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MITSVA SURPRISES: GLEANINGS FROM *SEFER HAREDIM*

Judaism is generally characterized as a faith system based on a host of precepts, divided into obligations and prohibitions. The stress on doing, in contrast to being, which is implied in this definition, has given rise to the critical question of where is the human being in all this? Is there room for conscience, for developing and perfecting character traits? Or is everything reduced to almost rote behavior?

This is an issue that was central to the thinking of Rabbi Dr. Walter S. Wurzburger. In what is arguably his most definitive book, *Ethics of Responsibility*, he deals with this issue quite extensively.¹ One could even suggest that this is the underlining motif of the book. He writes:

I am glad that Halakhah makes space for the input of individuality and subjectivity on religiously significant issues. It should be borne in mind that meticulous observance of halakhic norms does not exhaust the meaning of Jewish piety. Halakhah merely provides the foundation; it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the attainment of religious ideals. As R. Soloveitchik put it, “Halakhah is not a ceiling but a floor” (31-32).

There are different ways to approach this critical issue. One could zero in on the extra-halakhic categories that pervade Judaism, including going beyond the letter of the law (*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*),² the way of the pious (*midat hasidut*),³ fulfilling the desires of Heaven (*latset yedei Shamayim*),⁴ doing that which is right and good (*ve-asita ha-yashar ve-ha-tov*),⁵ and to walk in the way of good people (*le-ma’an telekh be-derekh tovim*).⁶ Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this.⁷

One could point to the specific requirements needed to authentically fulfill the dictates of Jewish Law, such as focus (*kavana*) and intention, among others. One could also point out the precepts that either pre-suppose or generate character development. The focus in this presentation is on a unique inventory of precepts, one which has not gained adequate currency. The book is *Sefer Haredim*, a treatise by R. Elazar Ezkari, a contemporary of R. Yosef Karo and R. Yitzhak Luria of Safed.⁸

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R. Ezkari divides the precepts in an unusual way, i.e., according to the parts of the body, in addition to the standard obligation-prohibition paradigm.⁹ Thus, he categorizes the *mitsvot* by whether they are heart related, eye related, mouth related, ear related, hand related, foot related, etc.

More important for our immediate discussion are what he designates as *mitsva* obligations, including some that are quite surprising. Some of these surprises impact most significantly on the matter of character development, on *being* rather than mere *doing*. Were they to be embraced by the covenantal community, they would project quite a different picture of *mitsva* actualization.

FREE WILL

It is possible, though not desirable, to go through an entire life on automatic pilot, without ever choosing Judaism. There is much to be said for having the entirety of Judaism so deeply entrenched that no other alternative is possible. At the same time, acting Jewish without ever consciously accepting upon one's self the obligations that come with being Jewish is less than ideal.

Reaching the age of responsibility, *bar* or *bat mitsva*, and entering the faith community at that time, would seem to be the first instance that one could actually make a mature embrace of faith. Yet, it would hardly make sense that this is the only time that such conscious choice is made, if made at all.

In the view of R. Ezkari, "At any time that a prohibition or potential prohibition presents itself and the individual refrains, that person fulfills this obligation [to choose life]" (p. 57, no. 20).

R. Ezkari understands the imperative to "choose life" (Devarim 30:19) as not merely good advice or exhortation. It is actually a *mitsva* obligation. Herein he follows the view of *Rabbenu Yonah* (*Sha'arei Teshuva*, 3:17).

Exactly how this works is unclear. How is a person who chooses not to eat an unkosher item different from one who simply does not eat such item? The key seems to be that the prohibition 'presents itself,' that the opportunity is there for the taking, but the person refuses to act on the opportunity (p. 57, no. 20). It is in this type of situation, when the person actually chooses and says "no" to the prohibited item, and "yes" to God, that one fulfills the *mitsva* of choosing life. Otherwise, refraining from transgression is less a matter of choice, and more a matter of absence of opportunity.

It is noteworthy that R. Ezkari applies this mitsva fulfillment to the deliberate avoidance of a transgression, rather than the fulfillment of an obligation, such as to shake the four species or to don *tefilin*. Perhaps R. Ezkari appreciated that every action, every mitsva fulfillment, inherently involves a conscious choice to do something, whereas avoidance is not always a choice.

