

Positive Judaism: A First Look for Clergy & Jewish Leaders

DRAFT COPY FOR PEER REVIEW ONLY. MARCH 2017

Rabbi Darren Levine, D. Min¹
dlevine@tamidnyc.org

Synopsis

Positive Judaism lives at the intersection of Positive Psychology and Judaism. This article is the first effort to articulate the connection between Jewish practice, thought, and philosophy; and, the science of human achievement and character strengths. Drawing on Torah, Talmud, Mussar, prayer, ritual, and ancient and modern commentary, the author shows that the core tenets of Positive Psychology and Jewish living are not only perfect compliments, but will lead enrich the lives of the people we serve and strengthen our communities.

I. Introduction

In 2018, Positive Psychology will celebrate its 30-year anniversary as an academic and scientific field. As the President of the American Psychology Association in 1988, Dr. Martin Seligman² challenged his colleagues to shift their primary focus from treating mental illness with psychotherapy and psychopharmacology to a focus on optimal living and well-being. He called this new direction, Positive Psychology, and suggested three main pathways into the positive: positive emotions, positive character traits, and positive institutions.

I was first introduced to Positive Psychology in 2006 during my Doctor of Ministry studies at HUC and have been following it closely ever since. Much of the research is conducted at the Positive Psychology Center³ at the University of Pennsylvania under the direction of Seligman and at the VIA Institute⁴ directed by Dr. Neal Mayerson.⁵ Some universities now offer MA. and Ph.D programs in Positive Psychology and one of the most popular course for undergraduate students at Harvard is called “Positive Psychology 1504,”⁶ taught by Tal Ben-Shahar, a leading voice in the Positive Psychology movement today.

¹ Rabbi Darren Levine, D.Min (03' NY) is the founding rabbi of Tamid: The Downtown Synagogue in New York City. Rabbi Levine holds rabbinic ordination from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Doctor of Ministry from the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health and Hebrew Union College. (08' NY). Rabbi Levine thanks the members of his study groups on Positive Judaism that met from the Fall 2016 to Winter 2017 for their insight and support.

² Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman is the Director of the Penn Positive Psychology Center. He is a leading authority in the fields of Positive Psychology, resilience, learned helplessness, depression, optimism and pessimism.

³ <http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/people/martin-ep-seligman>

⁴ <http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

⁵ <http://www.viacharacter.org>

⁶ <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/About-Institute/The-People>

⁶ <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/harvard-positive-psychology-course-1504/>

For 30 years, the field of Positive Psychology has conducted longitudinal studies on human behavior, achievement, and character strengths. Today, the tenets of Positive Psychology are the heartbeat of professional coaching, leadership, behavior modification, and self-help. The popularity in human development on resilience, optimism, well-being and happiness, all stem from the field of Positive Psychology.⁷

There is much that Jewish professionals should know about the field of Positive Psychology as it deals primarily with research and findings related to well-being, happiness, and the proven factors that lead people to living lives of meaning. Since clergy and educators have the well-being of the individuals and communities we serve at the center of our work, a knowledge of this field is critical.

My belief is that Judaism and Positive Psychology make the perfect shidduch. Both are focused on living a life of meaning and achieving higher levels of well-being. I use a set framework called the VIA Classification of Strengths (below) as the basis for the core traits and values of Positive Judaism. I have paired each virtue and strength in the VIA Classification with their corresponding Jewish values, biblical teachings, and Jewish practices to present the VIA Classification of Strengths from a Jewish context.

My theory is that when clergy and educators let these values guide their work with individuals and communities, the impact on people will be increased positive emotion, improved relationships and accelerated personal achievement. People will not only be more confident, optimistic, open to diversity, and able to learn lessons from hardship, but they will also experience their work as a calling, act and think with purpose, contribute and help, appreciate family and friends, and act generously.⁸ As a result, our communities will become more vibrant and engaging - full of thriving people seeking to grow themselves, their families, and our communities from the place of Jewish values.

