Sense of Meaning and Purpose in Jewish Education

edited by Jeffrey S. Kress

with a foreword by Arnold M. Eisen

JTS The Jewish Theological Seminary

Sense of Meaning and Purpose in Jewish Education

A Symposium at
The Jewish Theological Seminary

October 31, 2007

edited by Jeffrey S. Kress

with a foreword by Arnold M. Eisen

JTS The Jewish Theological Seminary

With appreciation to
Audrey Lichter, Alan Mendelson, and Diane Troderman
for their visionary leadership
and to the
Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life
for their financial support

DESIGN AND COMPOSITION BY MILES B. COHEN

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Readers about to make their way through this volume have a treat in store. Rarely do we have the chance to listen in on conversation in which the participants really talk to (rather than past) one another and at the same time really talk with (rather than at) their audience. This is that rare conversation. It lives up to its subject—meaning and purpose in Jewish education (and, I think, *all* education worthy of the name)—by speaking meaningfully and purposively to the subject at hand. By so doing, it enhances the reader's sense of being part of an enterprise that endows meaning and purpose to all our lives.

What thoughtful person is not concerned, at least intermittently, with these topics? What Jewish parent, child, teacher, spouse, friend, or co-worker does not reflect from time to time on where each of us fits in the world, how our time should be spent, how every present moment is shaped by the past we inherit and the future we help to build? Who among us has not been thankful for luminous insights of the sort that greet readers of this volume (insights that in some cases are contributed by children and reported by symposium participants: itself a source of confidence in the character of the human spirit)? Who has not thought and worried about what we have to offer to those who share our world and our days, and what we hope to receive from them?

Jewish or not, professional educators or not, we are often part of the type of discussion on which this volume enables us to eavesdrop. If you are like me, you will frequently find yourself interjecting comments of support and disagreement as you read—a sure sign that the volume has more than achieved its purpose.

I read the manuscript in the week leading up to *parashat Beshalaḥ* in the cycle of readings from the Torah, the chapters recounting climatic moments of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt and their dramatic rescue at the Sea of Reeds. For me this section of Torah has another, more personal meaning. It was the one taught to me at the age of eleven when I first learned to *lein*, or chant, Torah aloud from the scroll with the use of musical notation. My first-grade teacher, a man I looked upon as very kindly and very, very old, took the trouble to write out by hand—in both Hebrew and English—the portion I was learning. The gesture was apparently pointless (I, of course, owned books that contained the text) and opaque in its significance (I remember no explanatory speech or note). I am not sure that at age eleven I understood the full range of meanings and purposes that I ascribe to the gesture by my teacher today, some fifty years later. But I think I got the gist of it even then: love. The first formal Jewish educator in my life was telling me that he loved the Torah and loved me. The meaning of his life was wrapped up in transmitting love for the Torah to Jewish kids like me. That was the purpose of Jewish education in his eyes and, I suspect, one of the major purposes that he had in mind when he thanked God each morning for another day of life.

I will never forget that lesson from my teacher (and, of course, cannot remember any other lesson that he taught me). Virtually every teaching that we learn or transmit, I suspect, whether by word or example, is inseparable from personal associations of memory and emotion like this one. Many of those associations are attached to encounters, conversations, and exchanges with people who matter to us. This volume bears witness to that truth, as it goes back and forth from psychology to theology, personal experience to measurable data, recent development in educational theory to age-old patterns of development in children. I hope you will both enjoy the conversation that awaits you and add to it. No author or editor of a foreword could ask for more.

Arnold M. Eisen
Chancellor, The Jewish Theological Seminary

Overview

Jeffrey S. Kress

Background

Jewish education is an enterprise dedicated to holistic growth. Jewish educators are not satisfied with an outcome of "knowing about" Judaism. For example, Michael Rosenak (1987, p. 267) describes three categories of the goals of Jewish education. [To]:

> (1) effect the socialization of the child into a religious community . . . ; (2) foster the child's individuation as an implicitly religious person; and (3) negotiate the tension between religious belonging and reliability, on the one hand, and religious "becoming" and spiritual autonomy, on the other.

Jewish educators help students to achieve individual and group identities, to negotiate adherence to religious norms while at the same time living in a modern, pluralistic society, and to connect with history while recognizing the divine in the present. Interestingly, many of these educators work toward these ends as they negotiate these same tensions for themselves and seek the same range of outcomes for themselves and their families.

The term "Jewish identity," though somewhat out of favor, in part because of its lack of descriptive precision, is often used as shorthand for this array of outcomes. The breadth of desired outcomes is one reason that *success* in Jewish education has been a controversial topic in the research community. The growing conceptualization of Jewish identity as an idiosyncratic and ever-evolving construct brings an expectation of ever-more nuanced and varied ways of conceptualizing and assessing the outcomes of Jewish education (e.g., Charme, Horowitz, Hyman, & Kress, 2008).

It was in this spirit that the group that came to comprise the Happiness Project embarked on its work. The story of the project's creation is recounted by Audrey Lichter in her introductory remarks in this manuscript. The simplicity of the question that launched this project, posed in the context of comparing day school students with their peers in secular settings, belies the complexity of the issues. "But are they [day school students] happier?" became a springboard for our work.

The terms *they* and *happier* evolved considerably from their initial formulation. Most basically, *they* broadened from a focus on day school students to encompass other Jewish educational settings as well. The team's engagement with the term *happier* was far more complicated. We realized early on that while a subjective sense of well-being has a rich research tradition associated with it (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), we wanted to root our work more firmly in Jewish value concepts and the operationalizations and associations with *happiness* used by Jewish educators. In fact, we have alternatively framed our work as exploring *quality of life* outcomes, as opposed to *happiness* (though the name Happiness Project seemed to stick).

Our conversations with leading educators and our reading of the literature resulted in four broad and interrelated categories:

- Connectedness to family, peers, and community
- Successful intelligence, including critical and analytical creative problem-solving skills
- Social and emotional competence
- Sense of meaning and purpose

Each of these areas is complex and multifaceted. The expertise of the team members and others (e.g., Robert Sternberg's group, which we consulted regarding the second item) best matched the first three areas. We felt *least* confident in our ability to address the fourth element. This symposium was meant to be a way to help us move forward in our work. The goal of the symposium was to address the following broad interconnected questions:

How do we operationalize *sense of meaning and purpose* within a Jewish context?
What is meant by this and related terms (e.g., spirituality)?
How does a sense of *meaning and purpose* develop?
How do we know it when we see it?

We invited two groups of experts to share their perspectives. The first group was comprised of Jewish spiritual thinkers and practitioners. Members of this group were chosen not just for what they know about the topic itself (though each is well-credentialed in that arena) but also because they are active in work that translates their knowledge into practice. Their work with Jews about issues of spiritual growth and the search for meaning and purpose is the major aspect of what they do. The second group was made up of behavioral researchers who have studied related topics, though not necessarily in a Jewish context.

The participants were given a background commissioned paper prepared by a graduate student in psychology, Megan Kash (Appendix B), and asked to provide brief comments related to the four questions listed above. The format was structured to promote interaction among the participants to spur creative applications of their expertise to a new context. While these conversational elements are framed as "interludes" in this manuscript, they were essential and generative elements of the experience. The conversation was marked by warmth and humor in addition to wisdom and insight, and participants were willing to take risks in "thinking aloud" and in challenging one another. I served as facilitator for the morning sessions featuring the Jewish thinkers and practitioners, and Dr. Richard Davidson facilitated the afternoon presentations from the behavioral researchers.

Summary of Major Themes

Though the insight and richness of this conversation can only be appreciated through a complete reading of the narrative, I will summarize some themes that emerged both from my participation in the session and from my close reading of the transcripts during the editorial process.

The Centrality and Challenges to Jewish Education of Sense of Meaning and Purpose

Sense of meaning and purpose was described as relating to core, foundational elements of Judaism: our relationship with God and with our fellow, what constitutes a holy act, what is our responsibility toward others, and so forth. While this description may not be surprising given the participants in the symposium, it is worth noting due to the existence in Judaism of ambivalence about the concept or a suspicion that spirituality may serve as a mask for deep commitment and consistent practice. This ambivalence can be seen, for example, in the rise of Hasidism and the opposition that accompanied that movement or the distinction we still draw between *keva*, the fixed elements of ritual, and *kavanah*, the elements involving intentionality.

There was also broad consensus that while a sense of meaning and purpose cannot be *taught*, Jewish educators and educational institutions have a vital role to play in helping learners develop the capacity for a sense of meaning and purpose and in providing opportunities for youth to experience moments of deep connectedness, wonder, and awe. Participants paid particular attention to the importance of the educators themselves grappling with their issues of meaning and purpose as a stepping stone in their work with youth.

Internalizing and Externalizing

The definitions developed in the course of the symposium encapsulated two general trends that can be conceptualized as "internalizing" and "externalizing" (the definitions roughly map onto the two constructs "meaning" and "purpose," respectively). The former refers to issues of reflectiveness, sense of wonder, emotional awareness, dealing with frustration and challenges, goal orientation, creativity, empathy, and appreciation of one's strengths. The latter has to with pro-social activities such as social justice and social action, as well as positive everyday social interaction. The term *tikkun olam* was raised frequently in the discussion, with *tikkun* (repair) interpreted to fit both the internal conceptualization (repairing one's self) and the external (repairing the world). Importantly, these two conceptualizations were seen as strongly interrelated, with the development of one hinging on the development of the other.

Successful achievement of sense of meaning and purpose seemed to relate to the convergence of the internal and external elements of the construct: that the difference one makes in the world is in keeping *both* with one's sense of self *and* with the integration into one's sense of self the capacity and ability to improve the world.

State or Trait?

While symposium participants expressed differences of opinion on a variety of issues, one recurring point of contention had to do with the degree of, or possibility for, permanence of a sense of meaning and purpose. This discussion brought to mind the "state vs. trait" debates in psychology in the second half of the previous century. Is sense of meaning and purpose a characteristic of a person, part of who one *is*? Or, is it something that is experienced transiently at particular moments? In general, the argument for sense of meaning and purpose being a trait or characteristic of a person came from a participant (Dr. Richard Davidson) whose work focuses on Buddhist practitioners, while those working primarily in a Jewish context tended to talk about more fleeting states. This might indicate varying approaches to the construct in different faith traditions. Regardless, there was consensus that it is possible to create conditions under which one is more likely to achieve outcomes of meaning and purpose (either as a way of life or as a set of distinct experiences) by creating opportunities for reflection, exposure to role models, doing "holy" acts in the world, educators' treating the issues seriously and respectfully, youth to build on their strengths, and educators to match their pedagogy with student strengths.

Emotions and the Potential and Need for Growth

The word "ineffable" is often used in the context of a discussion of the issues of meaning and spirituality, and it appeared over the course of the symposium. While the term is generally used to refer to the indescribable feeling of the divine, there is a sense in which *sense of meaning and purpose* is itself marked by ineffability. The meaning of the construct itself is hard to articulate and defies attempts at pithy summary. Further, there was overlap between the definition of the outcomes and the descriptions of what it would take to achieve these. For example, self-awareness is described both as a component of sense of meaning and purpose and also as a competency that would enable one to achieve sense of meaning and purpose.

The participants, while acknowledging the difficulty in encapsulating the ineffable elements of sense of meaning and purpose, did see the construct as related to, or grounded in, areas—such as empathy, attention, self-regulation, and emotional awareness—with solid research traditions. They generally embraced the tension between efforts to concretize the construct and a desire to avoid reductionism in this area of the human experience. So, while stopping well short of *equating* sense of meaning and purpose with a set of emotional competencies, there was frequent discussion of abilities such as empathy, reflectiveness, and attention that help one to achieve a sense of meaning and purpose. And, while one cannot be instructed as to how to "have" a sense of meaning and purpose, it is possible to create conditions that would (a) help individuals grow in their underlying emotional skills and (b) provide an environment in which one is more likely to achieve a sense of meaning and purpose (e.g., by welcoming questions and by providing opportunities for quiet reflection).

Not surprisingly, given the participants, there was broad agreement that Jewish educators should attend to the emotional needs of students in general and, more specifically, promote a sense of meaning and purpose by focusing on the underlying emotional competencies and by providing conducive environments. However, there was also a consensus that *Jewish educational settings were not meeting their potential in achieving these goals*. Questions were raised regarding the type of teacher preparation and competencies and the nature of school-based programming and structure that would help students develop a sense of meaning and purpose.

Methodological Issues

Psychological researchers have long struggled with the idea that the opinions one reports on a survey or in an interview may not be those that actually guide one's actions in the world. Of course, one might unwittingly bow to social desirability or even distort one's response outright. For complex phenomena in particular, the issue can be even more subtle as a research participant might be called upon to articulate ideas for the first time and to encapsulate multifaceted and difficult-to-understand issues into relatively pithy statements. To question

the ability of individuals to report about issues such as spirituality is not to denigrate our research participants as ignorant of their own experiences. Rather, it is to acknowledge the depth of these experiences and the limitations of research methodology to capture this. As such, in the area under consideration—as in the field in general—the use of "self report" through interviews and surveys was a matter of some controversy. It was also noted that self-report methodologies can serve not just for data collection, but also as "intervention" because asking someone to reflect on these issues likely will cause change in the way the interviewee thinks about these issues. Whether this is seen as a benefit (as it allows for the blending of research and practice) or a concern (as the research distorts the object of research) depends on one's research worldview and beliefs about the possibility of "pure" research.

In any case, methodology was discussed that would allow for a more unobtrusive (and therefore less reactive) approach to assessment. For example, because one's sense of meaning and purpose would assumedly help determine one's actions in the world, methodology should allow for the observation of participant behavior. Assessment should "sample" many aspects of participants' lives because sense of meaning and purpose may be transient (see discussion above). In addition to everyday interactions, times of stress and challenge may be particularly useful observation points. To assess developmental change, methods should allow for extended and in-depth engagement with the participants.

In summary, the cliché about "raising more questions than were answered" certainly applies to this symposium. Perhaps it is most accurate to see the conversation as resulting in a better-defined set of frameworks, or tensions (as summarized above), within which to think about the notion of *sense of meaning and purpose*, rather than as a concise definition and a concrete research program. If this is the case, then it may be most useful to think about a strategy of future initiatives (based in research and/or practice) that attempt to elucidate elements of this complex construct, while acknowledging their inevitable shortcoming in their ability to encapsulate its complexity. Such an approach suggests the creation of a consortium of those involved in this work in which multiple new insights come together to develop an ever-growing mosaic of understanding.

REFERENCES

Charme, S., Horowitz, B., Hyman, T., & Kress, J. S. (2008). Jewish identities in action: An exploration of models, metaphors, and methods. *Journal of Jewish Education, 74*, 115–143.

Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*, 276–302.

Rosenak, M. (1987). *Commandments and concerns: Jewish religious education in secular society.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Welcome and Introductions

Alan Cooper · Audrey Lichter

[*beginning of recorded material*]

DR. JEFFREY S. KRESS Welcome everyone to what I am sure will be a very interesting day of discussion and deliberation on a topic that inspires and is of great importance to all of us, and that is the sense of meaning and purpose in Jewish education. To get started, I want to call on a few people to help welcome the group. The first person I'd like to acknowledge is our Provost at the Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS], Dr. Alan Cooper, who will provide a welcome and as is traditional for the beginning of important and significant occasions, also will share a few words of his specialty, which is Torah. Dr. Cooper is a professor of Bible.

DR. ALAN COOPER

I think everyone's specialty is Torah in one way or another. There's not a great distinction. First of all, I'm honored to have been invited to speak with you for a moment. I'd like to welcome you on behalf of JTS. First of all, I bring greetings to you on behalf of both Chancellor Eisen, who would love to be here, and on behalf of my colleagues on the faculty, some of whom are here and may join me in using words of greeting and welcome:B*erukhim haba'im leveit hamidrash larabanim ba'america*, welcome, welcome to the Jewish Theological Seminary. We're so delighted that you're here and wish you a productive day. I also wanted to apologize for my own inability to stay through the entire event, which I would love to do, but I am pressed with other matters as I'm sure you can imagine. I wish I could be free to spend more time with you. Third, I wish you a day that's filled with perception, discernment, and maybe even some action or some thoughts that lead to action.

The reason I frame my wishes for you that way, at those three stages—perception, discernment, and action—is I'm thinking about last week's Torah portion, which describes Abraham's response to the theophany that he experiences in the beginning of the portion, at the beginning of Genesis, Chapter 18. I'm sure you all know the text by heart, so I hardly have to quote it; but you know, these three guys appear, standing at some distance, not very far, apparently, but standing still in the vicinity of Abraham. And what happens is: Abraham looks, he sees them. Then, according to the text, he looks again, and then he runs to greet them. So the commentators, when they take a look at that text, they see a couple of things that are pretty extraordinary—more than a couple—but there are two that I'm going to talk about for three minutes. One is that Abraham looks twice. It's very clear on this. He looks. And there are these three guys standing, and then he looks again and then he runs, so why does it say he looks twice, wouldn't once be enough? And why does he then *run*? Those are the questions.

