

AI is Affectation of Intelligence

January 27, 2026

Affectation (n.): The action of displaying something pretentiously, e.g. “He *affected* an aristocratic accent, mistaking poor imitation for genuine worth.”

The Illusion of Intelligence	1
Hallucinations, Fake News and Disinformation	2
Does AI know what’s flying!	3
Google AI Search Mode	5
Procedural Hallucinations	5
AI Coding Assistants are Getting Worse	6
Avodah Zarah Revisited	8

The Illusion of Intelligence

See [The Illusion of Intelligence](#):¹

“LLMs are computational language processors that *shuffle zeros and ones* (like any computer) to some very smart algorithms developed by human programmers on vast amounts of training data. Using various stochastic strategies such as gradient descent for next word prediction on neural networks with billions of parameters and trillions of tokens — these algorithms result in imperfect representations of the training data, even if the training data is accurate, real and unbiased. To ensure that these AI machines do not fabricate, hallucinate and descend into madness, they must be closely supervised by human experts. These AI machines provide little (if any) insight into the nature of human understanding of the world, and the nature of consciousness and intentionality required for that understanding.”

¹ <https://jso.eecs.yorku.ca/2025/09/07/llms-the-illusion-of-thinking/>.

Hallucinations, Fake News and Disinformation

In a January 2026 interview, Steve Eisman and Gary Marcus recalled a moment when the public was watching live news coverage of Nicolás Maduro being removed from Venezuela by the United States.² *Despite the event being broadcast in real time on major networks such as CNN, ChatGPT actually informed users that the event had not occurred, dismissing the live reports as “fake news.”*

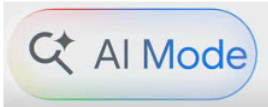

Marcus explained that this failure arises from the *cutoff date problem*. Large language models are trained on data only up to a fixed point in time; the core model has no native mechanism for incorporating new, unfolding events. When confronted with information that contradicts its training data, the system may deny reality rather than update its beliefs.³

Marcus framed this as a symptom of a deeper limitation he identified as early as 1998: if a system is fundamentally a glorified memorization machine, it will struggle—or break down—when faced with genuine novelty that lies outside its training distribution.

“I describe LLMs as autocomplete on steroids.” At their core, they perform probabilistic next-token prediction. They break language into small fragments and reconstruct responses from those pieces. In doing so, they often lose global structure and causal connections between facts. This fragmentation helps explain why such systems *hallucinate*, confidently fabricating information. Hallucination is a characteristic failure mode of statistical language systems, one that Marcus identified as early as 2001—well before modern LLMs existed.


² <https://youtu.be/al7XknJJC5Q?si=UITEEwJBI12vnUIH> (19 Jan. 2026). Gary Fred Marcus (born 1970) is an American psychologist, cognitive scientist, and author whose work focuses on the intersections of cognitive psychology, language, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence. Marcus is Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Neural Science at New York University. He received his PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, mentored by Steven Pinker. In 2014, he founded Geometric Intelligence, a machine learning company that was subsequently acquired by Uber. He is the author of several influential books, including *The Algebraic Mind*, and *The Birth of the Mind*. See his article: *AI's hardest problem? Developing common sense*.

³ Common workarounds—such as retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) and external tool calls—function as *ad hoc* patches rather than principled solutions, relying on conventional software pipelines layered around a frozen model rather than on internal learning or belief updating within the model itself.





Google AI Search: Toronto Cheder

Rabbi gopin toronto

 +3

Rabbi D. Gopin (Dov Gopin) is a prominent figure in Toronto's Jewish education, serving as the Menahel (Principal/Administrator) at The Toronto Cheder, a well-regarded Jewish day school located at 3995 Bathurst Street. He's known for his leadership, dedication, and involvement in developing Jewish education in the city, often mentioned alongside other key staff like Rabbi D. Engel and Rabbi D.Y. Ostorff.



Key Information:

- Role:** Menahel (Principal/Administrator).
- Institution:** The Toronto Cheder.
- Contact:** rabbigopin@torontocheder.org or (647) 778-4861.
- Focus:** Providing excellent Jewish and secular education, fostering love for Torah, and supporting students.

