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## Chapter 2

# Virtues That Transcend: Positive Psychology in Jewish Texts and Tradition

Eliezer Schnall, Mark Schiffman, and Aaron Cherniak

### 2.1 Introduction

The discipline of psychology, ensconced in the disease model, had long focused almost exclusively on human weakness and frailty, absorbed with uncovering the causes and treatment of mental illness and pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). By contrast, positive psychology, which has flourished in recent years, focuses on human strengths, wellness, and fulfillment (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA, 2000), considered the clinicians' "bible," catalogues problematic thoughts and behaviors that characterize disorder and malfunction, in line with the initial disease model approach. Positive psychologists have therefore proposed their own classification system, Peterson and Seligman's (2004) *Character Strengths and Virtues* (CSV), based on the human qualities and assets believed related to the "good life."

The CSV suggests six *virtues* (core characteristics), dubbed the High Six, demonstrated by individuals of good character, including wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Each of these is defined by several *character strengths*, viewed as the mechanisms or processes that lead to display of that virtue. For example, the virtue of courage may be attained via such strengths as bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. Peterson and Seligman's (2004) method for selecting the High Six involved examining various primary texts of large-scale ancient societies recognized for their enduring influence on human civilization. Specifically, they analyzed relevant expositions culled from the following traditions:

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Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, ancient Greece, Judeo-Christianity, and Islam. Although the researchers concede that not all virtues are “equally ubiquitous” (p. 50), they proposed the six that seemed present, at least in some common form, across cultures.

In the case of Judaism, the CSV focuses on the Ten Commandments and selections from Proverbs. Based on that relatively limited scope, Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify the presence in Judaism of some, but importantly, not all, of the 24 strengths. However, our contention is that all of the High Six virtues, as well as the character strengths that define them, are meaningfully and substantially evident in the classic texts of Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

“Judaism” refers to the religion of the Jews, along with the philosophy the religion espouses and the way of life it prescribes. A religion of ethical monotheism, Judaism’s central characteristics include belief in one God Who revealed Himself and His Torah to His people at Mount Sinai.<sup>2</sup> “Torah”<sup>3</sup> is a Hebrew word that refers to the Pentateuch (including the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), and also more broadly to the overall corpus of Jewish biblical texts and teachings. The Pentateuch combines a narrative, spanning creation of the world to the ancient Israelites’ near entrance into the Land of Israel, with sections mandating ritual laws and ethical principles. The Jewish Bible also includes later canonized works, which together comprise the Prophets and Hagiographa.

The written text of the Bible is accompanied and explained by Judaism’s Oral Law. Many of these oral traditions were eventually compiled and recorded in sets of treatises now known as the Talmud and Midrash. The former is a collection of fundamental texts expounding the legal, philosophical, ethical, historical, and spiritual traditions of Judaism. Redaction of the Talmud occurred in the early centuries of the Common Era, and may have continued until at least the sixth or seventh century. The Midrash, authored by rabbis of the Talmudic and post-Talmudic periods, offers biblical commentary that further illuminates Jewish philosophy, ritual, and tradition. The current chapter draws from the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash, as well as from later seminal works of leading rabbinic scholars and philosophers such as Maimonides,<sup>4</sup> who further elucidated the corpus of Jewish law and thought.

An exhaustive examination of the entire CSV classification system through the lens of Jewish religious texts in a single chapter is obviously impossible. The current

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<sup>1</sup>Peterson and Seligman apparently accept the idea that all characteristics identified in the CSV may be recognized within a single tradition. For example, they cite research (p. 28) involving focus groups drawn from the Inuit of Greenland and the Maasai of Africa whose members readily acknowledged all 24 strengths.

<sup>2</sup>For more on the core articles of Jewish faith, see Sect. 2.5.

<sup>3</sup>Literally, “instruction”.

<sup>4</sup>Leading twelfth century philosopher and legalist.

Maimonides is described in contemporary psychology literature as “arguably the most influential Jewish scholar ever,” (p. 405) whose approach to the behavioral sciences anticipated the work of such luminaries of the discipline as B. F. Skinner (Leshtz & Stemmer, 2006). Furthermore, Maimonides is described as “[a]mong the major historical figures relevant to positive psychology” by a leading textbook in this field (Compton & Hoffman, 2013, p. 14).

**Table 2.1** Character strengths associated with the virtue of transcendence

Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
Gratitude	Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
Hope	Expecting the best and working to achieve it
Humor	Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
Spirituality/Religiousness	Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

Based on Seligman et al. (2005)

work therefore focuses on transcendence, a member of the High Six particularly relevant to a volume devoted to positive psychology and religious traditions. We demonstrate that each of the character strengths related to this virtue, including appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality/religiousness (see Table 2.1), are deeply valued in classic Jewish thought and practice.

Transcendence, as defined by the CSV, involves connection to something or someone larger than oneself, a theme that unites the somewhat disparate character strengths associated with it. Specifically, appreciation of beauty connects one to excellence; gratitude connects one to goodness; hope connects one to the future and its potential; humor connects one to adversity and incongruity in ways that bring amusement and diversion rather than fear or suffering; and spirituality connects one to the nonmaterial aspects of life and the universe, whether perceived as divine or otherwise. Peterson and Seligman (2004) consider transcendence a virtue, because the above forms of connection proffer meaning to life. They “remind us of how tiny we are” but simultaneously lift “us out of a sense of complete insignificance” (p. 39).

Many of the character strengths relevant to transcendence are associated with measures of well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), with recent reviews further elucidating these relationships. For example, Wood, Froh, and Geraghty (2010) examine the research relating gratitude to physical health, along with the copious research relating the character strength to emotional well-being.<sup>5</sup> Optimism, a key component of hope, is associated with both physical and mental health, as demonstrated by Conversano et al. (2010). Martin (2008) similarly explicates the relationships between humor and both physical and psychological health. Spirituality and religion have likewise been linked to both mental and physical health (Koenig, King, & Carson, 2012).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>In the context of the current volume, it is noteworthy that recent research suggests that religious gratitude, or gratitude to God, may be particularly important to psychological well-being, at least in individuals religiously committed (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Cohen, et al., 2011).

<sup>6</sup>The link between well-being and the strength of appreciation of beauty is tenuous, however (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Recent work by Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker (2012) suggests this character

The following sections describe the character strengths associated with transcendence through the prism of traditional Jewish literature, thought, and practice.

## 2.2 Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

This character strength refers to the capacity to notice and delight in the presence of goodness in both the physical world and the social domain. Individuals strongly demonstrating this attribute are said to experience frequent awe-related emotions including wonder, admiration, and moral elevation. As means toward creation of enriching, awe-filled lives, the authors of the CSV emphasize responsiveness to such elements as aesthetic beauty in one's environment and displays of ability, talent, or moral goodness by others.