So Rashi, who comes to discuss these questions, says that the first "looking" is actually just his sense perception, just his looking and seeing with his eyes. This second one is his discernment. So, he has to move from perception to discernment before he acts. And as soon as he discerns what's going on, he immediately *vayarats;* immediately, he runs to greet these individuals. But Rashi treats it as a kind of Alphonse and Gaston routine, where you know what's happening is that Abraham sees these guys standing there, he's waiting for them to come to him. They don't come. He sort of figures out that they decided that it would be a *tirḥa* for him; it would be an imposition on Abraham to entertain them and provide them with hospitality because after all, in a previous chapter, what has he done? He's just circumcised himself, which probably means he's not exactly the most comfortable guy in the world. I mean, I don't remember that experience, myself, [*laughter*] but if you had done it in adulthood, you presumably would remember it vividly. So there's Abraham, sitting there in some discomfort and there are these guys who are standing there, and they don't want to move toward Abraham because it would be an imposition on him. And finally, Abraham realizes that, so he then goes out to greet them.

What Rashi doesn't do is explain well what it is that motivates him the second time he sees to go and *run*, not just to go out and meet them but to *run* and greet them? And the answer to that question comes from the very nice explanation and passage that's in a lovely commentary of the early sixteenth century called the *Toldot Yitsḥak* by Isaac Caro, who is the uncle of the famous Caro and not the famous Caro. This is the Caro who should be famous but isn't. So *Toldot Yitsḥak* says, first of all, that Abraham runs because he discerns that no ordinary individual is standing before him or no ordinary group of individuals, but it's God, and so he runs. He says, even though Abraham was old and weakened on account of his circumcision and naturally should not have had the strength to move at all, much less to run, nevertheless, his discernment of the presence of God before him led him to run to greet that presence. So how did he know that it was God? Well, Yitsḥak Caro has an explanation for that, too. He says that normally when you're sitting there in the desert, if people are approaching you, you're going to see them coming from the distance. But the text says no such thing about Abraham and these three visitors. Rather, Isaac Caro points out, he sees them all of the sudden *as if* they had come out of nowhere. And so he thinks, these are no ordinary guys who are walking across the desert. Just as it wouldn't be an ordinary thing for a guy in his nineties who circumcised himself the day before to go for a jog in the desert during the heat of the day. So having discerned the extraordinary thing that has happened, that these individuals have appeared all of the sudden out of nowhere, he is able to reason his way to the conclusion that he's in the presence of God. And that gives him the strength and the motivation to run. His perception is insufficient. His discernment—which is based, according to Yitsḥak Caro, on his reasoning it out, understanding through a process of reasoning, what's happening before him—enables him to see God in front of him. And despite his age and his infirmity and his weakness, he runs; he takes the most precipitous action he possibly could immediately upon the moment of true discernment. That's what I wish for you today. That you perceive, and discern and then *tarutsu*, run when you've found the solution. Run in the direction of God. Thank you.

KRESS Thank you, Dr. Cooper. And thank you also for charging us to start at that point in Abraham's journey and not at the activity that preceded it. I now want to ask Audrey Lichter to come to the podium and welcome you on behalf of the Happiness Study.

AUDREY LICHTER

Welcome everyone. It's really an honor to see such a distinguished panel [made up of people] who have taken time out of their busy schedules to join us and the distinguished guests we have here. I am one of the founders of the Happiness Study. On behalf of the rest of our leadership team, I'd like to recognize Alan Mendelson and Diane Troderman. I'd like to welcome you to the Jewish Theological Seminary and to today's symposium on measuring a sense of meaning and purpose as a goal and an outcome in Jewish education. If I may, I would like to digress for a moment to the origins of the Happiness Study, which began one cold March morning, 2001, with the keystone question that launched our endeavor. I approached Alan Mendelson, a Hartford community leader and venture capitalist for a gift for our local Jewish day schools. Alan responded quite innocently, "I know Jewish day schools create *Jews*, but do they create *happier people*?" As a result of this question, I introduced Alan to Dr. Richard Davidson, an eminent neuroscientist whose brave research and his work with the Dali Llama and his monks has brought him national attention and recognition. Alan asked if we could design a study that could test the happiness in Jewish day-schooled students in a scientifically valid way, and have Dr. Davidson advise us. Yes, it was possible. And so began our Happiness Study.

The study attempts to prove a hypothesis that Jewish transformative experiences such as [those in] day schools and Jewish overnight camps not only produce more observant and passionate Jews, but that they also contribute to four essential quality of life indicators that we call happiness. These are (1) connectedness to family, peers, and community; (2) successful intelligence, including critical and analytical creative problem-solving skills; (3) social-emotional competence; and (4) sense of meaning and purpose.

For example, the emotional competence of delaying gratification has been documented in the famous "marshmallow" study[1] to increase one's ability to learn, as measured

[1] Described in Y. Shoda, W. Mischel, and P. K. Peake, "Predicting Adolescent Cognitive and Self-Regulatory Competencies from Preschool Delay of Gratification: Identifying Diagnostic Conditions," *Developmental Psychology* 26 (1990): 978–986.

on SAT exams. We, in the Jewish world, might teach and practice *kashrut*, the traditional separation of milk and meat. The children [who] learn that they cannot have the ice cream that they want so much because they just had hamburgers a couple of hours ago, are not only practicing *kashrut* but also are learning to delay gratification. If we can link the best of secular science to our own spiritual traditions and ancient traditions, we can change the landscape of the conversation that we have with parents and donors as to the significance of supporting these kinds of experiences. Peer-reviewed research has documented that these four factors are valuable in childhood and increase one's quality of life or happiness as an adult. Our ultimate hope is that we can explore our hypothesis that institutions that provide this transformative experience can ultimately attract greater numbers of Jewish students and participants and will raise significantly more funds.

In the last four years, we have made great progress toward our goal. Dr. Michael Ben-Avie from the Yale Child Study Center and Dr. Jeff Kress, Assistant Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary became our principal investigators. Diane Troderman joined Alan Mendelson and myself as part of our leadership team. Tony Frank became our administrator. We gratefully received $100,000 of seed funding from the Steinhardt Foundation and early funding from Targum Shlishi Foundation. We'd like to acknowledge the hard work of both Michael and Jeff over the years. They created and administrated a series of surveys to both day schools and summer camps that primarily focus on social [and] emotional competencies and connectedness to community. We have already administered these surveys to three day schools and two Ramah camps. We are working with Dr. Robert Sternberg's PACE Center to identify appropriate measurements for successful intelligence, and we will pilot these in schools in the next few months. Today's symposium hopefully will launch us on our way to determining a path to how we can measure a sense of meaning and purpose.

We encourage you, if you are interested, to participate in future endeavors in our study. You may read our materials, which are in your packet that we have provided, and you may access more information on our website. Please feel free to speak to any of the members of our team today or to contact us after the symposium. We would like to thank Dr. Jeff Kress and Tony Frank for the terrific job they did in organizing today's event—and Jeff for moderating the Jewish scholar's component. On behalf of everyone, we would like to thank the Jewish Theological Seminary for agreeing to host this groundbreaking symposium and for making such wonderful facilities available to us. Finally, I would like to offer a special thank you to Dr. Richard Davidson for his ongoing feedback and for helping to plan and structure today's symposium and [for serving as] principal moderator. As I mentioned, Dr. Davidson is a world-renown scientist, and Richie, as I know him, is a wonderful brother-in-law. So at this point, I would like to introduce Jeff Kress once again. Thank you all.

KRESS Thank you all. I want to reiterate Audrey's thank-you and acknowledgment of everyone who came here to be a participant in this discussion and observer. All of you are passionate about this topic, and all of you have given of your time; some of you have traveled long distances, and we all appreciate that. I want to thank Audrey for her leadership in this project along with Alan Mendelson; and Diane Troderman, who has been an advocate for us and an advisor from the beginning as well. And [a] special thank you to Tony; and to Stacy Trencher, who is not here, but some of you have been in touch with her and who helped enormously with the logistics. Before I get to the format, I want to introduce the panelists. Introducing the panelists could take the next two hours because of the wonderful accomplishments and resumes of these folks. You have a snippet of these in your packet. These were taken from bios that are posted that were pages long, so rather than introduce them, I'm going to ask each one in turn to speak to the audience and give a highlight sentence or two, just to identify oneself, knowing that people will learn more about each of you over the course of the day. I am Jeff Kress, I am on the faculty of Jewish education and Chair of the Department of Jewish Education at JTS and again, welcome to everyone who's here.

DR. MAURICE ELIAS I'm Maurice Elias. I'm on the faculty in psychology at Rutgers University and also affiliate faculty in Jewish Studies at Rutgers. My main work is in social-emotional learning and development of social competence in children, focusing on schools.

DR. TODD KASHDAN Hi, I'm Todd Kashdan. I'm an associate professor in the psychology department at George Mason University. I study the yin and yang of psychology. So, I study the dark side; I study anxiety and mood disorders. And, I study the light side; I study meaning in life, purpose, positive

emotion. Most of my work is based on curiosity and exploratory behavior across the life span.

RABBI RACHEL COWAN I'm Rachel Cowan. I direct the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. We're spending a lot of time thinking about issues of spirituality and about cultivating qualities that help people be really present in their lives, awake in their lives, in the whole Jewish framework. So I'm really looking forward to this, to seeing what we all teach each other and learn with each other.

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON I'm Richie Davidson. I'm Audrey's brother-in-law. Audrey has been a very, very dear member of the family and an inspiration, and I want to just start by acknowledging Audrey's wonderful passion and dedication to this effort [and] these issues; it really is inspiring—not just to the family, but she is influencing many people around her in wonderful ways, which is why I'm here. I have a large laboratory that I direct. I'm a neuroscientist, I study the brain. Why am I interested in all this? Well, I'm particularly interested in positive human functioning, ways in which we can cultivate virtuous qualities like compassion and kindness and clarity. I've been working over the last fifteen years with the Dalai Lama very, very closely. Part of the effort in my laboratory has involved a very unusual project where we've had individuals who have dedicated years of their life to training their mind. Tibetan Buddhist monks are long-time practitioners, and we have tested changes that they can produce in their brain through long-term contemplative practice. I am interested in the broader reaches of that. One of the things that the Dalai Lama is telling us all the time is that it's important to involve other spiritual and religious traditions. And, in fact, I am organizing a meeting with the Dalai Lama that will be held in India with representatives of all of the world's major religions to discuss the relations between contemplative practice and science. And so that's something that I am very deeply interested in and involved with, and so I hope to share some of that perspective as we go along today.

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER My name is Larry Kushner. I'm kind of like a writer-in-residence, and my official title is the Emanu-El Scholar at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. I think I have the best rabbinic gig in the country, all I do is teach. And write books. I just had a novel published, *Kabbalah: A Love Story,* available at Barnes and Nobel now. [*laughter*] I am honored and delighted to be here.

DR. ROBERT ROESER Good morning. My name is Robert Roeser. I'm a developmental and educational psychologist, and I work at Tufts University. My research interests are around schools as a basic context of human development. Also, I'm working on a large project on spirituality and its relation to positive qualities of development, such as generosity, well being, and contribution to others. And, like Richie, I have become interested over the last few years in thinking about how certain contemplative practices can be used with young people in secular settings to promote human flourishing. I'm also very grateful to be here.

RABBI IRVING GREENBERG I'm Yitz Greenberg and after a long and checkered career, I'm currently writing full time, and the book I've been working on makes the argument that Judaism as a religion is about increasing the quality and quantity of life in this world.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN Hi, I'm Neil Gillman. I have been teaching theology and philosophy here for about forty years. I like to say that I am about three-quarters retired. I still do a little bit of teaching. I got into philosophy from my undergraduate work at McGill and have been particularly interested in epistemology and the whole issue of how do we know anything, let alone how do we know anything about God, which is even more problematic. I am hopefully doing more writing. I have become interested in the whole mind-body issue. And I now read more and more in neuroscience than in anything else and if I had my life to live over again, I would be a neuroscientist major and not a philosophy major, and maybe then I could solve problems of how do we know anything about God much better than I can as a philosopher. My major work is in teaching and writing on theological issues. I am very happy to be here. Thank you, Jeff.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS My name is Yakov Travis, and I am also really honored and happy to be here. In a nutshell, I suppose the reason I'm here is because in 2002, I started the first-ever master's program in Jewish spirituality, which lasted two years, graduating six people. [Then] . . . I . . . started the Tiferet Institute, which is only a year old now. Its purpose is [to promote] excellence in the study of Jewish spirituality. The institute basically tries to create an environment, which I wish [had] existed when I was in yeshiva or while [I was] working on my PhD, where spirituality is taken seriously not *just* on an intellectual level but *also* on a spiritual level. We teach courses

through web conferencing—very cutting-edge stuff. We have students from all over the world: Jews, non-Jews, rabbis, rabbinical students, educators. They want to understand God from a deeper perspective, and we all meet online. Now we are trying to create a center where people can come, like a *beit midrash*, not exactly an ashram, but where the study is serious, and the spiritual experience is really honored and explored in an experimental way.

RABBI NANCY FLAM I'm Nancy Flam, and I work with Rachel at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. I'm Co-Director of Programs, directing both our program for educators and our program for rabbis. We are training our fourth group of about forty rabbis over an eighteen-month period in a contemplative, retreat-based format, so they can cultivate their own spirituality and then from that place, lead and teach their various congregations. And I also direct our program for educators. We ran a similar eighteen-month program for educators of Jewish youth. In that program, we integrated both great practices of social-emotional learning and contemplative practice for the teachers and experimented with how the teachers might then integrate such work with their charges. I work . . . in contemplative practice, through meditation, contemplative prayer, contemplative study, and movement-based, body-based presence and contemplation.

KRESS Thank you all. Now, why are we sitting in this strange format where some people's backs are toward other people? Good question. The format for today, and our real goal for today, is for the folks around this table to have a discussion amongst themselves, where we get a chance to first listen and then participate. My job is timekeeper and traffic cop at the beginning, then [I'll] hand the baton over to Richie in the afternoon to do the same. We're going to have shifts of three speakers in the morning, each of whom will have no more than ten minutes [to talk]. I asked them to keep the time [of their presentations to] between five and ten minutes after which the lights will dim, the orchestra will play, and they'll have to stop. I'll flash a time card at five minutes and then if I have to flash the eight-minute time card, you'll know it's time to start wrapping up. After each shift, the panel will have a chance to talk amongst themselves for some time. So I feel like the teacher who says, "If you go over, it comes out of your recess time." So if we go over, it comes out of the group discussion time. We'll do one shift, we'll take a quick break, we'll do another shift that will probably lead into lunch, and then we'll continue in the afternoon. In the afternoon, after another break, we'll have a chance for Q and A. How will we do this in an orderly way? You have in your packets—and there are others around—little cards on which you can take some notes. You can write down questions and give those to a member of the team. If you don't have a little card, or if you want to write a really long question, you can use a pad of paper. If you need a second pad to write your question, then I don't want to hear your question. [*laughter*]

So, why are we here? We're here, as Audrey mentioned, because our team was anxious for some input around this construct—sense of meaning and purpose. What is it? What are we talking about? And, important to our research study, how do we assess and measure it in creative and meaningful ways? This is a conversation around these issues. We have people who've thought about the definitions and people who have thought about the measurement. And we hope to walk away today with some sense of direction and more questions than we can pursue. This is the beginning of a dialogue with people who are at this table, with people who are in this room, and with people who are not at the table or in the room for whatever reason, but we hope to be able to reach out to. That's our narrow purpose. More broadly, we see our discussion today to be part of an important ongoing conversation about the place of these kinds of outcomes in Jewish education. We hope that this is not the end of this dialogue, but the beginning. I'm going to introduce our first panel of three: Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Rabbi Nancy Flam, and Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, in that order. They'll each have five to ten minutes to share their thoughts.

Jewish Thinkers and Educators

PRESENTATIONS 1

Irving Greenberg · Nancy Flam · Lawrence Kushner

RABBI IRVING GREENBERG

I start with a comment on happiness. Happiness is being invited to opine on a subject about which you are ignorant and pull it off like you have some authority. [*laughter*] I decided after reading the material, that rather than entering the argument ". . . is meaning or sense of meaning different than purpose," or distinguishing spirituality, religion, and purpose, I would like to take a somewhat different tack. In particular, I point to the opening section of Megan Kash's summary[2] of the literature with its essential finding that when people have a sense of purpose and meaning, it correlates positively with psychological well-being but negatively with (that is to say, it removes or reduces) tendencies toward substance abuse, drugs, alcoholism, and depression. Assuming that is true, the obvious implication is that if you have a sense of purpose and meaning, you will live a longer and healthier life. That's a gross simplification, but that is, in essence, the implication of the literature. In this case, the sense of purpose and meaning was defined as having *three* important elements: a sense of mission and purpose in life, a future-oriented attitude, and a feeling that the mission and attitude are not dependent upon public judgment or convention or on external recognition but are internalized and rooted in self.

I offer an alternative tack and propose reversing the direction of that analysis as follows: As a religion, Judaism's central goal is to increase life and upgrade the quality of life. It seeks to enable people to live a more extended and a healthier life. I submit that enabling increased life is the mission and sense of purpose that we're supposed to derive from Judaism. Let me summarize the point. The existence of God is the teaching that most observers point to as Judaism's most influential contribution to world civilization. I argue that even more influential is the Jewish teaching that it is God's will and purpose that the whole universe is in movement toward life and perfection. In the universe, there is a conflict between life and death in which life eventually will win out. The central story of Judaism, I believe, is Creation, a story that is told in Scriptures and repeated in the Sacred calendar and told again in the ritual structures. The Creation story tells that the universe is moving toward order, dynamic order. That dynamic order sustains life. Therefore, even though we encounter death as a universal force, the presence of life actually is increasing in the world. Furthermore, not just the quantity of life but the quality of life is growing. Over the eons, human life has emerged. This highest form of life, the human being, reflects an enormous growth in capability and quality of life. In fact, life is becoming more and more God-like. In the Torah, human beings are described as in the image of God.