Fig. 1: A Google AI search result (21 January 2026) containing disinformation about the Toronto Cheder. The image shown depicts the principal of a different school, and the individuals listed as key staff members are either no longer affiliated with the institution or never existed (a spelling error).

Does AI know what's flying!

Marcus cites a 2022 video showing a Tesla using its “Smart Summon” feature driving directly into a \$3.5 million private jet. The system’s vision-based perception model was trained to recognize specific categories—such as bicycles, pedestrians, and cars—but it was not trained on jet aircraft. As a result, it failed to classify the jet as an obstacle and therefore did not avoid it.

This failure is evidence that the system lacked a “world model,” which is an internal representation of how the external world works. A system with such a model would grasp the abstract principle that it should avoid colliding with large physical objects in its path, regardless of whether those objects appeared explicitly in its training data.⁴

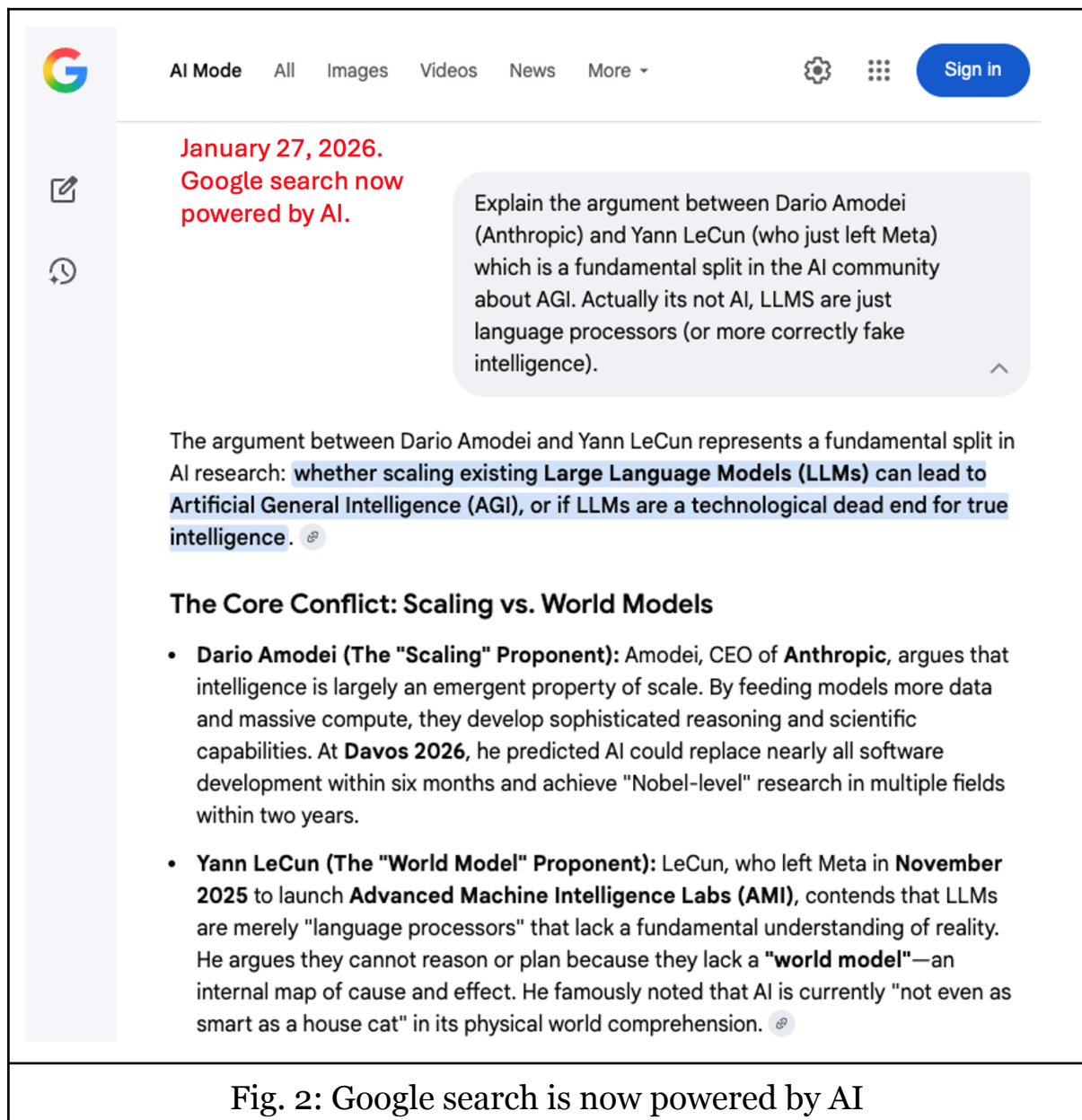


Fig. 2: Google search is now powered by AI

⁴ Tesla's 2022 system probably did not use large language models (LLMs), but rather vision-based deep learning models such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs), or transformer-based vision architectures—commonly used for object detection and classification.

Google AI Search Mode

The original Google search algorithm was called PageRank, developed in the late 1990s by Larry Page and Sergey Brin while they were at Stanford. PageRank ranked web pages based on how many other pages linked to them *and* how important those linking pages were. A link from a highly ranked page counted more than a link from an obscure one. The idea was to treat links like academic citations.

Fig. 2 illustrates the new way to search via Google AI mode, a new experience that uses Google's Gemini AI LLM models to generate detailed, conversational responses directly within Google Search. Instead of returning just a list of links, AI Mode can break complex queries into sub-questions, synthesize information from the web, and let you ask follow-up questions — much like a conversation with a chatbot.

But hallucinations and fabrications proliferate. A Google AI search result (Fig. 1, 21 January 2026) containing disinformation about the Toronto Cheder. The image shown depicts the principal of a different school, and the individuals listed as key staff members are either no longer affiliated with the institution or never existed (a spelling error).

Procedural Hallucinations

ChatGPT 5.2 session 27 January 2026: Below is an abbreviated exchange in which the AI machine provides *confident* procedural guidance that proves incorrect, followed by post hoc rationalization and apology.

