed at the Seder in fulfillment of the commandment to eat matzo on Passover. This matzo, according to Jewish law, must be directly produced by the energies of an “intelligent” man — *koach adam*—who is deliberately aware during the entire matzo making process, of its special significance and purpose. The question automation poses is whether pushing a button in a matzo plant satisfies these requisites and can also be considered *koach adam*—whether it is true to say that the button pusher makes matzos in the same way as the baker who turns them down with his own hands. Some are not convinced that this is the case.

Perhaps they have never articulated

their opposition to the machine matzo in these terms of the dilemma of man and the machine. Yet deep down, subconsciously even, there is the suspicion that the machine is more than a servile extension of man and that, in some growing sense, it is apart from man capable even of exerting its mechanic’s will upon him. Only history can ultimately decide this issue.

Pesach 1982: Is Mashiach Here? The Song

The holiday of Passover celebrates the deliverance of old and prophesizes the redemption to come. Beyond this, Passover is uniquely a time for song. On Shabbos Chol HaMoed, the intermediate Sabbath of Passover, we chant the Song of Songs. On the 7th day of Passover we read Moses’ Song of the Sea, and the Haftorah is the Song of David. The emphasis on song on Passover is not accidental. Rather it bespeaks the unavoidable link between song and redemption, between *shira* and *geulah*.

The Talmud tells us that G-d had originally desired to make Hezkeyahu, King of ancient Judea, and the Babylonian Emperor Sennacherib, who laid siege to Jerusalem, Gog and Magog, whose titanic struggle in the

end of days was to herald the coming of Mashiach. But the *midat hadin*, “the quality of justice” demurred and asked: Almighty, if You didn’t make David Mashiach, who offered, in all circumstances, good and ill, hymns and songs of praise before You, then how can you consider making Hezkeyahu Mashiach, Hezkeyahu who failed to say *shira* in the face of the most incredible miracles including the abject routing of Sennacherib’s vaunted legions without the loss of a single Jewish life?

Hashem’s intention was stayed by the irrefutable logic of the *midat hadin*, and Mashiach is still to come.

Mind you, Hezkeyahu, next to Mashiach, was possibly the greatest promulgator of Torah in the whole history of learning.

Hezkeyahu had planted a sword by the door of the Bais Hamedrash and proclaimed; “He who will not study the Torah will be pierced by the sword.” Search was made from Dan unto Beer Sheva and not an ignoramus was found . . . There wasn’t a boy or girl, man or woman, who wasn’t thoroughly versed in the laws of cleanness and uncleanness.

There was never a time of greater Torah dissemination and observance than Hezkeyahu’s and indeed, “it was the oil of Hezkeyahu that destroyed the yoke of Sennacherib.” (*Sanhedrin* 94a) Yet, because he failed to say *Shira*, the coming of the Messiah was postponed for another 2500 years at least, and we have had to suffer the most harrowing succession of calamities ever sustained by any people in all the annals of history — the destruction of two temples, the expulsions, massacres, pogroms, humiliation and wretchedness of the *galus*, and finally in our time, the Holocaust: And all this because Hezkeyahu failed to say *shira*, to thank



G-d for the miracles wrought in his time and on behalf of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel. All his Torah and the Torah of his generation were to little avail and could not overcome the offense of silence, of not saying *shira*.

