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Publisher's Note



HIS ISSUE was all but complete at the beginning of October. I now look back wistfully to days when our most urgent concern seemed to be the implications of ChatGPT. October 7 changed all that. SAPIR turned from a quarterly to a near daily, with one topic: the war in Israel. We

thought about shelving this issue, at least for a time if not for good.

Yet the story of the Jewish people is one of resilience. Tragedy is never forgotten, but it makes way for celebration. Destruction makes way for rebuilding. Once Hamas is defeated, our focus will turn back to our core mission: fostering a thriving Jewish community. We will begin that work with tears in our eyes, but begin it we must. We will have a new appreciation for the fragility of life, the value of friends, and the need for unity. But the challenges that we faced before the war will still be here. And technology is surely one of them.

In Genesis we read of the sin of Eve and Adam. The snake tempts Eve, who eats from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Why was that a sin? Isn't more knowledge — by definition — a better thing?

According to the biblical account, that early encounter changed us forever. It changed relationships between men and women. It changed the way we pursue a livelihood and put food on the table. It changed the way we saw ourselves, made us aware of our nakedness, and created the need for clothes. It banished us from the Garden of Eden. Our short-lived innocence was gone. (It didn't work out great for the snake, either.) A new era began and people had to adapt.

Today's apple is Apple. It's also Zoom and ChatGPT. The pandemic accelerated changes that were already happening. If I can attend services in my pajamas from my living room, why bundle up for synagogue? If I can ask ChatGPT a question, why seek out a rabbi? The larger issue for readers of SAPIR at this moment is whether we are objects or subjects in the new story of technology that is playing out now. Judaism must find its voice amid the cacophony and hysteria surrounding these innovations. Is it ethical to produce weapons guided by AI that will require no human intervention? Should we sacrifice privacy to monitor social media for hate and potential violence? Judaism has much to teach here.

Jewish leaders need to be on the forefront of crafting policies and modeling the use and limitations of technology. It's not easy to say "enough." Just because something is available doesn't mean it needs to be used. And yet, in a world that wanted to maximize productivity, the Jewish people introduced the weekend. In a world that is connected 24/7, we unplug on Shabbat and let our devices lie untouched for 25 hours. We can embrace technology and resist its siren call.

It's true that Adam and Eve never got to go back to the garden. But they learned that life in the suburbs wasn't all that bad. *