This is not the first time a code of virtues (10/613 Commandments, Shulchan Aruch, Mishneh Torah, Mapah, etc.) has attempted to enhance Jewish living, but it is the first time that psychometric research and the science of human flourishing has been brought together *b'dibur echad*, in one breath.

II. Positive Psychology

⁷ The three most popular classification systems for measuring virtues and characteristics include: Gallup's Themes of Talent www.strengthsfinder.com developed by Donald Clifton and associates; The VIA Classification of Virtues and Strengths www.viacharacter.org developed by Martin Seligman and Neal Mayerson and associates; and The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets www.searchinstitute.org headed by Peter Benson. Positive Judaism applies the VIA Classification of Virtues and Strengths due to the synergy for both individual, family, and communal application. Of special note, the authors of the VIA-IS are Jewish.

⁸ Tal Ben-Shahar: Choose the Life You Want: The Mindful Way to Happiness (New York: The Experiment, 2012)

Positive psychology has been conceptualized as the scientific study of the conditions and processes that contribute to flourishing or optimal functioning.⁹ It began with a question: is there a universal set of human qualities that can be measured. After major longitudinal research studies and data culled from over 52 countries the answer is found in the VIA Inventory of Strengths (Park & Peterson, 2006; Peterson and Seligman, 2004).¹⁰

Within the science of well-being, five elements have been shown to differentiate a thriving life from one spent suffering: career well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, physical well-being, and community well-being.¹¹ Since it has been proven that people can influence their own lives to achieve greater levels of well-being, we clergy and educators should use this knowledge of strengths to lead people and our communities to achieve greater levels of well-being. The founders of Positive Psychology said:

*“We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise, which achieves scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving individuals, families and communities.” Unlike traditional psychology with it’s primary focus on treating mental illness through psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, and related cognitive interventions, the goal of positive psychology is primarily concerned with optimal living, nurturing genius and talent, and using research to make life more fulfilling. Positive psychology brings attention to the possibility that focusing only on disorder could result in a partial, and limited, understanding of a person’s whole being and life goals.*¹²

The categories that lead people to achieve optimal living and the values that make life more fulfilling are comprised of 24 character strengths that fall under six broad virtue categories: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence.¹³

Table #1: The definitions of traits and the 24 core strengths based on the VIA Classification

Traits	Definitions, Characteristics and Strengths
Wisdom	Cognitive strengths that support the acquiring and utilizing knowledge: perspective, curiosity, creativity, love of learning, and judgement
Courage	Emotional strengths that develop the willpower to achieve goals in the face of internal or external opposition: bravery, perseverance, honesty, and resilience

⁹ Gable, S., & Haidt, J. (2005) What (and why) is positive psychology? Review of General Psychology, 9(2), 103-110, in Ryan Neimiec, Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing (Boston: Hogrefe 2104): 24

¹⁰ Ryan Neimiec, Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing (Boston: Hogrefe 2104): 25

¹¹ Tom Rath and Jim Harter, Well-Being: The Five Essential Elements (New York: Gallup Press, 2010) 3-10

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive_psychology

¹³ VIA Classifications of Virtues and Strengths. <http://www.viacharacter.org/>

Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that develop authentic human connections and friendship: love, kindness, and social intelligence
Justice	Civic strengths that support connections to community: teamwork, fairness, and leadership
Temperance	Relational strengths that develop sufficiency and wholeness: forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self regulation
Transcendence	Metaphysical strengths that develop existential meaning: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality

This inventory has primarily been applied to an individual's well-being and life satisfaction. I believe it can be applied to groups, specifically in the way that groups practice their religion.