Clearly, in the perspective offered by R. Ezkari, the obligations we fulfill and the prohibitions we avoid are best off as deliberate choices, rather than thoughtless actions. Herein R. Ezkari rejects Judaism by reflex, absent heart and soul. It is via constant choosing that one builds character, that one truly and purposefully affirms the word of God. This is the first mitsva surprise, that choosing to affirm and to avoid are Biblically obligatory.

What is unclear and subject to debate, is whether within this configuration there is room for wrestling with choices. If a prohibition presents itself and one chooses to refrain, is it acceptable if that choice is preceded by serious debate concerning whether to refrain? Following the famous rabbinic observation that one should not develop a visceral distaste for that which is prohibited and instead should cultivate a spiritual rejection based on the commitment to following God's word, such debate is arguably necessary, at least at some juncture in one's embrace of mitsva obligation.¹⁰

One could further argue that the choice to refrain is actually more laudable when there is a desire for the prohibited item but one refuses to cave in to the desire. This approach removes the sense of guilt that some might have for even harboring a stifled desire for a forbidden fruit. On the contrary, this might even be a true religious achievement. Those who are immune from the allures of the forbidden may have it easier, but not necessarily better, unless at some time they freely chose in favor of righteousness.

CRUELTY

Aside from his novel way of dividing up the mitsva obligations and the unique set of mitsva obligations that he delineates, R. Ezkari also brings an added dimension to the mitsva responsibilities, what may be termed 'the big picture.' He brings a much more broad context to the obligations, often seeing them as paradigmatic for a much larger area than the immediate mitsva context.

A good example of this idea is the relatively straightforward charity obligation. For R. Ezkari, there is much more to this mitsva than actu-

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ally giving to the needy. Critical to the giving is also the way one gives. The charity must be offered with an open hand, not a closed one, with a soft heart, not a hardened heart (Devarim 15:7).

R. Ezkari sees this in the larger context, making it incumbent to uproot from within ourselves the trait of cruelty (p. 104, no. 27, following *Sha'arei Teshuva*, 3:36). He states that the Torah, after forbidding the closing of the hand from proffering charity, goes on to further prohibit the hardness of heart when giving. This is to assure that the charity is tendered with compassion, according to R. Ezkari. This is a broad mandate covering the entirety of life, not only charity; kindness and compassion should be the governing approach, and cruelty removed.

Additionally, we are asked to eliminate the trait of stinginess and to cultivate generosity, having a good eye and a positive feeling about that which we share with others (p. 104, no. 28, based on Devarim 15:10). There is no argument about the wisdom and desirability of cultivating these character traits. What may come as a surprise is that this is part of the mitsva package.

This is further reinforced with the charge to extend loans to those in need, even if repayment is jeopardized by a looming Sabbatical year, which engenders the automatic cancellation of loans (p. 106, nos. 37-38, based on Devarim 15:9). Once the loan is cancelled via the Sabbatical year, the creditor is admonished not to demand repayment of the loan (p. 117, no. 1, based on Devarim 15:2). R. Ezkari questions the faith of one who does not comply with these charity mandates, who is of hard heart and without the yoke of Heaven.

Obviously, a poor person who apprehends the joy of a benefactor at being able to help, will feel that much better about accepting the help. Many a homily has been delivered about how charity is so needed for the person giving the charity, who gains so much from the giving. With R. Ezkari, these benefits are established as sacred Biblical obligations. They are obligations that are clearly designed to build character, to formulate a pattern of kindness and compassion, of caring and generosity; to, in the words of R. Ezkari, uproot from within ourselves the capacity for cruelty. So, aside from “doing” charity, we are here presented with a sacred charge to “be” charitable.

There is a balance to this approach to cruelty, a limit to the exercise of compassion. There are some people who do not deserve to be treated kindly. It is prohibited to like those who deliberately mislead the public, who entice others to deviant behavior (p. 105, no. 34; based on Devarim 13:9). Furthermore, the Biblical command to give no brief to those who mislead (Devarim 13:9) includes a warning to have no pity or compassion

on those who cause others to sin or to falter (pp. 105-6, no. 35).

