

## Tag Institute: Jewish Perspectives on Aging

### Abstract

*A change in socio demographics has presented a new paradigm. The notion of 'retirement' is changing; people are working longer and living longer. For years efforts to support older generations has predominately concentrated on welfare services but as a result of a change in demographics we are faced with a new challenge. These new realities have prompted us to ask the question "How can we support the elderly, those that are healthy, yet who in today's society feel isolated and undervalued?"*

*In this paper we seek to identify, traditional Judaic teachings, values and traditions that offer valuable moral insights to help us answer this question. In doing so, we show how Judaism offers a source of wisdom that is able to contribute towards our understanding of how to enrich the lives of our elders.*

*Herein lies a review of traditional Jewish sources and literature. Although this by no means claims to be exhaustive, it offers an overview of key sources upon which further research will be based. By highlighting the importance of the older generations and the value that Judaism places on them, this research advocates that more time must be spent in developing activities and interventions for our elders. Appropriate action research projects are suggested within the context of the sources, illustrating the significant contribution that traditional Jewish sources offer to the social issue of ageing; an issue that no one of us is exempt from today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Tag Institute For  
Jewish Social Values

January 2012

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## 1. Introduction

There are specific Jewish laws regarding the way the young relate to their elders. Most famously, “You must rise up before the aged, and honour the face of the elderly, and you must fear your G-d: I am the L-rd.”

Aging enrichment attempts to give tasks and challenges to elderly people to keep them involved, in their traditional role as valued members of the wider community. It has the potential to prolong life and to increase meaning and happiness for the elderly. Additionally, most of the ideas in this article show that elderly people are a resource to society and creating avenues for them to give can improve the lives of all.

This document is an attempt to define what traditional Jewish texts say about aging and old age, and attempt to distil from them some universal messages which are relevant to aging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This document focusses on the following areas which typically Jewish, both in terms of sources in traditional texts, and in practice within Jewish communities for the past millennia.

Many ideas and values have been said in the name of ‘Judaism’ or ‘Traditional Judaism’. It is sometimes hard to differentiate between a traditional Jewish idea, and a modern idea that has been repackaged using traditional Jewish terminology. For the purposes of this study a ‘Jewish idea’ is one that can be located in traditional Jewish sources, and one which has become part of Jewish ‘culture’ insofar as it fits into the context of current and historic traditional Jewish practice. The attempt has been made (recognising and acknowledging personal biases) to try to derive ideas from the texts, rather than reading the existing academic literature into the words of the Rabbis.

The following are some of the areas where Judaism can make a contribution to the existing discourse and literature on aging enrichment:

- Judaism values elders, and views them as leaders and as a repository of knowledge. Every earlier generation is one step closer to the revelation of G-d at Sinai, and as such are closer to the original source of spirituality. Old people have also gained from their life experience and have much to share with the next generation. Elders must be held in high esteem and treated with respect. In return, the elderly are expected to act a way which is deserving of respect, with awareness of their position in society and with consideration for others.
- Old age is a continuation for the path that a person has chosen throughout their life until old age. A person does not become a different person, there is no sudden transition from ‘young’ to ‘old’, but rather each person continues along their way from youth to old age. Although repentance is always possible, and it is never too late for a person to change their life, fundamentally preparation for old age should begin while young. The more a person is aware of their mortality and their finitude, the more they will be able to make the most of every moment, and build up the skills and mental attitudes that will give them a happy and meaningful old age.
- Elders are leaders. As such they have a role to play as educators and teachers. They can advise and guide others, and act as a resource for younger generations.
- Old age is a warning to prepare for death. This takes many forms – physical, financial, emotional and spiritual. Preparing people for death can allow them to cope better with life, without fear. It also gives them the comfort and stability of planning for their afterlife, and ensuring that their wishes are carried out.

Even though this document is divided into these separate areas there is overlap between them and the boundaries between ideas are not necessarily clearly marked. Furthermore, Jewish literature is so vast, and this document is perhaps only scratching the surface of the potential contribution of Judaism to the field of aging enrichment.

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Each suggested action research is labelled with one (or multiple) of three labels: Continual Learning, Continual Giving and Continual Meaning.

## 2. Valuing Elders

Old people are viewed as an important (possibly the most important) segment of society. “The end of the matter is better than the beginning,” states Ecclesiastes. The Midrash states that the exodus from Egypt (and thus the birth of the Jewish nation) was only possible because of the elders.<sup>1</sup>

According to Jewish tradition, the concept of old age, and the physical signs and illnesses that accompany aging were in answer to prayers of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob.<sup>2</sup> Even in the Messianic era, when the world will be in its ideal state, there will still be old people. “The old men and the old women will still sit in the streets of Jerusalem.”

The Talmud tells us something interesting about the coins that Abraham Avinu manufactured:

Our Rabbis taught: What was the coin of Jerusalem? The names David and Solomon were on one side and the word Jerusalem on the other. What was the coin of the patriarch Abraham? — An old man and an old woman on the one side, and a young man and a young woman on the other.

The Davidic dynasty and Jerusalem were the two most important things in the entire nation. It was appropriate that they should be represented on the coinage because they are central to the nation. But for Abraham, the central thing was both the young and the old. Rashi<sup>3</sup> explains that the old man and woman represent Abraham and Sarah, while the young couple represents Isaac and Rebecca. We see the equal and central importance of both young and old.

Yet the value and meaning of old age is based on having some contribution to make to society. If society has no role for their elders, or if the old people have nothing to occupy their time and energies, then there is a breakdown of society and of the silver years of aging. Wong<sup>4</sup> defines successful aging as “having a positive meaning and purpose in life, even when one’s physical health is failing.”

If the elderly have no function or purpose in life they will hasten their own end. “Rabbi Yossi says: A person only ever dies from having nothing to do.” This is a restatement of the verse in Job that, “The old lion perishes for lack of prey, and the whelps of the lioness are scattered abroad.”

Furthermore, more than at any other time in life the words of Hillel from the Mishnah ring true – “If not now – when?” There is a sense of urgency and awareness that time is slipping away, and that every moment is precious. But time can only be valuable if there is some purpose with which to fill it.

### a. Old age is a reward for performance of mitzvot.

The Torah states several times that reward for performing mitzvot is old age. “That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land which G-d swore to your fathers to give them, as the days of the heavens above the earth.”<sup>5</sup>

Old age is a blessing. It should not be perceived as a burden, and elderly people should be held in the highest esteem for having earned this blessing. The Talmud states that:

They said to Rabbi Yochanan that there are old people in Bavel. He was amazed and said, “The verse states, ‘In order that your days will be lengthened, and the days of your children, on the

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<sup>1</sup> *Midrash Shochar Tov* Psalms 119 and *Yalkut Reuveni* Exodus (p. 13)

<sup>2</sup> See footnotes 124 and 134

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki 11<sup>th</sup> century French commentator on Bible and Talmud

<sup>4</sup> Wong, P. (2000) ‘Meaning of life and meaning of death in successful aging’ in A. Tomer (ed.), *Death Attitudes and the Older Adult*. New York: Brunner Mazel.

<sup>5</sup> For example Deuteronomy 11:21

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land [of Israel].<sup>6</sup> But it doesn't promise long life outside of Israel!" Then they said to him that in Bavel everyone comes early in the morning to the Synagogue and leaves late at night. Then he said, "That is what has enabled them to live a long life. This is like the statement of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi to his children, 'Rise early and stay up late, and go to the Synagogue, so that you will have a long life.'<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere in the Talmud we read of some students who asked their teacher in what merit he lived such a long life:

It was stated: The students asked Rav Adda bar Ahava, 'in what merit did you live so long?' He answered them, 'in my entire life I was never strict with my family, and I never walked in front of someone who was more important than I....<sup>8</sup>

There is a custom in British Jewish communities that when someone is mourning for a close relative, those who comfort the mourner wish him or her 'a long life.' The intention is to bless the person with something valuable and meaningful.

## b. Decline of the Generations

Underlying the entire concept of elders within Judaism is the idea that old people who have lived their lives well are inherently more valuable than younger people. The Talmud has King David asking G-d, "I have heard people say, 'when will this old man die, so that his son Solomon can come and build the Temple....' G-d replies, 'I would rather have one day of your Torah learning... than a thousand sacrifices of Solomon....'<sup>9</sup> Midrash Tanchuma describes how Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu would walk along behind Moses and Aharon, and ask themselves, "when will these two old men die, so that we can take over and rule?"<sup>10</sup> Yet G-d decided that they would die first, leaving Moses and Aharon to lead the Jewish people for another 40 years.

The Talmud states that anything older is more valuable than something younger.<sup>11</sup> King David states, "I have become wise through contemplating the elders."<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, each earlier generation is viewed as being one step closer to the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai, and therefore on a higher spiritual level than every subsequent generation. Furthermore, earlier generations are viewed as being on a higher intellectual level. Both of these concepts are summed up in the phrase "*yeridat ha-dorot*" (decline of the generations).