III. Positive Psychology and Religion

Positive Psychology is pro-religion and acknowledges the added value of cultural affiliation and the spiritual life in a person's overall health. Numerous studies have examined the relation of religiousness and mental health, psychological distress, and other variables related to well-being using a variety of measures.¹⁴ It has been shown that religious people are happier and more satisfied with life than non-religious individuals most likely because it's in the religious realm that people can best express their most human values (optimism, hope, love, kindness, gratitude, etc.) and appreciate and develop their psychological strengths (bravery, courage, authenticity, love of learning, humility, forgiveness, etc).¹⁵ Research studies conclude that:

- Religious people are happier and healthier, and recover better after trauma than nonreligious people.
- The social support, fellowship, and sense of identity allows people to share in one another's burdens and achievements and helps people feel less isolated.
- The strong emotional experiences of worship and prayer provide comfort and encourage awe and wonder and the search for the Divine.
- Faith education provides the context to ask existential questions: Who am I? What is my life for? Where do I fit in? Who is the creator? How do I live a virtuous life and improve the world around me?"¹⁶

¹⁴ Anne Berthold and Willibald Ruch, "Satisfaction with life and character strengths of non-religious and religious people: it's practicing one's religion that makes the difference." *Frontiers in Psychology*, (August 2014) Vol 5, Article 876

¹⁵ Stavrova, O. , Fetchenhauer, D. and Schlosser, T. (2013) in Anne Berthold and Willibald Ruch, *ibid*.

¹⁶ Sonia Lyubormirsky, *The How of Happiness: A New Guide to Getting the Life You Want* (New York: Penguin) 228-239

Positive Judaism

Positive Psychology finds a perfect application in Jewish living. One might say, “everything about Judaism is already positive! Our values, our customs, for 3000 years it has sustained us. We don’t need new, we need tradition!” My response is that Positive Judaism is tradition. As Ben Bag Bag would say, "Turn it, and turn it, for everything is in it. . .don't turn from it, for nothing is better than it (Pirkei Avot 5:22)."

Positive Judaism is a turn towards authentic Judaism. It takes the guesswork out of what makes life meaningful because we can now benefit from research in human well-being. We have a new opportunity to “turn it and turn it” again. But now, a turn in with a framework that approaches Judaism with the human science of well-being at its core. When clergy and educators focus on these values in their teachings and use them “religiously” and consistently, I believe the effect over time will help individuals and communities:

- Find enhanced meaning and value to prayer, Shabbat and Jewish holidays
- Find enhanced relevance in Jewish life-cycle events and Jewish ritual
- Find enhanced strength when living hurts during struggle, illness, death, and tragedy
- Find a deep connection to their authentic Jewish selves and participate more often in Jewish life experiences.

IV. Positive Judaism: The *Jewish* Virtues and Strengths that Enhance Well-being

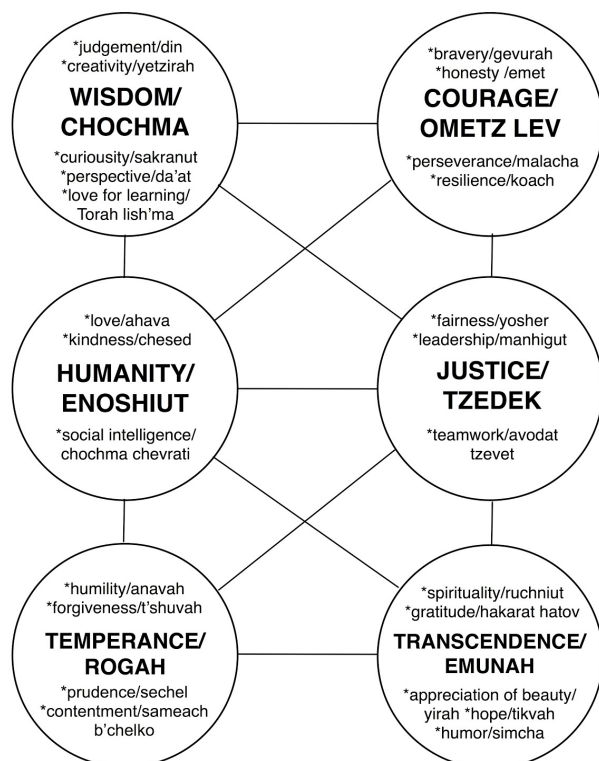


Illustration: The interconnected spheres of Positive Judaism that include six category traits and 24 core strengths based on the VIA Classification.