As a religion, Judaism's central goal is to increase life and upgrade the quality of life. . . . Enabling increased life is the mission and sense of purpose that we're supposed to derive from Judaism.

The second point the religion makes is that God loves life. That is the central theme of the Creation story. God blesses life, and God wants more of it (see Gen. 1:12, 20, 22, 24, 25, 28). Thirdly, the religion claims that God promises that we will get to a perfect world. What is the definition of a perfect world?

[2] Appendix B, henceforth referred to as "the springboard paper."

One that is full of life. In particular, it is full of life in the highest form: the image of God. In this future perfect state, life will be sustained in all its intrinsic value and dignity, and it will be developed in all its capacities. Thus in the Messianic age, which is the climax of the Jewish religion, life will win out. At that point, humans, with God's help, will have overcome all the obstacles to life such as economic deprivation and political poverty, hunger, oppression, war, killing, sickness. Humans will also overcome alienation and isolation. These emotions are the outcome when the connection of people to God, to other people, and to a sense of purpose is lost; and separation and disconnectedness win out. Judaism teaches that to get to this final perfection, humans must join in the upgrading process. I call the process *tikkun olam*, although I recognize that in contemporary language, *tikkun olam* has a kind of political, or fashionably left, overtone. I don't mean that partisan usage but rather *tikkun* in a much boarder sense. Everything that builds up the capacity of the world to sustain life, either quantitatively or qualitatively, is *tikkun*. Humans must join in the *tikkun olam* process because they, with God, will build the infrastructure sustaining life; they, with God, will create this society of justice and equality; they're the ones who must participate in creating the communal/spiritual ground that nurtures this whole process. Equally important: as a result of that partnership and participation, they themselves will come out with a sense of dignity, and their capacities will be developed. This would not be the case if they were simply granted, that is, were recipients of, such a state of perfection.

Tikkun is an assignment that every human has. The Jewish role is to simply be an avant-garde or to teach or to [be a] role model.

This partnership committing humans to perfect the world, otherwise known as "covenant," evokes a response in God. That is to say, God also participates in this process. The most powerful participation is the Divine relationship to humans. Humans who connect to God feel an intrinsic value, an intrinsic self-worth that cannot be refuted or repealed by societal judgments, not even by bad economic or political conditions. Society can assault the individual self and sometimes even break it. But, if I have a deep enough relationship to God—then even being put in jail or slavery or whatever, even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death—I will not be afraid or degraded because God is with me.

Similarly, in personal life, Jewish religion teaches that a person should guide every act to maximize life over death. Therefore, every action done in this spirit—from eating food, to speaking to others, to sexual activity, to establishing relationships honestly—all end up confirming and enriching life. All such life actions come out of the relationships to God and humans, and they confirm these relationships. Then they lead to better life. Done collectively by enough people, they will lead the world in the same direction—toward life. My conclusion is that creating or upgrading life in its dignity, as well as making and upgrading the world to sustain this quality and quantity of life, is the *mission*, if you will, is the purpose of every human being's life. I mean every human being. *Tikkun* is an assignment that every human has. The Jewish role is to simply be an avant-garde or to teach or to [be a] role model.

Now, some applications: First, if an action leads to a longer life, a higher quality of life, then the attitude, value, or behavior is defined as a *mitzvah*, as a positive, as a *tikkun olam* act. That is the real definition of holy acts. Second, since faith, trust, and a sense of mission lead to a higher quality of life, they are in fact intrinsic, crucial elements of the religion. Therefore, they deserve to be and should be taught by day schools without apology. It's a central aspect of raising children or educating through religion. No day school would hesitate to teach Shabbat or *kashrut*; this development of life is no less important. Teaching purpose is not only a crucial element of education, it's a test of whether the school is actually achieving its goals. And, therefore, I posit that day schools should do better in communicating this mission. And, yes, theoretically, success teaching life affirmation as mission can be measured.

One last comment. The crisis in our sense of purpose is that classically, sense of mission, purpose, grew from the fact that everything was given. Status was a given; gender was a given; every person was born into his/her life situation. The sense of meaning and purpose grew out of that givenness. I was born a Jew, that was given. I was at Sinai; it's never going to change, and I know exactly how a Jew should act and I can apply that to every aspect of life. The sense of purpose had the power of being self-evident, the power of being seen as essential, that is, the very essence of the person. The crisis of our time is that

mobility—whether economic, political, or geographic—as well as the explosion of communication and exposure to every other alternative value system have undermined all givenness. Hence, for many people there is no sense of purpose—all options seem plausible. I believe that at this time, it is education rooted in religion that has the capacity to speak forcefully about purpose. As the culture opened up, even the people who in the past told you what your mission was have lost the inner confidence to say it. I contend that day schools uniquely have the capacity now to affirm that election, that mission, that purpose of building life and to offer a description of what is the purpose or mission for everybody. It's appropriate that in an age of voluntary covenant that the mission be offered not simply because tradition says so, or because God says so. Rather the religion-based school must have the courage to articulate the goal and create a community to nurture these behaviors. Day school education has to have the confidence to teach strong values that can be understood pluralistically, that is, justified not by "that's the way it's always been, that's the way it must be," but pluralistically. This is a choice put before you. This is what religion in education is all about.

We need educators who can recognize soul.

DR. JEFFREY S. KRESS Thank you. Before I recognize our next speaker, I just want to mention the questions that I asked the group to think about for today: What we mean by meaning of purpose: are these two separate concepts or one? Where are they located in the constellation of Jewish ideas? How do they play out in the different segments of the Jewish community? How [do] they relate to concepts such as spirituality? And what are the developmental considerations in terms of how these are expressed and assessed? And what is the methodology, and will we know it when we see it? [S]o you should just know what frames the conversation. So, Rabbi Flam—

RABBI NANCY FLAM

My comments are really about the first set of questions, not the last three you mentioned, Jeff, and I hope they will be useful. For me, sense of purpose really maps to what I believe is theologian Carter Heyward's expression, "where your own greatest passion meets the world's greatest need." Where your own greatest passion meets the world's greatest need. Or, Frankel's "motivation" that causes people to seek their own specific vocation or mission in life. Or, Seligman's application[3] of one's signature strength in service of something larger than the self. Purpose, then, becomes a way for something very particular, in a very particular human being, to be expressed and given to the world. And this depends very much on knowing oneself, that there's a certain amount of self-knowledge one has to have—an inner sense of who I am—where is my passion, where is my strength? And then finding a way to bring that to the world. For a child, that means being in the presence of adults who can recognize the soul of that child. It means that that child needs to be ideally in a home and in a school where the particularity of that child's soul and passion, that child's way of working, is recognized, mirrored, affirmed, and nurtured.

So I do think that these are the kinds of educators we need. We need educators who can recognize soul, if you will, to use that terminology. It's like the Zusya story many of you are familiar with. Reb Zusya was afraid that when he would go to the next world, God would ask him why he wasn't more like Moses. And so he worked very, very hard to be just like Moses. When he met God, God said, "Why weren't you more like Reb Zusya?" We need teachers who can help our children be more like Max or Sarah or whoever, so they can actually express their particularity. So *purpose* to my mind is something very particular. I believe we have many different Jewish concepts and language for understanding particularity and its importance. Among them, the idea from midrash that every Jew has a particular letter in the Torah; that there's a particular take, a particular meaning, some spark of Torah that is going to call to you and that you need to interpret, that you need to actually bring your soul to release its truth. Or, similarly that every Jew has a particular mitzvah that calls him or her: it might be to heal the sick or to pursue justice or to feed the hungry. But something different is going to catch each particular soul, and that may change over time. I know for me, for many years, it was visiting the sick. Or from the kabbalistic tradition, that each human soul comes from a soul root. And that root feeds and flowers all sorts of different souls in the universe—souls of people, souls of animals, souls of plants, souls of minerals. And that when a person has

[3] As noted in the background paper in Appendix B.

an affinity toward another person, an activity, or even a food, the reason is that the person is needing to release the divine energy, the soul spark, of that material or that person; and the souls that the soul is also connected to, share soul roots. It's a real sense of particularity. And we could look at many other ways of thinking about that from the Jewish perspective. One of the greatest examples that I've found in my own experience in Jewish education for the training of the expectation of purpose comes from a teaching of Danny Siegel who, when he taught about how kids should try to determine their bar and bat mitzvah project (which has become a trope now in American Jewish education), they should try to identify first what they love, then what they're good at, and then how they can bring what they love and what they're good at to meet a real need of the world. So my daughter, for instance, who loved beading at age twelve decided she would make all sorts of jewelry. And my husband set up a website, and we told all our friends; and she sold all this great jewelry and collected the money, which she then contributed to the Dysautonomia Foundation, which works on behalf of research and support for a disease from which her beloved uncle had died. That became a way of taking her gifts and passions and skills and with purpose, bringing it to the world.

Just a few thoughts about meaning: I do distinguish meaning from purpose. Meaning to me is precisely *not* about the personal or the particular but about something cosmic, existential, [and] vast, where the self is not so much at the center. It is about connecting with something larger than the self. Within a context of Jewish education for youth such as a day school, camp, or Israel experience, I think meaning gets made mostly *affectively* by feeling connected to something bigger—the "biggerness" of Jewish history, the literature and values, [and] the struggles and triumphs of the Jewish people. I think that is made for the most part affectively, not cognitively. But I do think for many Jewish kids, especially as they reach high school, the capacity, the cognitive capacity for making meaning grows and is a huge need that is sometimes served well, sometimes not. What interests me about meaning-making in Jewish education is whether we're talking about the *formation* of meaning or the *cultivation of the discovery* of meaning. Because the formation of meaning is like religious formation—a lot of our education is about forming categories of thinking so that our experience can be explained to ourselves in that way, categories of meaning—we have many ways of making meaning. You [Greenberg] spoke of some of them. We could say good Jewish language [is] about [the idea that] the meaning of life is to be holy, or to do God's will, or to uphold a covenant, or to be a light to the nations, or to repair the world. We could go on and on. There's much language, and you're advocating not stepping away from teaching that language; I call that meaning formation. But what about creating contexts where we invite and allow children to open up into the vastness of their own ruminations, inviting the questions themselves? So Rachael Kessler, who is a really wonderful educator, specifically in social–emotional learning, does a whole wonderful unit on "mystery questions." And this is in secular schools, inviting soul into the classroom, where students are asked to write their mystery questions about whatever subject or topic is happening, and they are profound ruminations. Just creating a context where the questions are asked and valued and that is communicated by a teacher asking students to ask the questions opens up a possibility for the discovery of meaning. So one of the things that may be very interesting in your research as you go about designing it and looking at schools and other contexts is—are we looking at meaning-*formation* or the facilitation of meaning-*discovery*? Robert Coles speaks in *The Spiritual Life of Children* of the intense, penetrating rumination of children, which often is missed and is at the core of meaning-making.

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER

Thirty-five years ago I was leading a pre- bar and bat mitzvah retreat for parents and their kids. It was *Shabbos* afternoon and I was tired, and I fell back on an old pedagogic trick, which is, I just ask a question to which I really don't know the answer and see what happens. And I thought I had such a question. I said to the kids, "How many of you believe in God?" You know, I figured I'd get a good argument going; some would say yes, some would say no. True story. But to my dismay, not one kid raised his or her hand. Sometimes kids say no *lehakhis* (to be provocative). It was not like that; it was "No, we really don't believe in God." There were only about twelve or thirteen kids, and they were typical suburban kids. I mean they weren't Hasidim, they weren't *mamzerim*, they were just little *beinonim* (average) kids. I remember thinking, "So it's come to this: three thousand years of Jewish piety and struggle for a bunch of obnoxious little suburban kids who

don't really believe in God." I did the pedagogic equivalent of dropping back several yards to punt, and we talked about something else, I don't remember what it was. But I remember, a few minutes later, another question comes into my head, and I say to the kids, "How many of you kids have been close to God?" And so help me God, every kid raised his or her hand. Now I was curious, "Tell me when," and they ticked off what I would call the Jewish experiences of proximity to the divine. One kid said last night when we lit *Shabbos* candles, and my mama gets that funny look in her eyes. Another said: Last week my father wanted me to help him, I didn't want to help him, but I helped him anyway. Another one said: Last year when *zayde* died. They knew what it meant to be close to God, and that has stayed with me and been a formative story in my own professional life as a teacher ever since.

I don't think you can ask, especially Jewish kids, if they believe in God. If you ask a Jew that question, they'll treat it like a question from the House Un-American Activities Committee and ask if they can speak to their attorney. But if you ask Jews if they've been close, even Jews who stubbornly claim they are atheists will give you an answer. That's my first point: that when we want to talk about this general topic of spirituality and meaning, we need to pay closer attention to times of proximity to the divine, and we need to create environments in which people—and this is a biggie—can talk about that in a safe, non-judgmental context. "Well I was close to . . . Well tell us about that." And, more importantly, can we somehow persuade teachers to do that, which at least in my experience, is very, very difficult.

Item two: I think spirituality in America today and in the Jewish community has become a code word for *really* religious as opposed to *going-through-the motions* religious. And that's why people, I think, are so fascinated by the topic because we like to talk about what it means to be really religious. You could call it our response to the divine presence in all of being. I am reminded of William James's great list of four items that characterize the mystical experience, but I think that would also apply to characterize the experience of closeness to the divine. One, we are passive; we can't have it, it has us. Two, it is transient; it comes and goes whenever it wants. Three, its noetic; when it's over we know something. Four, it is ineffable; we can't put it into words.

Item three: We cannot set spirituality as our goal. I was invited to speak at a congregation. They said we'd like you to come and give us spirituality. I said, "I would if I could, but I don't think it's possible." I believe that it is the pixie-dust-divine-grace outcome of trying to live a holy and serious religious live. Sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't. It is to religious behavior like love is to marriage: You've gotta be married. You've gotta be a good spouse. Sometimes you get love. Sometimes you don't. Finally, one last, quick story. My oldest granddaughter is in kindergarten, and they have a pet snake whose name is Naḥashi. Naḥashi lost her skin, and the teacher decided to pin it on the wall so that the children can come up and look at Naḥashi's shed skin. But when they came in the next morning, apparently ants had found Naḥashi's skin and were crawling all over the skin. The teacher, in what I regard as an extraordinary demonstration of spiritual and human evolution, without batting an eyelash, says, "Huh. Let's see what else the ants might want to eat." Instead of being horrified, the teacher demonstrated at least four things: living curiosity, openness to novelty, wonderment, and flexibility. It seems to me that we cannot set spirituality as our goal, but what we *can* do is try to expose children to as many spiritually evolved, human models as we can find and hope that the spark will jump the gap. What did you do today? I went to study with my *rebbe*. Oh, you study Talmud? No. Oh, you study Torah? No. Oh you study Midrash? No? Then what did you do? I watched him tying his shoe. In other words, the living presence of the teacher is all that we can hope to give kids in spiritual education. We scour the earth, and we turn our pockets inside out to find [all] the spiritually evolved men and women we can, and we let them loose, and we bite our fingernails or bite a stick between our teeth because we know that by definition they will not say officially correct things or do officially correct things. That is the nature of the spirituality. Thank you.

We cannot set spirituality as our goal, but what we can do is try to expose children to as many spiritually evolved, human models as we can find and hope that the spark will jump the gap.

DISCUSSION INTERLUDE 1

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON Capitalizing on the recency effect in asking a question: You [Lawrence Kushner] seem to imply that these qualities are somewhat transient and ephemeral; they come and go. Your example of love and marriage. To me, it's kind of a pessimistic view. Why can't they be present more continuously? I come as both a Jew, as well as someone who has been studying Buddhist contemplative practices; and in *that* tradition, there is an expectation that these kinds of qualities can permanently infuse the mind, if you will. They can eradicate our destructive propensities and transform the mind in ways that are enduring. And what you imply is something to me that is not enduring; it's more transient.

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER I don't think you can hang on to it. I really think they come and go. It's like that wonderful line that Dustin Hoffman gives in *Little Big Man* where he is watching an old, revered Indian holy man about to die, and he goes through the whole ritual[of] "forgive me and I forgive the universe." Dustin Hoffman is watching him, and then all of the sudden he realizes he's not dead. And he sees Dustin Hoffman hiding in the bushes, and he says, "Am I dead?" And Dustin says, "No, you're still alive," and the old man says, "Well, sometimes the magic works. Sometimes it doesn't. Let's go have lunch." [*laughter*] My experience is that, having devoted big chunks of my own personal life to trying to hang on to this stuff , you can't hang on to it. You just keep doing what the right thing is, and sometimes you get it; and sometimes the magic works, and sometimes it doesn't. And I'm suspicious of anybody who claims to have it or to have a sure-fire way of guaranteeing that you can get it.

DAVIDSON Now, to just briefly respond. I honor your suspicion, and I, too, am suspicious. I think suspicion is a very healthy thing in this regard, but also I'm reminded of a *New Yorker* article that was written a number of years ago, and it profiled the lives of three people. One was Yo-Yo Ma, the cellist; another was Wayne Gretzky, the hockey player; and the third was Ed Wilson, who is a very well-known neurosurgeon in San Francisco. And it asks what these three people have in common—they're all the best in the world at what they do. What they had in common is practice, practice, practice. To me, that is an essential element of this. If you want to transform the mind, it requires practice. And everything we know from neuroscience teaches us that.