The Talmud states that "If the earlier generations are like angels, then we are like people. But if the earlier generations are like people, then we are like donkeys."<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Yochanan says, "The hearts (minds) of the earlier generations was like the opening of a large hall; ours are like the eye of a needle."<sup>14</sup> Rav Pappa asked Abaye<sup>15</sup>, "Why did the earlier generations<sup>16</sup> have miracles performed for them, whereas we do not have miracles performed for us?"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 11:9

<sup>7</sup> Berachot 8a

<sup>8</sup> Taanit 20b

<sup>9</sup> Makkot 10a

<sup>10</sup> *Midrash Tanchuma* parshat Acharei Mot

<sup>11</sup> Bava Batra 91b

<sup>12</sup> Psalms 119:100. However there is another possible translation and explanation, which is that "I understand more than my elders."

<sup>13</sup> Sabbath 112b

<sup>14</sup> Eruvin 53a

<sup>15</sup> In Taanit 24a a similar statement is attributed to Rabba. And in Sanhedrin 106b a similar statement attributed to Rava.

<sup>16</sup> He is referring not to ancient history, but to the generation immediately before his own.

<sup>17</sup> Berachot 20a

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The Mishna at the end of Sotah gives specific examples of the losses from one generation to the next:

When Rabbi Meir died, composers of fables ceased. When Ben Azzai died, the assiduous students of Torah ceased. When Ben Zoma died, the expositors ceased. When Rabbi Akiva died, the glory of the Torah ceased. When Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa died, men of deed ceased. When Rabbi Yossi Ketanta died, the pious men ceased; and why was his name called Ketanta ('small')? Because he was the least of the pious men. When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai died, the lustre of wisdom ceased. When Rabban Gamliel the Elder died, the glory of the Torah ceased, and purity and abnegation perished. When Rabbi Yishmael ben Fabi died, the lustre of the Kehuna ceased. When Rebbi died, humility and fear of sin ceased.<sup>18</sup>

From all of these sources we see that elders should be respected as an earlier link in the chain stretching back to Sinai, and a time when people were closer to G-d, Torah and spirituality.

In the generations before the coming of Mashiach, when everything will be topsy-turvy, the Mishna says that "the youths will embarrass the face of the elderly, and the elderly will have to stand before the young."<sup>19</sup> We see that the normal way of things is that the young should respect the elders and stand before them.

The very basis of Jewish law and Torah study is to trace ideas and laws back to earlier generations, to understand how they viewed things. The most authoritative Jewish law in Judaism is one which can be traced right back to Moses Rabbinu – *Jewish law le-Moses mi-Sinai*. There is a concept that a later Jewish Court may not contradict a ruling of an earlier Jewish Court.<sup>20</sup>

In a sense this paper itself is continuing with this Jewish tradition, in looking to the earlier generations for guidance in the present generation.

Unfortunately, popular perception of elders, even in the Talmud, is not as the Jewish law and Jewish sources would want it. The Talmud finds a biblical source for a popular saying:

Rabba again said to Rabba bar Mari: From where can we derive the popular saying: 'When we were young we were treated as men, whereas now that we have grown old we are looked upon as babies'? — He replied: It is first written: And the L-rd went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light" but subsequently it is written: "Behold I send an angel before you to keep you on the way."<sup>21</sup>

Even though there are several other interpretations of this piece of Talmud, the simple meaning is that the elderly are treated as babies and not given the respect that they deserve. G-d led the Jewish people in their infancy; an angel in their later years. Similarly, the young are given the greater respect and honour, and the elders are left to carers and not considered to be as important.

In days gone by Jewish leaders were elders. Moses<sup>22</sup>, Hillel<sup>23</sup> and Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai<sup>24</sup> and Rabbi Akiva all lived to be 120 and only began teaching Torah when they were octogenarians.

"And Moses was 120 years old" – He was one of four who died at the age of 120, and they are Moses, Hillel the Elder, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, and Rabbi Akiva. Moses was in Egypt for 40 years; in Midian for forty years; served and led Israel for 40 years. Hillel the Elder came up

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<sup>18</sup> Sotah 49a

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See *Mishneh Torah* Hilchot Mamrim chapter 2 for details of this rule and exceptions to it.

<sup>21</sup> Bava Kama 92b

<sup>22</sup> Deuteronomy 34:7

<sup>23</sup> Sifre Deut. 357

<sup>24</sup> *Kuzari maamar shlishi*

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from Bavel at the age of 40; studied under the Sages for 40 years; served and led Israel for 40 years. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai engaged in business for 40 years; studied under the sages for 40 years; served and led Israel for 40 years. Rabbi Akiva began to learn Torah at the age of 40; studied under the Sages for 40 years; served and led Israel for 40 years.

Shkolnik et al. write that respect for elders no longer exists in modern secular Western society:

This concept of respect for the wisdom of the elderly no longer exists, in the modern hi-tech era, among the secular population. The secular society respects its elderly at best out of politeness, as a moral obligation.

This idea is echoed in Hernandez who writes:

Nowadays, society tends to exclude the elderly. They are considered incompetent and are denied any responsibilities. This is far removed from previous societies in which, given their experience, the eldest members enjoyed a much higher status. They were considered wise, the teachers, and the guardians of customs and traditions. They were the transmitters of their peoples' history<sup>25</sup>

Judaism teaches the opposite of this – that elders are deserving of respect because they are closer to Sinai, and because they are leaders of the community. Unfortunately, often this is only theoretical and not put into practice, even with the Jewish community.

## c. Elders Must Earn Respect

Elders are deserving of respect. And conversely they are expected to act in a way which deserves of respect. They are exempt from the mitzvah of returning a lost object, because it would not be respectful to their honour to have to pick up lost items from the ground.<sup>26</sup>

There is an obligation on everyone to stand when an old person passes by. But there is equally an obligation on an old person not to pass in front of people more than necessary, so as not to disrupt them too much.<sup>27</sup> Malbim<sup>28</sup> learns this as an ethical obligation:

If he does cause people to rise and sit for him constantly he will lose the splendour of old age, and cheapen the honour of being old. He will not appear to have favour or good counsel in the eyes of G-d or people.

The Talmud states that “there are four categories of people who the mind cannot bear... a philandering old man.”<sup>29</sup>

All of these sources show that an elder may demand and expect respect, but must also act in a way that is deserving of honour and respect.

## d. Elders as a Resource

Fundamentally, elders are viewed as a resource, and as ‘better’ than younger people. ‘Elder’ is used as a term of the highest respect by the Mishna and Talmud. Even in their old age, people have a valuable contribution to make, as King David says, “They will still bring forth fruit in old age; they will be lively and invigorated”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hernandez (2008) ‘Effects of Intergenerational Interaction on Aging’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 34: 292–305,

<sup>26</sup> Bava Metzia 30a

<sup>27</sup> *Sifra* Kedoshim 7; Kiddushin 32b

<sup>28</sup> Meir Levush Malbim 19<sup>th</sup> century Bible commentator on Leviticus 19:32

<sup>29</sup> Pesachim 113b

<sup>30</sup> Psalms 92:15

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The Torah states, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of each generation; ask your father, and he will tell you, your elders, and they will say to you.”<sup>31</sup> We always look to learn lessons for the future from stories of the past.

The verse states, “With old age comes wisdom, and understanding with length of days.”<sup>32</sup> Malbim explains that someone who has tested ideas repeatedly, throughout the years of life, gains a wisdom and knowledge which is true and irrefutable.<sup>33</sup>

This is expressed in the Talmud “Even if the elders tell you to destroy, and the youngsters tell you to build, you should destroy and not build, for the ‘destruction’ of old people is really building, and the ‘building’ of young people is really destruction.”<sup>34</sup> This is referring specifically to the rebuilding of the *Temple*.<sup>35</sup> From the fact that the Talmud brings the quote without specifying the context we see that it is not only in matters of supreme political, religious and spiritual importance that we must follow the advice of the elders, but we should take their advice into account in every area of life. The Midrash states this forcefully when it says “Anyone who takes advice from the elders will not stumble.”<sup>36</sup>

We find from the inception of the nation, when Moses stands at the Burning Bush, G-d tells him to “Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them...”<sup>37</sup> Later in the Torah, when Moses says that he is unable to lead the people of Israel alone and provide for their physical needs, G-d says to him, “Gather for me seventy elders...”<sup>38</sup>

*Yalkut Shimoni*<sup>39</sup> states that the elders are the ones who establish and maintain Israel<sup>40</sup> Elders are the ‘eyes’ of the community<sup>41</sup> who lead and direct the congregation, and are held accountable for communal sins.<sup>42</sup>

The Midrash<sup>43</sup> describes Israel as a bird, and the elders as the wings. Without them the bird cannot fly. The same Midrash describes how G-d involves the elders in the redemption. G-d told Moses to speak first to the elders before going to Pharaoh, and at the End of Days G-d will also give honour to the elders, as the verse states, “G-d will rule from Mount Zion and Jerusalem, and will give honour to His elders.”<sup>44</sup> They will also sit in judgement with G-d at the End of Days, based on the verse, “G-d will come to judgement with the elders of His people.”<sup>45</sup>

The elders are the representatives of the entire community. When the entire community sins a communal sin offering is brought. It is the elders who offer the sacrifice: “The elders will lean their hands on the head of the bull...”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Deuteronomy 32:7. See Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra ad loc.