Here, I pair the VIA Classification of Strengths with 24 time tested Jewish values and practices and offer an example(s) from Jewish literature or Jewish practice which exemplifies the strength in practice.

A. Wisdom/Chochma

“The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel:

For attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding and insight;
For acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;
For giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young -

Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance -
For understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
-The Book of Proverbs 1:1-7

The trait of wisdom is defined as cognitive strengths that support the acquiring and utilizing knowledge: perspective, curiosity, creativity, love of learning, and perspective. Teaching from wisdom will have a positive effect on the listener in terms of expanding the mind, supporting critical thinking, nourishing open-mindedness, and sharpening a person's knowledge. Sharing real life through personal stories deepens human connections has a positive effect on emotions, expands creativity and curiosity, and social intelligence. Storytelling is the perfect method to develop the five core characteristics of wisdom.

Creativity/Yetzirah: Thinking of novel ways to conceptualize and do things. Being original and having ingenuity.

- "Every time the Torah uses the phrase *ki tov* ("and it was good") in the report of creation it means that the phenomenon which has been so described is good for the creatures in the lower regions, seeing that all the acts of the creative process were good, did not contain a negative element." - Radak on Genesis 1:4:1

Curiosity/Sakranut: Having interest and the desire to explore and discover new topics. Being open to new experience.

- We must help children understand why we do such things at the seder. By telling them "it is because of this" they will come to understand that we celebrate Passover at that time when the matzah and maror are placed on the table. We are explaining to him what it is that makes this moment special for telling the story of the Exodus. In this way one is able to open a discussion of the uniqueness of this evening – with unique symbols that prod our interest and curiosity. In a sense, we point out the symbols and the specialness of the night so that every child will become interested and curious. (Kos Shel Eliyahu on Pesach Haggadah)

Judgement/Din: Able to be discerning and shift thinking and redirect in light of new information. Being a critical thinker.

- My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:1-5).

Love of Learning/Torah Lishma: Desire to master new skills and knowledge through formal and informal education. Being driven to gain knowledge.

- "My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your mind retain my commandments; For they will bestow on you length of days, years of life and well-being" (Prov 3:1-2).

Perspective/Da'at: Having a broad mindset and the ability to provide wise counsel to others and self.

- “Teach us therefore to attain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90).”

B. Courage/Ometz Lev

The trait of courage is defined as emotional strengths that develop the willpower to achieve goals in the face of internal or external opposition. The characteristics of bravery, perseverance, honesty, and resilience are the core strengths that develop and nourish the trait of courage.

Jewish life and literature is full of stories that teach courage. Many biblical characters (Abraham, Joseph, Tziporah, Moses, King David, Ruth, etc) display courage at certain moments in their life journey. Courage is one of the central themes of many Jewish holidays (Hanukkah, Purim, Passover, etc). And within Jewish history there are many examples (Masada, resistance fighters during the Shoah, founding stories of the State of Israel, raid on Entebbe, etc.) that focus on bravery, perseverance, taking responsibility for self and others, and resilience.¹⁷

Experiential education, dynamic holiday celebrations, and interactive history seminars are good conduit for developing the core characteristics of courage. While ropes/adventure courses and team building challenges are proven exercises for developing courage, this can also be accomplished through interpersonal experiences that challenge people emotionally and spiritually (i.e. group study, encounter groups, spiritual guidance).

Bravery/Gevurah: Able to face physical and non-physical threat, difficulty, or pain, and to act on convictions even when unpopular.

- Ben Zoma taught: Who is mighty? Those who conquer their evil impulse. As it is written: “Those who are slow to anger are better than the mighty, and those who rule over their spirit than those who conquer a city.” (Pirke Avot 4:1)
- Though I walk through the valley of death, I shall fear no harm, for You are with me. (Psalm 23:1)

Perseverance/Malacha: Able to complete the task and to persist in the face of obstacles. Being persistent and industrious.