RABBI NANCY FLAM I think in Judaism there is a profound and recurrent teaching about the possibility of falling away and then returning [through spiritual practice], like hearing the word on Sinai, then coming back and making a golden calf; it was a forgetting of this transformative moment. It happened pretty quickly. And then a re-remembering, so it's a coming back to the truth that one has seen and known and practicing again. So I think in Judaism, there is very much an acknowledgment of the inevitability, in a sense, of falling away. And that's where this concept of *teshuvah*, coming back, certainly in the mystic tradition in terms of coming back to the object of meditation; there's going to be a falling off. And so, it's a return, and every moment of return is a moment of waking up. In the same way, we also have concepts, more from the mystical tradition of *ratsoh veshov*, that there is a back and forth of the divine energy and of our consciousness and capacity. Also, there is a pair of concepts about consciousness, of *godlut vekatnut*—an expanded consciousness and a more constricted consciousness. So I think it's the yin and yang, you know; it's really understanding that the human being has all these capacities. At the same time, there are paths in Judaism of training the mind. It's not "I'm going to forget, so what?" We are very behavioristic in some sense, coming back again and again to a particular mitzvah or in *musar* training, which is a mind training, to have one's first response be more the ideal response in any human interaction, to train the mind more toward generosity. We do have that as well. So I think we have both the training and the sense of ineluctability of the falling.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS A few quick points to you, Larry. First, maybe it's not all or nothing in recapturing the experience. I lean toward what Richie is saying. I'm asking about this: it seems that Judaism, from the Torah onward, is trying

to give us ways to recapture Sinai, some kind of deep experience. Perhaps it's just that these ways have become ineffective. When I teach the part of the Torah when Moses goes to Mount Sinai, Chapter 24 [in] Exodus, he experiences the *kavod;* he goes into a cloud, and he experiences the Glory. Then he comes down; Exodus 25 to 40 is all about building the *mishkan* with all of these details about a place where the *kavod,* the divine presence, can live. But Moses still can't enter into it. So even from the Torah, there's this idea that we need to build systems to have that living presence continue on a daily level. And the siddur, I think, [has] become ineffective. Later commentators like the Tanya say the whole prayer service leading up to the *shema*, ending *haboḥer be'amo yisra'el be'ahavah*, that this was designed for an awakening of our feeling that God loves us, to bring us to a place where we love God. These are like technologies, but they don't seem to work. I'm wondering, first of all, that maybe if we found the right technology—and I think that's what Richie is trying to do—we can more effectively recapture those feelings. That's one point.

Another quick point is that I'm so thankful you brought up the issue of the living presence of teachers. And I think at some point it would be interesting to go around and ask if are there examples in our lives of people who have given us a vision. I know, in your work, Richie, how much the Dali Lama and his presence is important. I just started studying yoga and where I go, it's a pretty serious place; the presence of the guru is all-important. And I think in Jewish life we've lost that. I've been in communities where teachers have this deep, visceral spiritual connection, but I don't think that's largely what we're trying to put in day schools. I wonder if we can explore that further in our research.

KUSHNER Anybody who says, "If you do these things, you will definitely have a spiritual experience" is a quack. It *cannot* be guaranteed. You could see religious life as a series of behavior patterns to act as if you're going to fake it. And if you fake it, then the chances are when it comes down, you'll be able to receive it and recognize it, yes.

TRAVIS Maybe there's spiritual experience, and there's spiritual experience—but if somebody says "Okay, Larry, close your eyes and I going to take you on a guided visualization for the next ten minutes . . ."

KUSHNER Sometimes the magic works. Sometimes it doesn't.

TRAVIS But it's more likely to work [with certain spiritual experiences] than if you're just watching television.

RABBI YITZ GREENBERG All that you can do is raise the percentages—you can raise the percentages in your favor. [*simultaneous conversation*]

TRAVIS I am not saying it's guaranteed, but there are techniques to awaken . . .

KUSHNER No, for some people they work and [for] some people they don't.

GREENBERG Well, but, you and I know some things are more likely. All you're saying is that you can raise the probabilities.

KUSHNER Absolutely. If you take a course in art appreciation, I think your chances of seeing more beautiful things are greater. But it's still not guaranteed.

TRAVIS That is an important word—guarantee. Maybe there are no guarantees.

DAVIDSON [One] [p]art of the issues that were just touched on that I think is very important in the education context is that different practices, different techniques or technologies, as you used the words, may be more effective for certain kinds of people than for other people. I don't think that we really know, either in the Eastern religious context with which at least I'm familiar or in a scientific context, how do you really think about pairing individuals to match their particular cognitive, emotional, and spiritual style, if you will, with the kind of practices that may be most likely to promote the kind of experiences that we describe?

GREENBERG The point, I think that I have to distinguish [is] between the moments you're on, that you're really on the same wave lengths, and the moments you try; in other words, no one can live [at the] peak all your life, it's just impossible. At some point you don't have the capacity to have another orgasm, your body cannot handle that. In Jewish history, too, Sinai is a great moment. You have to realistically allow for the fact that you can live off the memory, and that's why you constantly retell it. But in fact, the experience of being there

comes once in a while, and after all the efforts, there are no guarantees. It's the difference between *keva* and *kavanah*: when you pray, you're praying for those few moments when you're really feeling God's connection, when you're feeling that your heart is pouring out. But 90 percent or 98 percent of the time, that's not the way it goes. Now, the strength of the insistence on experience is integrity, the fact is that it does really have this power. The weakness is if you insist *only* on that; you stop or you write it off or you walk away from it, then it doesn't happen. So, the other way is *keva*: you set up a practice, you set up a routine, you set up an emphasis. That's great. The weakness in that is sometimes it becomes so detached from the experience you're seeking that it becomes an obstacle. That's what Yakov was referring to. The yeshiva that I went to, too, they were so busy getting across the rituals and the details; they really had forgotten what was the experience they were trying to bring out and it became an obstacle. The more you knew and the more details you had, the less likely you would be open to the experience. So each way, wherever you go, there's a strength and a potential weakness in the system, which doesn't change the basic truth. And I think you can raise the odds or you can create a sensitive or more receptive environment. You could get all the right teachers; you can listen to the kid more. All of those raise your odds. But in the end, I have never seen, all of us have never seen a moment where that was a guarantee, or even where there is a high yield. The yield is low; you have to accept that if you can get one out of ten or two out of five, whatever, you're doing great. You have to accept that.

DR. TODD KASHDAN I completely agree with Rabbi Kushner about the probabilistic nature of certain spiritual moments and at the same time, everything you just brought up about the idea of discipline or practice. If I can add another dimension that I think is missing, it's the temporal dimension. And that is, in a moment, the randomness is even greater—the probability of having a spiritual moment regardless of what initiates it, what context is set up, what framework, what mindset you're in. I'm going to use an analogy to mindfulness, people who are practiced in that discipline and are working toward being mindful. Our default is being mindless. That's similar to the description by Rabbi Greenberg. If you're overly trained, which is [the result of] what coaches always do—[have you] learn [until] it becomes second nature—then you don't actually know the behavior. You're not committing to the context. When you're playing baseball as the short stop, if you focus on the exact conditions of that moment, you might recognize that the grass on a particular field may influence the route of the ball in a particular way. If you're doing things as if they're second nature, you're not being mindful to these novel distinctions. But we ebb and flow out of mindful states. And I think people would ebb and flow out of a spiritual state, and how I view a purpose is as an architectural framework that describes the totality of the person. So you can live a spiritual life with or without a purpose as an architectural framework for that. How does that architectural framework develop? It's the idea of trial and error, of practicing disciplined acts and eventually developing this framework—a stabilizing force that helps us decide how to allocate our finite energy and attention, and how to decide between competing options of what to do with our lives. A prominent purpose might increase the likelihood of spiritual experiences. We can understand whether this is true by conducting larger assessments, random assessments, of a person's behavior for a longer time period. The idea is, if they're trained with a sense of discipline, as well as openness and flexibility, then you would expect that child to have a much less random framework of when they're going to have spiritual moments compared to someone without that discipline and guiding framework of how to allocate their resources and make decisions between choosing one pathway of actions such as generosity, kindness, compassion, and meeting the world's needs, as you were talking about, or the alternative pathways. In my opinion, the time or temporal period you're looking at is of fundamental importance when you address these questions philosophically or scientifically.

DR. ROBERT ROESER I just wanted to punctuate how important I think the discussion of the qualities of the teacher and the pedagogy is as to thinking about what purpose is. Especially in psychology, we tend to think of these things as something about the individual. I think flipping it to think about the environment and how it nurtures it and the qualities of the teachers is so right-on because that's really what education and human development is about. It's about role modeling, providing possible images of what one can be. I just wanted to add two comments into the mix. I think Richie's comment about thinking about how to match pedagogy to individual young people is really interesting, and I think the

wisdom of the teacher, the wisdom of wise teachers, is something that's instructive in that regard. In the Indian context there are many different kinds of yoga, and the teacher will often instruct people based on their presumably intuitive wisdom about that person: "*You* need to go peel potatoes and that's your spiritual practice, and *you* need to go meditate, and *you* need to go give public speeches." So I think we can think about doing research on wise teachers who know how to do this kind of matching. The only other point I wanted to make is related to Rabbi Flam, who spoke so beautifully in thinking about child development in this regard. I remember in India, I was interviewing swamis who were running schools for youth, and they said something very similar to [what] you [said]. They said our job is to help young people discover who they are. And they would be making this hand waving motion over their hearts to indicate that education was a process of taking the covers off something that was hidden. They didn't mean discover by activity, well they did also mean that, but they really meant it almost in a *subtractive* way. That is, what are the conditions that are necessary to remove this veil of forgetfulness about who we are and what our purpose in life is? So I think that thinking about the kinds of pedagogies that help one dis-cover one's purpose, to dis-cover meaning for oneself in that constructivist learning sense, is so critical, rather than pouring in what meaning is, what your purpose should be. How do we, as you say, cultivate the conditions to allow that to reveal itself if we really believe there is some form of wisdom already inside of us that just needs some water and light to grow rather than needing to be implanted in the person from the outside in the first place? So I really think that's a very wise thing for us to keep thinking about. What are the pedagogies and how do we match them with the young person in a way that educates, [that is,] "draws forth," which is what *educate* means at its etymological root, that which is already within them!?

Students' spiritual experiences are best thought of as byproducts of what happens when our students match their passions to a strongly perceived need in the world.

DR. MAURICE ELIAS I want to follow up with that kind of analogy. Some of you may have heard of John Fetzer. The John Fetzer Institute is an institute that focuses on the study of spirituality. But John Fetzer is what I call a pragmatic spiritualist. He came about his interest in spirituality by studying what he called the unseen world. So he was fascinated by the fact that there were radio signals in the air that we couldn't see, but somehow they can be captured. And he actually invented the unidirectional radio receiver, which enabled us to have an organized system of radio networks around the country. And Fetzer also invented a very important thing, night baseball, [*laughter*] because he also saw no good reason why we couldn't play baseball just because we couldn't see. The ball is there, it's all happening, we just needed a way to see it. And then he turned his attention to spiritual concerns. And so the analogy I want to make to John Fetzer's work is that we talk a lot in Jewish education about the broadcast frequency. But we also have to talk about the receiver. If the receiver is not tuned in to the broadcast frequency, it doesn't much matter what's being broadcast, doesn't matter how fantastic the pedagogy is. The messages will not get through. Let's broaden our consideration about the receiver to introduce [Howard] Gardner's notion of multiple intelligences. Here is the way I think of his notion of multiple intelligence: they are exhibited where the greatest passions meet the greatest needs. Gardner said that individually, we are tuned in to having certain passions. Some are artistic, musical, kinesthetic, some are spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, mathematical, verbal-linguistic—we all have at least one of these passions, or what Gardner would call "intelligences." And so our opportunity to meet the world's greatest needs would intersect potentially with our doing something in our area of passion. So I think that's something for us to think about in the Jewish educational context. The messages being conveyed in most education programs are not well matched to the passions of our students nor to any sense of them having a positive impact on the world as a result of what they are learning. Even appealing to their sense of spirituality is problematic because Gardner has not been successful in identifying a distinct spiritual intelligence. Indeed, it may well be that students' spiritual experiences are best thought of as byproducts of what happens when our students match their passions to a strongly perceived need in the world. And of course, developmental considerations must also be applied.

PRESENTATIONS 2

Rachel Cowan · Yakov Travis · Neil Gillman

RABBI RACHEL COWAN

I want to just say at the beginning that I'm so happy that this topic is being discussed and brought forward. It's something that it seems I've known about, and I've been talking to people about this work; I say "It's a happiness study," and everyone [responds] "Jews don't do happiness." My former boss at the Cummings Foundation said, "I think we're genetically programmed not to be happy." So, I just, want to say *ashrei yoshvei veitekha,*[4] you know, how many times do we say it? Will nobody pay attention? I think that *ashrei* is a really good definition of what we were talking about. This quality, the spiritual qualities that we would want people to have. Anyway, that's just to begin with. I think maybe what I could do that's most helpful, since people said so many terrific things already, is to come back to this question of creating environments for spiritual experience. I think that for education, in a way that's the most important thing.

Whether or not we can access intimacy with God, there are environments in which we're more likely to do that and those where we're not. So I think really focusing on the quality of the environment and the capacity of teachers and, just what we were saying before, what Nancy said about the different letters of the Torah, that each child is unique, and how do we train teachers to be sensitive to different spiritual types. It's interesting from the experience of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. We work with rabbis who one might think had it all together and have the time to go inside and really spend a lot of contemplative time: spend time in the study of Hasidic texts [and] to reconnect with their inner life and their soul so that they go back and they are working from that place. And, so, if rabbis are needing to do that, to find time to reconnect, educators and children need to do that, too. And I was thinking about purpose and meaning, how each of us would sit at this table and say what was it that really gave us a sense of meaning. I am forever grateful to Neil Gillman for that first class I took in theology when I discovered religious existentialism. That I didn't have to prove to my father that there was a God; I could just act "as if." I have been acting "as if" ever since and, lo and behold, I have some wonderful connections. So I'm always grateful to you for that.

If you know yourself and you have the capacity for generosity and the capacity for love, you know what it means to really try to be telling the truth. When you have the capacity for faith and trust, then whatever happens in your life, you will be able to deal with it.

Gardner hasn't been able to fully define spiritual intelligence; but if we think of spiritual competence, what would we talk about? What would it mean to have schools where that was looked for? One of the ways I've thought about that is what are some of the *midot* that we would want kids to have that would be expressions of [a] spiritual life? We talked around the table about awe, gratitude, generosity, humility, *yirah, bitaḥon,* trust. I think when kids are in touch with those qualities, they are kids who will know themselves deeply; and if you know yourself and you have the capacity for generosity and the capacity for love, you know what it means to really try to be telling the truth. When you have the capacity for faith and trust, then whatever happens in your life, you will be able to deal with it.

And I think there are educators who can break down those [*midot*] into ways kids can really have experiences of developing. As Nancy said before, how do you create ambition to have that sort of meaning and that sense of pushing forward the work and the curriculum even beyond the level of social-emotional intelligence, which is extremely important.

[4] This phrase, which means "Happy are those that dwell in Your house," is the first line of a prayer in the daily liturgy.

Without that, nothing is going to happen. But also, then, what is the spiritual intelligence? How would we understand that and how would we break that down? So I think that if we can create environments, as someone said, a safe environment . . . And I was just thinking again, Larry, how talking about God is so hard to do because of the perception that Jews don't do God. I know because I'm a rabbi talking about God in a *devar Torah*, and I'm looking at the bubble above everybody's head going "huh?" It's the God I don't believe in—I feel like that's what we're up against—the God we don't believe in, and so how can we open that up? How can the prayer experiences at day schools be meaningful? How can kids discover what it means to pray? I think back to Nancy; there's the formation of the skills—that's important. But there's a cultivation of the heart that needs to be part of that, too. I'm not an expert and you know more than I, but people keep saying that our kids come out of day school hating to pray. Doesn't seem like a successful outcome. [*laughter*]

So I just think that there are ways to help kids really be able to see the image of God in the other kids in their classroom. They may not even have to like them but to see that this is there, so they really can develop empathy and kindness. And to have experiences in nature—I just think it's so important to really sense where we are in this universe, to have this kind of humility that it isn't all about us; it's not all about my story. To have experiences of creativity and art and writing and to see aspirations of excellence in sports—all those things are excellent education on any level but if we're also trying to have this spiritual lens that we look through, we might do them in a different way. We might just open them up a bit more. That's really all I'm hoping will come out of this—that kids would know what was their mission statement and know what was their purpose, knowing that people change all the time. And so I think mission and purpose are cyclical. For a while, this is your meaning, and therefore your purpose is to do this. Again, what that article in the *New York Times* about more yoga, less stress, said . . . these kids are focused on a mission where the whole thing is "get into college, get into college, I'll cheat, I'll whatever." How can you? Somebody told me her daughter is in third grade, and her classmates are asking her where she's going to college. She said "She's just a little kid, why do we have to think about that?"

That's really all I'm hoping will come out of this—that kids would know what was their mission statement and know what was their purpose.