In Jewish tradition, notice and appreciation of excellence and beauty are vital and sacred duties. Jews are taught to appreciate God via His creations, given the difficulty of otherwise connecting with an invisible and incorporeal divinity.<sup>7</sup> Verses such as “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork”<sup>8</sup> (Psalms 19:2, see also Psalms 104:24), imply that one should contemplate the awe-inspiring wonders of the universe, investigating the marvels and minutiae of the physical and natural sciences, and thereby approach God. This principle is elucidated by Maimonides (excerpted from his *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Basic Principles of the Torah, 2:2): “When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him...”<sup>9</sup>

Jewish rite formally incorporates such awe-inspiring contemplation in the daily prayers and recitations. Perhaps the most commonly recited blessing, mandated following each instance of relieving oneself, is that referred to as *asher yatzar*. This blessing acknowledges the wondrous wisdom evident in the human body and its intricate functions. Blessings are also uttered when encountering virtually every other significant natural wonder in the surrounding world. For example, brief blessings are recited upon witnessing lightning, rainbows, comets, great mountains, vast bodies of water, or fruit-trees in spring bloom; hearing thunder; or encountering other extraordinary examples of natural beauty or magnificence (*Shulhan Arukh*,<sup>10</sup>

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strength may be related to life satisfaction, although an earlier investigation by Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) found only a weak association.

<sup>7</sup>That relating to God is obligatory is evidenced by verses that mandate recognizing God (as in the first of the Ten Commandments; Exodus 20:2, Deuteronomy 5:6) and loving Him (Deuteronomy 6:5).

<sup>8</sup>All translations of biblical verses are adapted from *The Holy Scriptures* (1955).

<sup>9</sup>Translation from *A Maimonides Reader* (1972), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup>Sixteenth century legal code by Joseph Caro based on the Talmud and other law codifications, and the sourcebook for all modern compilations of Jewish law.

*Orah Hayyim* 226–229). Notably, blessings are also recited when seeing especially sagacious religious or secular scholars, who engender admiration via their demonstration of excellence in developing the rational mind (224:6–7).

While the above sources reflect recognition of stunning elements of the natural world, Jewish scripture is also replete with focus on the supernatural. For example, the Exodus from Egyptian slavery, accompanied by the miraculous ten plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea, and culminating with the divine revelation at Mount Sinai were undoubtedly awe-inspiring events. Significantly, in the context of these wonders, Moses adjures the people to stand and witness God's imminent salvation (Exodus 14:13). The purpose of this seemingly extraneous command was apparently to emphasize the value of appreciating transcendent moments.<sup>11</sup> This lesson is carried to the present day, as Jews recite a special blessing when encountering a place where they perceived a miraculous occurrence (*Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 218).

Furthermore, numerous holidays, such as Hanukkah which commemorates divine salvation from the oppressive Greek King Antiochus, Purim which commemorates divine salvation during the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus, and Passover which commemorates the abovementioned Exodus from Egypt, provide Jews opportunity to contemplate God's miracles – both those described in ancient sources, as well as those they are encouraged to see in their own lives. For example, the *haggadah* text of the Passover *seder* (ceremonial meal) praises those who discuss at length the miracles of the Exodus, urging each and every Jew, even millennia after the event, to view himself as though he personally was liberated from Egyptian bondage. It also reminds that numerous other enemies and oppressors throughout the ages have attempted to destroy the Jewish nation, but by God's hand His people have withstood. Passover thus emphasizes reflection upon God's awe-inspiring miracles from the dawn of Jewish history during the Exodus from Egypt until the present day.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the importance of recognizing the beautiful and the inspiring in the natural and supernatural of God's creations and activities, human creation of beauty

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<sup>11</sup> The commands for preparatory measures prior to the Sinai Revelation (Exodus 19:10–11) and prior to the heavenly purveyance of the quail (Numbers 11:18) may carry similar intent. It is also noteworthy that the Judean King Jehoshaphat, many centuries later, uses words almost identical to those of Moses when announcing to his subjects that they were about to witness a miraculous military triumph and salvation (II Chronicles 20:17).

<sup>12</sup> Throughout history and until modern times, Jews have traditionally created their own holidays commemorating perceived miracles occurring for specific communities or even individuals. The German Jewish community of Frankfurt am Main, for instance, established "Purim Vintz" in 1616 commemorating deliverance from violent persecution at the hands of Vincent Fettmilch's anti-Semitic gangs (Ulmer, 2001); this holiday was still being celebrated hundreds of years later, as attested by Rabbi Moses Sofer, leader of nineteenth century Central European Jewry (*Sefer She'elot u-teshuvot Hatam Sofer, Orah Hayyim* 191). An example of a holiday celebrating personal miraculous salvation comes from the writings of the great religious legalist Rabbi Avraham Danzig who wrote that every year he observed, with festivities and prayers, the date in 1804 when his family was saved from the conflagration that destroyed his home (*Sefer Haye Adam* 155:41).

in service of God is also emphasized in Jewish sources. One is enjoined to utilize talents, skills, and resources across the various domains of life, including in art, music, and other forms of the aesthetic, in religious rites and rituals. For example, large portions of the book of Exodus (chapters 25–31, 35–40) are devoted to description of the magnificent Tabernacle built for God by Moses and his people, its refined precious metals, engraved sparkling gems, expertly embroidered tapestries, and exquisite sculpture. The service garments of the priests were elegantly dyed and woven, designed “for splendor and for beauty” (28:2, 40). The brilliance of the Tabernacle is emphasized alongside the wisdom and insight of the artisans who devoted their talents to construction of the exquisite structure (35:10, 25).

Multiple chapters of I Kings (6–7) and II Chronicles (3–4) similarly convey the majesty of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, including its imposing architecture, extraordinary vessels, and inspirational worship service. The overall grandeur of the surrounding city is encapsulated by the Psalmist who referred to Jerusalem as “the perfection of beauty” (50:2). In the post biblical period, Herod refurbished the Second Temple; of this structure, the Talmud states (*Sukkah* 51b),<sup>13</sup> “He who has not seen the Temple in its full construction has never seen a glorious building in his life.”

The requirement that divine service be performed via beautiful appurtenances is not only a demonstration of respect for God, but also a reciprocal means of influencing His people. As Maimonides explains (*Guide for the Perplexed*, III, chapter 45), the assembly and decoration of the ancient Holy Temple in Jerusalem was designed to inspire worshippers with awe and thereby humility and veneration.<sup>14</sup> The aesthetic beauty of the Temple and its service was intended to engage multiple senses. The fabulous sight of its structure and contents was complemented by the uplifting incense aroma of the Golden Altar. The Temple ambience was further enhanced by the emotion-evoking splendor of the Levite choristers’ songs, drawn from the Book of Psalms (e.g., chapters 48, 81, 92; see Talmud *Tamid* 33b), known for its rhythmically poetic and inspiring verse.<sup>15</sup>

Far from mere historical accounts, the biblical descriptions of the Tabernacle and Temple set an example for all subsequent houses of worship, to which they are compared (Talmud *Megillah* 29a). For instance, the Talmud (*Sukkah* 51b) describes the synagogue in Alexandria of Egypt, built long after the biblical Temple, with its

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<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations of the Talmud are adapted from the Soncino Press version of the Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>14</sup> This idea, Maimonides elucidates, is the intent behind the biblical injunction to “reverence My sanctuary” (Leviticus 19:30) which would naturally lead to fear of God.