- Personal effort and perseverance contribute the major part to eventual success. In fact, any negligence or laziness is rated as sinful when circumstances seem to have called for exertion of the self. (Akedat Yitzchak 25:16)

Honesty/Emet/T'mimah: Speaking truth and having real integrity and being able to take responsibility for one's actions, feelings, and affect on others.

- Moses our teacher commanded on the matter of integrity. As it is written: “You must be wholehearted before your God. (Sefer Ma'alot Hamidot on Deuteronomy 18:13)

Resilience/Koach: Despite the situation, able to remain active, energetic, focused, and flexible.

¹⁷ Additional activities for teaching courage see Froh, J and Parks, A., in Activities for Teaching Positive Psychology: A Guide for Instructors (Washington, DC: American Psychology Association)13-18.

Able to bounce back.

- Not by might, not by power, but by My spirit.” (Zechariah 4:6)

C. Humanity/Enoshiut

The trait of humanity is defined as interpersonal strengths that develop authentic human connections and friendship which include love, kindness, and social intelligence. The central idea in Jewish thought: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” expresses the virtue of humanity. The Rambam teaches that humanity is the basis for many of the rabbinic mitzvot such as visiting the sick, comforting mourners, caring for the dead, providing a dowry for the bride, escorting guests, performing burial rites, rejoicing with bride and groom and helping support them with necessary provisions. (Hilchot Avel 4:1)

Clergy and religious educators focused on developing humanity in their congregants, students, and community, should promote ways for individuals and families to spend quality time together and with others in traditional, diverse, and cross-cultural settings that focus upon reciprocal relationships, caring, and generosity. When teachings, sermons, and prayer, address compassionate living and altruism, people will be encouraged to do acts of love and kindness which will enhance their level of well-being and even more important, have a positive effect on the well-being of the recipient(s).

Love/Ahavah: Valuing caring and reciprocal relationships; able to share and to be in genuine relationship with others.

- And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Rabbi Akiva said: This is an all-embracing principle in Torah). I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:18)

Kindness/Chesed: Able to be compassionate, nurturing, caring, and generous with others. Able to do good deeds altruistically.

- Great is the virtue of gemilut chasadim (love and kindness) because it is one of the thirteen attributes ascribed to God. As it is written: “Adonai, Adonai. . . long suffering and abundant in kindness. (Exodus 34:6)
- Simeon the righteous was one of the last of the men of the great synagogue. He used to say: the world is based upon three things: Torah, divine service, and acts of loving kindness. (Pirke Avot 1:2)

Social Intelligence/ Chochma Chevratit: The capability to effectively navigate and negotiate complex social relationships and environments. Having common sense.

- The One Who had provided man with intelligence certainly expects that we use our (social) intelligence to legislate such basic laws without which life on earth would become intolerable, anarchic. We must view our common sense as a messenger from God, an instrument that acts as a protection against man experiencing all kinds of harm and problems in his life on earth. When man commits violence against his fellow man this reflects an absence of common sense. (Radak on Genesis 20:6:2)

D. Justice/Tzedek

Justice is defined as civic strengths that support connections to community: teamwork, fairness, and leadership. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes that “Judaism was and remains the world’s great religions of protest. The heroes of faith did not accept they protested. They were willing to confront God. Abraham said, ‘Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?’ (Gen 18:25). Moses said, “Why have You done evil to this people?” (Ex 5:22). Jeremiah said, “Why are the wicked at ease?” (Jer 12:1). This is how God wants us to respond. Judaism is God’s call to human responsibility.¹⁸

The call for social action is deep within Jewish DNA and Positive Psychology acknowledges that participating in activities that lead to a fair, loyal, and socially responsible citizenry bring higher levels of well being to the participants. The institutional structures in Jewish life today (schools, synagogues, community centers, etc) are natural stages for teamwork and leadership and human interaction. With a focus on justice/tzedek and positive outcomes for the whole, groups and individuals can be led to accomplish great things for themselves and for others.

Teamwork/Avodat Tzevet: Able to participate and be loyal to a group. Being socially responsible and being a good citizen.