GREENBERG She's three years too late!![*laughter*]

COWAN I think a lot of these issues could be measurable, and I'm sure many are already happening, but they can inform curricula.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS

I want to focus my remarks here on some underpinnings of these conversations. . . . I'm uncomfortable with some stuff that's going on here. I think we have a real need for clarity if we are going to go forward and do this seriously. I begin by quoting Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (who taught here at JTS) who wrote that "the modern Jew has become a messenger who has forgotten the message."[5] When we talk about "purpose and meaning," what I'm uneasy about here is that you seem to want to assess whether people are getting the message, but we're not really talking about what the message is! We want to assess whether twelve-year-olds, fourteen-year-olds, eighteen-year-olds feel a sense of purpose from their day school education. And I understand where it's coming from, and I applaud it, but what I'm uneasy about, Audrey, is that in your introduction you used the words "our hope, our goal is to prove that basically what's happening right now *is* working." And therefore parents will send their kids to the schools, and funders will continue to fund. Well, it's not working on many levels. And I think we need to address that and not just change the conversation so that parents and funders will open up their wallets, but change the actual "product." So I think that's part of my sense of what's going on here. We just don't want to prove what's working is good enough, but we want to explore how to do it better.

It's still about how we measure the experience of meaning and purpose for the kids. The question that I believe needs to be asked beforehand is: Where are those who are four

[5] Susannah Heschel attributes this quote to her father on p. xix of her introduction to A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets,* Perennial Classics Edition (New York: Perennial, 2001).

times the age of these twelve-year-olds, fourteen-year-olds, eighteen-year-olds? What do *they* hold as the meaning, the purpose of life, and what Jewish study, Jewish practice, are meaningful in light of that purpose? So I want to propose that as the researchers move forward, in their surveys or journaling exercises, however they're going to assess things, that they also interview the teachers and ask them: What is the message? What is the purpose of life? As clear as that. What do you hold is the purpose of life? Are you conveying that to the kids? And ask the kids at the same time: What do you think your teacher holds as the purpose of life? As direct as that question can be. It'd be interesting to see, do they match?

Now, my second point—and I want to give a little background—is that this study is about assessing day schools, and the question is what kind of day schools? I didn't grow up going to a day school. I grew up in a Reform family with a pretty weak education. My spiritual journey began in earnest when I was seventeen and I left home, and I started exploring things on my own. But I have spent years educating educators who teach in Jewish day schools, and I want to say frankly, they don't know what they're talking about. They don't have the content. There's a rich tradition of spiritual development particularly in kabbalistic and Hasidic texts that they don't know. People graduate from the finest rabbinical schools and educational programs, and they haven't been taught this. And part of what we're doing now is teaching these people this stuff, and it takes time; it's a serious study, just as with any other form of psychology. So in our program, it's a commitment of four hours a week for a year with some retreats just on kabbalistic and Hasidic notions of soul and what that might mean today. And we work with that—just on kabbalistic and Hasidic, rooted in the Torah, notions of God. Part of the problem with God-talk is we have a very weak God conception. Some of my younger students instead of "G-d," write "G!d." I'm uncomfortable with using the word "God." I prefer "Hashem," but even that has connotations. We need to really teach the biblical, kabbalistic, and Hasidic ideas, whether people can buy it or not. This is the tradition. We need to teach this God-talk.

We need to really teach the biblical, kabbalistic, and Hasidic ideas, whether people can buy it or not. This is the tradition. We need to teach this God-talk.

But part of the real reason why this interests me so much is that even though I'm teaching mostly adults, I'm raising my daughter who is seven and my son who is thirteen. One is at a *yeshivish* day school; one is in a modern Orthodox, religious-Zionist day school. I daven at Habad just because it's the only kabbalistic–Hasidic place in town. But I'm basically homeless; I don't fit in anywhere. I wanted to bring that up because what I'm about to say perhaps presses some buttons. My sense is that we're talking about *non-orthodox* day schools. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's the sense I got from the website and the whole conversation. I'm curious that there is nobody from Habad here. I guess I'm the closest thing. Habad is a dynamic movement that is probably growing more than any other. Why aren't they at the table? How would these questions be framed in Orthodox schools, which have a much clearer ideology and statement that this is the purpose of life? But it's not simple. Where I live in Cleveland, Ohio, you have four Orthodox synagogues, one next to the other. And each says it's Orthodox, but each has a very different ideology about what the purpose of life is. And in a nutshell, you can say [that] Habad's is [to] "spread the Divine Spirit everywhere—to the four corners of the earth." The *yeshivish* one is [to] "become a *talmid ḥakham*, marry a *talmid ḥakham*, learn at *kolel*, and acquire *olam habah* that way." The religious-Zionist *beit keneset*'s is [to] "move to *erets yisra'el*, return the Jews to Israel and to a more spiritual dimension, which leads to the Messianic era." The fourth is another modern Orthodox, but that's beside the point. I think it would be interesting to do a control group between Conservative or Reform day schools or Orthodox day schools or different types of Orthodox day schools. The whole question of the day school needs to be problematized—what kind of day school are we talking about? There aren't yet Renewal-based schools, but what if there were? So I think that needs to be the question.

Finally, I want to say that in every Jewish school—and I've taught teachers [in ones] from Conservative to Orthodox to Reform to Renewal—I believe they all teach the same thing, in ritualized form, about what the purpose of life is. We know what the purpose of life is. We teach it, whether we speak it

or not. How do we do that? Because everybody would agree that the *shema* is central: *shema yisra'el*—Listen. Hear it deeply; and *eḥad*, there's a unity; and *ve'ahavta*, love *Hashem, yud-heh-vav-heh*, with all one's heart, with all one's being, with all of one's possessions. So there is this deep awareness of oneness that we need to repeat twice a day, whatever day school they're in, the kids are doing that, presumably. It's in the mezuzah, bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah initiation, we strap it onto their heads and arms, to mark this importance of oneness, this aspiration to acquire the deep, intense love of *Hashem*.

So what I want to propose is maybe it would be interesting to study when people recite the *shema* or the *ve'ahavta*, what happens? Could you do a survey or have them journal? Do they *want* to love God? Do they feel love of God? What do they think about the unity? Because that is the main message that the tradition is imprinting through this ritualization. I think it would be even more interesting if Richie would get the MRI and PET scans on teachers when they're reciting the *shema* and see what's going on. And maybe that should be a criteria for who we hire. If things start lighting up, if there are gamma rays when he recites *shema*, then we'll hire. If they don't light up, we'll nix him. Thank you.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN

Thank you. The overarching purpose of what I want to say is to suggest a language for this conversation and to discuss the association that came to my mind when I read about the word "meaning" and the word "purpose." For me, the issue of meaning is best conveyed by the word "myth." And I want to suggest that educationally, our goal should be the creation of a personal myth. By personal myth I mean the individual's broadest sense of "who am I?"—an overarching, integrating sense that pulls together the various dimensions of my being, various communities to which I belong. Connecting the dots. A myth is a structure in one's life. I'm talking about myth in the academic sense of myth, not in a popular sense of "fiction." Myths convey meaning; there are many, many definitions. My original teacher was Paul Tillich, but Rollo May talks about the beams of the house without which the house could not stand, but which are invisible. What are the beams that make the individual sense of house? Myths structure, and I think that education is a structuring resource, and that's why I am so excited about Richard's presence here because as I said, somewhat facetiously, that if I had my life to live over again, I would major in neuroscience because I have come to appreciate the fact that there is a certain imperialism of the brain. The brain is involved in every act of knowing. What's going on in this room is being determined by the functioning of our brains. And I am fascinated to have learned that neurosciences really are not totally able to explain what is self-consciousness. What's my self? What is the neurological basis for my sense of self? And that's why I think that what the effect of neuroscience is going to be on education, on general education and religious education. I just think that dimension of the enterprise is indispensable; we can't go anywhere without this. I got to know that there is such a man as Eric Kandel recently in my life. I've already read his book three times; some of it I still can't understand but most of it I do. But Kandel was on Charlie Rose about a year ago, and he talked about the fact that this century is the century of "neuro," et cetera, right? Neuro-aesthetics, neuro-ethics. And I said "Go on, say neuro-theology, neuro-religion," but he didn't say it. I think that's indispensable to what we're doing here, I just don't know where that piece of the research work is at right now. I don't know how far we've gotten. I know a lot of pop stuff—taking PET scans of people when they are meditating. I'm not convinced that's the way to go; maybe it is. But it seems to me that the notion of who I am and the sense of an integrating sense of my self is how we achieve meaning. Myths impose meaning, and meaning comes out of a sense of the pattern, the structure, the connecting of my personal dots. And that is, at least to a large extent, a neurological enterprise. I quote frequently from *Fiddler on the Roof*, without apologetics, that magnificent line in the song on tradition. "Because of our traditions, every Jew knows who he is and what God expects him to do." What an extraordinary definition of meaning and of purpose because what God expects him to do is purpose. And here I want to introduce the notion of eschatology, a personal eschatology or the eschatological dimension of my personal myths. Mainly, what am I here to achieve? And it seems to me that as a religious person, as a religious Jew, what I am here to achieve is to redeem the world. That's not uttered with a sense of grandiosity, it's uttered in the simple sense that every Jew is to have a sense of the Messianic complex and to believe that everything I do is done for the purpose of redeeming the world; that's purpose, to me at least. It's personal fulfillment, but it's personal fulfillment as part of a much broader sense that I can't

fulfill myself unless I change my family and unless I change my community and if I effectively change my community, I'm going to effectively change the world. And I think that's what we're here for. That's what God expects us to do. So I'm left with my tradition that tells me who I am in the broad context of things, that's my personal myth, and what God expects me to do is to redeem the world.

Which brings me to my third point and that is community. My most effective teaching moments as I think over these forty years—there are probably three. I consider myself lucky to have had three great teaching experiences. Most of the others are okay but these are great. Once, many years ago, I didn't know what I was doing. I was a counselor in a Ramah bunk in Wisconsin, and I had fifteen- to sixteen-year-olds, and they threw me in this bunk and to my amazement, not that I did anything, they formed a creative group and they functioned beautifully as a group. And within a week, they loved each other and they supported each other and did incredible things. It never happened before, it has never happened again, but at that moment I appreciated the sense that at its very best, education depends on the ability of the individual finding himself or herself within a supportive group of shared values, shared meaning, and shared purpose, a shared sense of who we are in the big complex of things, and a shared purpose of what we are on Earth to do. And so, personal myth, eschatological dimension, and a sense of the value of eschatology and a sense of community.

At its very best, education depends on the ability of the individual finding himself or herself within a supportive group of shared values, shared meaning, and shared purpose, a shared sense of who we are in the big complex of things, and a shared purpose of what we are on Earth to do.

I want to close with a very brief anecdote. My second great teaching experience was in the grade two class in a Reform day school in Boston, where the teacher invited me in, "Jacob's grandfather knows everything about God; let's invite him in to talk to us about God." I had learned by then that the best teacher is the one who asks the questions, right? So I said to this bunch of grade two kids, "Tell me about God. What's your picture of God?" And right in front of me I saw this little girl sitting in the front row, very solemn, and I said, "You haven't answered me. What do you think? When you think of God, what comes to your mind?" And she says, "A waterfall." I said, "A waterfall. Why a waterfall?" She says, "Because when I come close to a waterfall, I feel fresh and clean and renewed." I said, "That's wonderful." And she said, "That's what God means to me." I said, "Wow." Then I was ready to walk out, but then she said, "But then there are the rocks." I said, "What are the rocks?" She said, "To get close to my waterfall, there are all kinds of rocks in the way." I said, "Well, what are the rocks?" She said, "Poverty, war, racial tension." Grade two! I sort of began to—my eyes were filled with tears. I turned to the teacher, who is now, incidentally, a rabbinical student at HUC downtown, and I said "Why do you want me here?" [*laughter*] It's extremely important what happened after that. These grade two kids, after I sort of broke up the conversation, all moved themselves around this solemn little girl and they gave her a hug. And I said, "Now that's an educational moment!" And that's what I mean—she had a sense of who she was and what was expected of her. That's meaning and purpose to me.

DISCUSSION INTERLUDE 2

DR. ROBERT ROESER I just want to pick up on this last story, which I find so beautiful—a comment and then a question. It seems to me that the notion of metaphor is really important for assessing in a developmentally appropriate way young people's sense of purpose and meaning, so I really love this story and the fact that it's an image. It's a sensory motor image—that's not an idea that was so generative here. My question is to the educators around the table: Are there other questions that you've asked of young people like this question, where you've had experiences where what came forward really informed you about the thinking and feeling that they had. The idea that you [Gillman] led with a question is such a wonderful way to access these things. I am wondering what questions people have found generative in this way.

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER I was in my office at the synagogue when the fourth-grade teacher runs down the hall, opens the door to my office, and says "We need you right away; they're talking about God!" [*laughter*] So, I go to the fourth-grade classroom and say to the kids, "Tell me, what you know about God?" And one kid says, "God made the world." Another kid says, "God is one." So I write all of these down on the board. Another kids says, "God is good." Another kid says, and I'll never forget this, "God is invisible." And I was going to write invisible on the board, but before I can, a second kid says, "No, God is visible." And the first student says, "I don't see him, what's he look like?" And the second kid says, "That's just it, there is nothing to see."

DR. MAURICE ELIAS Parallel to what Yakov was talking about—when I work with parents, I ask them to talk about their mission statements and to create their family mission statements. And then I ask kids what they think their parents' mission statement is. And one answer that was very informative to me was when a kid says that his parents' mission statement would be "No mall too far." [*laughter*] To the child, family life was so completely focused on shopping and consumption that the child's impression of the mission statement was about the mall. The parents, who were very thoughtful and caring people, were astonished to see the gaps between some of their own internal views and what they were projecting to the outside. It is a very powerful type of question, to ask parents and teachers about purpose and mission and then have a kind of cross conversation about what you *think* you are conveying and then what you *are* portraying to the recipient.

RABBI NANCY FLAM I also think that how we ask the questions, and in what context we ask the questions, is very important because there is a phenomenon I have seen over and over again in kids in about the fifth grade, where it becomes uncool in the community for kids to acknowledge what they know existentially about their own experience and sense of God's presence. And I can remember one time observing a class where it was very clear that one child was tremendously brave in putting forth her version of the waterfall image. When all around her were, I hate to be gendered about it, kind of cooler boys who just shut down. So how we ask those questions, in what context, is important. Which is one of the reasons why I like Rachel Kessler's approach to questioning, which is done anonymously, where people write down on index cards their questions and then they are passed around for the group to read aloud. So it's as if everybody owns everybody's question, and I think there is something powerful about that.

RABBI RACHEL COWAN I was going to say the same thing. I remember one of the educators in the educators' cohort talking about how she's the principal of a top Talmud Torah in the Midwest, and she said these kids come in from high school with these knapsacks breaking their backs . . . for them to just come in and sit for a few minutes. And the questions that these kids had just completely broke your heart; there was so much anguish in these questions. And what she said was . . . the fact that they heard other people asking those questions, to know that somebody else had the question they had but hadn't dared to ask, even not knowing who it was—it just made such an enormous difference, and then she was able to begin to talk about some of these things.

DR. TODD KASHDAN I am a clinical psychologist, as well as a researcher, and this reminds me of a technique that I was trained in called motivational interviewing. Related to Yakov's technique, and what Maurice mentioned, besides being an assessment device in this research, it also serves as an intervention in itself. The idea is that when there is a discrepancy between two views, whether it's the teacher's message and the student's perception of it, the perceptions of parents and students, or between a person's values and actions, an opportunity exists. Tension exists and when this is explored instead of avoided, an opportunity exists to find meaning, purpose, and the supportive nature of their environment—this includes the safety of the environment and whether the current environment is congruent with my values. There is this Kojak as you ask them, "Help me understand this. Here's what you value," whether it's the child or the parent or the teacher, "and here's what you're doing. Help me understand the gap between what matters and what you are doing because I can't make sense of it." By exploring this tense discrepancy between what I *do* and what I'm *saying*, an intervention occurs. We're talking about children who are present but disengaged. They're answering the questions, but we don't feel the sincerity because their non-verbal cues tell a different story. These techniques can be useful because at the very end [of the springboard paper], Megan hits upon a point that I talk about in my own work, which is the need for discrete, unobtrusive methods. In this technique, you're not asking, "Hey, what's your purpose? What are the values that guide you?" Everyone knows purpose is a good thing, so they know it's good to say, I have a purpose that relates to my Jewish education. We have to use backdoor routes to circumvent socially desirable responding and this is one avenue.

It's unrealistic to expect these qualities to be cultivated in children if they're not also present in teachers.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS Building on this a little bit; part of what's been going on is that in the education of children, the purpose is not really the children but the parents. The mitzvah of *talmud torah* as codified by Maimonides is not to study Torah but to teach Torah, *veshinantam levanekha*, teach your children. Well you can't teach your children what you yourself don't know, so you'd better go out and learn. But everybody knows that teachers learn more from students themselves; master teachers ask questions, and their students become their teachers. But I think [this is] especially [true] where there is a dissonance between what the children perceive is the mission statement and what the parents think the mission statement is. What if we were more conscious as we bring more Jewish kids into day schools of the impact that has on the parents and framed it that way? Sending your kid to a day school—how does that affect your own sense of meaning and purpose? And I think you'll find that it gets parents, whose live are focused around the mall, to shift their priorities a little bit, and I think that's worth exploring.