<sup>15</sup> Josephus Flavius records a tradition that Alexander the Great once marched against Jerusalem to exact vengeance on the hapless Jews who had sworn allegiance to Darius, emperor of Persia. Upon his arrival, however, Alexander gazed upon the High Priest of Israel, whose awesome image and vestments, he declared to his troops, he had beheld in his dreams. Alexander then prostrated himself before the High Priest, offered sacrifices in the Temple, and granted the Jews special dispensations (*Josephus, Antiquities* (1958) 11:329, Harvard University Press version). This account may offer an outsider’s perspective of the stirring impact cast upon those who witnessed the High Priest garbed in his Temple finery. (A similar narrative regarding Alexander is recorded in Talmud *Yoma* 69a.)

magnificent double colonnade and golden cathedrae. Even to contemporary times, Jewish law prescribes that the synagogue (where possible) be the tallest building in the town (Talmud *Shabbath* 11a; *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 150:2), handsomely structured and attractively decorated (*Zohar*,<sup>16</sup> Exodus 59b), with an ornamented ark to house the Torah scroll (*Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah* 282:1). Modern synagogue services echo that of the breathtaking ancient Temples in other ways as well; the Psalms sung by the Levite choristers, for example, are incorporated into the daily prayer service.

However, the obligation to serve God with beautiful accoutrements is not confined to synagogue adornment. Based on Exodus 15:2, “this is my God, and I will glorify Him,” the rabbis derived the principle of *hiddur mitzvah* – that one should fulfill His commandments in handsome fashion<sup>17</sup> (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*,<sup>18</sup> Tractate Shirata, 3). As explained in the Talmud (*Shabbath* 133b), all ritual items, such as the *lulab* (palm branch), *shofar* (ram’s horn), and prayer shawl, should be beautiful; similarly, the Torah scroll should be written by a skilled scribe, with a fine reed-pen and in fine ink, and wrapped with exquisite silks.

In addition to the role of beauty in divine service, classic Jewish sources emphasize the importance of the aesthetically pleasing in other ways as well. For example, the Talmud (*Berakoth* 57b) states that “Three things restore a man’s good spirits: [beautiful] sounds, sights, and smells,” and “Three things increase a man’s self-esteem: a beautiful dwelling, a beautiful wife, and beautiful clothes.” In that vein, Maimonides, who was also court physician<sup>19</sup> to the Egyptian vizier al-Fadil, records that “one who suffers from melancholia may rid himself of it by listening to singing and all kinds of instrumental music, by strolling through beautiful gardens and splendid buildings, by gazing upon beautiful pictures, and other things that enliven the mind, and dissipate gloomy moods” (*Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics*, chapter 5, p. 70, AMS Press version).

The authors of the CSV suggest that in addition to appreciation of physical beauty and displays of talent, recognition of moral goodness constitutes a third component of the character strength we currently describe. Indeed, Jewish literature also views the concepts of beauty and excellence, along with their opposites, as descriptions of conduct and of the soul. For example, the Talmud (*Yoma* 86a) uses the word “ugly” to refer to someone unscrupulous in business and discourteous in interpersonal relationships. Similarly, although the Bible frequently emphasizes the comely appearance of the righteous women it describes (e.g., Sarah, Genesis 12:11; Rebecca, 24:16; Rachel, 29:17), Proverbs (31:30) explains that superficial beauty, is not, by itself, of value: “Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that

<sup>16</sup>Of uncertain authorship, the *Zohar* is a primary work of Jewish mysticism.

<sup>17</sup>The root of the relevant Hebrew word in Exodus 15:2 may be variably translated as “glorify” or “adorn.”

<sup>18</sup>Midrashic work containing expositions of the Book of Exodus.

<sup>19</sup>For more on Maimonides as physician, see Rosner (1998). It is noteworthy that Maimonides is described in current academic medical literature as “a bioethical role model for contemporary clinicians” (Gesundheit, Or, Gamliel, Rosner, & Steinberg, 2008, p. 428).



fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” True beauty, in other words, is defined by righteous conduct and saintly deeds.

The above point distinguishes the Jewish approach from that of the Greeks, whose tradition is highlighted in the CSV description of this character strength. The authors of the CSV cite the writings of Plotinus, the third century Greek founder of Neoplatonism, who posited that the soul delights in pondering beauty, for it senses therein “a hint of the divinity that it (the soul) shares” (p. 540). For Plotinus, beauty necessarily embodies holiness, whereas for the Jew, beauty only finds its meaning when inspiring connection to God or when applied to His service. In sum, where the Greeks “believed in the holiness of beauty,” Jews believe in “*hadrat kodesh* [Psalms 29:2; 96:9], the beauty of holiness” (Sacks, 2010, p. 300).

## 2.3 Gratitude

Gratitude encompasses feelings of joy and thankfulness experienced upon receipt of a gift. The trigger for such responses in those expressing this character strength may be a gift of virtually any type: intentional or accidental, material or intangible, lasting or even ephemeral. A further essential component of this strength is that grateful recipients of a favor or goodness experience grace – the transcendent emotion that results from recognition that others have benefitted us.

Through the eyes of Jewish tradition, gratitude may characterize the ideal personality more than any other trait. The very appellation “Jew” has its etymological source in the name of Jacob’s son Judah (see Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 98:6), whose name stems from the Hebrew root meaning “thank” or “praise.” Judah’s mother Leah chose his name as a display of gratitude to God (Genesis 29:35), thereby setting precedent for her later progeny to express their own thankfulness to Him. The Midrash (*Genesis Rabbah* 71:5) elaborates that Leah’s descendants, including David and Daniel, were known for their praise of God (see Psalms 107:1, attributed to David; and Daniel 2:23).

Gratitude is the underlying motif of numerous religious precepts, accentuating the significance Judaism affords being thankful. The fifth of the Ten Commandments, to honor father and mother (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16; see also Deuteronomy 27:16 and Proverbs 23:22), is a prime example of this theme. The medieval work *Sefer ha-Chinuch*<sup>20</sup> explains (*mitzvah* [commandment] 33),

At the root of this *mitzvah* lies the thought that it is fitting for a man to acknowledge and treat with loving-kindness the person who treated him with goodness, and he should not be a scoundrel, an ingrate who turns a cold shoulder [to him] – for this is an evil quality, utterly vile before God and mankind. It is for a person to realize that his father and mother are the cause of his being in this world; hence in very truth it is proper for him to give them every honor and every benefit that he can since they brought him into the world and then, too, labored through many troubles over him in his early years.

<sup>20</sup>This classic but anonymous work proposing philosophy of Jewish laws was likely written in the thirteenth century. This translated excerpt is based on the Feldheim version, pp. 181–182.

The *todah* (thanksgiving) offering (Leviticus 7:12) represents another precept whose roots are embedded in gratitude. Presented in the ancient Temple by survivors of peril, including severe illness, or an ocean or dessert voyage (Talmud *Berakoth* 54b), and by joyous celebrants, such as bride or groom on the wedding day (Bachya ben Asher<sup>21</sup> to Leviticus 6:2), the offering is a pure expression of gratitude to God. According to the Midrash (*Leviticus Rabbah* 9:7, 27:12), the *todah* will be the only offering brought in the eventual Messianic Age, a fact that may underscore the eternal importance of displaying gratitude. In fact, the *todah* offering is practiced in modified form even in contemporary times, in the context of a synagogue benediction (*birkhat ha-gomel*) recited by survivors of the abovementioned precarious situations (*Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 219:1–3).

Another religious ritual whose core theme is based on expression of gratitude is the obligation to offer *bikkurim* (first fruits; Deuteronomy 26:1–11). In biblical times, Jews traveled to Jerusalem and donated the initial produce of their annual harvest to the Temple's officiating priests. This contribution was accompanied by a declaration of gratitude to God. The text of the recitation is relevant to what Peterson and Seligman (2004) call *gratitude span*, which refers to the number of occurrences for which one experiences thankfulness at a single time. In addition to expressing gratitude to God for agricultural bounty, the pilgrim's declaration recalls the miraculous Exodus from Egyptian slavery that God orchestrated "with a mighty hand" and "with wonders" (verse 8), and he rejoices that God gave "this land [of Israel], a land flowing with milk and honey" (verse 9). The *bikkurim* rite thus promotes expression of gratitude for abundant divine goodness, both current and past.