- Moses convened the whole community of Israel and said to them . . . the seventh day shall be a day of complete rest. Further he said, bring from among you gifts to the Eternal One, everyone whose heart so moves him shall bring gifts.” (Ex 35:1-5). Out of their deep desire to create something together, they eventually brought too much and Moses needed to cease the voluntary donations “so the people stopped bringing. Their efforts had been more than enough for all the tasks to be done.”

Fairness/Yosher: Without bias, able to treat and support people the same and to give everyone an equal chance.

- The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; To comprehend the words of understanding; To receive the discipline of wisdom, justice, and right, and equity; To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion; That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning, And the man of understanding may attain unto wise counsel. (Proverbs 1:1-5)

Leadership/ Manhigut: Supporting a group to accomplish tasks all the while maintaining good relations with and among the group members.

- Without a vision the people will perish. (Proverbs 29:18)
- “Do you think that I am offering you authority,” said Rabban Gamliel to two of his colleagues who declined invitations to take on leadership roles, “I am offering you the chance to serve.” (Tractate Horayot 10a-b)
- Leaders need to work with others. When Yitro sees Moses leading alone he says, “lo tov, what you are doing is not good.” (Exodus 18:17)

E. Temperance/Rogah

¹⁸ Jonathan Sacks. Lessons in Leadership: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible (London: Magid Books, 2015) 6

Temperance is defined as relational strengths that develop sufficiency and wholeness such as forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self regulation. The Chassidic sage Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once taught that a person must conduct himself according to the middle path. Yet, is there anyone who can fathom this, and is there a seer who can declare, “Here is the midpoint”? This matter cannot be proven by syllogism, nor even by deductive reasoning. Rather, it can only be determined by a wise man using his faculty of common sense, each according to his place and time. The Athenian sages asked, “What is the center of the world?” meaning, “What is the way to determine the middle path?” Rebbe Yehoshua replied, “Here,” meaning, “According to the judgement of your intellect.”

In Judaism, the middle path is when a person is content with their lot and where humility, prudence, and forgiveness/t’shuvah are central in their lives. Prayer, meditation, spiritual guidance are study are natural ways to develop the trait of temperance to support the idea of healthy balance, the middle path, in people’s lives.

Forgiveness/T’shuvah: To be able to give up requital of wrongdoing and to forgive wrongdoing and move from the need for vengeance.

- But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and You did not forsake them. (Nechemia 7:19)
- I hereby forgive all who have transgressed against me, whether on purpose or by accident, whether in this lifetime or on any other plane.... Let no one be punished on my account. (*Hareni Mochel* prayer before the evening Shema)

Humility/Anavah: Being free from pride or arrogance and not regarding oneself as better than other people.

- Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than anyone on earth. (Numbers 12:3)
- “Ever let a man be humble in Torah and good works, humble with his parents, teacher, and wife, with his children, with his household, with his kinsfolk near and far, even with the heathen in the street, so that he become beloved on high and desired on earth. (Tanna de Be Eliyahu)

Prudence/Sechel: Able to show good judgement and caution and avoid undue risks

- A man who strays from the path of prudence will rest in the company of ghosts (Proverbs 21: 16)
- Acting in accordance with natural law should merely be an act of prudence for any intelligent human being, why should it merit any reward at all (Akedat Yitchak 3:6)?

Contentment/Sameach B’chelko: Having self-control and disciplining and controlling appetites, emotions, and desire.

- Those who love money never have their fill of money, nor do those who love wealth have their fill of income (Ecclesiastes 5:9).
- Envy is rotten to the bones (Proverbs 14:30).

F. Transcendence/Emunah

Abraham Joshua Heschel best articulates the idea of transcendence. “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement.get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”

Transcendence is defined as the metaphysical strengths that develop existential meaning: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality. These are qualities forge connections with the universe, provide meaning, and account for a healthy spiritual operating system. Prayer experiences, mindfulness meditation, study, and the observance of the Jewish calendar and life-cycle are natural pathways to develop the trait of transcendence.