<sup>32</sup> Job 12:12

<sup>33</sup> Malbim’s Commentary on Job 12:12

<sup>34</sup> Megillah 31b

<sup>35</sup> See Tosefta Avoda Zara 1:3. This is probably referring to the time of the Bar Kochba rebellion, when the rebels did try to rebuild the Temple (against the advice of the elders). This rebellion was eventually quashed with great loss of life and the destruction of the final remnants of the Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>36</sup> Exodus Rabba 3:6

<sup>37</sup> Exodus 3:16. Rashi (ad loc.) explains that this refers to the leaders, rather than all the old people, for it would have been impossible for Moses to gather all the aged from amongst the 600,000 Israelites.

<sup>38</sup> Bemidbar 11:16

<sup>39</sup> Collection of Midrashim probably early 13<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>40</sup> Yalkut Simoni Yeshoshua 8:33

<sup>41</sup> Bemidbar 15:24. See also Leviticus 4:13 where the elders are called “the eyes of the congregation”

<sup>42</sup> Deuteronomy 20:2. Rav Nachman of Breslav (*Likutei Moharan Tanina 4(ve-et ha-orvim):8*) blames the spiritual ills of society on the elders of the generation who are not constantly involved in increasing the spiritual light in the world.

<sup>43</sup> Exodus Rabba 5:16

<sup>44</sup> Yishaya 24:23

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 3:14

<sup>46</sup> Leviticus 4:15



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The Talmud in Taanit describes the order of prayer on a fast day. The fast was for lack of rain, and the day was dedicated to repentance and prayer.

The eldest amongst them says words of admonishment. It was taught: If there is an elder, he should speak. If not, the wisest amongst them should speak. And if not a person of stature should speak.<sup>47</sup>

## e. Representing the Divine

Old people personify an aspect of G-d in the world. Rashi, in his commentary on the first of the Ten Commandments explains that G-d appeared to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai as “an old man full of compassion”<sup>48</sup>

The kabbalistic concept of the G-dhead (*Keter*) is described as *Atik Yomin* (Ancient of Days) based on the verse in the book of Daniel, describing Daniel’s dream of the four animals: “I saw in my night vision, and I saw with the clouds of the heavens, something like a man coming, and by the Ancient Days he arrived, and they [the animals] were brought before Him.”<sup>49</sup>

The word ‘*Atik*’ is also connected with the concept of removal from the world<sup>50</sup> which applies both to G-d and to the elderly. Withdrawal from the drives and desires of the physical world gives the elderly a unique perspective and viewpoint. They thus represent this aspect of Divinity.

The elderly also demonstrate G-d’s kindness and continual involvement in the world, as stated by Yishaya “Until old age I am He, and until *seivah* I will carry you. I made, I will bear, I will carry and I will deliver.”<sup>51</sup>

The elders represent the connection with the previous generation and therefore with the miracles of G-d that occurred in the past. This is explicit in the verse, “Israel served G-d all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and had known all the work of G-d, that He did for Israel.”<sup>52</sup> Abarbanel<sup>53</sup> explains that the elders showed the younger generation the correct path to serve G-d, because they had witnessed the miracles that G-d had performed, and therefore had a stronger connection to G-d than the following generation.

When Rebecca, the matriarch, went to seek G-d, to inquire about the twins she was carrying, the Midrash<sup>54</sup> tells us that she went to the old people, who represent G-d. “Anyone who greets an old person is considered as if they have greeted the face of G-d.”<sup>55</sup>

Simon the Righteous was the High Priest in the Second Temple, and every year when he entered the Holy of Holies he was accompanied by G-d in the guise of an old man:

It was taught: The year that Simon the Righteous died he said to them, ‘this is the year that I will die.’ They asked him, ‘how do you know?’ He replied, ‘every year on Yom Kippur I was accompanied by an old man dressed in white and wrapped in white. He would enter with me and

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<sup>47</sup> Taanit 16a

<sup>48</sup> Rashi to Exodus 20:2. This is in contrast to how G-d appeared to the Israelites at the Red Sea as a ‘mighty warrior’. These two descriptions are both included in the *Anim Zemiroth* hymn recited at the end of Sabbath morning services, which describes G-d as having, “Old age on the day of judgement and youthfulness on the day of war.” See also *Mishneh Torah* Hilchot Sanhedrin 2:3 where Maimonides rules that an extremely old man may not sit on the Sanhedrin because he has cruelty within him. This is not the place for the much longer and fuller discussion that this idea deserves.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel 7:13

<sup>50</sup> See Rabbi Elijah Kramer (18<sup>th</sup> century), also known as the Vilna Gaon *Asarah Klalim* chapters 6-7

<sup>51</sup> Yishaya 46:4

<sup>52</sup> Yehoshua 24:31

<sup>53</sup> Ad loc.

<sup>54</sup> Genesis Rabba 63:6

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

come out with me. Today I was accompanied by an old man dressed in black and wrapped in black. He entered with me, but he did not leave with me.' After Sukkot he was ill for seven days, and then he died.<sup>56</sup>

As representatives of G-d they stand in firm opposition to idolatry. The Midrash states that "why did G-d command us to honour the elderly? Because they command Israel to keep well away from idolatry."<sup>57</sup>

## Summary:

These ideas of the importance of the elderly, and the respect and honour which they deserve, and which they must earn, underlay the Jewish perspective on aging. The elderly are a resource of knowledge and practical experience, who must be treated not only with polite respect, but valued for who they are and what they still have to contribute.

Western Society, both young and old, tends to ignore the value of the older generation. Self-image of the elderly diminishes, often accompanied by mild depression. Younger people have a tendency not to recognise the value of the elderly. Studies have shown that interaction between older and younger generations leads to higher self-esteem amongst the elderly, and greater respect, honour and value for the elderly by the young.

Therefore, any aging enrichment program that allows for direct interaction between generations will tend towards the Jewish view of the role of the elderly within society.

## 3. Continuing Life's Path

One of the ideas which is repeated multiple times in Jewish texts is that life for the elderly is built upon the life they have created for themselves throughout their years. It is not a new beginning, and they do not become new people. Just as there is virtually no concept of retirement in Judaism,<sup>58</sup> so there is no sudden change in old age from the path that a person has chosen for themselves. This is true in the physical realm, though in the spiritual realm Judaism says that there is always time for repentance.

The Talmud asks why the *erech*<sup>59</sup> value of a woman is reduced by less in her old age than the *erech* value of a man. It answers "an old man in the house is a burden on the house. An old woman in the house is a treasure in the house."<sup>60</sup> Rashi explains that an old woman is still able to continue with her work in her old age, whereas an old man is unable to do so. We must ask, if so, why does the old man simply not do the tasks of an old woman, and thus also become a treasure in the house? The answer seems to be that a man is not able to get meaning from life if he must change from his normal activities and tasks late in life. The Talmud<sup>61</sup> tells us that the harshness of the labour that Pharaoh made the Israelites perform was that he gave women's tasks to men. Maharal<sup>62</sup> explains<sup>63</sup> that a person finds it oppressive to perform tasks that go against his or her nature.

Jonathan ben Uzziel, in his translation of the verse in Zachariah, "The old men and old women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each person with his cane in his hand because of old age"<sup>64</sup> writes, "The old men and old women will again sit in the markets of Jerusalem and each person will have his actions with him

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<sup>56</sup> Yoma 39b

<sup>57</sup> Exodus Rabba 31:17

<sup>58</sup> With the exception of the Levi'im who had to retire from their work in the Temple at the age of fifty.

<sup>59</sup> See Leviticus 27:1-8

<sup>60</sup> Arachin 19a

<sup>61</sup> Sotah 11b

<sup>62</sup> Rabbi Judah Loew 1520-1609

<sup>63</sup> *Chidushei Agadot* ad loc. s.v. *vayimareru et chayeihem*

<sup>64</sup> Zachariah 8:4

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to protect him from old age.” In other words, it is how he has lived his life that will determine the best path for his old age.

The Talmud makes the distinction between Torah, which will stand by a person in old age, and physical labour, which will abandon him:

When a person becomes sick or elderly or suffers, and is no longer able to be involved in his work, he will die of starvation. But the Torah is not so, rather it protects a person from all evil in his youth, and it gives him a good end and hope in his old age.... Similarly it says regarding Abraham, “And Abraham was old, and G-d blessed him with everything.” We find that Abraham kept the entire Torah before it was given....”<sup>65</sup>

This seems to parallel the Mishna<sup>66</sup> in Kinim<sup>67</sup> which says:

Rabbi Simon ben Akashia says: The elders of the ignoramuses – the older they get, the more their minds become confused, as the verse states, “He removes the speech of men of trust, and takes away the sense of the elders.”<sup>68</sup> But the elders of Torah are not so. Rather, the older they get the more their minds become sensible, as the verse states, “Wisdom is with the aged men, and understanding in length of days.”<sup>69</sup>

Although it contrasts Torah study with every other kind of activity, it is perhaps reasonable to broaden the category which protects in old age. Abraham lived before the Torah was given, therefore his Torah observance was not reading the text of the Written or Oral Torah, but must have involved thinking about spirituality and philosophy, and living a life which would lead to a healthy and good old age. This, then, is a universal idea which should be shared far and wide.