A number of medieval Jewish thinkers argue that gratitude is not merely relevant to various individual precepts, such as those of the *todah* and *bikkurim* offerings, but rather is the fundamental principle underlying all of the Torah's commandments. Bachya ibn Paquda,<sup>22</sup> in his seminal work *Hovot ha-Levavot* (p. 176, Routledge and Kegan Paul translated version) maintains that gratitude to God for His kindnesses is precisely what necessitates adherence to all His laws. Additionally, Abraham ibn Ezra<sup>23</sup> (to Exodus 20:1) writes that the Torah obligates Jews to perform more commandments than gentiles because the former, saved by God from slavery in Egypt, owe a larger debt of gratitude to Him. Ibn Ezra's words may explain why there is an explicit commandment to remember the Exodus each day (Exodus 13:3, Deuteronomy 16:3), in addition to multiple daily religious practices<sup>24</sup> similarly intended to evoke that event (see Nachmanides<sup>25</sup> to Exodus 13:16).

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<sup>21</sup> Leading thirteenth century Jewish philosopher and biblical exegete.

<sup>22</sup> Leading eleventh century philosopher.

<sup>23</sup> Leading twelfth century biblical exegete.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Exodus 13:9.

<sup>25</sup> Leading thirteenth century philosopher, legalist, Kabbalist and exegete.

Recalling and reflecting upon God's wondrous miracles encourages gratitude and renewed commitment to fulfilling His word (see Yonah of Gerona<sup>26</sup> to Talmud *Berakoth* 4b).

The CSV differentiates between personal gratitude (thankfulness toward another person) and transpersonal gratitude (thankfulness to God or a higher power). While our preceding discussion established the essentialness of gratitude in Jewish philosophy generally, it is noteworthy that gratitude is seen as a Jewish religious imperative both relevant to one's relationships with man (personal) and with God (transpersonal), not unlike the CSV's distinction. In addition to the abovementioned requirement to honor parents, another example of personal gratitude is the instruction of the Midrash (*Exodus Rabbah* 4:2) that a guest receiving shelter should consider that he owes his host his life. Furthermore, even a traveler with sufficient provisions of his own should nonetheless purchase food at the inn where he lodges in order to profit his host (Midrash *Numbers Rabbah* 19:15). Additionally, as an expression of appreciation one should provide some service to a town from which he benefited, as did Jacob who, when he sojourned in Shechem, sold low-priced goods at the gates of that city (Midrash *Genesis Rabbah* 79:6).

Religious practices that instead foster the second form, transpersonal gratitude, are also emphasized in Judaism. In fact, rituals relevant to transpersonal gratitude are mandated throughout the day, encouraging what Peterson and Seligman (2004) call *gratitude frequency*, a reference to how often one feels grateful. In fact, the very first words uttered immediately upon waking each morning (i.e., the *modeh ani* prayer), express gratitude to God for the gift of another day of life. Numerous subsequent morning blessings thank God for such basic and often overlooked endowments as the abilities to see and to stand upright. Moreover, near the end of the thrice daily *amidah* prayer wherein Jews beseech God for their needs, a special section (entitled *modim*) conveys gratitude to God for all He provides. Additionally, both before and after meals, mandatory benedictions express appreciation to God for sustenance. A brief blessing is even recited after each instance of relieving oneself, communicating gratitude for the relevant bodily functions. These collective blessings and prayers attune awareness to God's beneficence and the gratitude thus due Him.

Also consistent with Peterson and Seligman (2004), the Bible prescribes expression of gratitude regardless of the intention of the giver. For example, despising Egyptians is prohibited despite the fact that they enslaved the Israelites. The Egyptians, the Bible states, deserve some measure of gratitude for initially hosting the Israelites in their land (see Deuteronomy 23:8 with Rashi's<sup>27</sup> commentary), even though their hospitality may have been for ulterior motives. In related vein, the Midrash even advised gratitude toward inanimate benefactors. Its authors observe that Aaron, and not Moses, was commanded to prompt the first plagues in Egypt by symbolically striking the Nile with his staff. The Midrash explains that Moses' life was saved when, as a baby, he was placed in a basket on the Nile (Exodus 2:3), and

<sup>26</sup> Leading thirteenth century moralist and legalist.

<sup>27</sup> Leading eleventh century Talmud and Bible exegete.

striking the same body of water that benefited him would exhibit ingratitude. Some may doubt the value of gratitude toward an inanimate object or a benefactor with questionable intentions – yet the goal may be to encourage an overall personality that exudes gratitude through exercises of thanksgiving.

Finally, the Talmud repeatedly and emphatically denounces ingratitude, for example criticizing Adam for this very shortcoming. When God questioned Adam regarding his eating from the Tree of Knowledge in disobedience of His command, Adam blamed Eve for instigating the sin (Genesis 3:12), demonstrating ingratitude to God who provided him a wife (Talmud *Abodah Zarah* 5b). Pharaoh is similarly condemned (Midrash *Sekhel Tov* Exodus 1:8) as ungrateful for persecuting and enslaving the family and descendants of Joseph, who dealt kindly with Egypt and implemented an economic plan that saved the country from famine and ruin (see Genesis 41). Additionally, the Talmud (*Abodah Zarah* 5a) faults the Israelites for complaining about their desert sustenance (Numbers 21:5), demonstrating ingratitude for the manna from heaven that God miraculously provided. Perhaps summarizing the rabbinic view on this matter, Judah of Regensburg<sup>28</sup> writes, “there is no worse trait than being ungrateful” (*Sefer Hasidim*, 665).

## 2.4 Hope

Recognizing this character strength as multi-faceted, Peterson and Seligman (2004) explain that hope, along with optimism, future orientation, and future-mindedness together represent the emotional, cognitive, and motivational components that define it. Those high in this strength expect desired outcomes to occur and act in ways thought to increase their likelihood. Such an approach toward life sustains good spirits and galvanizes goal-directed behavior.

Hope for the future and its anticipated goodness is prominently valued in Jewish literature and tradition. In fact, Seeskin (2012) argues that among Judaism’s contributions to humanity was “the belief that the future will be an improvement on the past or present” (p. 3). The following discussion supports this contention through analysis of classic Jewish sources highlighting hope in both the context of national destiny as well as the life of the individual.

On a national level, hope in a better future is expressed through prophecies predicting redemption of the Jewish people, the coming of the Messiah, and the resurrection of the dead. With regard to redemption, Jeremiah prophesies “there is hope for your future... your [exiled] children shall return to their own border” (31:16) in the Land of Israel. The prophet Amos (9:14) makes similar declarations, as does Hosea (2:20), whose prophecy predicts peaceful restoration of the Jews from exile. Selections including these verses are read aloud in the synagogue in the context of the Sabbath and holiday *haftarah* recitations. Prophecies of eventual return to the

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<sup>28</sup>Leading twelfth century sage and mystic.

Land have long been part of the national consciousness, instilling hope through many dark periods during millennia of exile from the Jewish homeland.