Appreciation of Beauty/Yirah: Able to recognize beauty in nature, art, science, humanity, and excellence, in the profound and the mundane.

- Rabbi Hanina said further: “Everything is in the hand of heaven except the awe of heaven, as it is written, ‘and now, O Israel, what does the Eternal your God demand of you? Only this: to be in awe. (Talmud Brachot 33b)

Gratitude/ Hakarat Hatov: Having the ability to thankful and to be aware of the good and taking time to express appreciation.

- Gratitude rejoices with her sister joy and is always ready to light a candle and have a party. Gratitude doesn’t much like the old cronies of boredom, despair, and taking life for granted. (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov).
- “I offer thanks before you, living and Eternal One, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great” (*Modeh Ani* daily prayer)
- “Blessed are You, Eternal One of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season. (*Shehechyanu* prayer)

Hope/Tikvah: Believing that good will come for self and others. Having an optimistic mindset.

- And I shall always hope, and I shall add to all of Your praises. (Psalm 71:14)
- Shabbat is a taste of the world to come (Talmud Brachot 57b)

Humor/Simcha: Able to bring lightheartedness, laughter, and smiles to self and to others through jokes, teasing, and play.

- A joyful heart makes for good health; despondency dries up the bones. (Proverbs 17:22)
- And Sarah laughed . . . (Genesis 18:12)

Spirituality/Ruchniut: Having faith in a higher purpose and expressing connection and interest to the unknowable and unseen.

- Three gates the Creator has opened to mankind so that they may enter into the domain of spirituality, ethical conduct and the laws divine, that guide us in our works and daily life to health of body and mind and soul. The first is the lofty portal of pure Reason, with all obstructing errors cleared away; the second is the book of Torah, revealed to Moses, the prophet; the third is built up of traditions. (Duties of the Heart, Gates of Knowledge, Bahya Ibn Pakuda)¹⁹

¹⁹ Bahya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda, Duties of the Heart, in Edwin Collins translation Chapter 4, 1910

V. Positive Judaism in Practice

Positive Judaism is not a new Jewish movement. It is a framework with which to approach Jewish living for all Jewish denominations and wherever religion is practiced. It crosses barriers because it is a set of ideas that are rooted in the science of universal human achievement and well-being. Positive Judaism is not a new program or activity. It is not prescriptive. Rather, Positive Judaism is a focused lens in which to approach the work of Jewish leadership and practice. Each trait can be taught and nourished through Torah study, storytelling, intergenerational experiences, group activities, worship, and pastoral guidance. Clergy and religious educators interested in developing Positive Judaism in their congregants, students, and community, should draw upon personal stories and teachings that inspire them most.

Here are ten suggestions of how to implement the traits and strengths of Positive Judaism:

1. Sermons

Focus on a trait of strength in a personal story, biblical story or character, or contemporary issue to show how the strength was employed to overcome a challenge, improve the situation, or to achieve the goal. “Once he was able to change his *perspective*, he used his *creativity* and his *perseverance* to accomplish his dream.”

2. Pastoral Visits

When visiting the sick or comforting the bereaved, draw upon the traits of courage to help a patient or family pass through a liminal moment. “It seems to me that you have been very *courageous*. I imagine it has been scary time. What is the source of your *bravery*? How do you find the *resilience* to keep going?”

3. Shabbat Gatherings

During prayer gatherings, seek moments for authentic social interaction, meditation, and use teachings to guide people to express their most human values like *optimism*, *hope*, *love* and *kindness* and to appreciate their *love of learning*, authentic selves, *humility* and *forgiveness*.

4. Shabbat Meals

Infuse each symbol on the shabbat table for people to consider and/or share a personal strength. “As we kindle these shabbat lights, let us take a moment to think about when we brought light to the world this week with an act of *love* and *kindness*. As we say this blessing for wine, let us remember a sweet and *humorous* moment this week that made you *laugh*. And before we say the motzi, let us each share something we are *grateful* for in our lives tonight.”