As much as we are mandated to uproot cruelty, it seems that cruelty should not be totally uprooted, since that capacity must be maintained for those whose behavior leaves little choice but to be strict and cruel with them. Undeserved compassion has unpleasant consequences. Whoever is compassionate to the cruel will in the end be cruel to those who are compassionate (*ibid.*).

By maintaining this capacity for cruelty, as unwanted as it is and as much as it can hopefully be avoided, the acts of kindness remain actions which are chosen rather than reflex reactions. Good reflexes are laudable, to be sure, but good choices even more so. Choosing to be kind, precisely because the opposite capacity is still retained, brings the human being more fully into the character building orbit.

ANGER

There is little good to say about anger. Avoidance of anger is encouraged in every Jewish ethical treatise. The angry expression is condemned as being totally unacceptable. What is unclear is the exact nature of the anger prohibition. For R. Ezkari, it is clear that losing one's temper is a Biblical prohibition. The source for this is relatively well known and not a straightforward derivation, yet for R. Ezkari, there is no question that the matter is Biblically based.

Following the *Zohar*, R. Ezkari understands the Torah charge to avoid making an idol *for* oneself as an injunction not to make an idol *of* oneself (pp. 65-66, no. 42, based on Shemot 34:17). One makes an idol *of* oneself by habitually becoming angry, causing one's sacred soul to depart and to be replaced by a bad spirit, by an idolatrous alternative (p. 65, no. 42, citing the *Zohar*). R. Ezkari concludes this rather involved extrapolation with the acknowledgment that this is a departure from the basic sense of the text, but insists that the anger prohibition was included in the Sinaitic transmission to Moses.

The alternative to anger is being calm, at ease, unflappable, content with life in general and with all the specifics. No circumstance, whether it is being robbed, not receiving honors, or even being insulted, should cause one to become angry (pp. 102-3, no. 17). If one is truly with God, there is no room for anger.

Anger seems rooted in a lack of faith, in not accepting what God has obviously ordained for the person. This does not mean that one should not fight evil with all one's energies; one should be angry at the presence of evil. But it is still not appropriate to lose one's temper;

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instead one should use one's temper. There is no room or justification for ego-centered anger.

Another facet of this, is that letting loose with a temperamental outburst is often a capitulation to one's base urges. It is much more difficult to remain in control, and in losing one's temper one is renouncing the higher calling to transcend the petty. The self becomes the focus, and anything which does not agreeably feed into that self is seen as reason to scream. It is more than the homiletical turning of one's self into an idol, of loudly protesting anything and anyone that does not bow down to one's self.

The anger prohibition is another classic instance of Jewish law developing character. A calm, content, accepting person is in a state that is most salutary. The genuine expression of faith would inevitably lead to that calm state, wherein anger is not even possible. The knowledge that becoming angry is a Biblical prohibition strongly linked to the idolatry prohibition, further drives home this point.

Some may challenge this anger hypothesis on psychological grounds, that stifling anger may not be good for one's mental health. There are two points to be made regarding this contention. The first is that cultivating a mind set that places one in a permanent state of ease, wherein no matter what happens one is free from complaint, bitterness and anger, is indisputably the best mental state for anyone to be in.

The second is that, failing having attained such a state, it is not necessarily true that it is better to get the hostility out of one's system. Recent psychological literature seems to indicate that anger begets anger, that angry expression brings with it not catharsis, but more anger. There is no real health benefit to letting loose—maybe a momentary release, but a release into more of the same.

In choosing God, we choose to be calm and accepting, kindly and content, and creating an atmosphere of friendliness that conduces to welcome social interaction.

VENGEANCE

One of the ways in which anger is released is through exacting revenge. One is more likely to get back at someone if one is angry at what the other has perpetrated. Unlike anger, the nature of whose prohibition is not explicitly spelled out, the vengeance prohibition is clearly and unmistakably presented in the Torah.

Not only is carrying out a grudge forbidden; so too is even just harboring a grudge (Vayikra 19:18). In harboring a grudge, one may even display what is ostensibly a more noble character, in not doing to the other what the other had done to you. But the nobility in refraining from doing is not combined with nobility of thought. In actuality, the person remembers what had been done and lets the other know that the wrong has not been forgotten, but that he, the victim, will not be like that. However, overtly demonstrating that you are not like the other, that you are better and rubbing in that better behavior, is strictly prohibited (p. 103, nos. 20-21).