Throughout their long history of affliction, Jews have hoped toward the Messianic Age, a time when peoples “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” and when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation” (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). Unlike the despotic regimes which oppressed Jews throughout the centuries, the Messianic king will righteously “judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land” (Isaiah 11:4). Hope for this utopian future is included in Jewish prayer books as part of a daily affirmation that paraphrases Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles of Faith, in which one declares: “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he may delay, I wait daily for his coming” (Sacks, 2009, p. 204).

The thrice daily *amidah* prayer emphasizes national hope throughout. For example, its first two blessings praise God for the redemption and salvation He brings for His people. Later blessings focus on the long anticipated ingathering of the Diaspora, rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the coming of the Messiah. Similarly, one of the four blessings that comprise the grace after meals petitions God to rebuild Jerusalem. There are also numerous references to redemption across the special holiday prayers. For instance, the liturgy for Passover, which commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, alludes to future redemption. Perhaps most famously, the end of the *haggadah* text of the *seder* expresses yearning that next year’s Passover will be celebrated in Jerusalem.

Various life-cycle rituals likewise include hope-related prayers that anticipate redemption of the Jewish people from exile. At circumcision celebrations, for example, a special insert highlighting this theme is added to the grace after meals. Similarly, an officiant at wedding ceremonies prays aloud that God “bring great happiness and joy to one who was barren [Jerusalem], as her children return to her in joy” (Sacks, 2009, p. 1040).

Jews also believe in eventual resurrection, trusting there will be life even for those deceased. This principle is supported by multiple biblical verses, such as Isaiah’s prophecy, “Your dead shall live” (26:19) and Daniel’s statement that “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake” (12:2). A reminder of this belief is included in each of the daily *amidah* prayers, where God is praised as the One Who will revive the dead. Isaiah (25:8) further predicts a time when God “will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces,” a verse recited at Jewish burial services, when such hope may be essential in assisting those present in coping with their loss. In addition, mourners then recite a special text of the *kaddish* prayer which references a future where the dead will awaken to eternal life (Sacks, 2009, p. 1056).

While the above sources stress hope for a brighter collective future, Jewish religious literature also highlights hope of a personal type. Such sentiment is reflected in numerous verses from Psalms, including “I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope” (130:5; see also 39:8). In fact, the seventh blessing of the weekday *amidah* prayer beseeches God in His capacity as Redeemer of individuals from their personal tribulations (see Rashi to Talmud *Megillah* 17b).

A fascinating Talmudic account (from *Berakoth* 10a, based on Isaiah 38) records a conversation between the prophet Isaiah and the biblical king Hezekiah, then on his deathbed. The former had just prophesied that the king would be punished<sup>29</sup>: “Set your house in order; for you shall die” (38:1). Hezekiah’s hopeful response may illustrate the optimism, future-mindedness, and goal-directed behavior that Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify with this character strength. The Talmud records that he emphatically declaimed a tradition from his ancestor David that “Even if a sharp sword rests upon a man’s neck he should not desist from prayer.” Hezekiah’s supplication was indeed granted, as God declares, “I will add unto your days fifteen years” (verse 5). Despite his ominous situation, Hezekiah was motivated by an expectation that he could evoke a more positive outcome, and the divine reprieve from death at the conclusion of the biblical account validates his hopeful and optimistic approach.

In fact, optimism, the cognitive component of hope, is repeatedly emphasized in the Talmud. Like the CSV, which describes prodigies of specific character strengths, the Talmud refers admiringly to the first century sage, Nahum Ish (“man of”) Gamzu, a paragon of hopeful optimism. No matter what apparent evil befell him, he would respond with his mantra, “*gam zu le-tovah*” – “this too is for the good” (Talmud *Taanith* 21a).<sup>30</sup> The Talmud relates that Nahum was blind, impoverished, and plagued with grave illness, yet he never ceased insisting that life always be viewed through the perspective of optimism.

Nahum’s disciple, Rabbi Akiba, followed in his teacher’s footsteps, living by the maxim “Whatever the All-Merciful [God] does is for good,” as is exemplified in the following narrative:

Rabbi Akiba was once going along the road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was everywhere refused. He said ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good’, and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a rooster, a donkey, and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the rooster, a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is for good’. The same night some brigands came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. [Realizing he was saved from captivity only because he had been refused hospitality in the town that was pillaged; and similarly, his location in the field was not detected by the brigands only because his light had been extinguished and his animals silenced, Rabbi Akiba] said... ‘Whatever the All-Merciful does is all for good’. (Talmud *Berakoth* 60b-61a)

Rabbi Akiba did not limit optimism to his personal life, but extended it to his view of Jewish national destiny as well. The Talmud (*Makkoth* 24b) relates that after the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple, a group of rabbis observed a fox emerging from the rubble of the Temple’s Holy of Holies. They were all devastated, recognizing that the sanctuary that once manifested God’s glorious presence amongst their people had become stomping grounds for wild animals. The only exception was Rabbi Akiba, who laughed at the specter, even as his colleagues

<sup>29</sup> Hezekiah had violated God’s will that he marry and procreate.

<sup>30</sup> Nahum’s cognomen “man of Gamzu” is etymologically related to his mantra, which began with the phrase “*gam zu*.”

cried. He explained to them that Scripture already predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Temple site left desolate (Micah 3:12). However, it also predicted rebuilding of the holy city and its environs (Zechariah 8:4). Now that the first prophecy was fulfilled, Rabbi Akiba continued, the second would surely come to pass as well. And with these words of hope for the future, his colleagues proclaimed: “Akiba, you have comforted us! Akiba, you have comforted us!” The Talmud’s inclusion of this narrative provides a paradigm of optimism and hope for the Jewish people.

## 2.5 Humor

Of all the character strengths, humor, in particular, may be described in many ways, and Peterson and Seligman (2004) offer various components to their definition. Humorous individuals are skilled at laughter, gentle teasing, and bringing smiles to others’ faces. They uphold good spirits even during adversity by maintaining a cheerful perspective that sees a light side to life’s challenges. A further component of this strength is playful creation, recognition, and/or enjoyment of incongruities. The following discussion focuses on the positive attitude toward these elements of humor conveyed in classic Jewish sources.<sup>31</sup>

An outgrowth of the fact that expressing humor may elevate mood and benefit mental health (Martin, 2008) is recognition that encouraging laughter and good spirit in the downtrodden or dismayed may constitute a category of religiously valued deed that God rewards. This point is underscored in a Talmudic account involving Rabbi Berokah Hoza’ah (*Taanith* 22a). The great sage was walking through the marketplace when he met Elijah the Prophet.<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Berokah asked Elijah whether anyone present was destined for divine reward in the World to Come. In response, the prophet indicated that only a few of those in the market had earned such distinction. The rabbi then eagerly approached two of those Elijah identified as worthy, intent on learning the source of their great merit. They explained, “We are jesters, when we see men depressed we cheer them up; furthermore when we see two people quarrelling we strive hard [via jest] to make peace between them.” This narrative casts two primary CSV definitions of humor in a positive light, praising those who bring laughter and smiles to others, specifically in the face of adversity and strife.

Maimonides, the rabbi and physician, in line with both the above Talmudic account and the CSV, prescribes laughter for those in distress, implying that it may

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<sup>31</sup> We primarily focus on the Talmud and its commentaries, avoiding the contentious question of whether the Bible itself may contain humor. The interested reader is referred to Friedman (2000, 2002) and Morreall (2001) for review of that issue.