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON I just want to go back to a point that Yakov made and Nancy touched on, too, and it relates to creating a condition where these kinds of questions can be asked. It goes back to the point about the importance of the teacher. I think that education will produce the kind of effects that many of us hope for only in so far as teachers really embody these characteristics, and embody them in a way that is associated with them exuding these qualities in their everyday life in a way that is discernible by the kids with whom they're interacting. That's a critically important issue. I think that anytime we begin to think about assessing these qualities in the kids, it's going to be really important to assess these qualities in the teachers because it's unrealistic to expect these qualities to be cultivated in children if they're not also present in teachers.

And then, I deeply honor and respect your [Gillman's] interest in neuroscience and applaud it. I love it. But I also want, as a neuroscientist, to quickly say—and I know the comment was made somewhat flippantly—that I think we can overemphasize how much we actually know. And I think it's important for us as scientists to exhibit qualities of humility with respect to what we know. We know preciously little. I think it would be a charlatan who would say we know enough to be able to tell from a brain scan whether somebody's going to be an effective teacher or not. We're just not there yet, that's not to say you couldn't be there in X number of years, but I don't think we're even remotely close to that at this point in time. I think this is a very important line of investigation; I love the idea of looking at people when they say the *shema*. I'm convinced that variations of what happens will actually predict very important aspects of, to use your terminology,

their relationship to God. I think that's something that is a profitable strategy to actually think about, and we are doing those kinds of experiments. We are doing them with advanced Buddhist practitioners; we're bringing them into a laboratory. There is no reason it can't be done.

RABBI YITZ GREENBERG What are you doing with the Buddhist practitioners?

DAVIDSON We're bringing them into the laboratory, we put them in the scanner . . .

KUSHNER They make them sing the *shema*! [*laughter*]

DAVIDSON That's right, the *shema*, but from their tradition. It produces changes in the brain that had never before been seen in the history of science They are dramatic. They are unusual.

GREENBERG What kind of changes?

DAVIDSON I could talk more about that later; it would be a big diversion right now, but I'll be happy to talk about it later. They are changes that have to do with the circuitry we know is involved in the regulation of emotion, the regulation of attention, and other building blocks that I think are the constituents, if you will, of meaning and purpose.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN I asked a neuroscientist once, "How much do we know about the brain as of today?" He said, maybe 26 percent of what there is to know." I said, "Wow." He said, "We have a very long way to go." I said, "I understand that." That's the point for you [Davidson] to make. *You* are supposed to be humble about *your* field. My job is to tell you how unfortunate it is that the 26 percent that we *do* know is largely absent from the discussion, as far as I can see, certainly in my field of religious epistemology. I was stunned that you would even want to be here because this conversation—I think, to a significant extent, until today, as far as I know—could have been conducted without the presence of a neuroscientist. So I'm fighting both fights. I did a workshop for a number of years with a very prominent psychiatrist—Mortimer Ostow *alav hashalom*—and he kept saying, "Gillman, it's all biology." I said, "No, it's not, it's not *all* biology." He said, "Well it's a hell of a lot more biology than you've ever appreciated." I said, "I understand that," and I said, "I'm very happy to have studied with you." I don't know how much biology there is in all of this, but what troubles me is that so much of the conversation is being carried out without a sense of biology having anything to do with the discussion. So that's your job—to tell me how humble to be. My job is to tell you how indispensable you are.

DAVIDSON I appreciate that. I do think that it is the case in the academy that philosophy in general as a field now takes neuroscience very seriously. You cannot be a member of a first-rate philosophy department in the Western world without reading neuroscience. That's not true of departments of religious studies. I agree with your point—it should be true. And, in fact, I just participated in a symposium in Princeton that was organized by the Princeton Center for the Study of Religion, where this was really the focus of that symposium, that religious scholars now need to be taking this stuff into account in their teaching.

GILLMAN Yes, that's why I say that I went through this whole business about fifty years too early because when I did it, neither at McGill, where I did my undergraduate work, nor at Columbia where I did my doctoral work, nor at the Seminary where I was ordained to be a rabbi, would anybody even mention the fact that the brain is involved in everything that we're doing.

DAVIDSON Well, the cool thing is that brain plasticity is present throughout the entire life span, so it's never too late! [*laughter*]

YAKOV TRAVIS When I saw the pictures on the web of the monk with all the electrodes on his head, it brought to mind that we "strap our kids in" from bar or bat mitzvah time on, depending on the movement—we put something on their head every morning, this is an initiation into adulthood. That's the weirdest thing, how—from a kabbalistic perspective, from a Hasidic perspective—there's stuff happening to them and there's certain meditations to be said beforehand, and there's a flow, flowing down from here to here [*motions from the head through the body*]. But most people never get taught those teachings. They learn that this is how we do it, these are the laws, you don't do it on Shabbat. Well, why don't we do it on Shabbat? Because there is something happening on Shabbat that you don't need this to activate it. Now, a student of mine sent me a video, which I watched—and you might think it's bogus—in which this guy is putting on tefillin, and they had some scanner measuring his aura. When he put on his tefillin,

it lit up! And so that inspired people to put on tefillin. See, it really does something! Again, I don't know if it's bogus, but imagine if we could go to a place where people are putting on tefillin and doing certain meditations that prepare them for it, and demonstrably the machines light up, and you can say this is what's going to happen! We could then tell kids: "You can't do it until you are twelve or thirteen, and when you do it, you shouldn't speak anything outside of holy words." Think about the shift that would have in kids' confidence about what this initiation is about. Something to explore perhaps.

GILLMAN I want to say one thing about metaphor. Do you know how many teachers have told me over the years that you can't teach young kids about metaphors because they don't know what metaphors are? I am not a teacher, I am not an educator, and I never took an education course in my entire life; but I am convinced—never mind the word metaphor, but I said I am convinced—that I can teach a kid about what a metaphor is all about, from kindergarten on. But then Dr. Steve Brown, dean of the Davidson school, came along and he said, "You're absolutely right, all the research shows that you're right." And I said, "Thank God, now an educator supports me! I'm not flying off the facts." Kids understand what metaphors are all about.

GREENBERG Just a couple of the observations. I don't mean to poo-poo neuroscience; I think it's a field of tremendous promise. But the talk about it reminds me of the fantasy that the nineteenth-century rabbis had, too, that science was going to prove that Sinai happened; science was going to prove that human beings have a God gene, or prove the fact that there is a God, and so on. I think that these values are issues of meaning and choice; by definition you are not going to prove them. It's important to know this—and it cuts both ways. If a religion is assuming, let's say, a soul, and then a study showed that what you claim is a soul is really some chemicals in my brain, then it would be disproved. But purpose and meaning are choices—usually not made by being shown and proven.

What pluralism is about is not that we are afraid to make statements of authority or of values, but that you have the obligation to offer multiple, even conflicting, views so the child can sort through them and make some judgments and can make choices that are closest to one's spiritual thing.

The other two points are: first, to return to Yakov's question—is this injection of purpose and meaning only for non-Orthodox schools or is this intended for Orthodox schools as well? I assume that we are talking about all schools. Comment number two on this issue is that the Orthodox schools typically have greater self-confidence and a greater sense that they have a right to tell you what God wants you to be like. My experience with the more modern and more liberal schools—the modern Orthodox as well—is that they're much less secure about saying what it is that God wants. We have a tradition, but, of course, the tradition is disintegrating before our eyes. So the traditional Orthodox have a slight advantage there. Having said that, they have two problems. One is they have the advantage, but they don't take it because of the fact that often they are too busy with the details of observance to ask about meaning and purpose. The other danger is that they unequivocally state and uphold beliefs and values that the students can't take home. That is, the student hears it, but assumes that this is a religious truth—but in the real world, it doesn't work. In yeshiva, whales swallow people and spit them out. In reality, it doesn't happen.

The liberal schools and modern Orthodox schools: (a) have to ask the questions and (b) have to be encouraged not to be afraid to offer a model. One of the key problems here is the loss of a sense of confidence or courage or authority to offer any models whatsoever. I love the point raised earlier that questions are more valuable than answers. Having said that, I think one of the problems of modern education is the fear of making any normative statements. It is like many parents today who are afraid to say to the child "No, that's wrong," or "You shouldn't do it." There is a total loss of authority. I would argue that what pluralism is about is not that we are afraid to make statements of authority or of values, but that you have the obligation to offer multiple, even conflicting, views so the child can sort through them and make some judgments and can make choices that are closest to one's spiritual thing. But the inability to make any statement leads to the excessive practice of "no

statements, only questions"; I think that is a real deprivation for the student. This is especially true because TV, and God knows what other sources, Brittany Spears, are not afraid to make statements about what they think life is. After parental and school abdication, the values of celebrities are the only authority a child ever hears. So I would like to argue for a little bit of balance on question and answers. We should be giving more answers—albeit admitting their limitations as answers.

One other point; to come back to the ability to speak about purpose and meaning, I want to add this—I think that in the end it will come out somewhere near where Neil was arguing. An idea like *tikkun olam* has one great advantage in that it enables a tremendous range and spectrum of meaning and a tremendous range of individualization—as against *shema,* representing the teaching of unity, because again, Yakov, with respect, you have to understand what is problematic about what you said. It is true that all the day schools may say *shema* every day, but how many teachers in those day schools would really say that what is behind the prayer is that I (the teacher) really believe that there is a God, a God who cares . . . It's much more problematic than the community, much more problematic than the parents, though they're problematic, too. I am not saying we shouldn't offer the model, but to say that is the complete definition is not a real picture. The benefit of teaching *shema* as *tikkun olam* is that you can teach people how to feel the presence of God, which gives them a whole different existential meaning and a whole different sense of inner worth. And that's great. But it also allows for most of the students who say *shema,* who probably interpret *tikkun olam* more in terms of perfecting the world, helping other human beings, or taking care of the image of God rather than upholding the specifics.

TRAVIS I think it would have to be built in. Since you have a system in which people are reiterating these words, the *shema.* We've ritualized this as the purpose. So *tikkun olam* would need to be brought into that.

DAVIDSON I would ask you guys in terms of that, how can we better teach the teachers and the students to say the *shema* in the way that you are describing, to really practice with them how to ask questions?

GILLMAN Heschel would say, [*imitating accent*] "Gentlemen ve have had many answers, but ve have forgotten the questions. Vhat are the questions? [*laughter*]

DR. JEFFREY S. KRESS Let me just make a couple of comments on, first of all, historical issues. I want to point out that this is something that is a unique historical moment in terms of this conversation at the Seminary but as I understand it, this is part of a historical process begun long ago about conversations in this building between cutting-edge Jewish thinkers and cutting-edge psychologists and behavioral scientists. So, I'm glad that it's back here. It certainly represents a coming together across the table, with my own experiences, having a background and degree in psychology, and now working here in this field; so it's very significant that this conversation is happening and is happening here.

Behavioral Researchers

PRESENTATIONS 1

Maurice Elias · Todd Kashdan

DR. MAURICE ELIAS

I just wanted to say a little bit about my perspective on this research. My initial research connection with this comes really in the context of Jewish identity and an interest in trying to see the extent to which Jewish identity informs overall identity. It's an interesting issue. One of my undergraduate honors students, along with Jeff and me, did a study where we took a look at the difference between Jewish identity when you look at it kind of under the microscope—where it can look very enriched, full, and elaborated—and then if you can kind of pull back the microscope and look at the place of Jewish identity in the person's overall identity. You'd find that it's a little stuck in the corner. The person doesn't consult it in their everyday decision making, their problem solving, and [when making] the difficult values decisions. So, to me, this connects very much to the question of purpose and meaning and literally, what is the meaning of someone's Jewishness in the context of their larger identity. And my interest in this is based a lot on Chris Argyris, who is a social psychologist, and has a concept of a "theory in use." He talks about the fact that we carry around many theories with us. But what theories do we actually use in everyday life? So, in that respect, it began to motivate me to want to assess this issue of identity and purpose in an unobtrusive context. Those of you who read the [springboard] paper, read that one of the concerns in the assessment of meaning and purpose is in the reactivity of a lot of the assessments. Give someone a scale, they check off things about their purpose. But, is this the purpose they really carry around with them?

This connects very much to the question of . . . what is the meaning of someone's Jewishness in the context of their larger identity.

The larger context of the work related to the handout you received is work that I've done in the Plainfield public schools. Plainfield is a disadvantaged urban area in New Jersey where kids are at exceptionally high risk; a number have had issues of abuse and neglect. Parents have been incarcerated; there is a large number of single-parent families. And it began to occur to us in talking and working with these students and trying to build their social and emotional competencies that a key issue in our ability to reach them seemed to be the values that they held. And so we began to explore, from a research point of view, whether or not students who held certain values as life guides would be less likely to fall into the difficulties that their peers and classmates, who do not have those values, fall into. And we looked specifically at religiosity, forgiveness, and purpose. The feeling was that the extent to which kids would be able to identify with a positive sense of purpose, with what William Damon calls "noble purpose," and also that if they had a strong sense of forgiveness, those kids might be able to transcend their background and experiences and focus on the opportunities being offered to them to improve their lives. So, the issue of how to work with this was something that we were looking for, and we came upon something called the Laws for Life essay. This is something developed by the John Templeton Foundation in one context, but we use it in another. The idea of the Laws for Life essay is giving kids an opportunity to write about the laws by which

they live their life. Not by which they *want* to live their life but by which they *actually* live their life. It's not easy to create a context in which that will actually happen. I won't go over all the details about it, but I will say we were very attentive to creating a normative environment in which the kids would put on paper the laws of life that are more operational than they are aspirational. So, we had the kids write these Laws of Life essays, and then we scored them using the rubrics that you have in your hands to see the extent to which kids identified purpose, religiosity, and forgiveness; but today we're obviously focusing on purpose. There are actually two versions, an older version and a more developed version (the latter appears in Appendix C, p. 57). And you'll notice, apropos of something mentioned earlier, that the wording on one version says "modal purpose rubric." One of the things we're interested in assessing was their *modal* expression of purpose versus their *peak* expression of purpose. So in other words, was the essay characterized by purpose or was there one peak mention of purpose? We ultimately found that there was no difference in those two things. I want to share with you for our consideration what it means to have an unobtrusive operational way of measuring this. And so here, as you can see, are our operational definitions at four levels, level four being the most encompassing sense of purpose, connected to someone's desire to make a difference in the world, contribute to the younger generation, think about matters larger than the self. And then you have a slightly less optimal definition where it is explicit that the person is interested in doing these things but their *intrinsic* motivation is not as clear. In level four, the person is in a sense saying the right things, and it's very clear from the content of the essay that they believe this, this is them. In level three, they can say the right things, but it's not necessarily clear that it's a deeply held belief on their part. Level two is, if you will, a less elaborated mention of purpose, and level one [is] no mention at all. On the back of the sheet are the specific word choices that students use and obviously these are words that would signal to a reader or reviewer that a sense of purpose is being invoked. So this methodology of assessment has some benefits of being unobtrusive and, of course, the rubric literally operationalizes the person's view, or the research team's view, of what is it that constitutes purpose. And this is basically the rubric that our team has been working with, and we found some differentiation in our data so far, but it hasn't been a very powerful index We've been working with fifth graders. We are also going to look at eighth graders and eleventh graders. We'll also look longitudinally to see how the hidden child's sense of purpose might evolve over time as they go through eighth grade and eleventh grade. We have a long way to go, but I did want to share this as a particular example of a methodology that's unobtrusive and can get at where a sense of purpose might reside in a child's overall laws of life.

DR. TODD KASHDAN

Well, I second the gratitude of everyone else for being invited to this panel, and I think what surprised and excited me is how much about what's been said by the rabbis and scholars has been very similar to the conceptual model that I have been creating on purpose in life. I don't know what I can cover in ten minutes because I've got a 150-page manifesto that I've written on the purpose of life that's under review right now, so I'm going to give some nooks and crannies and focus on some of the gaps that need to be talked about. But I should stress that as a scientist, a theoretician, and an empirical researcher . . . I've read the entire literature on purpose and the research to date, and it sucks. Of course, besides Maurice's work. [*laughter*] There's bad research with bad methodology, and that's why meetings like this are really important. But to date, the research has been subpar, a lot of it's been cross-sectional, which means a bunch of people get a bunch of global questionnaires, and you throw them out there to see how answers on one scale relate to answers on another scale at one time point. That's pretty much been most of the work to date.

I think we need to step back and think conceptually about what are the ingredients of purpose in life. And as I mentioned before, I see it as a global, architectural framework for defining a person's life goals and serving as a compass for everyday decisions. And so in this way, purpose doesn't govern behavior, it serves as a form of direction, as a compass to a navigator, and from this perspective, the idea is that a person doesn't have to have a purpose to live a healthy and good life. But this is one pathway and with this pathway, it's essential to have one. I'm going to talk about it as a binary thing for now—you have one or you don't—but in a couple of minutes, I'm going to talk about some of the dimensions of what constitutes a purpose. The aspect of what becomes this renewable reservoir of meaning that you get from a purpose, as everyone's been talking

about today, is I think that you live a life that's in congruence with that purpose. And I think that one of the most essential ingredients of having purpose in life is that it should stimulate behavioral consistency. The idea is that a purpose, a strong purpose, should influence a person's vocations and avocations. You should see some consistency in the content across the domains, and it should be relatively resistant to changing situations, contexts, and demands.