R. Ezkari notes that the essence of this prohibition is not the words that are expressed—it is the thought that is harbored in the heart. If that is the case, then the Biblical prohibition is specifically aimed at the way one thinks, at the way one develops internally as a person. The outer expression is wrong because it betrays what is even more wrong internally (p. 103, nos. 20-21, following *Sha'arei Teshuva*, 3:38).

What dynamics are generated by the Torah prohibiting the maintaining of anger within at someone who has perpetrated a wrong? One takes this prohibition seriously only by honestly confronting one's own inner self and wrestling with the vengeance demon, even with the anger demon. Eventually one comes to the conclusion that it is wrong to think in such a destructive way and therefore banishes such thought and moves on with life in a more constructive way.

In psychological terms, one would recommend to the victim of the wrong not to let the anger fester inside; let it be the perpetrator's problem, not yours. In Judaic terms, one would say that this prohibition is God's formula for transcending pettiness and maturing into a truly believing and faith imbued person.

This is another of the primary obligations that form one's character, to be good for good's sake, for no ulterior purpose and without any put down.

CRYING

There are certain human behaviors that, by definition, come spontaneously and that absent spontaneity, are less than genuine. The full range of emotions come under this broad umbrella, from laughter to tears, from sadness to joy. Try telling someone to cry and they may be able to fake it, but the emotion that gives birth to the cry cannot be manufactured. Yet, according to R. Ezkari, we are obligated to cry.

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Consider the directive, “And your kin, the entire house of Israel, should lament the loss by fire. . . .” (Vayikra 10:6). This is a command to Israel to mourn the death of two of Aharon’s children, Nadav and Avihu. In the view of R. Ezkari, this is a proto-type for a more embracing regulation—that whenever a worthy person dies, one should cry over that passing (p. 68, no. 3; see also p. 76, no. 49). It is unique to R. Ezkari that he considers the requirement to cry a Biblically based imperative.

A pattern is emerging in the thought of R. Ezkari, a pattern of the mitsva as an enveloping paradigm and of mitsva aimed at the interior of one’s being, at one’s heart and soul, with the outer behavior merely a gauge of the more basic focus on the inside. How else can one understand the mitsva obligation to cry? One cannot ask of others to cry any more than one can demand of others to laugh.

People cry if they are moved to cry. They will cry at a tragedy, mostly at a tragedy that affects them. Though it is hardly possible to generate tears, it is possible, even necessary, to address the issue of what should matter enough that crying would naturally ensue.

In mandating that one must cry at the passing of a worthy person, God is telling us that we must appreciate the importance of every worthy person, that they are important to us, and that every worthy person leaving the world diminishes us. Once we have internalized this point, crying would come naturally.

We do not need to be told this for those to whom we are close and whose passing we feel with full impact. But we need to be told this for those who via their worthiness impact upon us, an impact that we do not feel unless we are forced to think it through and even thereby urged to become closer with those worthy people.

Crying, true enough, cannot be legislated. But like the vengeance and grudge bearing legislation, the aim is to the heart and mind, to the way that we think. This is another of the *Sefer Haredim*’s mitsva surprises that builds within us the fullness of appreciation for the goodness that surrounds us, and which we should meaningfully and genuinely acknowledge.

THOUGHT CONTROL

It may seem next to impossible to regulate thoughts, but it is already manifest in the approach of R. Ezkari that the Torah is very much concerned with the heart and the mind, to the point that there are explicit rules addressing how we should think and how we should feel. It is therefore important, and hardly surprising, that the Torah provides

guidance regarding our thoughts, to head off unwelcome behavior.

We are admonished not to follow the whims of the heart (Bemidbar 15:3 9). In the view of R. Ezkari, this is an instruction not to contemplate committing a sin or any other wrong (p. 105, no. 29). This injunction is directed at our thought processes, that we control our thoughts so as not to plan to sin. It is of course difficult to tell people not to think this or that. In reality, the moment you tell someone not to think about something is the moment that they start thinking about it. What is herein being addressed is active thinking about doing wrong. That is definitely under human control.

There is a further warning against thinking lustful thoughts during the day that will lead to unwelcome results at night (p. 105, no. 30, based on Devarim 23:10). In that vein, one would include the restrictions prohibiting lustful staring or even just staring for pleasure at those who are forbidden to us in marriage (p. 106, nos. 1, 4, based on Bemidbar 15:39 and Devarim 23:10).

