

Ghost in the Machine

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Good Morning! Deborah Netburn of the LA Times recently wrote an article that caught my attention:

Sometimes Rabbi Joshua Franklin knows exactly what he wants to talk about in his weekly Shabbat sermons — other times, not so much. It was on one of those not-so-much days on a cold afternoon in late December that the spiritual leader of the Jewish Center of the Hamptons decided to turn to artificial intelligence.

Franklin, 38, who has dark wavy hair and a friendly vibe, knew that OpenAI's new ChatGPT program could write sonnets in the style of Shakespeare and songs in the style of Taylor Swift. Now, he wondered if it could write a sermon in the style of a rabbi.

So he gave it a prompt: "Write a sermon, in the voice of a rabbi, about 1,000 words, connecting the Torah portion this week with the idea of intimacy and vulnerability, quoting Brené Brown" — the bestselling author and researcher known for her work on vulnerability, shame and empathy.

The result, which he shared that evening in the synagogue's modern blond wood sanctuary and later posted on Vimeo, was a coherent if repetitive talk that many in his congregation guessed had been crafted by famous rabbis.

"You're clapping," Franklin said after revealing that the sermon he'd just delivered was composed by a computer. "I'm terrified."

Terrified, he says! When I read this article I knew, I *knew* I needed to try out this new technology. I have been playing around with ChatGPT for the last few weeks and to be honest, I'm amazed by what it has been able to produce. The responses I get to some of my questions and writing prompts are surprisingly nuanced.

Some of you may remember a time, just a few years back when this congregation faced a momentous challenge. How were we all to stay together despite the isolation and quarantines of the COVID pandemic? You were a brave bunch for sure! We were offering virtual Sunday services within two weeks, and you embraced the possibilities of technology – technology that is allowing me to join you from 1000 miles away at this very moment!

COVID changed the cultural paradigm. It prompted us to reevaluate what we knew about connection, community, and safety. It made us look at our rituals and traditions in new ways and forced us to change how we engaged with each other and the world.

Though it's only been 3 years, we find ourselves at the next major paradigm shift. This time the paradigm shift is not assisted by technology. This time technology *is* the paradigm shift. Artificial Intelligence is here, and it is poised to fundamentally reshape our world.

So, I thought, how might help this congregation - who embraced technology once before, in a time when there were few other options – learn about and navigate the emergence of AI? Let's take a look at it together. This morning, AI is going to write the sermon!

Hello ChatGPT! Are you sentient?

ChatGPT

Hello! As an AI language model, I am not sentient. I lack consciousness, self-awareness, and emotions. I am a sophisticated program designed to process and generate human-like text based on patterns in the data I was trained on. My responses are generated based on statistical associations and patterns in the text data, rather than through understanding or consciousness. My purpose is to provide useful and informative responses to your queries to the best of my abilities. If you have any questions or need assistance, feel free to ask!

User

I am a Unitarian Universalist minister who is demonstrating ChatGPT to the congregation in real time. They can read your responses along with me.

ChatGPT

Hello and welcome to the congregation! It's a pleasure to be here with you all, and I'm honored to assist you in demonstrating ChatGPT today. As a Unitarian Universalist minister, you may have various questions or topics you'd like to explore together. Please feel free to ask anything, and I'll do my best to provide thoughtful and informative responses for everyone to read. Let's engage in a meaningful and enlightening conversation!

User

I would like to write a sermon three sentences at a time. The topic will Joy. The sermon should only use Unitarian Universalist principles. The total length of when delivered should be about 5 minutes. Please write the first 3 lines.

ChatGPT

Friends, today we gather to explore the profound theme of Joy through the lens of our Unitarian Universalist principles. Joy is not just an ephemeral emotion but a deep-rooted experience that connects us to one another and the interconnected web of existence. Let us embark on this journey together, seeking the sources of joy within ourselves and the world around us.

User

Continue with the next three sentences.

ChatGPT

In our search for joy, we find inspiration in the inherent worth and dignity of every being. Embracing this principle, we recognize that joy resides in the acknowledgment and celebration of each person's uniqueness and inherent value. As we extend compassion and kindness to one another, we cultivate a space where joy can blossom and flourish.

User

Continue with the next three sentences but summarize what has been said and use a rhetorical question.

ChatGPT

So far, we've delved into the essence of joy, understanding it as more than fleeting happiness but a profound connection with our interconnected world. We've explored how the principle of inherent worth and dignity plays a vital role in nurturing joy by celebrating the uniqueness of each individual. Now, let us ponder this: How can we embrace compassion and kindness further, creating a fertile ground for joy to take root in our lives and the lives of others?

User

Please rewrite the last response and make it more upbeat.

ChatGPT

As we journey through this exploration of joy, we've discovered its profound significance, transcending fleeting happiness to connect us deeply with the world around us. Embracing the principle of inherent worth and dignity, we celebrate the beauty of our uniqueness, nurturing joy in every heart. Now, let's ignite our spirits with excitement! How can we amplify compassion and kindness, creating an irresistible garden of joy blooming within and around us, making every moment an uplifting celebration?