<sup>32</sup> II Kings 2:11 records that Elijah did not die a natural death, instead ascending to heaven in miraculous fashion. According to Jewish tradition, he sometimes reappears to conduct missions of great significance. Elijah’s mention in this Talmudic passage stresses the critical importance assigned to encouraging beneficial laughter.



contribute to recuperation of the ill. He even suggests that bringing mirth to the sick is a religious requirement for their caretakers:

One should *strengthen the [body's] vital power*... by telling the patient joyful stories... and by relating news that distracts his mind and *makes him laugh*... One should select people who can cheer him up, to serve him and to care for him. All this is obligatory in every illness [italicized emphases added].<sup>33</sup>

In line with the final component of the CSV definition of humor mentioned above, there are multiple examples of playful creation or enjoyment of incongruity in the Talmud. The practice of the sage Rabbah “to say something humorous” (*Shabbath* 30b) before he commenced each lecture may provide such an example. He intended that the mirth associated with laughter prime the hearts and minds of his students (see Rashi there). The Talmud also relates that Rabbi Jeremiah offered a *reductio ad absurdum* argument to poke fun at a quoted legal opinion, in an effort to make a colleague laugh (*Niddah* 23a). Additionally, the sage Bar Kappara once placed a large basket over his head, a playful act presumably incongruous with normative rabbinic comportment, specifically in order to bring laughter to a leading contemporary (*Nedarim* 50b-51a). It is noteworthy that Bar Kappara was also known for his skill at using biblical verses for clever word play (*Nedarim* 51a).<sup>34</sup> In that vein, the following example of linguistic humor is predicated on the fact that there were different dialects of the Aramaic language spoken in Babylonia and in the Land of Israel. The Talmud relates that:

A certain Babylonian man who moved to the Land of Israel married a woman. He said to her, “Cook me two hooves [*talfei*].” She cooked him two lentils [*telofhei*]. He became angry with her. The next day, he told her, “Cook me a neck [*geriva*].” She cooked him a *geriva*-measure of grain. He said to her, “Go bring me two gourds [*botzinai*].” She brought him two lamps [*botzinai*]. He said to her, “Go break them over the top of the gate [*reisha de-bava*]!” [The sage] Bava<sup>35</sup> ben Buta was sitting on the gate and judging. She went and broke them on his head. He said to her, “Why did you do that?” [She responded] “Thus my husband commanded me.” He said, “[Since] you did the will of your husband, God will bring out from you two sons like Bava ben Buta” (*Nedarim* 66b).<sup>36</sup>

On the one hand, this excerpt highlights comedic use of incongruities and word-play. Furthermore, it emphasizes Bava ben Buta’s playfully positive response to a potentially volatile circumstance, a telling example of the use of humor to reappraise stressful situations, consistent with another of the CSV’s definitions of humor.<sup>37</sup>

There is even a Jewish holiday associated with humor, known as Purim. An integral theme of that day’s celebration is “reversal” (Esther 9:1), reflecting the Jews’

<sup>33</sup> From *The Regimen of Health*, excerpted from Rosner’s (1990, p. 47) translation.

<sup>34</sup> The second party in both the account of Rabbi Jeremiah and of Bar Kappara made a deliberate attempt to avoid laughing, which may indicate conflicting views on humor among the sages of the Talmud (see also *Nedarim* 50b).

<sup>35</sup> Bava’s name is also the Aramaic word for “gate”.

<sup>36</sup> Translation based on Brodsky (2011, p. 20).

<sup>37</sup> For other examples of humor in the Talmud, see Brodsky (2011) and Diamond (2011).



unexpected salvation from the murderous designs of the ancient Persian leader Haman, who was instead himself hanged by King Ahasuerus on the very gallows that Haman had designated for executing the Jewish leader. Pursuant to this ironic and incongruous shift, Purim has become linked with humor and jollity.

Contemporary scholars of humor (e.g., Martin, 2007) caution that not all humor is beneficial, echoing the Talmud, which promotes only certain uses of humor, while condemning others as destructive. For example, *leitzanutha* [mockery] is forbidden unless aimed at idolatry or other sins deserving derision (*Megillah* 25b). Similarly, unbridled *sekhok* [levity] is seen as an impediment to Torah study (*Aboth* 6:5) and an invitation to promiscuity (*Aboth* 3:13).

While some may argue that positive psychologists should focus on the benevolent forms of humor, Peterson and Seligman (2004) counter that cynics and satirists also play an important role. Such individuals make evildoers into a laughingstock, and repel and correct harmful deviations, thereby building group cohesion. Perhaps in this vein, some traditionally display leniency toward mockery during the Purim holiday. For example, there is a custom dating back to the sixteenth century to present a Purim *shpiel*, consisting of satiric skits or monologues. Such satire may also take a written form, like the twelfth century Tractate *Purim*, a parody composed in the style of the Talmud (see Hanegbi, 1989).

## 2.6 Spirituality

The character strength of spirituality is particularly manifest in those who possess clear beliefs about the ultimate meaning and purpose of the cosmos and the individual's place within it. They are confident that life has a transcendent (nonphysical) element, and their theories regarding the higher purpose of life and the universe comfort them and mold their conduct. Importantly, spirituality in this context is also connected to pursuit of moral values and goodness.

Spirituality, by the above definition, is central to Jewish thought and practice, finding strong expression, for example, in the traditional Jewish understanding of "divine providence." The notion of divine providence is based on belief that God is omniscient, guides temporal events both great and small, and punishes those who violate His commands, but rewards those who choose to observe them. Acceptance of God's providence therefore offers direction to life and suggests ways to shape one's conduct (i.e., fulfilling the Bible's mandate of goodness and moral purity toward God and fellow man). Furthermore, such acceptance provides special comfort to those who trust in Him, as David wrote, "I will fear no evil, for You are with me" (Psalms 23:4). This idea was explicated by Bachya ibn Paquda who wrote that one who trusts in God exchanges "constant grief" and "continual worry" for "a peaceful mind and a tranquil soul" (*Hovot ha-Levavot*, p. 263).

Jewish literature is replete with reference to God's omniscience and direction of worldly events, foundational and potentially comforting components of divine providence. The former notion is explicit in Scripture ("For His eyes are upon the

ways of a man, and He sees all his goings” [Job 34:21]), Midrash<sup>38</sup> (“Even the small talk that a man talks with his wife is written down” by God [*Leviticus Rabbah* 26:7]), and Talmud (“Know what there is above thee: an eye that sees, an ear that hears” [*Aboth* 2:1]). Regarding the latter principle, God’s supervision of history, the verse states: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord.... He turns it wheresoever He will” (Proverbs 21:1). Not only is the fate of nations subject to His whim (e.g., Judges 2:11–14; 10:11–13), but also trivialities of the individual life: “No man bruises his finger here on earth unless it was so decreed against him in heaven” (Talmud *Hullin* 7b). Even outwardly random events need not precipitate any special fears or increased trepidations, for their outcomes are equally under His direct control (Proverbs 16:33).

