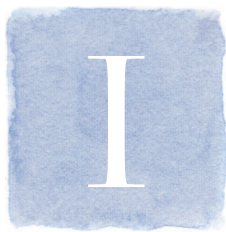# INTRODUCTION

I N FOUR PAIRS of essays — on synagogue life, education, social media, and AI — eight Jewish thinkers and practitioners examine the effects of technology on Jewish life.

Synagogue life. Rabbi Elliot J. Cosgrove of Manhattan's Park Avenue Synagogue describes how his synagogue turned the necessity of technology in the age of Covid into a virtue, blending online and offline interactions to create a richer liturgical, educational, and communal experience. Rabbi Rachel Isaacs offers a bracing counter-vision, explaining how she kept her small-town Jewish community in Maine offline and outside during the pandemic. For her, in-person is essential, because "Judaism is, at its core, an embodied faith."

Education. Mordechai Lightstone recounts the history of Chabad's embrace of technology, a project that began decades before the internet and that has expanded exponentially since then. Chabad's enormous success, he argues, is based on the Rebbe's insistence that the project is not about harnessing technology for holiness but

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about understanding that holiness is what technology is for. Sara Wolkenfeld of Sefaria is less sanguine. She examines the disruption from new technologies as the Jewish "paradigm of books" meets a world in which "searching is the new reading." There is, she suggests, no going back: "Digital natives do not find 15th-century technology to be the best way to experience Torah." So we must construct new pathways to Jewish knowledge and create a new understanding of the value of human intellectual labor in an age of machines.

Social media. Rivka Press Schwartz and Melissa Frey confront the question of the impact of social media on Jewish youth head-on. Schwartz identifies the challenge as one of "embracing new technologies and the opportunities they create without being swamped by them." We have met many other contemporary challenges while remaining true to Jewish values. Now, we must articulate "a Jewish ethic of technology" in a register students can hear. Frey offers one way forward: intentionally using overnight Jewish summer camps as a break from technology. "We teach kids that patience matters and that valuable things take time. Apps and the internet provide instant gratification, but real life and real people move at a different pace."

Artificial intelligence. Finally, Tiffany Shlain and Melanie Levav take on the question of AI. Shlain, a technology entrepreneur, is optimistic about the impact of AI on humanity, though she also relishes her practice of "Tech Shabbat," in which the screens are put away for a day a week. As she says, "all my best ideas come to me on Shabbat." Levav ends our collection, suitably enough, with a meditation on Jewish death in the age of AI, online kaddish and shiva, and life-extending technologies that might even lead to immortality. Are we entering "the death of death"? ✳

—*The Editors*