We can easily accept that staring at others is demeaning and disrespectful, and if such staring arouses passions, can be dangerous. But even absent such considerations, there is a concern as to what happens to the person who occupies the mind with such aberrant thoughts. The Torah regulations are a generic directive to put a clamp on thoughts that may lead to forbidden behavior. Once a behavior is established as out of bounds, then any thought regarding such behavior is likewise out of bounds. It may take discipline and hard work to achieve this measure of thought control, but it is an achievable goal if one removes with finality from one's behavioral lexicon any possibility of wrongdoing.

This is the case with matters that are physically impossible. Most of us do not contemplate space walking, primarily because we know that it cannot happen, that we are not in any space program and will not even hitch a ride into space, never mind walk in space. Once sinful behavior is rendered as likewise impossible, as it should, albeit for different reasons, then the contemplation of sinning will likewise abate. This is another in the list of character builders.

ENVY

One of the more pernicious thoughts that can overwhelm the person is envy. This type of thought is explicitly prohibited. Thus, merely harboring in one's heart the desire to marry an already married woman is forbidden (p.100, nos. 2-5, based on Shemot 20:14 and Devarim 5:18).

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The envious thought is bad enough. It is further exacerbated if the envious person engages in underhanded activity designed to separate the married woman from her husband in order to marry her. This escalates the envy into active coveting, an additional prohibition (p. 100, nos. 2-5). The matter of whether the woman also wants to leave her husband is hardly relevant; it is the envy that is squarely at issue. Envy too, is a matter of the heart, as R. Ezkari notes.

The envy prohibition extends beyond the subject of thought control previously discussed, in that the object of the envy may even be a permitted item, such as someone else's house or car. Houses and cars are bought and sold all the time, but a house or car that is purchased as a result of having an envious desire for that house or car is not permitted. To covet anything belonging to someone else is not acceptable and to further cajole that person into parting with that item compounds the breach.

Envy of this sort and genuine faith are incompatible. Those who profoundly believe in God would not resort to forbidden means to undo the status quo, to question the facts on the ground by forcing a change of ownership, or even desiring such change.

R. Wurzburger refers to Ibn Ezra's observation regarding the tenth statement (usually referred to somewhat inaccurately as the tenth commandment), "that the cultivation of a proper faith in God will engender a set of attitudes rendering it impossible to envy someone else's good fortune" (69). We come back to the recurring theme, that true faith and laudable character traits are mutually locked into each other.

ARROGANCE

A true believer is, by definition, humble before God. Since one is always before God, a true believer is always humble. Arrogance is not only socially repulsive but is also religiously impossible.

Arrogance is Biblically prohibited (pp. 101-2, no. 15 and p. 106, no. 2, based on Devarim 8:12-14), as is boastfulness. Even people whom one may excuse for being boastful, such as monarchs, must nevertheless remain humble (p. 102, no. 16, following *Sha'arei Teshuva*, 3:34). R. Ezkari understands the specific directive to the monarch to remain humble as going beyond the monarch. It is, once more, a paradigmatic legislation, starting with the king, but extending to every member of the community. If the king must remain humble, how much more does this apply to the non-kings.

Arrogance is a serious breach, is in the category of idolatry, and is roundly condemned (pp. 101-2, no. 15). It should be noted that arrogance and boastfulness can manifest in different ways. One could be humble before God, but arrogant with other people. One may legitimately think of one's self as superior to others, at the same time as being religious. The Biblical legislation pre-empts such thinking.

The arrogance and boastfulness prohibition precludes haughtily imposing one's self on people who are deemed of lesser stature (p. 102, no. 16). Each person is a creation of God and no one has the right to attribute greater or lesser importance to the self over others. This is a denial of the Godly. Being humble before God, and before the human world created by God, is the behavioral end result of a heart and mind process that fully integrates the essence of everyone being equal before God. It is "being" in the highest sense.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

What is the position of the self in a humble world? Is there room for the much-trumpeted notion of self-esteem in a God centered universe? Self-esteem is, after all, one of the most ubiquitous notions in modern psychological thought, with every form of aberrant behavior linked to low self-esteem.