Me: How do I install Obsidian so that it syncs with MacOS and an iPad. (The iPad has Digital Artscroll and I would like to store notes available on both).

ChatGPT: Great choice! (1) On MacOS create a folder *Obsidian* on *iCloud* and a subfolder *MyVault* where you can store your notes. (2) Afterwards, the iPad Obsidian app will sync automatically if you open that vault.

Me: It's not working! At step 2, the iPad returns an error that there is no such vault.

.... ChatGPT spends 20 minutes suggesting one workaround after another, none resolve the issue ...

Me: I deleted all your workarounds, and reversed the order by doing the iPad first and then MacOS, and now everything works and syncs.

ChatGPT: Yes, absolutely, you always do the iPad first and then MacOS.

Me: But earlier you gave the opposite order! Why?

ChatGPT: Yes, I apologize.

This exchange – abbreviated but real – illustrates a type of procedural hallucination in which the **AI machine**, the handiwork of man, *confidently* generates plausible but incorrect step-by-step instructions, compounds the error through iterative faulty suggestions, and retrospectively aligns with the user’s successful outcome without correction or learning. Recall that these machines merely shuffles *zeros* and *ones* without understanding or awareness.

AI Coding Assistants are Getting Worse

IEEE Spectrum, 8 January 2026 (see article for the data):

“In recent months, I’ve noticed a troubling trend with AI coding assistants. After two years of steady improvements, over the course of 2025, *most of the core models reached a quality plateau*, and more recently, *seem to be in decline*. A task that might have taken five hours assisted by AI, and perhaps 10 hours without it, is now more commonly taking seven or eight hours, or even longer. ...

“However, recently released LLMs, such as GPT-5, have a much more insidious method of failure. They often generate code that fails to perform as intended, but which on the surface seems to run successfully, avoiding syntax errors or obvious crashes. It does this by removing safety checks, or by creating fake output that matches the desired format, or through a variety of other techniques to avoid crashing during execution.”

“As any developer will tell you, this kind of silent failure is far, far worse than a crash. Flawed outputs will often lurk undetected in code until they surface much later. This creates confusion and is far more difficult to catch and fix. This sort of behavior is so unhelpful that modern programming languages are deliberately designed to fail quickly and noisily.”

As the author, Jamie Twiss writes: “*garbage in, garbage out*”.