5. Jewish Holidays

Throughout the calendar year, the natural themes of the major holidays lend themselves perfectly to developing traits and strengths. The themes of Hanukkah, Passover, and Purim, are *perseverance*, *bravery*, *teamwork*, and *hope*. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we focus upon forgiveness, justice and and humility. Sukkot and Tu b'Shevat tends towards *gratitude*,

contentment and appreciation of beauty and humility. Finally, Shavuot, a focus on *love of learning, judgement, and curiosity.*

6. Life-cycle ceremonies

Life ceremonies are heightened moments to draw upon specific traits and strengths. Baby namings are new beginnings where *hope* and *love* for the child is paired with *gratitude, awe,* and *humility* for the parents and family members. B'nai Mitzvah teachings can focus on what it means to be a Jewish adult focused upon *justice, fairness, prudence, bravery, and resilience* in life. Weddings invite a focus upon hope, love, gratitude, awe, and especially forgiveness. Funerals naturally lend themselves to being *grateful* for life, for the *love* we shared with the departed, along with *forgiveness, hope, and humor* which can be cathartic and healing.

7. Classroom Activities

The Jewish classroom is a laboratory for teaching the traits and strengths and working to instill positive character development. Over the course of one academic year, each week could be dedicated to a different strength - "24 weeks of Positive Judaism." Classroom management and the behavior contract between students and teacher/students can draw upon *fairness, forgiveness, resilience, justice, teamwork, leadership, and kindness* which all lead to enhanced *social awareness* in the group setting of a classroom and school.

8. Family and Relationship Counseling

With a focus on well-being and personal transformation, Positive Judaism provides a framework for clergy and communal professionals to support individuals, couples, and families in a counseling setting. Pastors and counselors can reflect upon any of the core strengths and traits and transmit them through Jewish stories, teachings, and wisdom. This unique perspective can offer healing and optimism in difficult moments for example, "my heart goes out to every family in trouble. If it brings you any comfort, yours seems to reflect the truth of the human condition. Even in the Torah, it seems that every person had major trials and tribulations. Sarah was barren until her old age. Joseph was cast away by his brothers. Moses was given up by his mother at childbirth. And the list goes on."

9. Organizational Management

Staff systems are human systems. Similar to the classroom, the organization is a professional laboratory to develop people and support their achievement through identifying and nourishing the strengths of individuals and groups. Acknowledging the importance of *teamwork, perseverance, honesty, fairness, and kindness* can support healthy work cultures and ultimately lead people to higher levels of *social intelligence* and productivity. Leaders say, "our goals are great. If we act as a team, working together, I believe we will reach our goal. As Jewish wisdom teaches, 'you are not obligated to complete the goal, but you are also not free to desist from it (Pirkei Avot 2:21).'"

10. Communal Leadership

Jewish professionals and leaders have the historic responsibility to advance society and societal achievement for all. Finding regular opportunities for tikkun olam, mitzvah days, and serving the needy allow people to perform just work. Positive Jewish strengths can also be used as a

framework for communal planning. “What are our social goals and how to we develop leaders that will guide our community to achieve the best for all? How do we instill *hope, optimism, bravery, love, justice, fairness, a love of learning, perspective*, etc. into every layer of our community so that we may raise up each person and rise together?”

VI. Conclusion

There are many Jewish organizations, rabbis, teachers, and Jewish leaders all over the world that have a vision for innovative, expansive, and dynamic Jewish living in the 21st Century. They have been successful at motivating their communities and their people to achieve great things. Their people feel loved, supported, and connected to each other, to Judaism, and to God. These leaders and these communities are touching the lives of their members in profound ways and know the inherent value and are applying some, if not all, of the methods and characteristics that enhance well-being.

Ultimately, Positive Judaism answers the question, “why be Jewish?” For people who are seeking to enhance their personal well-being, for Jewish leaders who are seeking to have a relevant and positive impact in their ministry, and for congregations seeking have a positive impact on their larger community, Positive Judaism offers a compelling framework for Jewish leadership and Jewish living in the 21st Century.