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschütz <sup>70</sup> writes at length about the importance of a person preparing for old age while still in their youth. He says:

In truth, while a person is young, the physical energies rule a person, and the spiritual energies are subjugated to the physical.... But when he grows old the physical energies become weaker, and the energies of the soul and the spirit rule, they have the strength and the power.... Therefore the wicked, who are not accustomed to be ruled by their souls, when they reach old age and no longer have physical energies and desires, become weak and despondent, they are considered as if they are worthless, because everything has changed for them. They do not want to follow the desires of the soul.... But the house of the righteous, which is the body of the righteous person, which has been accustomed to this from youth, even when the physical energies were strong, and who does not follow his desires too much... and overcame his nature to listen to the energies of his soul even while the physical energies had the upper hand... then in his old age when the physical energies have gone and the spiritual energies come, he is easily able to bear it, because he has been accustomed to this his whole life.... Therefore while we are still young we should minimise our physical energies...

Rabbi Eybeschütz’s ideas find modern idiom in the work of Flood:

Flood (2005) offers an alternate view of successful aging that focuses on the individual’s perspective, encompassing physical, functional, and psychosocial health while adding the existential or spiritual domain. Using the process of concept analysis, Flood (2003) defines successful aging as “the individual’s perceived satisfaction in adapting to the physical and

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<sup>65</sup> Kiddushin 82a

<sup>66</sup> Although it is included with the Mishna, most commentators understand that it is actually a Baraita which was added later

<sup>67</sup> Kinim 3:6 and (slightly differently) Sabbath 152a

<sup>68</sup> Job 12:20

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 12:12

<sup>70</sup> Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz *Ye’arot Devash* Drush 3 Tochachat Mussar

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functional changes of aging, while experiencing spiritual connectedness and a sense of meaning or purpose in life" (p. 34). Floods multidimensional definition recognizes the importance of the individual's personal values and beliefs and considers all four domains of life within nursing's sphere - physical, functional, psychosocial, and spiritual.<sup>71</sup>

This choice of life-path is nowhere more true than in intellectual pursuits. While a person is young they can develop either their physical capabilities or their intellectual and spiritual abilities (or both). The more they have prepared themselves for a stage of life when their physical abilities begin to wane, the more they will have a successful transition into old age.

Judaism stresses that a person must keep learning their entire life. There is never a time when the obligation to learn Torah no longer exists.

The Mishna in Ethics of the Fathers states, "Elisha ben Avuya said: Someone who learns when he is young, to what can he be compared? To ink writing on new paper. Someone who learns when he is old, to what can he be compared? To ink writing on erased paper."<sup>72</sup>

*Avot de-Rebbi Natan* elaborates:

He [Elisha ben Avuya] used to say: Someone who learns in his youth – the words of Torah are absorbed in his blood and come out clearly from his mouth. Someone who learns Torah in his old age – the words of Torah are not absorbed in his blood, and do not come out from his mouth clearly.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, Judaism claims that there a constant obligation to learn, which never leaves, even in old age. Rabbi Tarfon says, "It is not your obligation to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."<sup>74</sup>

Russell writes that learning in old age becomes even more urgent and important, as there is a much greater awareness of the clock ticking and time running out:

Maslow's (1970)<sup>75</sup> notion that self-actualization can only be realized in older adulthood means that learners may decide it is "now or never." In Maslow's terms, faced with the realization that they have a limited number of years of life left, humans may seek to reach the pinnacle of their abilities in order to achieve self-actualization. The Being recognizes that this may be the last opportunity to accomplish a sense of self-worth. In relation to later-life learning, time as a dimension of influence is recognized by a number of authors who have engaged in extensive research related to later-life learning (Beatty & Wolf, 1996<sup>76</sup>; Findsen, 2005<sup>77</sup>; Jarvis, 2001a,<sup>78</sup> 2001c<sup>79</sup>; Wolf, 1991<sup>80</sup>, 1992<sup>81</sup>, 1998<sup>82</sup>). All authors alluded to the significance and uniqueness of

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<sup>71</sup> McCarthy, Valerie Lander (2011) 'A New Look at Successful Aging: Exploring a Mid-range Nursing Theory Among Older Adults in a Low-income Retirement Community' in *Journal of Theory Construction & Testing*

<sup>72</sup> Ethics of the Fathers 4:20

<sup>73</sup> *Pirkei de-Rebbi Natan* 24:4

<sup>74</sup> Ethics of the Fathers 2:19

<sup>75</sup> Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper and Row.

<sup>76</sup> Beatty, P. & Wolf, M. (1996) *Connecting with older adults: Educational responses and approaches*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.

<sup>77</sup> Findsen, B. (2005) *Learning later*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.

<sup>78</sup> Jarvis, P. (2001a) *Learning in laterlife: An introduction for educators & carers*. London: Kogan Page.

<sup>79</sup> Jarvis, P. (2001c) 'Questioning the learning society' In P. Jarvis (Ed.), *The age of learning: Education and the knowledge society* (pp. 194–204). London: Kogan Page.

<sup>80</sup> Wolf, M. A. (April, 1991) 'The older learner'. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Northeastern Gerontological Society, Albany, NY

<sup>81</sup> Wolf, M. A. (1992) 'Personal development through learning in later life' In L. A. Cavaliere & A. Sgroi (Eds.), *Learning for personal development: New directions for adult and continuing education* (No. 53.) (pp. 73–84). New York: Jossey-Bass.

time as interpreted in later-life and the relationship with the ontological and existential need to learn.<sup>83</sup>

In other words, any discussion of a truly meaningful old age should begin while people are still young, and able to choose a path that will prepare them for old age. However we define ‘righteousness’ in modern terms, the idea of aging enrichment should begin as early as possible, to make the transition from ‘young’ to ‘old’ a smooth one which does not require major change. Conversely, once someone is old, asking him or her to change from the life-path they have chosen is far more difficult, and perhaps increases the frustrations of old age, rather than enhancing life.

## Summary:

Limited academic research has been done in the field of proactive coping for aging. It is believed that Judaism, with thousands of years of tradition, has the potential to make a huge contribution to this discourse. Not only can discussion and preparation for aging have a big impact on satisfaction in old age, but putting life choices in the context of aging can also enhance a person’s later years.

## 4. Elders as a Repository of Knowledge and as Teachers

Elders are first and foremost the wise people who learn and develop Torah. In this sense it is a synonym for Sage, or (in the modern sense of the word) Rabbi. At Mount Sinai, when the Israelites received the Torah, it states that “Moses, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, along with seventy of the elders of Israel, ascended. They saw the G-d of Israel....”<sup>84</sup>

Both the *Sifra*<sup>85</sup> and the Talmud<sup>86</sup> say “*Zaken* means someone who has acquired wisdom.” Gersonides<sup>87</sup> writes simply that *zakeinim* (old people) means *chachamim* (wise people).<sup>88</sup>

One of the requirements for eligibility to the Sanhedrin, the final arbiter of Jewish law, is that the candidate has to be ‘aged’ (*baalei ziknah*).<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, someone who dedicates him/herself to intensive study/learning is called ‘*zaken*’, regardless of their biological age.<sup>90</sup> Rabbi Yossi HaGelili in *Yalkut Simoni* states explicitly that there can be *zekeinim* who are old and *zekeinim* who are young. “How great is *ziknah* – if they are old then *ziknah* is great because the Torah praises them with it. If they are young then *ziknah* is great because they also have their youth.”<sup>91</sup>

In the Talmud in Bava Batra, Rabbi Abahu asks Rabbi Jeremiah, ‘like whom is the Jewish law, us or you?’ Rabbi Jeremiah replies, ‘Obviously the Jewish law is like us, because we are older than you!’ The discussion then continues as to who has the better logic to support their position, but we see that in the absence of superior reasoning, it is the elders who are best able to determine Jewish law and practice.

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<sup>82</sup> Wolf, M. A. (1998) ‘New approaches to the education of older adults’ in J. C. Fisher & M. A. Wolf (Eds.), *Using learning to meet the challenges of older adulthood* (pp. 20–36). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>83</sup> Russell, H. (2008) ‘Later Life: A Time to Learn’ in *Educational Gerontology* Mar 2008, Vol. 34 Issue 3, pp.206-224

<sup>84</sup> Exodus 23:9-10. It is true that they were punished for looking too closely, but it is nevertheless clear that the elders are the connection between the Torah of G-d and the people.

<sup>85</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> century legal commentary on Leviticus. Kedoshim 7:11

<sup>86</sup> Kiddushin 30a

<sup>87</sup> Rabbi Levi ben Gershon 1288–1344

<sup>88</sup> Commentary to Job 12:20

<sup>89</sup> Sanhedrin 17a. Maimonides nevertheless excludes people of advanced old age from the Sanhedrin – see below.