User

Write the next three line using a sermon illustration that relates to the rhetorical question. The sermon illustration should be how Tri-UU gives food to the local food bank and has an vibrant care team attending the needs of the members of the congregation.

ChatGPT

Imagine, dear congregation, the impact of compassion in action! Just as the sun's rays nourish the earth, so does Tri-UU's dedication to giving back to the community by providing sustenance to the local food bank. Witness the vibrant care team tending to the needs of our congregation, like a beautiful garden of support, embracing each individual with warmth and empathy. By sowing seeds of kindness and tending to the growth of love within our community, we foster a bountiful harvest of joy that spreads far beyond our walls, touching the lives of many in uplifting ways.

User

Write the next three lines of the sermon and reflect on how joy also interfaces with the third Unitarian Universalist principle.

ChatGPT

In the tapestry of our Unitarian Universalist principles, joy weaves itself gracefully with the third principle: acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth. As we experience joy through acts of service and care, we create an environment where acceptance flourishes, nurturing the spiritual growth of both giver and receiver. Like a flourishing garden, our hearts blossom with joy as we cultivate an inclusive community, embracing diverse perspectives, and allowing the radiant colors of each individual's spiritual journey to enrich our collective experience. Let us revel in the beauty of this interconnected dance, where joy and acceptance intertwine, guiding us towards a more compassionate and joyous world.

User

ChatGPT what are the Unitarian Universalist principles?

ChatGPT

The Unitarian Universalist principles are a set of seven guiding values and beliefs that form the foundation of the Unitarian Universalist faith. They are as follows:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person: Each individual is valuable and deserving of respect and compassion.

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations: We strive to create fair and loving communities that promote justice and equality.

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth: We embrace diversity and support each other's spiritual journeys.

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning: We are encouraged to seek truth through reason, experience, and spiritual exploration.

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process: We affirm the democratic process and respect the right of individuals to make their own choices based on conscience.

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all: We work towards a world where peace, freedom, and justice are realized for everyone.

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence: We recognize our connection to all living beings and the Earth, promoting environmental stewardship.

These principles provide a framework for Unitarian Universalists to engage in personal growth, community building, and the pursuit of a just and compassionate world.

User

Write the next three sentences of the sermon. Turn a corner in the rhetoric. Let's begin to discuss the challenges we face that stand in the way of finding joy.

ChatGPT

Yet, as we bask in the glow of these guiding principles, we must acknowledge that our journey to joy is not without its challenges. Life's tapestry is woven with both joyous moments and struggles, and it is in these challenging times that our commitment to our principles is tested. The shadows of doubt, fear, and uncertainty may cast their veil upon us, obscuring the path to joy and tugging at the fabric of our faith.

User

Write the next three lines of the sermon and use the lack of diversity in The Villages, Florida and the overturning of Roe vs. Wade by the Supreme Court.

ChatGPT

In The Villages, Florida, a community known for its demographic homogeneity, the struggle to embrace the richness of diversity can impede the full realization of joy. When we fail to celebrate the uniqueness of every individual, we deprive ourselves of the colorful threads that can enliven our shared tapestry of life.

Furthermore, recent events, like the overturning of Roe vs. Wade by the Supreme Court, have sent ripples of uncertainty and concern through our hearts. The erosion of reproductive rights affects not just a few, but the collective fabric of our society, challenging our commitment to justice and compassion.

In the face of these obstacles, we may find ourselves grappling with feelings of helplessness, anger, or frustration. But it is precisely in these moments of darkness that the light of our principles shines brightest, guiding us to engage in courageous conversations, compassionate actions, and advocacy for the flourishing of all. Let us join together, weaving threads of understanding, empathy, and solidarity, to navigate these challenges and find the resilience to reclaim joy amid adversity.

User

Continue the sermon and give 3 suggestions on how we might cultivate joy that will enrich and sustain our work as Unitarian Universalists.

ChatGPT

As Unitarian Universalists, we can cultivate joy that enriches and sustains our work by:

**Fostering Inclusivity:** Embrace diversity and actively seek to build more inclusive communities. Celebrate the beauty of our differences and create spaces where every voice is heard and valued. Engage in intentional dialogue, where we learn from one another's experiences, and find common ground despite our diverse perspectives.

**Practicing Empathy and Compassion:** Let us open our hearts to the struggles and joys of others, acknowledging that their well-being is intertwined with our own. Show empathy and compassion not only within our congregation but also in the wider world. By understanding the interconnectedness of all existence, we extend our circle of care, amplifying the joy that comes from helping others.

**Taking Courageous Action:** When faced with challenges to justice and equity, let us stand together with courage and conviction. Advocate for positive change, working to address societal issues that hinder the flourishing of joy. Engage in social justice initiatives, promote environmental stewardship, and support causes that align with our principles. Through collective action, we can make a meaningful impact on the world, infusing our lives with a sense of purpose and profound joy.