The prophets were aware that God’s providence oftentimes seems hidden or incomprehensible to the mortal observer, as Jeremiah (12:1) wondered painfully, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?” and as Habbakuk (1:13) was similarly confounded. Yet the believer is calmed by the notion that evil flourishes only seemingly and temporarily (Psalms 92:8), and he is reassured by the conviction that God’s ways are ultimately perfect and just (Deuteronomy 32:4). Moreover, divine reward and punishment are only sometimes meted out in this world, as full recompense may only be realized in the afterlife, an idea that may offer further comfort.<sup>39</sup> For example, obedience to the Torah leads to earthly blessings (Deuteronomy 11:13–15), and its violation to corresponding temporal curse (verses 16–17). However, the rabbis of the Talmud stressed that true reward for fulfillment of the Law is not intended for the mortal realm, but rather for after death (*Hullin* 142a; see also *Aboth* 4:16). This concept is reinforced in daily morning prayers by recitations (adapted from Talmud *Pe’ah* 1:1 and *Shabbath* 127a) detailing numerous good deeds and ritual rites, fulfillment of which are said to yield reward retained for the World to Come. Later rabbinic works emphasized that the only pure bliss is the ecstasy of the soul experienced in its eternal life, and that God’s desire to reward and pleasure the afterlife souls of adherents to His will is the central purpose of man’s Creation (*Mesillat Yesharim*<sup>40</sup> chapter 1; *Derekh Hashem*<sup>41</sup> Section 2, chapter 2; see also *Sefer ha-’Ikkarim*<sup>42</sup> 1:7).

Nonetheless, numerous Jewish sources stress that Torah observance does not mean blind obedience to arbitrary commands intended solely to draw forth earthly and afterlife blessing via divine providence. To the contrary, the commandments are inherently purposeful, contributing to the welfare of the faithful and offering meaning and direction to their lives. The Bible characterizes the commandments as based on wisdom and understanding (Deuteronomy 4:6) and itself sometimes suggests specific reasons for individual laws (e.g., Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 17:16,17).

<sup>38</sup> Translation of the Midrash Rabbah is based on the Soncino Press version.

<sup>39</sup> Peterson and Seligman (2004) list belief in life after death as a critical distinction between those possessing the character strength of spirituality and those lacking it.

<sup>40</sup> Eighteenth century ethical treatise by Moshe Chaim Luzzatto.

<sup>41</sup> Eighteenth century philosophical treatise by Moshe Chaim Luzzatto.

<sup>42</sup> Fifteenth century treatise on the fundamentals of the Jewish faith by Joseph Albo.

Although recognizing that divine rationale may be beyond human comprehension (Talmud *Pesahim* 119a, *Sanhedrin* 21b), some rabbis of the Talmud also explored reasons for particular commandments. Talmud *Niddah* (31b) explains the seemingly abstruse law obliging separation of man and wife during her menstrual period with the rational explanation that subsequent to a brief mandated abstinence the marital relationship may be reinvigorated. Many medieval Jewish philosophers followed this tradition, presenting elucidations of Torah law. Abraham ibn Ezra (to Leviticus 13:45), for example, explained the requirement that lepers wrap themselves as intended to prevent infection of others. Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed*, III, chapters 26–27) likewise stressed that every biblical law serves a useful purpose, aimed at wellbeing of body and soul.

The underpinnings of divine providence, as well as other core articles of Jewish faith, are clearly explicated for adherents, contributing toward coherent beliefs regarding one's place in the universe, noted above as a key element in the positive psychology definition of spirituality. From the dawn of the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai when God presented the Tablets of the Law, including the first of the Ten Commandments, requiring belief in God (Exodus 20:2, Deuteronomy 5:6), its religion placed significant emphasis on knowledge of basic religious principles. Indeed, the *shema* affirmation recited twice daily incorporates biblical passages asserting central concepts as the unity of God (Deuteronomy 6:4), the requirement to love Him (Deuteronomy 6:5), and the idea of reward and punishment (Deuteronomy 11:13–17). The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 90a) further delineates Jewish doctrine, such as that of the divine origin of the Torah and the eventual resurrection of the dead. Among numerous medieval rabbinic scholars who offered formal and precise codifications of the essential dogma, Maimonides most prominently composed his Thirteen Principles of Faith, delineating fundamentals as God's eternity, incorporeality, and omniscience, printed in most daily prayer books to the present day. His Principles were rewritten around the year 1400 in poetic form (entitled *yigdal*); this hymn is commonly sung even in contemporary times during Jewish religious services and is taught to children as soon as they begin to pray.

The positive psychology strength of spirituality is also powerfully reflected in the writings of the Kabbalists. These Jewish mystics understood that ritual practices influence heavenly realities. Performance of religious rites incorporates the Jew into the divine system that provides the spiritual forces that sustain the world and all it contains. Kabbalistic thought thus suggests that fulfillment of the Torah allows one to connect with the divine order and strengthen the spiritual power that maintains harmony and life in the universe (Dan, 2006). These mystical ideas seemingly dovetail with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) notion that spiritual individuals believe in a sacred force that connects all living things to one another.

Among the specific questions whose responses Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggest differentiate those who exhibit spirituality is "How often do you pray?" (p. 600). For the Jew, prayer is both mandatory and frequent. In fact, some rabbis of the Talmud contend that the Jewish requirement of thrice daily prayer was instituted by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*Berakoth* 26b). Indeed, biblical verses suggest such frequency of prayer even in ancient times (e.g., Psalms 55:18), and it

is explicitly recorded that Daniel (6:11) consistently “kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.” In general, the Bible abounds with examples of both men and women who entreated God in an hour of need (e.g., Eliezer, Genesis 24: 12–14; Hannah, I Samuel 2:1–10; Manasseh, II Chronicles 33:12–13). Likewise, various chapters of Psalms profess to be the texts of supplications uttered by biblical figures (e.g., chapters 17 and 86, each beginning, “A prayer of David”, and chapter 90 beginning, “A prayer of Moses”). Relatedly, the Talmudic sage Rabbi Eleazar explains that prayer is among the most significant forms of divine service (*Berakoth* 32b), an idea reflected in more modern works, such as that of the Hasidic master Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi who wrote that “the idea of prayer is the foundation of the whole Torah” (as cited in Cohn-Sherbok, 2003, p. 440).

Although prayer may be viewed as a means of influencing a deity to satisfy the petitioner’s desires, Jewish prayer is also about connecting to the divine, a concept directly in consonance with the CSV notion of transcendence. It is noteworthy that while many biblical prayers regard material needs or physical salvation (e.g., Genesis 28:20–22; Numbers 12:13; II Kings 19:15–19), others reflect the yearning of the soul (e.g., Psalm 51, especially verses 12–14), indicating the role of prayer in bridging the divide between man and his Creator. Similarly, the Talmud frowns on one whose sole intent in praying regards anticipated fulfillment of his petition (*Berakoth* 32b), further indicating that prayer involves more than requesting favors from God. Even Maimonides, known for his rational approach to Judaism, wrote that one who prays must “see himself as standing before the divine Presence”<sup>43</sup> (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Prayer, 4:16). Perhaps most powerfully, the Jewish idea of prayer as an expression of spirituality was captured by the approach, especially prominent in the thought of many Hasidic masters, that prayer “is the oxygen of the soul; it is the spiritual life force, the umbilical cord connecting the soul with its Source, between the finite and the Infinite” (Rosen, 2008).

## 2.7 Relevant Psychology Research

Even those subdisciplines of psychology that are specifically focused on diversity and multicultural concerns have historically been slow to focus on issues of religion (Schlosser, Foley, Poltrock, & Holmwood, 2009). Although religion and spirituality have lately gained traction as topics of inquiry for psychology researchers, investigations of Jews and Judaism still lag (Rosmarin, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2009; Schnall, 2006). However, it is heartening that in very recent years this situation is changing, as a small but growing cadre of researchers begins to fill the gap, focusing on Jews in both theoretical and empirical studies of mental health and wellness (Schnall, Pelcovitz, & Fox, 2013).