But there are those who point out that self-esteem is not a panacea, that people with bloated self-esteem are capable of significant evil. As pertains to humility, being humble and free from boast does not translate into thinking of one's self as useless, as contemptible. There is a cry here for a balanced approach to the self.

These concerns are addressed in the Torah. We are told not to ascribe God's bringing us to the Land of Israel as related to our being righteous (Devarim 9:4). The reason for this is that we should not think of ourselves as being righteous (p. 104, no. 25). R. Ezkari sees this again as a generic postulate, extending far beyond the immediate issue of entry into the holy land. It applies to the entirety of life (following *Sha'arei Teshuva*, 3:29).

We are called on to be righteous, but it would be arrogant, even contradictory, to ever think we have attained righteousness. The truly righteous always think that they have so much more to do to be truly righteous. They are humble in the face of the enormity of their responsibilities.

But humility does not mean negativity about the self. Quite the contrary. The humble person knows that it is always possible to improve, to

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do better, and is resolute about endeavoring to improve. Such endeavor is predicated on an appreciation that one is capable of doing better.

One is not allowed to curse one's self (p. 109, nos. 15, 16, based on Devarim 4:9, 15). It is fair to assume that the person who curses his or her self thinks that this curse is deserved, that one is not worthy or capable of any good. This is a most destructive attitude, an attitude that precludes any future good. The self-imposed curse moves almost naturally into accursed behavior, a convoluted justification of the curse.

This is not humility. This is self-destruction. In humility, the self, in all its potential, remains intact and alive to the future. Not so when humility degenerates into the nether land of self imposed hell. It is in the middle ground, between arrogance and total self-negation, between self-righteousness and self-flagellation, wherein the person belongs—never good enough to preclude doing better and never so bad as to be incapable of any good.

Is it a surprise that a balanced approach to the appreciation of one's self is actually a Torah mandate? By now, after all the other surprises, the element of surprise is somewhat lessened. And again, it reaches to the very core of our being, to who we are and how we perceive ourselves, as the necessary prelude to what we do.

FEAR

The Biblical exhortation not to fear anyone (Devarim 7:17-18, 20:1) is more easily appreciated in the light of a genuine and profound faith in God and the resultant personality that emanates from such faith, as previously developed. We are in awe of God, and therefore fearful of no mortal.

Even if there is a real possibility that in rendering judgment one may be physically harmed by one of the parties in the case, still we are not allowed to let that fear cloud the decision making process (Devarim 1:17). On the contrary, we should be confident that no harm would ensue from judging righteously (p. 105, no.32). Again, this concern is not restricted to judges in a courtroom. It is more pervasive, including any matter involving right and wrong, of being in the minority against a majority that endorses and promotes deviant behavior. In such instances, one must fearlessly stand up for what is right (p. 113, no. 47, based on Shemot 23:2).

Fear is a powerful emotion and it is folly to categorically rule out the reality of fear as a factor in one's actions. But we come back again to

the basics, to the understanding that being in front of God, having God as our ever-present Guide, will render any contrary view as inadmissible, and any contrary person or group as insignificant.

Jewish history from time immemorial affirms this truth, that those who were imbued with unshakable faith stood up to the most awesome and fear evoking powers and did not flinch. Faith based courage and resolve is another character trait that is more likely to evolve if we take the mitsva obligations seriously, and in their full profundity. It allows for proper “being” even in the most trying circumstances.

HOPE

The Torah exhorts those who embark on a battle against the enemy not to fear the enemy, consistent with the previously discussed injunction not to fear anyone. Even if one is outnumbered and at a tactical disadvantage, one should not fear (p. 105, no. 31, based on Devarim 7:17-18, 20:1).

Not surprisingly, R. Ezkari sees this as extending to life in general, that when facing a dangerous situation, one should not despair of God’s compassion; instead, one should hope for God’s salvation. In a word, no matter what the situation, one should never lose hope. Giving up is not an option. Ultimately, everything is in God’s hands and God has the power to get us through any situation, however bleak it may seem.

This is not to suggest that we throw all of the responsibility for the future into God’s lap. Hope is not a challenge to God; it is a fundamental complement to our full commitment to help ourselves. This full commitment is founded on the realization that no matter how much we do, it is futile without God on our side. But we cannot expect God to help us if we do nothing. A person who refuses to look for a job cannot expect that God will bring the job out of nowhere. This principle applies likewise to health. We need God to overcome health challenges, but God needs that we address these challenges as well as is humanly possible.