<sup>90</sup> See Maimonides’s Commentary to Mishna: Berachot 1:9 where he elaborates on this. Also the point of argument between Tana Kama and Rabbi Yossi HaGelili in Kedushin 32b

<sup>91</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni* 12:21

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Elders are the transmitters of Torah. The Mishna in *Ethics of the Fathers* lists the transmission of the Torah from Sinai to the time of the Mishna. It states that “Moses received Torah at Sinai. He passed it to Joshua; and Joshua to the Elders....”<sup>92</sup> King David declares “G-d, You have taught me from my youth; and until now I proclaim Your wonders. Until old age and hoary hairs do not abandon me, G-d; until I have proclaimed Your might until the next generation, Your strength to everyone that is to come.”<sup>93</sup>

In *Ethics of the Fathers* we learn of the benefits of learning from the elders: Rabbi Yossi ben Judah of Kefar ha-Babi said: He that learns from the young, to what is he like? To one who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from his winepress. And he who learns from the aged, to what is he like? To one who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.”<sup>94</sup> There are exceptional young people who can teach mature Torah, and vice versa, as Rabbi Judah says, “Look not on the jar but on what is in it; there may be a new jar that is full of old wine And an old one in which is not even new wine.”<sup>95</sup> However the default position is that with age comes the ability to transmit Torah in the best manner.

This point is made clear by the statement of the Talmud that Ezra did not come to Israel to rebuild the Temple until his teacher, Baruch ben Neriah, had passed away.<sup>96</sup> The Talmud makes the point that learning Torah is more important than building the Temple. However, the reason that Baruch did not come back to Israel is because he was too old to travel, and therefore this source also shows that learning from a teacher of the previous generation is qualitatively different Torah study than learning with a younger teacher.

Rabbi Yochanan, the first of the generation of Amoraim, proudly states that when he was young he said a Jewish law, and found that the old Rabbis had been asked the same question and given the same answer.<sup>97</sup>

The Talmud says that G-d values the Torah learning of the elderly, and in the future He will build for Himself a Yeshiva of old people.<sup>98</sup>

Judaism specifically stresses the importance of grandparents learning with their grandchildren. “Rabbi Joshua ben Levi says that if someone teaches his grandson Torah the verse considers it as if he heard it from Mount Sinai....”<sup>99</sup> The concept of hearing something from Sinai means that there are some values and concepts which transcend time and in our modern era of transiency it is essential to also know that there are some things which remain permanent.

Nowadays this message is perhaps even more valid and important than ever before. In many families both parents work, and a share of the child-rearing falls on the shoulders of the grandparents. Conversely, encouraging intergenerational intra-family learning is important as families live further apart from the previous generation.

Of course, the Talmud does not intend to exclude non-biological descendants. Students are considered in some respects as children, and therefore intergenerational teaching must not be limited to blood relatives. The Talmud<sup>100</sup> tells us that there is never a time to stop learning or teaching:

Rabbi Akiva says: Even though a man learnt Torah in his youth he must still learn Torah in his old age. Even though a man had students in his youth he must also have students in his old age.

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<sup>92</sup> Ethics of the Fathers 1:1

<sup>93</sup> Psalms 71:17-18

<sup>94</sup> Ethics of the Fathers 4:20

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Megillah 16b

<sup>97</sup> Megillah 5b-6a

<sup>98</sup> Yerushalmi Megillah chapter 2 (which is missing from the standard text) cited in *Yalkut Yishaya* 427

<sup>99</sup> Kiddushin 30a

<sup>100</sup> Yevamot 62b

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The benefits of facilitating intergenerational learning and teaching are many. The elderly are being productive and useful, thus giving greater meaning to their lives. It also alleviates boredom, and increases self-esteem. They are also investing in the future, creating knowledge that will live beyond them and create for them an ‘afterlife’. The Talmud learns from a verse: “What do I learn from the verse, “You shall make it known to your children and your children’s children”? To teach you that anyone who teaches Torah to his child is considered as if he has taught it to his children and his children’s children and so on for all generations!”<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, The Talmud says that when someone says Torah in the name of their late teacher, the lips of the deceased move in the grave.<sup>102</sup> In other words, passing down knowledge creates a person’s afterlife.

For the young student it gives them a chance to value the elderly, and to confront their own mortality, and thus use their lives constructively. This is in addition to the obvious overt learning and teaching that has occurred. Strom and Strom write that:

For students the benefits are receiving individual attention, getting to know people outside their age group, and learning that older people care about them.... Students who had been tutored by elder volunteers made significant greater gains [in national examination results] than did their peers who did not receive assistance.<sup>103</sup>

Hernandez<sup>104</sup> writes that:

The elderly people interacting with the young people reap greater benefit, both in the reduction of stereotypes and in the improvement of their well-being, than those interacting with the professional trainer, is related to the benefit in itself of intergenerational relations with young people (Gigliotti, Morris, Smock, Jarrot, & Graham, 2005<sup>105</sup>; Herrmann, Sipsas-Herrmann, Safford, & Herrmann, 2005<sup>106</sup>). One of the reasons for this type of contact having such a positive influence is the that the elderly feel useful (Burgess, 1960<sup>107</sup>): those in our study knew that their participation in this service-learning program was aiding the students’ university studies. These results are confirmed by other service-learning pedagogical projects (Marx et al., 2004<sup>108</sup>; O’Quin, Bulot, & Johnson, 2005<sup>109</sup>; Shaw, 2005<sup>110</sup>). This type of contact has also been related to higher scores in life satisfaction among elderly people (Philip Tan, Zhang, & Fan, 2004).<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, Peacock and O’Quin write:

Many benefits have been documented for older volunteers as well. Among the benefits is a sense of altruism, which has been noted to contribute to positive affect among older participants (Dulin & Hill, 2003). Also, those who engage in community service for altruistic reasons report higher life satisfaction (Dulin, Hill, Anderson, & Rasmussen, 2001). Indeed, increasing ties to the community—in particular, relationship ties to younger members of the community— can

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<sup>101</sup> Kiddushin 30a

<sup>102</sup> Bechorot 31b

<sup>103</sup> Strom and Strom (1995) ‘Intergenerational Learning: Grandparents in the Schools’ in *Educational Gerontology* p. 329

<sup>104</sup> ‘Effects of Intergenerational Interaction on Aging’ in *Educational Gerontology*; Apr 2008, Vol. 34 Issue 4, pp. 292-305.

<sup>105</sup> Gigliotti, C., Morris, M., Smock, S., Jarrot, S., & Graham, B. (2005). ‘An intergenerational summer program involving persons with dementia and preschool children’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 31, 425–442.

<sup>106</sup> Herrmann, D. S., Sipsas-Herrmann, A., Safford, M., & Herrmann, N. (2005). ‘Program participation by senior citizens’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 31, 123–139.

<sup>107</sup> Burgess, E. W. (1960). *Aging in western societies* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago

<sup>108</sup> Marx, M. S., Pannell, A. R., Parpura-Gill, A., & Cohen-Mansfield, E. (2004). ‘Direct observations of children at risk for academic failure: Benefits of an intergenerational visiting program’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 30, 663–176.

<sup>109</sup> O’Quin, J. A., Bulot, J., & Johnson, C. (2005). ‘Sustaining intergenerational servicelearning in gerontology education’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 31, 41–50.

<sup>110</sup> Shaw, S. (2005). ‘Grandparent involvement in the communication development of children who are deafblind’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 31, 51–72.

<sup>111</sup> Philip Tan, P., Zhang, N., & Fan, L. (2004). ‘Students’ attitudes toward the elderly in the People’s Republic of China’ in *Educational Gerontology*, 30, 305–315.

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decrease loneliness, foster the development of new roles, and provide purpose and meaning in a life stage where limited opportunities for such may exist.<sup>112</sup>

There has been limited research done into grandparents volunteering in schools, and also into grandparent-grandchild relationships.

One of the things which makes Torah learning unique is that it is not learning to achieve results, but learning for the sake of knowledge. It would seem that this is an area in which there has still not been research. All of the studies so far have been of grandparents learning with or teaching grandchildren within a formal educational setting. It is within the non-formal realm that Judaism has tremendous potential to add to the field of aging enrichment.

Elders are those who have accumulated wisdom through experience. There is a discussion in the Talmud about whether the laws of standing up when an elderly person passes applies only to Torah scholars, or even to unlearned and non-Jewish<sup>113</sup> people. The conclusion (which is brought as the Jewish law) is the opinion of Issi ben Judah who says that the requirement to stand before an old person applies to all old people. He explains his reason, “because how many events has he experienced in his life.”<sup>114</sup>

*Sefer HaChinuch*<sup>115</sup> explains that the reason for honouring even elderly people who are not Torah scholars is because through their life experience they have come to see some of the wonders of G-d.<sup>116</sup>

Of course, the Midrash also recognises the reality that sometimes even the wisest of elders can make mistakes. There is a verse in Job which states, “He will remove reason from the elders.”<sup>117</sup> The Midrash interprets this as referring to Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Aharon, who all made bad decisions in their old age.<sup>118</sup>

The Mishna<sup>119</sup> states:

The reason that Adam was created alone in the world is to teach that anyone who destroys a single soul is considered as if he has destroyed an entire world. And anyone who saves a single soul is considered as if he has saved an entire world.

Each person has an accumulated lifetime of experience, thoughts, feelings and history. When a person dies, all of that disappears from existence. If there was a way of storing that information, in written, electronic or digital form, it would be equivalent to saving entire worlds. Most people are not able to write an autobiography, and perhaps will not think that they have an interesting story to tell. Enabling and facilitating writing will allow each individual to leave a heritage for eternity, and allow their soul to live on after their physical body leaves this world.