So, with a person who has purpose you should see some level of persistence. As an exemplar of that, you can look at the life of Mahatma Gandhi. He had at least two purposes [and] probably a bunch of other strong purposes, but two of them were seeking out personal enlightenment and helping other citizens better themselves. He never took days off. He wasn't like a teacher of today where you have Saturday and Sunday off, and you work five days a week. When he did, he suffered. When he recognized it, he suffered. He was seeking personal enlightenment and when a day wasn't consistent with that, he describes suffering on those days. A strong purpose should activate this level of consistency, and good theory of purpose or anything else should talk about person-environment interactions.

A purpose, a strong purpose, should influence a person's vocations and avocations.

Sometimes a purpose is disadvantageous. So, if a person has a purpose of helping and loving and caring for their family and they are incarcerated, they are going to suffer more in jail than a person without purpose. They lack access to resources that allow for behaviors and daily life consistent with that purpose. It also is important if you're going to study purpose, which is what we've really been moving toward, to really think carefully about what time period we're studying. Because in the short term, [those] who have a strong architectural framework that guides them in certain directions are going to persist at goals, and that's going to have a physical, physiological, and psychological toll on them because they're not going to abort tasks; they are going to persist at difficult things. So if you measure that in only a short time period, someone with purpose is going to look stressed and suffer more psychological and physiological damage. But if you look in the long term, it's these challenges and overriding them . . . just as we talked about the metaphor of the girl with the waterfall. When she climbs over the rocks, she's going to cut her feet a bit, she's going to suffer a bit.

In the long term, I argue that these challenges and the inevitable exploration, discovery, and growth are what allow purpose to be associated with long-term health and well-being. If we only focus on the short term, people who are pessimistic and lacking purpose might appear superior on health outcomes. Thus, we have to think very carefully when we research this in children And this also brings me to a point of distinguishing purpose and goals. They're not synonymous. One person's purpose cannot be another person's goal. A person who has a purpose should be attuned, and this is what Nancy was talking about earlier, to their intrinsic or core values and interests. It should be recognized in them, and from this they derive life goals and behaviors that are attuned with them. There's a lot of good research to support this model, that is, when you engage in goals that resonate with the core aspects of your personality, you show greater flexibility when you're faced with challenges: cognitive flexibility, behavioral flexibility. You show greater progress toward those goals and also you gain more positive experiences from working toward those goals. There is also work showing that everyone possesses a personality configuration. When you engage in behaviors that are with your dominant traits . . . I'm extremely extroverted; my wife is introverted, she prefers low levels of stimulation. When she is in restorative periods, going for hikes in the woods, she experiences the most positive emotions. When she is in large parties, she experiences the least. [My configuration is] the opposite. When you act in ways that are congruent with the dominant aspects of who you are, you end up performing better and experiencing more positive emotions. So one aspect of purpose is being attuned to what these are so that you can capitalize on them in everyday life.

I'm going to skip some other parts of the model because I have only a few minutes to talk, unfortunately. I'm going to move to some of the challenges in measuring purpose. One of the challenges for me, and I thought a great deal about this and talked to a number of scientists, philosophers, thinkers, and everyday people on the subway, is how do you differentiate people who look similar at the superficial level in terms of having or not having a purpose? Think of two police officers.

If you ask each of them: "Honestly, do you find that being an officer fits with your values in life?" who would say "no"? We all know that having a purpose is socially desirable. The underlying motive for these two officers—who may both do a great job—may be different. For one it could be the desire for power and status; for the other it could be to help and protect the public. How do you differentiate someone for whom [the purpose is] the guiding architectural influence on their life—protecting and guiding and helping the public—versus someone just seeking power, which is a lower level sort of psychic, cognitive process?

What I would argue is you don't ask them direct questions, you have to be indirect. A purpose shouldn't be able to be obtained—the direction to work toward a purpose should not be able to be obtained though one single pathway. What if you ended up being shot and becoming paralyzed and were no longer able to be a police officer? What if there was a situation that came up and you were framed and couldn't be an officer, what would you do with your life? This indirect way is a better way to get at purpose because if their purpose is to be fair and protect people, you should see these behaviors when they are with their family, and when they see disagreements that are around them. When they're playing poker, you should see someone less likely to cheat than someone else. You see this consistency; it's probabilistic, not all the time, but as a regular pattern more so than in someone with a weaker purpose in this regard. These are the methodologies of being indirect to study this.

One of the other techniques that I'm working on in my research laboratory right now is using circles or Venn diagrams, which you might remember from math class when you were a kid, and having people define themselves. "I want you to write down a list of everything that defines who you are. And now here's this one square and draw the circle of how large or how small they are in terms of the impact in your life." And then follow up in a way that is more indirect. "Ok, so here you mention that you have your family here as this larger circle. What is it you've done?" Reconstruct their lives over the past month. "Did you devote time to your family? What got in the way?" You should see patterns of behavior of working toward these things that are supposedly the most important aspects of their lives. If you don't, I would say you have a superficial or weak purpose. And I think there are a lot of techniques as opposed to just asking questions. All the literature has done to date is directly ask people how much meaning do you have, how much purpose do you have in your lives?

DISCUSSION INTERLUDE 1

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON Let me start by asking Maurice. In terms of the methodology that you're developing, have you looked at it in relation to other indices that may also be related to the outcome measures that we're all interested in, that is, in terms of positive youth development broadly defined, where you look to see the extent to which the information can be gleaned from these essays may be independent or redundant with other information that you can glean? So, for example, if you gave the kids a behavioral task that measures delayed gratification, how similar or different are these measures?

DR. MAURICE ELIAS We've started to do that, but as long as we're working within a correlation mode, we're not going to be able to learn as much as we can; we need to start working in a longitudinal mode. I think that's really going to be the true test of the utility of this kind of methodology. [*An unidentified voice asks for an explanation of the use of the term "longitudinal."*] If you take a snapshot of a variety of different indicators at any one point in time and they relate or don't relate to one another, that tells you *something*. But one question is: if you then take a look three years later at the same phenomena and you look at the pattern of relationships, that tells you a lot more. You can't exactly infer causality, but you can get a sense of directionality and stability of the phenomenon itself, and it helps you [to] draw your conclusions with more confidence. One of the things I think that Todd is touching on is that we don't know a lot about the developmental trajectory of purpose, and so the experiences that are going to lead to the kind of purpose we seem to want to see in adulthood are not necessarily linear. It's funny, I hadn't thought about this until this moment. You know Erik Erikson had sort of a theory of development of purpose if you think of his stage of identity as an analogue of purpose. And he talked about predictable stages that one must go through to get to that point. We don't have anything comparable, I don't think. At least, I haven't read any comparable things about the development of purpose. And yet, implicitly, a lot of what we're talking about is trying to speculate about what is going to lead to a mature sense of purpose when kids get to be adults.

We don't know a lot about the developmental trajectory of purpose. The experiences that are going to lead to the kind of purpose we seem to want to see in adulthood are not necessarily linear.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN Do any of you, and I don't know enough about the state of the field, know Jim Fowler's work on stages of faith in terms of longitudinal development?

RABBI YITZ GREENBERG And also Kohlberg's attempt to rank these things . . .

GILLMAN Fowler pulls all of these things together at the beginning of his book. And talks about the whole notion of a master story. Does anybody take this stuff seriously anymore? Fowler's about twenty years out; twenty years ago he did the research, but where is it? I haven't heard his name mentioned.

DR. TODD KASHDAN There is only so much you can mention in five minutes. I think Dan McAdams is doing a lot of work in terms of Kohlberg's stages of morality, also not using the exact terminology of Erickson—but just the idea of—and this is what you've [Gillman] done with myths—using a life-narrative approach and asking people to reconstruct their lives with details on major transitional periods. This is similar to what Maurice is doing, the idea of not leading the witness. If we're really interested in youth development in the context of Jewish education, there is value in finding people, other than the educators and people involved with the institute, to collect data. This is because members of the institute know what the ideal responses would be. To obtain reliable assessments, students need autonomy in answering

questions. Freedom from the constrictions of social desirability needs to be built into the methods and procedures for collecting and storing data.

GILLMAN Can I just push you for a second? There have been a lot of questions raised about Fowler's conceptualization. I found it singularly helpful to me, personally, in terms of my own faith development but also in terms of working with rabbinical students in what is considered to be the "middle" rabbinical school, somewhere between Reform and Orthodox. But where the whole notion of second naïveté, of breaking the myths, and tracing the evolution of the master story through the latter stages of youth into adulthood—How far in a longitudinal study have you been able to get? Where do you begin and how far have you been able to push it in terms of the various stages of the chronology of the individual life?

ELIAS We have just been able to gather data now for kids in fifth grade, eighth grade, and eleventh grade. And we're still working on these kinds of rubrics, and we're trying to work with these data. I just actually finished collecting them. So we're in an early stage of trying to see if there are any kind of systematic developmental differences. But I think the whole idea of looking at narratives is becoming increasingly recognized as important. I just learned about a field called narrative career counseling from a colleague in South Africa that is used as a comprehensive way of focusing on peoples' vocational life. I think what's happened is we've taken pieces of this—faith development, moral development, vocational development. But purpose is something that is more encompassing and organizing than all of these other areas. And I don't think we've really looked at it in that kind of encompassing, developmental way, at least not quite yet—it may be in your [Kashdan's] opus, I don't know.

KASHDAN Scientists must remain open to unknown possibilities—maybe the stages are different. When we fully examine the narratives, maybe there are quantum leaps and maybe there are multiple pathways to the same outcome (equifinality).

GILLMAN Maybe it's different than a Christian setting and a Jewish setting and a Buddhist setting. It may be very different.

DR. JEFFREY S. KRESS Let me nuance Neil's question to ask: in addition to what have you studied, *where* would you study? Are there points in life worth studying? Is there a way to say "Here is where we would likely see interesting indicators?" Or is it more individual. Narrative implies a certain individual way of evolving. But are there tendencies or generalities we can make about when to check in?

KASHDAN I don't think there is one route to developing a purpose that is couched in spiritual, religious life. I imagine at least two pathways; there are probably a lot of them. One is a very effortful, gradual process. You're learning the traditions from your family, you're learning from your community, you're integrating and synthesizing, you're exploring who you are as a person. There's an exploration process, a discovery process, and another important process that Rachel mentioned very briefly, which I didn't get to address, a synthesizing process. There are times when we are expanding, growing, trying to understand who we are, but we also need time to absorb all this new information that is coming. You mentioned being out in nature—there's a lot of great research on the restorative effects of nature, and I think part of the purpose is not just being consistent with spiritual practice or religion, if that's what we're talking about right now, but also taking a step back and restoring one's energy supply, attention resources, [and] putting all this information together to make a coherent entity of this architecture of who I am as a person. I think this is a gradual process. But we also have a quantum process where a major life event can take place; it can be direct, such as losing a parent, it can be indirect, such as 9/11, and then all of the sudden there's not this gradual, effortful, process; the process is trying to make sense of this event and what derives from it. There is research on altruism born out of suffering, and you see a lot of people that have suffered in development. So I think we need to be open to a varied number of different trajectories when we study these things.

DAVIDSON Can I make one point that you touched on Todd that I think is critically important. It is the issue of consistency. We talked about stimulating behavioral consistency, being relatively resilient to changing contexts as being one of the consequences of having a strong sense of purpose. And I think that one of the things that this implies is the critical need for assessment and evidence to be very broad with respect to the context in which purpose is actually assessed. An individual who we think of as having a very strong sense of purpose should exemplify that sense of purpose in a very wide range of

contexts. And one of the things that I've learned in my thirty years of being a psychologist, and then more of a neuroscientist, is that psychologists tend to be very lazy. It's very easy to ask somebody on a questionnaire how they may behave in a certain hypothetical situation or ask them to consider their experiences. But that's exceptionally crude and oftentimes a deeply misleading strategy for looking at this, rather than actually surveying across many different contexts and seeing the extent to which the echoes, if you will, of purpose are manifested in these very different domains of life. Just to give you one anecdote—we had a long-term meditation practitioner who was studying a month in our lab, and he was staying at a hotel just outside of campus. And the day after he left, I got a call from the manager of the hotel. I thought that there must have been a screw up with the university paying the bill for the hotel, but the manager just called to thank me because he said that three people who are employees of the hotel—a person who checks people in at the front desk, the woman who runs the restaurant, and the chambermaid—all spontaneously commented on the exceptional kindness of this person. They just found being around him to be such an extraordinary experience, they wanted to thank me for having such wonderful people stay at their hotel. And so, that's an example of the infiltration of purpose in everyday life. And that's the kind of thing we should be assessing. We should be sitting in lines in airports when people are frustrated and seeing how their sense of purpose really helps them deal with everyday life when they are challenged. That's when the rubber hits the road. And you can't ask a person to reflect on that because the answers you get will be worthless.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS I want to flip the issue of the narrative developmental trajectory and again focus on Judaic content. Because it's interesting to track the longitudinal progress or self-awareness of students, but what about the narratives we teach? We teach a lot of stories about spiritual development and one of the things that is helpful to me in teaching adults is that most of the narratives are dealing with adults, our heroes. Abraham starts way late in life, even if you take into account how long these characters lived past mid-life. Moses didn't have a good day school education; he was raised in an Egyptian palace, and his journey begins in his eighties. The kids' stories are actually often tragic, like Isaac and Ishmael. What are the stories that resonate with kids, and how do they respond to them? And, now, given that our lives are different, we live in a different society, do we need to—I'm not saying we need to rewrite the Torah—give stories that kids can respond to, and can we analyze that? But, of course, that brings to mind the Harry Potter series. We're living at a time where everybody's affected by Harry Potter, and I think that needs to be put into the equation. It's interesting that in our day and age, Madonna is writing kids' books based on Hasidic stories. What are the stories that are taking root in schools and that are teaching kids about development? And, then, are they age appropriate? I wonder if we can mix that into our explorations.

DR. ROBERT ROESER I think this is a really wonderful point, and it is the case that thinking about purpose—whatever it's about—it's about identity development; and the current way many developmental scientists view identity is in terms of a lifelong process whereby one constructs a self-narrative of a narrative—one that's informed by other narratives, as you're saying. The research shows, though, that even though kids have narrative elements when very young, its only in about middle adolescence when young people, with their capacities for awareness of thought and abstract thinking, can begin to construct a relatively coherent narrative of the self—the story of me now and who I wish to be and fear being in the future. Purpose is all about identification of oneself with some image of the possible, the ideal.

Research on identity in this post-modern age is showing that Erickson kind of got it wrong when he made adolescence the "time" for identity formation—we now conceive of identity development, with purpose being a key part of one's identity development, as a life-long process that begins in a self-aware way in adolescence but that extends through a period called emerging adulthood (18–30 years) and into adulthood (30 years-plus). And the core questions that animate the identity process also lie at the heart of the quest for purpose: Who am I? Where am I from and where am I going? What is the purpose of my life? There is no doubt this quest and its attendant narrative, one's "spiritual life story" begins in earnest in adolescence. What are the stories today that inform this process and this search for purpose in a materialist

Purpose is all about identification of oneself with some image of the possible, the ideal.

age is a key question. Research is really showing, too, that this emerging adulthood, from say eighteen to thirty years of age is a key time in religious and spiritual exploration, among other things.

GILLMAN I think that when we reach seventy, we are just beginning!

TRAVIS During the break I was talking to Steven Cohen who is here and is studying emergent adulthood. And we were talking about these communities—there are seventy across the nation—of spontaneous *minyanim*, not in a synagogue but in somebody's home—very vibrant religious communities that don't fit into any other structures. One of the factors to explain them, he said, is that this is a product of day schools, that these people have the skills and the knowledge to run a service, a participatory service and not rely on the rabbi, and so they don't need to join a shul. They just gather their friends together. So, Audrey, the selling point of a day school . . . you may not be able to prove there is any impact until emergent adulthood and that is worth exploring.

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER I hear you talk about purpose. I'm reflecting back on the three decades I spent as a congregational rabbi, and I am wondering what would happen if I could get those congregants one by one and ask them what they think the purpose of their life is. I don't think many of them will be able to answer the question. I mean I think they'd say "Yeah, I want to be a good husband or wife, . . . a good family," or "I want to be a good whatever I do for a living, and maybe improve my tennis game," and stuff like that. So, I'm just wondering how we would go about finding out from average, nice people on the street, what it would mean to ask them what's the purpose of your life? And how often they reflect. I'm genuinely fascinated.

ELIAS It's interesting . . . because when we actually work with kids on this, we begin by not asking them to reflect on it personally but we ask them to reflect on it biographically, by reading biographies about people and to begin to abstract what they would consider to be the purpose of the life that they're seeing in someone else's biography. Then we have them look at people they know, and have conversations with people they know, about purpose, and then work their way to themselves. I think part of the issue is that there isn't a format and a language and a context for really stopping and taking stock of one's purpose.

DAVIDSON I think a related question is whether it's possible for an individual to have a strong, positive sense of purpose without being cognizant of it. That is, to exemplify the characteristics of a strong, positive purpose in life without being self-reflective about it, necessarily. So, I wonder how that figures into the way you think about this when you do this kind of work.

