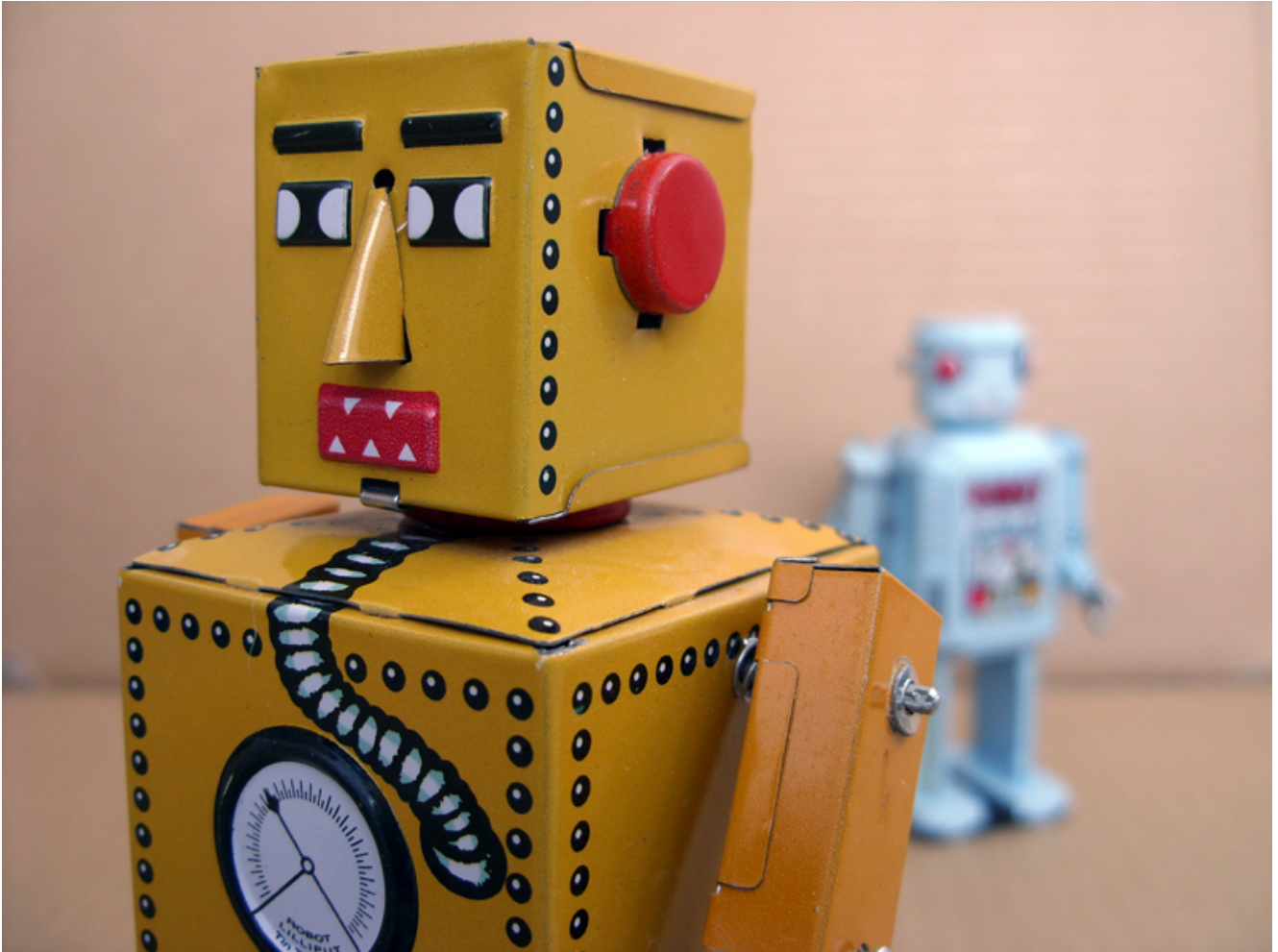


I'm Not a Robot!

written by Yossi Katz
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Last night I read a news report so upsetting, it weighed heavily on my mind the entire night. People have opposing opinions regarding current events, and it's probably better for me to leave the story out, but suffice it to say that we live at a time when good and evil are confused and compassion is often abused in the cruelest ways. This is not only true on the international stage and in the political arena, but applies equally in our everyday lives and experiences.

Take, for example, society's glorification of the pursuit of money and personal wealth. Nowadays, accumulating wealth is often seen as a religious obligation. "Heaven forbid" if someone chooses to live a simple, minimalistic lifestyle – he must be either a hippie or a loser. I once traveled upstate to

visit a friend whose chairs and cups were all unmatched. There was a beauty in the simplicity of his lifestyle and his valuing something for its practical use rather than aesthetic appeal.

By spending even a little time browsing the web, one is bombarded with advertisements and media exploiting physical beauty, food and so many other things that are sacred and meant to be earned and cherished. It is if we are being programmed that our every bodily desire is to be respected and sanctified. Society seems to be transforming into one big race for physical gratification.

As good Jews, we should be revolted by this perversion of truth, decency and human dignity. But our frequent exposure to these lies slowly dulls our conscience. Nevertheless, every so often we witness something so shocking that even we are awakened and begin to contemplate the ultimate truth. Perhaps such an experience is the news of the current barbaric murders in Israel, and the media's false representation of self-defense and basic survival. So, what are we to do? How can truth and spirituality prosper in such a vile and corrupt society?

Many years ago, there lived a different corrupt society. Born less than 300 years after the Flood, Abraham's generation was already challenging the very existence of God. Yet Abraham, who had grown up in the house of the chief idolater and idol salesman, was able to shake off the influence of the entire world and grow spiritually, becoming the first patriarch of God's People. How did he do it?

God commanded Abraham, "*Lekh lekha* – Go to yourself" (Genesis 12:1). Abraham was taught to focus on only one place: the Divine spark within himself. Eternal truth lies within. No matter what society may profess, we must learn to seek the truth within ourselves and discover our unique identity.

The verse goes on to list the influences that Abraham had to overcome to realize his individuality. "From your land" – this includes society's false attitudes and opinions. "From your birthplace" – this includes the problematic character traits and tendencies that we are born with. "From your father's house" – this includes the negative education and attitudes we may have picked up at home.

We each possess a unique soul; however, we cannot unlock its potential until we first separate ourselves and seek our individual truth, good qualities and spiritual path. Copying others, even religious and pious individuals, is detrimental to this process. Yes, we can appreciate them and all of the goodness around us, but ultimately we must seek the truth from within. We can begin by conversing with God and sharing words of sincere honesty wherever we find ourselves. By accustoming ourselves to constantly seek the truth – no matter how crude and uncharming it may seem, we can discover who we truly are and ultimately reach incredible spiritual greatness.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geneivah 5, 7-8