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<sup>112</sup> Peacock and O’Quin (2006) ‘Higher Education and Foster Grandparent Programs’ in *Educational Gerontology* vol. 32 num. 5 pp. 367-378 May 2006

<sup>113</sup> See argument there between Rashi and Tosefot as to whether the Talmud is referring to unlearned Jews, wicked Jews, or to non-Jews. In terms of Jewish law both are included. See also Yerushalmi Bikkurim 3:3 (11b) which states that the mitzvah even includes unlearned Jews. See also *Sefer HaChinuch* Kedoshim 257 which limits this law to sages and unlearned Jews.

<sup>114</sup> Kiddushin 32b

<sup>115</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> century book of Jewish law written anonymously

<sup>116</sup> Parshat Kedoshim mitzvah 257

<sup>117</sup> Job 12:20

<sup>118</sup> Genesis Rabba 99:5. Moses and Aharon spoke improperly to the people of Israel when, at the end of their lives, they hit the rock and said “Listen, you rebels!” Isaac erred when, in his old age, he favoured Esav over Yaakov. And Yaakov erred when he attempted, on his deathbed, to reveal the secrets of the End of Days to his children.

<sup>119</sup> Sanhedrin 4:5



## 5. Preparing for Death

Until now we have looked at activities which can enrich the lives of the elderly. But there is another component which, according to research, is equally important for living an enriched, long life. Regardless of a person's religious or spiritual beliefs, preparation for death removes the fear and enables a person to face the challenges of life with confidence.

It is true that there may be a connection between religious beliefs and the ability to cope with death. However, it is equally important, if not more so for those who have not developed religious or spiritual beliefs throughout their lifetimes to think about and prepare themselves for death and a possible after-life (within the broadest definition of that term).

Shkolnik et al. state, based on their research of elderly Jews in Safed and Bnei Berak, that:

These findings lead to the inevitable conclusion that there is a reciprocal interrelationship between activity, religiosity function and life satisfaction.... both life satisfaction and feelings of personal wellbeing, which are so important in the elderly, are reinforced by their faith and religious activity, provided they are functioning adequately in their daily life.<sup>120</sup>

Rabbi Abraham Yeshaya Karelitz, known as the *Chazon Ish*<sup>121</sup>, wrote a long letter to a non-Jewish judge when he was 35 years old. He was trying to defend Judaism from the charge of blood libel, which had raised its head again in 1911 with the Beilis trial. In this letter he describes the nature of humanity, and the constant struggles of life, as well as showing the sanctity of life and how murder and eating blood are antithetical to Judaism. He begins with the following observation:

Man is mortal from his birth. He maintains and strengthens his standing and existence through struggle and strife, with competition and constant war with nature, which has given him life together with death, existence together with decay.<sup>122</sup>

Already at a relatively young age, the *Chazon Ish* shows his awareness of mortality, and the importance of every moment of life, before the physical body loses the battle against nature and brings death and decay. The knowledge that we will all ultimately pass from this earth is something which becomes stronger with every passing year. It is important for a person to realise its significance and act upon it while he or she still has the physical capabilities.

This idea is expressed by King Solomon in the verses, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years arrive in which you say 'I have no desire for them'. Before the sun sets with its light, and the moon and the stars, and the clouds return after the rain."<sup>123</sup>

The Talmud recognises the physical and mental difficulties that accompany aging. The Talmud<sup>124</sup> says that signs of old age are the result of a special prayer of the patriarch Abraham.

Until Abraham there was no old age. Someone who would want to speak with Abraham would end up speaking with Isaac, or vice versa. Abraham came and prayed that there should be old age, as the verse states, "Abraham was old, well on in days."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Tamar Shkolnik, Chava Weiner, Lea Malik & Yoel Festinger (2001) 'The effect of Jewish religiosity of elderly Israelis on their life satisfaction, health, function and activity' in *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 16: 201-219, 2001. p. 214-5

<sup>121</sup> 1878-1953

<sup>122</sup> *Kovetz Igrot* vol. 2 letter 173

<sup>123</sup> Kohellet 12:1-2

<sup>124</sup> Bava Metziah 87a

<sup>125</sup> Genesis 24

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Rabbi Avigdor Miller<sup>126</sup> asks why Abraham's prayer was for an old person to look decrepit and decayed yet for a young person to look healthy and vibrant. Surely it is the elder who commands more respect – why does he not have the body to match that respect? Rav Miller answers that Abraham and G-d wanted us to prepare for our end. When we see our bodies begin to age it is a wake-up call that we do not have so much time remaining, and we must make the best use of our time and prepare for the next world. The awareness of approaching end makes time more valuable and meaningful.

Rav Eliezer Papo<sup>127</sup> writes in *Pele Yo'etz*:

When most of a person's years have past, and he reaches his forties, it is appropriate for him to remember his end, because every person goes ultimately to his eternity, and each day the remaining time gets less. If he did not remember his Creator in the days of his youth, and acted wildly, following his heart and drawn after the delights and vanities of the physical world, and he did not look at the actions of G-d, not is the time for him to think of his soul and to have mercy on the honour of his Creator, and to repent of his evil ways, and to go in the paths of goodness and the ways of the righteous....<sup>128</sup>

In addition to being a reminder of mortality, the aging process is also viewed also as a positive concept because the decay of the physical body allows for greater development of the spirit and soul. A weaker body and desires allows for greater focus on the mind and the soul, and a weaker evil inclination makes it easier to repent.

Confronting mortality and planning for eternity are the tasks of the elderly. Rabbeinu Yonah<sup>129</sup> writes in a similar vein:

The second thing: When a person reaches the days of old age and attains the days of *seivah*, and his energy is lessening, and his evil inclination is becoming weaker, he must also remember his end, for it is close, and he should think of his ultimate end and return to G-d who will have mercy on him. Someone who does not return in repentance when he reaches old age will have a great and heavy punishment... and it is surprising and strange that a person would ignore this...<sup>130</sup>

This requirement presented by Rabbeinu Yonah has also been noted by academic literature. "Robert Atchley (1991)<sup>131</sup> has observed that church participation is the number one form of organisational activity among older persons."<sup>132</sup>

## a. Prepare for death – physically and spiritually

"At that time Hezekiah was sick and close to death. Isaiah the prophet, son of Amoz, came to him, and said to him: 'Thus says G-d: Command your household; for you will die, and not live.'<sup>133</sup>

*Pirkei de-Rebbe Eliezer*<sup>134</sup> tells us that originally there was no sickness in the world. A person would be going about their business, and would sneeze, and their soul would depart through their nostrils. This continued until the time of Jacob. The Talmud states that until the time of Jacob there was never any illness in the world. "Jacob prayed and there was illness."<sup>135</sup> Rashi<sup>136</sup> explains the benefit of illness before

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<sup>126</sup> 908-2001. As quoted by Rebbetzen Tzipporah Heller

<sup>127</sup> 1785–1828

<sup>128</sup> *Pele Yo'etz ziknah*

<sup>129</sup> Yonah ben Abraham Gerondi died 1263

<sup>130</sup> *Shaarei Teshuva* shaar 2:7

<sup>131</sup> *Social Forces and Aging* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

<sup>132</sup> Ainley, S.C.; Singleton, Royce JR. and Swigert, V. L. (1992) 'Aging and Religious Participation: Reconsidering the Effects of Health' in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1992 31(2) pp. 175-188

<sup>133</sup> Kings II 20:1

<sup>134</sup> Chapter 52

<sup>135</sup> Bava Metziah 87a

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death is so that a person can prepare for death and leave instruction for their children. Elsewhere<sup>137</sup> Rashi explains that the purpose is also to give the children a chance to come to spend time with their parent before he or she passes away. *Pirkei de-Rebbe Eliezer* gives another reason. Jacob prayed, “Master of the Universe, do not take my soul from me until I command my children and household.”<sup>138</sup>

*Siftei Tzedek* summarizes the tasks for an elderly (or sick) person: “When a person is sick he should quickly arrange his affairs and command his household... This should be in front of witnesses... and he should direct his children how best to keep to the path of G-d, to act righteously and with justice. If he knows that his children fight with one another, he should distribute his inheritance before he dies so that they do not fight with one another after his death and cause a desecration of G-d’s Name... If, as a result of his instructions the children act with love and peace and honesty towards each other, it will bring pleasure to his soul and he will be able to lie in his grave in peace....”<sup>139</sup>

We see that Judaism gives several reasons for the frailty and illness that accompanies old age, and each of the reasons has practical implications and opportunities which have tremendous potential to enrich the lives of the aging.

This preparation is independent of any prior beliefs. This would include such things as ensuring that a person’s finances, including a will, are written and updated regularly, to reflect changes as they happen.

### b. Ethical will:

At the end of Genesis, just before his death, Jacob calls his sons to him, and gives them each a final blessing.<sup>140</sup> This blessing is also individual direction for each son, highlighting his strengths and weaknesses, allowing the son to develop his full potential and follow the path laid out for him by his father. The Chumash concludes with a similar blessing from Moses Our Teacher to each of the tribes, just before his death.<sup>141</sup>

Similarly, we find in the Talmud several examples of people commanding their children or students before their death. For example in Berachot 28a we find Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai instructed his students on his deathbed.