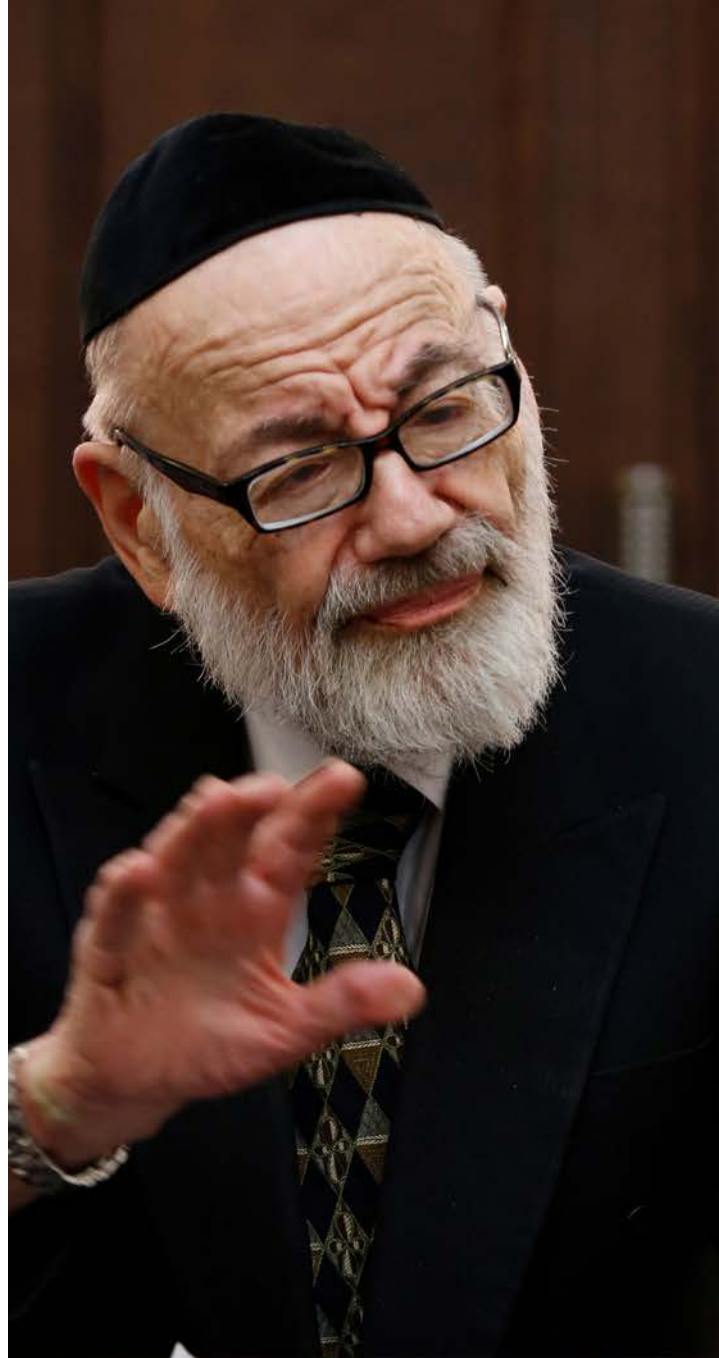
The transgression was compounded, it seems to me, by the fact that he, above all others, knew how to sing. For the Talmud, in Baba Batra 15a, tells us that it was none other than Hezkeyahu and his company who composed Shir Hashirim, the Song of Songs, which according to Rabbi Akiva, is *kodesh kadoshim*, the Holy of Holies of Scripture. To know how to say shira and not to say it when the moment for its saying finally arrives, is a cardinal lapse and forfeits Mashiach.

Implicit in all this is the unavoidable realization that whatever our preconception about Mashiach, he apparently is not a fixed being, destined to come at fixed time, but there are certain junctures in history which can indubitably be reckoned as Messianic times, and that there are certain personalities in those times who can just as indubitably be denominated as Mashiach. But the moment has to be grasped, otherwise the chance is muffed.

Our great teacher and mentor Rabbi Soloveitchik, once related to us an incident in the life of his grandfather, Rabbenu Chaim o.b.m., which seems to confirm this understanding of Mashiach. A learned *meshumad*, who became a missionary, presumed to bring his “message” to the Jews of Brisk. Understandably, Rabbenu Chaim could not abide this renegade in the midst of his town and moved heaven and earth to have him banished, warning the authorities that his presence was an incitement against the tranquility of the city and its environs. The powers that be relented in the face of Rabbenu Chaim’s unyielding demand, and the apostate was ordered to leave.

In one of those incredible coincidences, Rabbenu Chaim, precisely at that time, had to go to Warsaw and he happened to be on the same train as this self-same meshumad, who had just been run out of town. The meshumad brazenly approached Rabbenu Chaim and insisted that they engage in dialogue over the question of his apostasy and Rabbenu Chaim’s abhorrence of him and what he was doing. The apostate asked Rabbenu Chaim: “You know that Maimonides [*Hilchos Melachim*, Chapter 11, Halacha 5] tells us that Rabbi Akiva was entirely persuaded that Bar Kochba was Mashiach. But Rabbi Akiva was proven dead wrong. And if Rabbi Akiva erred then about Bar Kochba being Mashiach, how can you be sure that the Mashiach I worship is not mashiach?” Rabbenu Chaim answered: “And who told you that Bar Kochba was not Mashiach? He stopped being Mashiach when he turned against the sages and was killed because of his sins!”

We live now in the most portentous time; songs of messianism are all about us. Our eyes have seen wondrous evidencings of G-d’s intervention into the affairs of men and nations, not given to ancestors far worthier than us. Why? We know not. And there is one supreme obligation for Jews today, and that is to sing, to say



Have we sung the song of sure faith and profound appreciation, which can nail down this age as the long awaited Messianic epoch, or have we allowed the extraordinary transpirings about us to leave us unmoved without a song in our hearts?

shira, so that Heaven forbends, this once in a millennia opportunity is also not blown.