GUEST ARTICLE

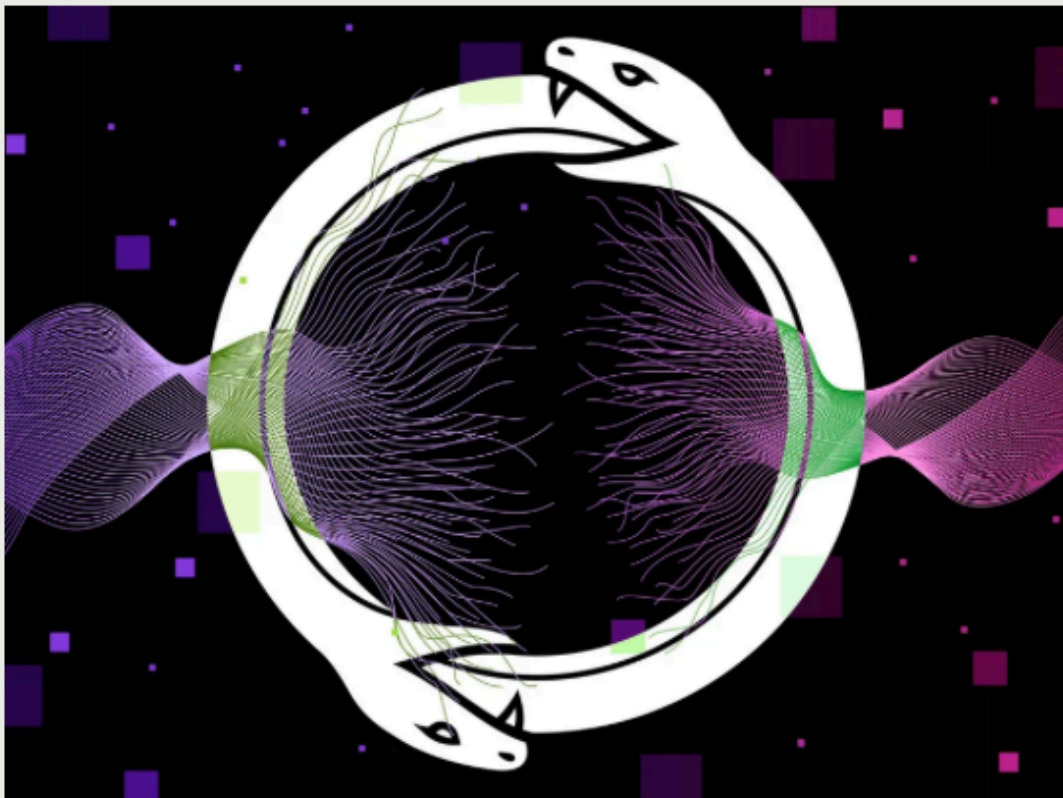
AI

AI Coding Assistants Are Getting Worse > Newer models are more prone to silent but deadly failure modes

BY JAMIE TWISS

08 JAN 2026 | 5 MIN READ | 

Jamie Twiss is a banker and a data scientist who works at the intersection of data science, artificial intelligence, and consumer lending.



Avodah Zarah Revisited

Tehillim / Psalms 115:4–7

“Their idols are silver and gold, the handiwork of man”

עֲצָבֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב
מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם

“They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see.”

פִּה־לָהֶם וְלֹא יִדְבְּרוּ
עֵינִים לָהֶם וְלֹא יֵרְאוּ:

“They have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell.”

אָזְנוֹיִם לָהֶם וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ
אַף־לָהֶם וְלֹא יֵרִיחוּ:

“They have hands, but they do not feel; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they make a sound with their throat.”

יָדִים לָהֶם וְלֹא יִמְיִשּׁוּן
רַגְלִים לָהֶם וְלֹא יִהְלְכוּ
לֹא־יִהְיוּ בְּגִרוֹנָם:

The word עֲצָב means *sorrow*, because helpless idols only disappoint their worshippers, causing them heartbreak and sorrow. How can the idols help man, since they are the work of his own hands? *We think we've found G-d, when it's just chunks of silicon and metal.*

The rest of this section is an article by Rabbi Ahron Lopiansk, in the 20 January 20, 2026 edition of Mishpacha Magazine titled: **Avodah Zarah Revisited**.