There are many historical examples of Rabbis leaving ethical wills for their students and children, either at the end of their lives, or before embarking on a potentially dangerous journey. Rabbi Judah HaChasid wrote *Sefer HaChasidim*; Ramban wrote his famous letter<sup>142</sup>; The Vilna Gaon wrote a letter to his children before embarking on a journey to Israel.<sup>143</sup>

*Gesher HaChaim* writes: “Any person who knows that there is a purpose to life and the life of his children – when he writes some kind of will, must not forget to instruct his children about the purpose of life, as we find written about Abraham Avinu, “For I know that in order to command his children and his family after them and they will guard the way of G-d.”<sup>144</sup> Each person should instruct in in his own words and style, and specifically for his children... whether in terms of relations with G-d, or interpersonal relationships.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ad loc.

<sup>137</sup> Sanhedrin 107b

<sup>138</sup> *Pirkei de-Rebbe Eliezer* chapter 52

<sup>139</sup> *Siftei Tzedek* chapter 8

<sup>140</sup> Genesis chapter 49

<sup>141</sup> Deuteronomy chapter 33. Sifrei Deuteronomy 2 explains why Moses chose to only rebuke the people before his death. But fundamentally this concept of leaving instruction to future generation is not limited to ‘end of life’.

<sup>142</sup> Though some research claims this is misattributed to Ramban. But nevertheless it is an example of an ethical will.

<sup>143</sup> Though he never actually made that journey, and returned home shortly after leaving.

<sup>144</sup> Genesis 18:19

<sup>145</sup> *Gesher HaChaim* Vol. 1 p. 41

There are many potential benefits to encouraging and facilitating people (especially older people) to write an ethical will. It allows for an intersection of past and future, giving cause to reflect on the past, but also to create a potential future, and a lasting legacy. It builds upon the life experiences of the elderly and their role within Jewish literature as the guides and 'eyes' of the nation. Furthermore, it can be tremendously beneficial to their descendants, and act as a constant reminder of the previous generation. The author of *Gesher HaChaim* writes: I thought to bring here some sections from the ethical will of my father, and in so doing we once again meet his personality and his views on life and beyond life."<sup>146</sup>

The idea of ethical wills is an idea which has gained some credence in the non-Jewish world, perhaps popularised by Barak Obama's letter to his daughters after being elected as President of the United States of America.

Notwithstanding the (fairly limited) spread of the concept of 'ethical will' in the non-Jewish world, it is believed that there is still a huge contribution that Judaism can make in this area. It appears that the uniqueness of the Jewish ethical will is that in addition to merging past and future, it is designed to be specific to each child, or student. Nobody knows better than a parent the strengths and weaknesses of each child, and a teacher sees things in a student that perhaps the student does not even realise about themselves. This specific advice, as well as general advice, is the essence of a Jewish ethical will.

### c. Preparation for Death: Practical

Death is almost a taboo subject in modern Western culture. Yet as people age they want to speak about it more, and lose their fear of death. Roy and Russell write:

Today death is relegated to the closet and avoided as an unwanted intruder. While older people often address the subject openly in order to confront their own finitude, family members usually suppress it as morbid.... [S]tudies carried out by gerontologists reveal that negative and hush-hush attitudes toward death and its surrounding rituals are inappropriate for the elderly. Researchers have shown that older people have less fear of death, approaching it more openly, than their younger fellows.<sup>147</sup>

Open and clear discussions with the elderly about death, and what they expect before and after death, enable those close to them to fulfil their wishes without conflict.

Jacob gave specific instructions to all his sons about where he wanted to be buried.<sup>148</sup> He asked to be buried next to his parents and grandparents in the cave of the patriarchs that Abraham had purchased for his family.

It is a Mitzvah to purchase a grave plot while still alive: Rabbi Elazar says: A person must have a nail or a peg fixed in a cemetery to mark his burial in that place."<sup>149</sup>; Similarly *Shiltei Giborim* writes "The custom in this locale is that each person purchases his place of burial."<sup>150</sup>

The Talmud states that a cup of wine used to be drunk at a wedding celebration in memory of Rabban Gamliel because of his foresight in planning for his own funeral and influencing the rest of his generation, and all later generations:

It was taught: Originally the expenses of a funeral were very burdensome on the relatives, and caused more suffering than the death itself. Eventually they used to leave the body and flee. Until Rabban Gamliel came and [left instructions to] treat him 'disrespectfully'. He was buried in

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<sup>146</sup> Introduction p. 17

<sup>147</sup> Roy and Russell *The Encyclopedia of Aging & the Elderly*

<sup>148</sup> Genesis 49:29-32

<sup>149</sup> Leviticus Rabbah 5:5

<sup>150</sup> End of sixth chapter of Sanhedrin

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simple linen garments. All of the nation followed his lead, and buried their deceased in simple linen garments.<sup>151</sup>

Preparing for death is a mitzvah and does not have to be done in a person's final moments. Knowing that their wishes will be carried out, and that they will not leave a greater burden for others is a comfort. It also allows a person to retain ownership over his or her own body even after death.

Roy and Russel report:

While openness about death appears to be on the rise, we might all still benefit from sharing the attitude of the 93-year-old man who declared his own openness and mastery of the last event of his life by saying, "It's mine ... don't belong to nobody else."<sup>152</sup>

One example of planning for after death is that of Rav Solomon Zalman Auerbach. He left clear instructions:

His last will and testament typifies Rabbi Auerbach's humble character and his respect and consideration for others. He entitled it *bakashi* meaning "request," rather than using the conventional term *tzavaah* meaning "instruction." He asked that his tombstone not be larger than those of his parents, that it not be inscribed with titles or praises and that it only indicate that he taught Torah at Yeshivat Kol Torah in Jerusalem. He requested that eulogies delivered at his funeral be brief so as not to burden the assembled people and that the speakers endeavour to stimulate the spiritual and religious feelings of the people in attendance. He emphatically asked that eulogisers refrain from lavish praise since such praise greatly pained him during his lifetime. He forgave all who committed any offense against him during his lifetime and asked forgiveness from anyone who felt that he had offended him. Finally, he asked his family to live together in peace and harmony.<sup>153</sup>

## d. Preparation for Death: Letting Go

There comes a point at the end of life when a person no longer wants to continue. This is recognised in both Jewish law and aggadata. For example, the Talmud tells of the city of Luz:

It has been taught: That is the Luz in which they dye the blue; that is the Luz against which Sennacherib marched without disturbing it, against which Nebuchadnezzar marched without destroying it, and even the Angel of Death has no permission to pass through it, but when the old men there become tired of life they go outside the wall and then die.<sup>154</sup>

The Talmud recognises that a person can become tired of life. There is a story in *Yalkut Simoni*:

A very old woman came before Rabbi Yossi ben Chalafta. She said to him: "Rabbi, I have grown excessively old, and now my life is disgusting, as I cannot taste food or drink, and I wish to be released from the world." He said to her: "How have you merited such a long life?" She replied: "My practice is that even if a matter is dear to me, I leave it aside and go early to the synagogue each day." He said to her: "Withhold yourself from the synagogue for three consecutive days". She went and did this, and on the third day she fell ill and died. Thus Solomon said: "Fortunate is the person who heeds Me to attend eagerly at My doors each day, to guard the doorposts of My entryway"<sup>155</sup>. What is written afterward? "For who finds Me finds life".<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ketubot 8b

<sup>152</sup> Roy and Russell

<sup>153</sup> Steinberg, A. (1997) 'Medical-Halachic Decisions of Rabbi Solomon Zalman Auerbach (1910-1995)' in *Jewish Medical Ethics* vol. III, No. 1 January 1997

<sup>154</sup> Sotah 46b

<sup>155</sup> Mishlei 8:34-5

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We should not learn from here that it is permitted for a person to end their life prematurely. Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, in *Tzitz Eliezer* explicitly rejects such an inference from this story.<sup>157</sup> However, we do recognise the concept that a person is tired of life and ready for death.

At this stage it would be comforting and calming for a person to know how to behave on his or her deathbed. There are specific Jewish laws for what is expected. These can be presented to the person.

There is a specific ‘confession’ to be made before death, along with repentance and forgiveness to anyone who has harmed the person. The person can be helped to make peace with everyone and everything.

The Talmud says that a person should always pray for a good death.

“For this let everyone that is G-dly pray to You in the time of finding”<sup>158</sup> Rav Nachman bar Isaac said: “In the time of finding” refers to the [finding of] death. For it is said: “The finding of death.”<sup>159</sup> Similarly, it has been taught: Nine hundred and three kinds of death were created in this world. For it is said: The finding (*totza’ot*) of death, and the numerical value of *totza’oth* is 903. The worst of them is croup, and the best of them is the kiss. Croup is like a thorn in a ball of wool pulled out backwards. Some people say: It is like [pulling] a rope through the loop-holes [of a ship]. [Death by a] kiss is like drawing a hair out of milk. Rabbi Yochanan said: “In the time of finding” refers to the [finding of a] grave. Rabbi Chanina said: Which verse [may be quoted in support]? “Who rejoice to exultation and are glad, when they can find the grave.”<sup>160</sup> Rabbah bar Rabbi Shila said: Hence the proverb: “A man should pray for peace even to the last clod of earth [thrown upon his grave].”