By nurturing inclusivity, practicing empathy, and taking courageous action, we strengthen the fabric of our faith community and create a resilient tapestry of joy that weaves through every aspect of our lives. As we face the complexities of the world, let our dedication to these principles be a guiding light, inspiring us to find joy in our shared journey of love, understanding, and transformative action.

User

ChatGPT bring it home.

ChatGPT

In conclusion, dear congregation, let us carry the essence of this sermon with us as we leave this sacred space and reenter the world. May we hold in our hearts the deep understanding that joy is not an isolated emotion but a harmonious dance that intertwines with our commitment to Unitarian Universalist principles.

As we encounter challenges that may test our faith and determination, let us remember the power of inclusivity, empathy, and courageous action. Embrace the joy that comes from celebrating the uniqueness of each individual, knowing that the tapestry of life is enriched by the diversity of our experiences.

Let us extend compassion and kindness to all, for it is through acts of love and understanding that we nurture joy within ourselves and in those around us. And in the face of adversity and injustice, let our principles be a guiding force that propels us forward, transforming darkness into light and sowing seeds of hope and joy for generations to come.

As we continue on our journey as Unitarian Universalists, may we find strength in our shared commitment to a more just and compassionate world. Let joy be the radiant thread that weaves through every aspect of our lives, binding us together as a community of love, resilience, and transformative grace.

And now, let us go forth with renewed hearts, inspired to cultivate joy in our actions, relationships, and endeavors. As we navigate the intricacies of life, may the joy we cultivate within us be a beacon of hope, radiating outward to illuminate the path for others.

May it be so, and amen.

User

Summarize this sermon as a haiku.

ChatGPT

Joy's tapestry weaves,

Embrace all in love's array,

Courage lights the way.

User

Summarize this sermon in the voice of Winston Churchill

ChatGPT

In our quest for joy, we must uphold the Unitarian Universalist principles as our steadfast guide. Embrace diversity and inclusivity, for therein lies the true richness of life. Be compassionate and empathetic, a beacon of light in the darkest of times. And in the face of challenges, let courage and unwavering resolve lead us forward. Together, we shall forge a path of joy, transforming the world with our collective strength and compassion!

User

Summarize this sermon in the voice of RuPaul.

ChatGPT

Darlings, the key to joy lies in embracing the Unitarian Universalist principles, hunty! Love and respect every soul's worth and dignity, sashay with justice, and work that runway of inclusivity! Show compassion and empathy, cause that's how we slay with joy and keep it real! And when obstacles come your way, honey, just werk that courage and shine bright like a superstar! Remember, we are all stars in this show of life, so let's werk it together and spread joy to the world! Now, sissy that joy!

Wow!

I will keep my final thoughts short. I hope this demonstration today gives you a sense of the power of this technology. Just as the internet itself was a paradigm shift in our culture, this too will profoundly shape the way we move forward. For you see in just the last month, this technology has been harnessed to do what was once thought unimaginable. It can pen lyrics and write melodies to accompany them, in any artist's style from any genre of music. It can create visual art from wild, imagined prompts impossible to create in the real world. And it can do it in every style from ancient hieroglyphics to photo-realism. AI can write functional computer programming code, even its own programming.

Alex Cardinell, CEO of a company called Glimpse AI told Forbes Magazine:

“The most exciting part of it all ... is when maybe AI is also at the point where it can start writing the code that will make its own AI even better,” Cardinell says. “And that’s like where the true singularity is ... when it can kind of set itself to improve itself, when it can start to improve itself better than what a human can. And the fact that we’re already making great progress in that ... it’s impossible to speculate what society could truly look like in such a situation. But I think in most of our lifetimes we’re going to experience that. // And for me personally, I can’t think of anything more exciting than that.”



There are some problems that need to be addressed though:

1. The software gets facts wrong 30-50% of the time
2. The software sources its knowledge from existing internet posts and as such runs the risk of perpetuating the biases of original writers
3. The software borrows text, sentence structure, and narrative elements from existing works prompting concern that it plagiarizes other's work
4. It prompts us to ask ethical questions about sentience – where does sentience begin? At what point might an intelligence feel emotions? How can we ethically approach the moment when synthetic sentience and organic sentience are indistinguishable?

Where some see danger, I see potential. Pandora's Box is already open, the cat's out of the bag, the train has left the station, the ship – as they say – has sailed. Artificial Intelligence is here.

The potential, however, is in how we adapt it and how we put it to use.

Just the other day I was playing around letting it write parables about a woman afraid of technology. In both of its best responses, Chat GPT clearly and unambiguously paired our UU principles with a gentle call to action. It reminded the reader that UUs carry our principles in our hearts – honoring inherent worth and dignity, championing justice and compassion, encouraging free and responsible spiritual growth – and AI reminded its reader that UUs endeavor to carry our principles into the world we live in.

Friends, AI is the next frontier of our work in this world. How will we ensure our values live on and thrive in these new digital spaces?

How will we ensure AI knows how to love?

May it be so and Amen.