The war situation is the model, whether it be versus an external enemy or an internal enemy like cancer. Aside from being undaunted, we also must actually engage in the battle if there is to be any hope. At all times, the situation is not hopeless, in the ultimate sense of hopelessness. Hope is the natural result of the elimination of fear.

Most people do not likely see hope as an obligation. They are more likely to see it as a psychological advantage and a religious nicety. But according to R. Ezkari, it is a mitsva, helping to round out one’s character.

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HAPPINESS

Happiness, in its ideal form, is like some of the other emotions contemplated in this presentation, an outward manifestation of an inner reality. There are specific times when we are required to be happy, such as during the festivals (Devarim 16:14). Because of this requirement, it is forbidden to deliver a mournful eulogy during the festivals, including Pesah and Sukkot, which have some less intense days of celebration (p. 80, no.11). Festivals are times of celebration (p. 82, no. 2), when eating and drinking are obligatory and fasting is proscribed (p. 82, no. 4, based on Devarim 16:14).

Joyful expression is obviously not restricted to these days. Daily joyous expression of gratitude to God for the blessings of life is a Jewish staple (pp. 71-72, no. 12). The festivals are times of expressive joy. Every ordinary day enjoys not only the spill-over from the festivals; these ‘standard’ days are punctuated by a perhaps more muted but nevertheless meaningful joy.

There are times in life when joy is not possible, such as when tragedy strikes. But these are the exceptions to the general rule that life be punctuated by solidly entrenched joy, rooted in appreciation to God for being alive and in God’s world. Happiness is at once a constant and a variable. It is constant in its always being present, but variable in the degree that the happiness is felt. Joyous events bring the latent happiness to the fore, rather than lifting people out of constant melancholy. Every moment, barring the tragic, should be a happy moment, with the joyful event giving voice to the understated yet real contentedness.

It is not easy to sustain happiness through an entire lifetime, but a well thought out and deeply felt feeling of gratitude, as evoked via the festivals, helps to create and maintain such happiness and serious joy. A spiritually happy person is not likely to be arrogant, to be envious, to be fearful, to become angry, or to be vengeful. Profound, meaningful happiness is perhaps the final punctuation mark on the fully rounded and developed person.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

We have presented herein a surprising list of mitstva obligations, dealing with imperatives in the area of free will, cruelty, anger, vengeance, crying, thought control, envy, arrogance, self-righteousness, fear, hope, and

happiness. Some are not as surprising as others, but all are generally not appreciated as part of the mitsva package as they should be. Undoubtedly, the person who fully embraces all these will have little doubt about the “being” orientation in Judaism, about accenting not merely what to do, but who to be.

NOTES

1. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994.
2. *Berakhot* 7a, *Ketubot* 97a, *Bava Kamma* 99b-100a, *Bava Metsi'a* 24b, 30b.
3. *Shabbat* 120a, *Bava Metsi'a* 52b, *Hullin* 130b.
4. *Shabbat* 120a, *Gittin* 53a, *Bava Kamma* 56a, 98a, *Bava Metsi'a* 37a.
5. *Devarim* 6:18; *Bava Metsi'a* 16b, 108a, *Avoda Zara* 25a.
6. *Mishlei* 2:20; *Bava Metsi'a* 83a.
7. “The Role of the Individual in Jewish Law,” *Tradition* 13:4 – 14:1 (1973), 123-36; reprinted, *Individual, Family, Community: Judeo-Psychological Perspectives* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1989), 75-87.
8. The version of *Sefer Haredim* that is cited in this article is the 1990 edition published by Frank Printers in Jerusalem. For a full extrapolation of *Sefer Haredim*, see my *Best Kept Secrets of Judaism* (Southfield, Michigan: Targum/Feldheim, 2002).
9. This, of course, refers to the two mitsva types, *mitsvot asech* and *mitsvot lo ta'ase*. These are usually, and in my mind inaccurately, labeled as the positive and negative *mitsvot*. Negative *mitsvot* is a classic oxymoron.
10. *Sifra*, *Vayikra* 20:26.