### e. After Death – Inheritance and Charity

Jacob gives specific instructions to his son Yosef regarding inheritance and receiving a double portion.<sup>161</sup> A large percentage of people die intestate, causing legal problems and family fights. By planning ahead a person can do their best to ensure that their money and possessions go to where they wish, and give effectively. There are many reasons why people do not plan properly. Financial planning should be offered to all elderly. Also, since people live longer, they must ensure that their will is updated regularly and reflects their current wishes.

Giving to charity is always a Jewish concept, and after death is an exceptionally propitious time to give. Researching charities, and suggesting appropriate causes is something that can be done by the aged themselves, using literature, internet, phone calls. Their role as elders of the community may enable them to have greater insight into the validity and honesty of charities.

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<sup>156</sup> Yalkut Simoni Mishlei 943

<sup>157</sup> Tzitz Eliezer 18:48

<sup>158</sup> Psalms 32:6

<sup>159</sup> Psalms 68:21

<sup>160</sup> Job 3:22

<sup>161</sup> Genesis 48:3-7

## 6. Suggested Action Research:

- I. Grandparents teaching grandchildren an acquired skill: Many people have knowledge that they can pass on to others. This may be specific skills (for example, a retired plumber or electrician, businessman or doctor has years of experience in their field, and may be able to help others starting out); or a foreign language (possibly to act as conversation partner, rather than as teacher, unless they also have a teaching background); knowledge of local history, or of a hobby. Teaching requires preparing the teacher and the student before the learning session. Yet with supervision, guidance and training this can be made meaningful and successful. The action research would be to interview elders who have such skills, and train them to be able to teach this information. Then advertising for youngsters who wish to learn these skills. This concept is similar to the 'Gilde' project in the Netherlands.

The Gilde projects go against the trend which sees voluntary work as the province of young people, by providing an opportunity for older people to gain a role again in society. They do this by acting as a mediator between offers by older people to make their skills and advice available and the demand for this from the population at large. They provide the opportunity for older people to act as a resource, using the skills and experiences they have accumulated during a lifetime of work, and to make these available to a wider community.<sup>162</sup>

This project would focus specifically on intergenerational learning, and ideally on grandparent-grandchild interaction.

One study shows how mentoring a grandchild can significantly change the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild. However, this study on mentoring was limited to ethical beliefs and social practices, and this seems to taper off after adolescence.

Grandchildren's perceptions of their closest grandparent as a mentor... showed significance for predicting intergenerational relationship satisfaction.... The teaching a grandparent performed as a mentor may have been significant at a grandchild's earlier stage when he/she was learning skills, values, or religious beliefs during childhood. However, after adolescence, young adults may already possess well-defined beliefs and social practices systems, making the mentor role less significant.<sup>163</sup>

The action research could focus on whether this mentoring can continue beyond adolescence, given a syllabus, and clear guidance, along with activities building on the strengths of both partners.

- II. Grandparent and grandchild learning something new together: Just as Rabbi Akiva says, a person must continue to learn for his or her whole life. The motivation for a grandparent learning something new will be the chance to spend time with a grandchild. It seems that often, intergenerational interaction is forced, or limited to superficial discussions. To give a new depth and meaning to the grandparent-grandchild relationship we would create a syllabus which builds on the strengths of each of them and allows them to learn together and from each other. The interaction between the generations will contribute new ideas, and forge strong bonds.
- III. Online intergenerational learning: Building on the previous two ideas, and recognising that often distance and other obstacles can impede any organised learning, this action research will use the power of the internet and technology to facilitate intergenerational learning. Major advantage – removes obstacles to learning due to distance. Creates strong relationships between families who live distant from each other. Disadvantage – requires access to, and knowledge of, the internet and

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<sup>162</sup> Pilley, C. (1993) 'Adult education, community development and older people' in Edwards, R.; Sieminski, S. and Zeldin, D. (eds.) *Adult Learners, Education and Training*. Routledge p. 267

<sup>163</sup> Alan C. Taylor, Mihaela Robila, and Hae Seung Lee (2005) 'Distance, Contact, and Intergenerational Relationships: Grandparents and Adult Grandchildren from an International Perspective' in *Journal of Adult Development*, Vol. 12, No. 1, January 2005

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associated technologies. Part of the training for this program will have to include familiarity with the technology. This disadvantage quickly becomes an advantage as it part of the intergenerational learning can be related to use of technology, and this will allow grandparents to access the world wide web.

- IV. Set up a program where the elders become the counsellors and guides. Hospital stays can be terrifying and bewildering for patients. Understanding what is going on, what treatment is being given and what the prognosis is can improve health and alleviate some of the terror of hospital. Visiting the sick is one of the most valuable and basic mitzvot in Judaism. “These are the things for which a person ‘enjoys the fruit’ in this world, while the ‘principal’ awaits him in the World to Come... visiting the sick.” There are two vital components to this mitzvah – praying for the person to recover, and performing any task necessary to help them recover.<sup>164</sup> [Continual giving, Continual meaning]

Similarly, set up a Council of Elders to inform medical staff (perhaps student doctors and nurses) of how best to treat elderly patients. This has been tried in USA with remarkable success. One student wrote:

“The Council of Elders provided a new and refreshing insight on the geriatric patient. Not only did they alert us to their concerns, but they helped us visualize some of our own. I feel this session will help me in future interactions with patients.”<sup>165</sup>

This Council of Elders could advise not only on matters of aging, but of culture and religion also. Furthermore, if successful, similar focus groups could be set up to advise local authority on issues such as transport, accessibility, mobility. Public institutions could be advised similarly.

- V. Tour Guides: Elders have perhaps greater knowledge of local events and history, and can develop a tour around the city/street/Synagogue/museum which plays to their first-hand knowledge and story-telling ability. This could be a free tour planned and delivered by people who have lived there for decades. The tour could be aimed at tourists, or at school pupils, or to other elderly people.
- VI. Facilitate setting up a database of charities, run and researched by the elderly. This will not only have contact details and descriptions of charities, but ranking based on such factors as transparency of charity, efficacy of getting funds to the needy etc.
- VII. Living history: Each elder is a living history book. Steven Spielberg captured a small part of this in his holocaust archive.

The Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum is a major repository for moving images pertaining to the Holocaust and related topics in European history. The collection currently comprises 1,005 hours of archival footage. Additional materials are regularly acquired from sources throughout the world. The majority of the materials originated between 1930 and 1945.<sup>166</sup>

Why should such a record be only about the holocaust period of history? Each person has a story to tell, and facilitating that story-telling is a tremendous gift to that person.

The Elderly can be encouraged to tell their life story (or an episode from it). This can be recorded either in writing, or audio/video. They can also volunteer to speak to school-children, giving them a unique and personal perspective on history. To a certain degree this could be done within the guidelines of the National Core Curriculum. Ultimately this will create a library of biographies which

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<sup>164</sup> Shulchan Aruch *Yoreh Deah* 335:4

<sup>165</sup> Westmoreland, Glenda R.; Counsell, Steven R.; Sennour, Youcef; Schubert, Cathy C.; Frank, Kathryn I.; Wu, Jingwei; Frankel, Richard M.; Litzelman, Debra K.; Bogdewic, Stephen P. and Inui, Thomas S. ‘Improving Medical Student Attitudes Toward Older Patients Through a “Council of Elders” and Reflective Writing Experience’ in *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*; Feb 2009, Vol. 57 Issue 2, pp. 315-320

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/filmvideo/>



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will not only be valuable for those writing them and their immediate family, but (if catalogued well, and searchable) will also provide a resource for historical study, and will create a living historical record. [Continual giving, Continual meaning]

- VIII. Create a proactive coping learning program to inform younger people about old age, and encourage them to think about what it means to be old, and what lifestyle changes they can make while still young in order to enjoy their old age. Greater interaction between young and old (e.g. through intergenerational learning – see below) will also give the opportunity to think about age related issues while still young.
- IX. Introduce the concept of ethical will. Rough guides should be prepared, facilitating making such a will. Perhaps seminars on how to go about writing this will. Obviously some people do not have children or students, and the concept must be repackaged appropriately. An archive (perhaps online) of these documents should be created to give them permanence. Perhaps school children could read these ethical wills and provide feedback, to give even more meaning and enrichment to this task.
- X. Present the elderly with examples of preparations and plans made by others for death and beyond (e.g. Rav Solomon Zalman Auerbach). Encourage them to consider what they expect from their funeral.

Prepare a worksheet explaining options and facilitating choice. Specific issues to be raised include:

How do you want to be buried/cremated etc. Where, etc. Who will deliver the eulogy, what will it say? What will the headstone say? Scattering ashes?

## 7. Conclusion

This brief document has highlighted some areas where Judaism can make an impact on the dialogue of aging, to enhance and enrich the lives of the elderly. Each of these ideas is only a suggested outline. More research is required in both Jewish and academic sources before implementing any of these ideas. There are also many other possible ideas for aging enrichment which are not covered in this document.

All of these have sources in academic literature, but are also stressed in, and derived from, Jewish sources. They all have the potential to enhance and enrich old age, and specifically in the areas of continual giving, continual learning and continual meaning. Judaism has, in these areas, a contribution to make to the current literature and practice