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<sup>43</sup> Translation from *A Maimonides Reader* (1972), p. 91.

Theoretical explorations of those aspects of Judaism relevant to both transcendence and mental health<sup>44</sup> or well-being have largely concentrated on the Jewish holy days, especially the Sabbath. For example, Golner (1982) and Goldberg (1986a, 1986b) argued that the spiritual practices of the Sabbath day parallel philosophies and interventions popular in contemporary mental health care. More recent expositions have expanded on these earlier treatments of the subject of the Sabbath (e.g., Smith-Gabai & Ludwig, 2011), with some theorists adding discussion of Jewish prayer in the context of its mental health benefits (Frank et al., 1997) and its focus on gratitude (Weiss & Levy, 2010). Moreover, Krichiver (2010) connects all major Jewish holidays with related positive psychology character strengths, including many strengths associated with transcendence.

In addition to theoretical analyses, various empirical studies of Jewish research participants also examined aspects of transcendence and emotional well-being. In a study of young Jewish adults, Ressler (1997) found a small positive relationship between religiosity and three measures of well-being: belonging, self-acceptance, and optimism (a key component of the character strength of hope). In a study by Rosmarin, Krumrei, and Pargament (2010) of Jews and Christians, greater spirituality and gratitude were associated with reduced depression and anxiety in both groups. Similarly, in samples of both religious and secular Israeli Jewish students, religious belief was negatively related to psychological distress and positively related to psychological well-being (Vilchinsky & Kravetz, 2005). Both of these relationships were moderated by participant report of finding meaning in life, an important element of the character strength of spirituality. Relatedly, Pirutinsky et al. (2011) report that intrinsic religiosity (defined in ways that overlap with the character strength of spirituality) moderated the association between poor physical health and depression among Jews. Although they cite multiple studies suggesting the ill or disabled generally suffer higher rates of depression, for those in their sample reporting high levels of intrinsic religiosity, poor health did not at all heighten risk of depression, a surprising and important finding. By contrast, in a study of Jewish female residents of Israeli old age homes, no relationship between religiosity (defined in ways that overlap with the character strengths of spirituality and hope) and subjective well-being was uncovered (Iecovich, 2002).

Related research focused specifically on religious coping. For example, among British Jews reporting recent major stress, those utilizing religious coping methods, associated with spiritual support and religious beliefs, were more likely to experience positive affect (Loewenthal, MacLeod, Goldblatt, Lubitsh, & Valentine, 2000). In fact, Rosmarin, Pargament, Krumrei, and Flannelly (2009) created and validated a Jewish Religious Coping Scale (JCOPE; based partly on a measure developed for early adolescents by Dubow, Pargament, Boxer, & Tarakeshwa, 2000). In a sample of Jewish adults, these researchers found that JCOPE scores were associated with

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<sup>44</sup>For a review of evidence that Jewish prayer and spirituality may be associated with *physical* health and well-being, see Levin (2011, 2012). For preliminary data suggesting Jewish spirituality may be related to dental and periodontal health, see Zini, Sgan-Cohen, and Marcenes (2012a, 2012b).

psychological distress; positive religious coping predicted lower levels of anxiety and worry, and negative religious coping predicted higher levels of depression and anxiety. However, Cohen (2002) reported that religious coping, religious belief, and spirituality better predicted quality of life and happiness among Catholics and Protestants than among Jews.

The above studies require the caveat that they are investigations of the behavior and beliefs of contemporary Jews, and thus involve participants who may not represent the values reflected by the time-honored primary texts of Judaism, such as the Bible or Talmud. For example, Weiss and Levy (2010) acknowledge that “Traditional Jewish practice specifies that one pray three times a day,” yet they reasonably speculate (in the absence of definitive data) that “most contemporary Jews do not pray at all, and only a small percentage may set aside time for daily prayer” (p. 111). ‘Studies of Jews’ are critical; yet these differ significantly from ‘studies of Judaism’ in that the latter would assess the correlates and consequences of traditional Jewish rituals and beliefs defined specifically and explicitly by long-established Jewish source texts.<sup>45</sup> Research of this second type is less common, yet such work more directly explicates the relationship between well-being and Judaism per se in the context of the character strengths that define transcendence.

Rosmarin, Pargament, and Mahoney (2009) pioneered this second and more direct form of investigation of Judaism and psychological wellness by creating a “trust in God” scale expressly based on Bachya ibn Paquda’s classic eleventh century philosophic and devotional text *Hovot ha-Levavot*. As described earlier (in the context of the character strength of spirituality), this medieval rabbinic work delineates trust in God together with the mental health benefits its author believed such trust proffers. Among their broad sample of Jewish respondents, Rosmarin et al. indeed found that divine trust related to personal happiness and to reduced depression and anxiety.

Rosmarin, Pargament, Pirutinsky, and Mahoney (2010; see also Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Auerbach, et al., 2011) subsequently applied the above approach in developing a spiritually integrated treatment (SIT) for anxiety. With the help of rabbinic consultants, the researchers created an Internet-based treatment drawn in significant part from classic Jewish sources, incorporating elements related to the character strengths of spirituality and gratitude. A randomized controlled trial was then conducted, evaluating the SIT among Jewish participants with elevated levels of worry and stress. Compared with controls, those receiving the SIT demonstrated reduced worry, stress, uncertainty intolerance, and depression. This groundbreaking work demonstrates that traditional Jewish concepts of transcendence associated with positive psychology character strengths may produce interventions that promote mental health and well-being.

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<sup>45</sup> Although both studies of Jews and of Judaism definitely exist in the research literature, we admit that classifying a given study in one or the other category is sometimes difficult. Our approach was conservative, considering ‘studies of Judaism’ to be only those whose methods were expressly and significantly based on the religion’s primary texts.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Surveying Judaism's approach on any subject is a bold and ambitious endeavor. Its literature and traditions span millennia, and, for any given primary source, there may be multiple approaches among the sages. A truly exhaustive discussion of any one of the topics covered above could comprise a chapter, if not a book, of its own. Furthermore, as this chapter focuses on only one of the six virtues described in the CSV, future research must address the other members of the High Six to demonstrate that classic Jewish texts yield meaningful and substantial sources for all 24 character strengths identified by positive psychologists.

In addition to the insights Judaism offers social scientists studying character strengths, Jewish clergy and religious educators devoted to inspiring virtues in their congregants and students may benefit from knowledge of psychological research and theory. The field of positive psychology, with its emphasis on experimentation and scientific validation has already yielded empirically supported interventions,<sup>46</sup> including many that could be adapted to classrooms in synagogues and religious schools. This initial treatise should prompt discussion among psychologists, academics, and Jewish scholars and educators regarding a symbiotic relationship between positive psychology and the Jewish tradition. The CSV was born out of the challenge issued to Seligman: "Can we hold hope that positive psychology will be able to help people evolve toward their highest potential?" (p. v). The product of efforts to investigate the reciprocal contributions of positive psychology and Judaism should suggest that the answer is a resounding "yes".

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<sup>46</sup>For example, Wood et al. (2010, p. 897) state, "Gratitude interventions have commonly been highlighted as a key success of the positive psychology movement." See there for a review of 12 empirically validated gratitude interventions.



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