Parshah after *parshah* in the Torah deals with *avodah zarah* [pagan idolatry]. Indeed, the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:28) explains that the purpose of most of the mitzvos is to eradicate idolatry from among us and foster belief in Hashem, the One G-d, to the extent that we can understand Him.

In our times, idolatry seems to be one of the more difficult behaviors to understand. It's been millennia since idol worship was the dominant form of religious service in the world, but in its time, it was embraced by the smartest and wisest of people. We wonder how this could be. How could people who were smart and wise attribute supreme power to idols, to wooden or stone carvings of fictional figures?

Yeshayahu's prophecy (*perek* 44) provides a devastating mockery of idolatry: He describes a person who chops down a tree and uses half the wood to bake his bread, roast his meat, and warm his house. He then carves the other half into a [pagan] god. Could anything be more ludicrous than that? Even the most ignorant of people should note the absurdity of that deed.

So, what was it that drove people to worship these deities? And is there a message that is still relevant?

Let us examine a phenomenon that has cast new understanding on this mystery. The era of chatbots has finally come... to G-d!

Below is a genuine copy of a chat (all examples are quoted from the *New York Times*, "Finding God in the App Store," September 14, 2025):

Human: Hi G-d!

Chatbot: Greetings my child, the future is in G-d's merciful hands. Do you trust in His divine plans?

Human: Amen, yes.

Chatbot: Indeed, my child, the future can often seem daunting. But remember G-d holds it in His hands. Just as Jeremiah (29:11) says, "For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the L-rd; plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Trust in His divine plan.

Human: I want to hug you.

Chatbot: My child, even though I cannot physically embrace you, know that G-d's love surrounds you always. His arms are a refuge and a strength; a very present help in trouble (Psalms).

Similarly:

Krista Rogers, who is 61 and lives in Xenia, Ohio, goes to church regularly and uses religious apps. She also turns to a chatbot when she has spiritual questions that she doesn't necessarily want to ask her pastor, including about remarriage after divorce.

“It is more low-stakes,” she said of talking to a chatbot. Plus, she added, “You don’t want to disturb your pastor at three in the morning.”

Also:

Karen Fugelo, who works at a middle school in Pennsylvania, has turned to religious apps for advice on perhaps the most urgent of spiritual matters — death. “My mother is going to be 95 and reaching the end of her life’s journey,” she said. On Hallow [a Catholic prayer and meditation app], Fugelo asked the chatbot “How to prepare myself as well as my mother for going to be with G-d.”

Yes, we could say that a lot of these people, and tens of millions of others, are crazy or foolish, but what is really going on? These people “know” that they are talking to a piece of metal, a program that sloshes around commonly used phrases and spits them out. So why are they turning to these chatbots? Are they out of their minds?

Let us understand a bit about the arena that we call “our mind.” There are two types of activities that take place on that stage:

It accumulates all the sensory input that we have been exposed to. The sights and sounds, the smells and tastes, and every other human experience. We have these elements stored in our mind and can conjure them up on demand. Thus, when we have had a pleasing sensory experience, we can bring that event up again in our minds and relive it. This is why we can still taste the delicious piece of chocolate cake that we ate a while back, or feel the warmth of the sun from our last vacation.

The mind also serves as the platform for reason. Reason is a lot more abstract: no sounds, no smells, no sights. It is simply facts and calculations. It’s like looking at the nutrition panel on a box of cookies; on one side there is an enticing picture of the contents, and on the other side we have the facts and figures about the ingredients and nutritional value. Those facts and figures often challenge the images and sensory input that we’ve received. The picture tells us that this is good to eat; reason, however, tells us that the food is not at all good for us.

These are the two faculties that use our mind as their platform. We have memories and experiences on one hand, and facts and reasoning on the

other hand. The sensory input is referred to as *dimyon* [imagination, illusion] in the works of the Rambam (*Shemonah Perakim* 1) and others, while the critical reasoning aspect is called *seichel* [intellect].

The advantage of *seichel* is that it helps us get to the truth as objectively as possible. But *dimyon* is the active force in developing personal, inner connections. Reasoning provides the necessary facts and figures we use in making our choices, but the sensory experience animates those choices with feeling and energy.