Isaiah (60:22) says: "In its time, will I hasten its redemption." Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (*Sanhedrin* 98) pointed to a contradiction here. It is written at once, "in its time [will the Mashiach come]", and "I will hasten [his coming]." If we are worthy, our deliverance will be hastened. If we are not worthy, it will happen only in its own good time.

Obviously, many factors go into the determination of worthiness and unworthiness, but there can be no question that one of the most important elements in this evaluation will be if we have met the challenge of our times appropriately. Have we sung the song of sure faith and profound appreciation, which can nail down this age as the long awaited Messianic epoch, or have we allowed the extraordinary transpirings about us to leave us unmoved without a song in our hearts?

Then, Heaven forfend, we will have crushed underfoot yet another golden opportunity for Mashiach.

Pesach 2006: The Trial of Affliction, The Trial of Affluence

Several years ago, a grandson of mine spent the last days of Pesach with us. It being the first time his family had not attended our Seder, my grandson wanted me to give him another chance to find the afikomen on Shvi'i shel Pesach, the last days of the Pesach holiday, to make up for the regular afikomen he had missed during the Seder nights. I explained to him that the afikomen is a mitzvah prescribed exclusively for the Seder night, and we would be guilty of the prohibitive

commandment of *bal tosif*—adding to the mitzvah—if we instituted an afikomen during the last days of Pesach as well ... he was not mollified.

My grandson nagging me for an afikomen opportunity, I had to devise another game plan: "The hunt for the *rechush gadol*." Whereas on the first days of Passover we recall through the matza the *oni*, the affliction of our ancestors, on the second days of Passover we focus on the *rechush gadol*—the great bounty. This is what Hashem promised Avraham when He told him that his descendants would leave with *rechush gadol* after serving the Egyptians for four hundred years (Bereishis 15:14). The idea conveyed by the *rechush gadol* fits more appropriately with the notion of prizes and expensive gifts, and I felt that the *rechush gadol* hunt was the perfect game for my grandchildren to play on the second days of Pesach. The game itself is "played" with the same rules as the afikomen search; the grandchild (I suppose all children can play this game as well) must look for the *rechush gadol* matza that has been hidden in a clever place by the father or grandfather. When the young boy or girl finds the *rechush gadol*, he or she receives a reward which ought to be even more valuable than the afikomen!

The Bnei Yisroel's collection of this "great bounty" came in two stages. The first stage occurred when the Egyptians, in a miraculous turnabout, sent the Bnei Yisroel away with expensive farewell mementos that they had ostensibly borrowed. The second stage, when the Bnei Yisroel picked up from the Red Sea shores on Shvi'i shel Pesach, a week after the initial Exodus, the gorgeous armor of their drowned, Egyptian pursuers. This armor surpassed by far the wealth they had collected in Egypt, and in fact, Moshe had to coerce Bnei

Yisroel to depart from their Red Sea riches (Shemos 15:22).

There are two explanations for the need for coercion here, which, superficially, seem altogether contradictory. Rashi says that Moshe literally had to tear them away from the Red Sea because they were so engrossed in accumulating the expensive remnants of the Egyptian cavalry. The Zohar, however, understands the need for force here in an entirely new perspective. The Jews did not want to depart from the Red Sea because never before had they sensed so vividly and unmistakably—the presence of the Shechinah.

My grandfather z"l saw no contradiction between Rashi's understanding and the Zohar's. There are two tests of faith—*nisayon ha'oni*, the test of affliction, and *nisayon ha'osher*, the test of affluence. When dark times hit, it is often difficult to recognize Hashem's Presence and believe fully in His ultimate guiding hand. However, even a more difficult test is the test of affluence: to believe in Hashem and heed His Word in times of well-being and ease. A person's recognition of Hashem even in affluent times can be an even more sublime vision than in a time of adversity. There is no contradiction here between Rashi and the Zohar. Bnei Yisroel's powerful awareness of Hashem came precisely because of their preoccupation with the riches at the sea. And this is what Chazal mean when they say: "What the plainest maidservant saw at the Red Sea was not seen even by Ezekiel in his marvelous conjuring of the chariot."

"We are expected," I told my grandson, "to feel the Shechinah when we are flushed with *rechush gadol*, and indeed, it is possible for us to reach higher peaks of *yedias Hashem* in wealth than in poorness.