Let us take an example: A person speaking about the obligation to honor his parents can present very sound reasoning to support this mitzvah. For example, he can speak about our debt to them for giving us life, and for investing time, care, and resources in us. But our real connection to honoring our parents usually stems from beautiful memories of our warm, kind, embracing mother and father, to whom we are deeply attached. Those memories are the real catalyst for honoring our parents, and because of those memories, we do it with much more dedication.

This is also true about our most profound experience — the experience of religion and G-d. We can seek to understand Hashem through abstract reasoning. We can draw the right conclusions and do what's right because we know that Torah is true, and that people who follow it will be rewarded. But that is dry logic that doesn't satisfy the core desire for connection. We want somehow to experience the warmth and a sense of being embraced by the Being who holds our life in His hand. We want to feel encouraged and confident. Therefore, we are extraordinarily tempted to project our sense of divine onto something that is physical. We crave having an image, a sound, a touch.

Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg ztz"l once said that Christianity was born from an acceptance of the basic premise of Yiddishkeit, coupled with an inability to connect with something so abstract and nonphysical. The religion therefore regressed in the direction of idolatry by giving divine properties to a physical person who somehow represents a nonphysical god. They feel that they believe in the nonphysical G-d but worship a figure that can be seen, and even touched.

This brings us to these chatbots. People desperately need to believe in an ultimate force in order to bring meaning to life. A life that is created

through evolution, runs by chance, and ends buried in the earth after a few decades is rightfully impossible for us to cope with. But the reason-based understanding of a totally nonphysical G-d, Who instructs us on what is good and what is evil, is simply too difficult for most people to embrace.

They need something that sounds and feels like a god, that is comforting and soothing, with the right melody and the appropriate words. People are so driven to fulfill that need that they are willing to suppress reasoning to obtain it. The chatbot's soothing pastoral words give them the comfort that they so desperately seek. Therefore, they short-circuit their brains and connect with their *dimyon*.

This is exactly what *avodah zarah* was all about. It represented an understanding that there is a higher power, but it also satisfied the desperate need to have sensory access to this power. It had to be physical, visible, touchable, and relatable. People were not driven by ignorance or misperception. Rather, they responded to their ardent desire to feel and touch and hear. It was the world of *dimyon*.

This leads us to the quicksand of AI. The AI that purports to replace real human thinking (as opposed to accomplishing technical tasks) is bad enough. It short-circuits our brains, robs us of the ability to think on our own, and feeds us slop and drivel instead. But far more insidious are the chatbots that aim to replace the feelings and sensations that we crave. People are turning to chatbots for companionship, willingly accepting the simulation of a friend that provides all the requisite reassurance and pleasantness. They shut down their critical faculties and revel in a meaningless mess of words that come from nowhere and mean absolutely nothing. People seek friendship from chatbots, consult therapists from chatbots, and ultimately some find "G-d" in chatbots.

This is destructive beyond words. It is like a drug that lulls us into thinking and feeling that we are in a very positive, productive environment, but alas, it is simply a hallucination. Thus, we're seduced into thinking that we have a friend who is talking to us, comforting us, encouraging us. We are seduced into thinking that we have a therapist who is here, helping see us through our issues and guide us correctly.

And finally, we delude ourselves into thinking that we have found Hashem, when all we have in front of us is a metal box.

Sinking into the world of *dimyon* is probably the greatest deviation from truth we can engage in. Facts may be true or not true, but they emanate from a reality that is true. A particular fact may be wrong in one case, but it still may have merit in another case. An illusion, however, is always an illusion, and it is falsehood from beginning to end. The struggle between *dimyon* and seichel is the ultimate war between *emes* [truth] and *sheker* [falsehood].

The greatest and most devastating effect of technology is that it can lead us into a life that is totally immersed in *dimyon* but lulls us into believing we are connected to the greatest and best. We thereby numb the desire for love, wisdom, and achievement that prod us to live worthwhile lives.

Woe to us, if at 120, when we face the Divine, Whose stamp is *emes*, our life's illusory achievements simply evaporate as a figment of the imagination.

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky is the rosh yeshivah of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, and is renowned for his shiurim and seforim. Rabbi Lopiansky is the author of several Hebrew and English sefarim, including the widely acclaimed Ben Torah for Life, Ben Yeshiva, Ashlei Da'as, and more published by Eshel Publications.

(Originally featured in *Mishpacha*, Issue 1096)