ELIAS I think that the reflective capacity is very important and, of course, that means, unfortunately, there's a reactivity to the methodology because we're asking people to reflect. But the fact that it's not normative doesn't mean that it shouldn't be. We probably will benefit, actually, from more reflective opportunities, and I think that's what we're finding. [Research subsequent to this symposium has increasingly supported the importance of reflection for learning and overall well-being, e.g., the work of Oliver Sacks.] Because if you think of all the informational messages that are coming to kids today from so many different places and of the process they use to sort out the different influences that are on their lives, Jewishly and otherwise, without an opportunity sit and to sort through, namely, to reflect on those, there's no clear way to know how that's all going to come together as a source of influence. So, I think this is something Rachael Kessler, whose name was mentioned before, feels should be part of all education—a greater opportunity in this incredible information age to reflect on the questions, "What am I learning, what am I hearing, whom am I hearing it from, what do I believe, and how does it get translated into my actions?"

RABBI RACHEL COWAN It's good to have some silence, too, to be able to be out of these constant emotions so that you can actually begin to do it.

KASHDAN My colleague and I have spent a lot of time on this question of awareness. I think there are three dimensions that define purpose. When you think of purpose, we think of the exemplars—Martin Luther King, the Mahatma Gandhi. What I see is three dimensions: You have *scope*, and that's how many domains in a person's life does a purpose have an effect in or how many contexts and situations. Another, and I think this is completely independent, is *strength*, which is, to what degree does it exert an influence on behavior, thoughts, and

feelings within that domain. So you could be extremely strong, and, only in one domain. And then the third dimension is *awareness*. And I think that a dimension of purpose is a degree of awareness a person has in the initial phases. Talking about youth development, there is often a lack of awareness of a person's purpose. The more behaviors they end up enacting, the more goals they create, and the more effort devoted toward those goals, the more you build a level of reflection and a level of authenticity and ownership. It's an iterative process. They reflect more or understand it more as part of the self. But this is derived from these three elements. When we think of purpose, we often think of strong and broad in scope, but there's no reason to suspect that's going to be any more common than other configurations. I would argue the average person has one or two weak purposes that are relatively narrow in scope, and only a few people have very strong purposes.

GREENBERG This not a comment or a question but a request for information addressed to both Drs. Elias and Kashdan. Is the conclusion that—I couldn't tell—I think you were hinting at the fact that in different stages, they have a higher degree of resistance to negative behaviors or the equivalent. In other words, I am wondering what your actual findings were. I was just wondering if you could share that with us.

ELIAS From our work?

GREENBERG Right.

ELIAS There does seem to be a protective effect for kids in difficult circumstances if they have a positive sense of purpose to hold onto. That's something we're finding. Again, how long-lasting it is has yet to be determined but at least in the present moment that we're working with these kids, we can definitely see it. The other thing I think is important is that as kids talk about their sense of purpose and meaning, what we refer to as "laws of life," with one another and share this with family members, it also helps strengthen it. So that when kids can talk about a common sense of purpose—a positive purpose—together, it creates a positive peer context that then emboldens them to be able to walk their talk.

GREENBERG Have you [Kashdan] had that same experience?

KASHDAN Forty years of research and right now, we lack any consensus on answers. The methodology is subpar and basically consists of asking people how much meaning they have in their life. Kash [in the springboard paper] reviews existing questionnaires, which ask on a scale of one to seven, how much purpose do you think you feel you have in your life? Following these questions, researchers follow-up by asking about how physically healthy they are right now, how much anxiety they feel right now? Then correlations are calculated among these different questionnaires. That's it. With a few notable exceptions, that pretty much sums where the field stands on methods for studying purpose.

GREENBERG So you haven't tried to measure these issues using different behavior outcomes?

KASHDAN Oh, I am right now. Right now I'm actually using electronic diaries that I'm having people in the community carry around, and they are randomly beeping them, so I get a random assessment of their behaviors in everyday life; and so I can see patterns at work and, in the home, when they are at leisure . . .

GREENBERG Excuse me while I report to my life-purpose sensor . . . [*laughter*]

KASHDAN The technology is amazing. We also have the E.A.R., the electronic activating recorder. It's like a hearing aid that goes over the ear, and it takes random ambient sounds of what's going on in the background of their lives periodically throughout the day, so it's not obtrusive, and then we go through it with them: "Sounds like there's a party here." "No, that was actually a work meeting." So you can actually see what they do with their lives. And we're relating this to what they say, what they actually do and strive for with their lives. The data are still being collected and hopefully six months from now, I can report the findings.

KUSHNER This was reported in the *New Yorker*. Some young woman reported, "My mother all my life said I should follow my dream, I should follow my dream. So I went to New York City and I followed my dream, and it was like twelve years and I still hadn't made a dent in it; and I called my mother and I said, you know, 'What should I do?' And she said, 'Get a new dream.'" [*laughter*]

GILLMAN It's just fascinating. It made me reflect upon an exercise that I use with my students to try to deal with the whole notion of personal narratives. I say: I give you a fantasy weekend: Friday night you have a blind date, you go to the movies so you don't need to talk to each other; finally you sit down at a restaurant for cheesecake and coffee, and your blind date looks at you and says, "Tell me about yourself." Next morning you have an interview with a human resources person at IBM where you are applying for a job. He looks at your resume and then leans back, smiles, and says, "Tell me about yourself." That afternoon you have your first encounter with you new psychotherapist. He leans back, or she leans back, and says, "Why are you here?" That night you're babysitting your grandchildren, they are all curled up in their PJs, and they say, "Grandma, grandpa, how was it when you were a baby?" I ventured to say that you would tell four different stories depending on the political [context]. So a personal narrative is a highly politicized statement, and I would imagine that there are a lot of, you know, commonalities but it's a highly edited, selective enterprise. When talking about awareness in terms of personal narratives, the thing you do is bring your boyfriend into your family, and you have a meal together with your parents, your family; and then you go for a walk, and your boyfriend looks at you and asks, "Did you see what was going on around that table?" and you say, "No, it was like every other meal." And suddenly you realize that your boyfriend has seen things around your table that you've never seen, and you've been sitting around that table for twenty-five years. So, what's a personal narrative, and how do you construct a personal narrative, and how do you determine what's crucial and what's incidental?

DAVIDSON If I can take the Chair's prerogative, I think that you're asking a series of fantastic questions, and they are deeply important both conceptually as well as methodologically. We will come back to those issues particularly at the end when we're trying to integrate. But in the interests of moving this along, let's have the next two presentations, and then we'll have more discussion.

PRESENTATIONS 2

Robert Roeser · Richard Davidson

DR. ROBERT ROESER

I developed a beautiful twenty-two-slide talk that I will not give but I will hand out, and it actually has data, sort of this crappy data that Todd referred to, [*laughter*] about asking kids, in the survey portion of the study, about their purpose and linking different views of themselves and the world. Since I was told I have just five minutes, I'm just going to speak about five points that I'd like to offer the group. The second thing I'll say before I begin, however, is I also am working on a large study that this data came from on positive youth development and spirituality, and I have a newsletter describing the seven sub-studies of the larger project. Unfortunately, I only have one copy of it, but I'd be willing to e-mail it to all of you or any of you, if you're interested. I have seven suggestions, actually.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN You said five.

ROESER I know, I expanded them in the last minute. [*laughter*] The first suggestion I have for this group is this: remain skeptical of the views of scientists in your work. It seems to me that the ethical and value neutrality of science makes a rapprochement tricky, and we can't wait around for full scientific proof of ancient wisdom! There is a press toward action that science does not prioritize. I was reading a nice article on self-control the other day, and it was talking about how scientists are very good at explaining the manifestations and functions of self-control, but science can never give us a compelling inspirational reason for *why* to be self-controlled other than, perhaps, to say there is some self-fulfillment or hedonistic or avoidance of pain kind of component to it. So there's something about your work being grounded in a moral framework that science does not start out from that makes this all a little tricky! So I think whatever we say—sorry to the conference organizers and to my colleagues—be very skeptical of it because the assumptions of science are very different than the assumptions one has coming from a religious tradition. There is an instrumental or utilitarian view of what it is all about there, and materialism often . . . The history of science on religion shows that it is always trying to explain religion in terms of something other than the meaning that comes from developing one's relationship with a principle of ultimate value: religion is "really" about economics or social relationships, and so on. Also, science has a rather profane view of the human being and, again, that's different, it seems to me, in some ways antithetical to a spiritual view of the human being.

My second suggestion is that I would include youth prominently in everything that you do. Personally, I think that self-report data from interviews and even surveys collected from youth are needed to get young people's perspectives on purpose and its development. I actually think asking kids about their purpose is both an intervention and an assessment itself. And it raises awareness about the question. Actually, I think it would be a great assessment strategy. My father used to ask me, from the time I was very little, "Son, what do you want to be when you grow up? I don't care what you say, I just want you to be thinking about it." Wow.

> Asking kids about their purpose is both an intervention and an assessment.

In California, I helped to train youth to become researchers and investigate youth problems. In your work, you can ally with youth and have them help you figure out what are the questions we should be asking other young people today; in this context, about what it means to be Jewish and to have a Jewish outlook on life. We've trained kids in California to help us gather focus group data, and kids will say things to kids that they won't say to us. So, include youth in that way and in focus groups obviously at the onset and at the end, once you find something you think you understand. You can bring it back to the youth themselves and say "Do we have this right, in your view?" It doesn't mean we privilege that view over other

perspectives on the data we might have, but we include it. So, include their voices.

My third suggestion is that we consider . . . I love the definitions that you've derived for purpose and meaning. I think they're excellent the way they are. And I would just echo something we've been saying that whatever they are, they are fundamentally about identity development in a rapidly globalizing and spiritually hungry world. What we've been saying, what we've heard Todd and Maurice say, is that, really, purpose is about what Gordon Allport, the famous social and personality psychologist, would call a cardinal identity. That is, it's an over-arching identity. Todd and I talked about immigrants. We have a huge immigrant population in the United States. Presumably something about their ethnic identity and being an immigrant filters into a sense of life purpose . . . my parents made these sacrifices for me, coming here; I need to do well. So this cardinal identity organizes other aspects of immigrant youth's lives: often gender identity, maybe religious identity, and so on and so forth. And I think that the development of purpose is not just about identity development, but it's also about world-view development. How do I see the world? Is the world a spiritual place? In the data I gave you, we actually assessed kids' belief in a theological world view, that God and the soul exist; a spiritual world view, that there's something more than the material world; an ecological world view; and then we correlated it with purpose. Those all correlated with purpose. Then we asked them if they believe that science has replaced the need for religion in the modern world, and to the extent kids believe that, they were much less likely to think their lives have a purpose and that life was meaningful and were much more likely to say life seemed meaningless. I don't think science is the culprit. I think dogmatic science, which removes mystery and awe is the culprit. We have to beware of a science that desacralizes the world, and I think many young people have to navigate this terrain between a materialist science and spirituality today. This is where the contemplative life can be so important—forming a bridge between rigorous inquiry into nature and human nature as we see in science and rigorous inquiries into our own purpose and nature as we see in the contemplative traditions of the world.

Tolerance for ambiguity and purpose, appreciation of paradox, deep inquiry in the nature of suffering, and finally, humility at the play of opposites in this world are essential features of a healthy sense of purpose. So wherever there's certitude, I'm not so sure there's noble purpose.

Suggestion four, we've already talked about. Assess Jewish educational contexts (as well as broader media contexts) as much as individual Jewish youth if you want to know about the kinds of purposes young people are developing today. I think this was so critical in what the rabbis really all talked about: whatever it is that the youth is developing, it's scaffolded, or what we call in developmental psychology an "assisted performance." They're not making these things up out of whole cloth; they're looking to their teachers, they're looking to the text, they're looking to what people say, what they do; their looking to the media to figure out who they are, what the world is like, and what their purpose in life should be. So to a certain extent you could develop a measure of youth purpose that never asks the kids anything. Now that's not totally true, but what's going on in the environment? How are we setting this expectation that life has purpose? What are the words we're using? What are the stories we're telling? In India it was quite clear that unless kids were in an environment where they were being told stories, they actually weren't developing any mental concepts about their inner lives at all. We would ask, "What is spirituality for you?" Their responses all depended on whether their contexts had ever required them to explore such issues. And this goes back to the idea that it's not normative; it's not normative because nobody ever says, "What's your purpose in life?" How can we make the exploration of the inner life, of meaning and purpose, normative again?

Suggestion five. This might be controversial. Find foreclosed and unquestioned purposes and senses of meaning in youth problematic even if consistent with tradition. I think certainty and purpose don't go together. I think tolerance for ambiguity and purpose, appreciation of paradox, deep inquiry in the nature of suffering, and finally, humility at the play of opposites in this world are essential features of a healthy sense of purpose. So wherever there's certitude, I'm not so sure

there's noble purpose. I think there's something dogmatic there and something dangerous as well.

Suggestion six: Work on the hard problem of science and religion as complementary ways of knowing in Jewish education. How do we promote a spirituality of reason, questioning, and self-inquiry and a science of humility, awe, and mystery? So the science tells us a lot but if it destroys mystery, it's dogma. And if the spirituality isn't critical, I don't know—it's not self-inquiring—I'm preaching to the choir here because the Jewish faith is very inquiry-oriented. The last thing I would say is consider measurement activities as formative, ongoing, and highly applied in nature. So, I like the idea that if you want to know what the kid is assimilating from Jewish education, get him to teach younger kids Jewish education and see what they do. This amounts to what educators call a "performance assessment." What would they actually do if you made them the teacher? And that will be a show-through moment for what they know and do. To come back to some of these points—we ask kids about their art classes; we use art, artifacts, and music: Tell us what you find particularly spiritually moving. Is there some piece of music that you listen to? What lyrics? And really, again, try to nestle up to their media-rich world to try to get unobtrusive measures of this.

One final thing and then I'll end. We also went to environments in the Boston area where kids were heavily involved in contribution to their community, with the idea that if purpose is about serving something more than my own self-interests, then let's go to those kids, get nominations of kids who are doing a lot of community service, and we have them tell us their life stories. Is there any religious or spiritual commentary in these real life stories? In this case, we were interested in how purpose and religion and spirituality might go together. So you might think about nomination studies of kids who really exemplify this. What are their qualities?

RABBI YITZ GREENBERG What were your findings?

ROESER The data's just in, so we don't know the answer yet. However, there's a series of nice tools as Maurice alluded to for analyzing this kind of data. You can do some quantitative analysis of what kids say, get out some features of the language; and we can also do thematic analysis, and there are other techniques we can talk about.

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON

First let me just start by saying I feel a little bit like I don't belong because I am really a neuroscientist; I don't study meaning and purpose, and I'm not a Jewish scholar. So my identity really doesn't much intersect although I'm deeply interested in these questions, and I am embarked on a stream of research that I think is relevant to these issues. So let me first begin with a little story, and this relates to an issue that was brought up this morning that is still a little troubling to me and that is the issue of the extent to which qualities like purpose and spirituality are transient as opposed to more consistent and that just permanently infuse our lives. This is a true story. A couple of years ago, I was in Dharamasala with the Dalai Lama, and we had these meetings at his home with a small number of scientists. We would typically go for about three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon; and in the middle of this three-hour period, there's a little tea break, and the Dalai Lama typically just sits in his chair during the tea break, and you can just sort of schmooze with him. I was there a couple of years ago, and there was this interesting Japanese scientist with us. And during tea break, we were all just sitting around just schmoozing, and he asked the Dalai Lama a really interesting question, which is very pertinent to this meeting. He said, "Tell me, your Holiness, can you tell us the time in your life when you were the most happy?" Now, I thought that was kind of an interesting question. And just like that [*snaps fingers*], His Holiness said, "I think right now." It just was a totally spontaneous comment. And I think that's an important teaching, at least that I took from it, about the continuity of practice, the continuity of these qualities that *utterly* infuse and *radically* transform everyday life. I think that this, to me, represents certainly an extreme end point, if you will. I don't think that this is very common, but I do think that it is—from the place that I sit —within the capacity of all our brains. But it takes practice and it takes specific—what I think of as—mind training to actually bringing about these kinds of transformations. But I think these transformations are quite possible. And they are within the realm of all of us. I think it's selling the human spirit short to think of these as necessarily ephemeral, that we just simply create the conditions and hope for the best. I think that we should be challenged to think about methods that produce better results because if all you can do is slightly increase the probability of these transient experiences occurring, to me, it is just selling the spirit short.

I don't think that it's taking full advantage of who we are and what our capacities to do good on this planet are. And those capacities I see very much as rooted in the brain and that is really how I approach this topic. And let me just say a couple of additional things related to this. When I think about the concepts of meaning and purpose as a neuroscientist, one of the things that we do in neuroscience, as well as in many domains in science, which sometimes has a bad smell to it, is reductionism. I think that there are different brands of reductionism. But when I think of the meaning of purpose, I'm immediately led to try to think about what the constituents are of meaning and purpose. What are the underlying building blocks that help meaning and purpose to develop and unfold? And I think about things like the fact that if someone does have a strong sense of purpose, then aspects of their attention need to be stable, they need to continuously come back and remind themselves what their purpose is. And in order to remind yourself what your purpose is, you need to have some element of stable attention. And we know a lot about attention, and we know a lot about how to educate attention despite the fact that William James in his chapter on attention in *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890 has a beautiful passage where he said that educating attention would be *the* education *par excellence*—and he actually italicized "par excellence" in the original—but he said how to affect an education on attention is not clear, but he said this would be the education *par excellence*. There *are* strategies for educating attention, which I think potentially would have consequences on the development of meaning and purpose and actually produce discernible changes in the brain. So, one of the global messages of my remarks is that education that promotes virtuous qualities of mind, including the development of meaning and purpose, should have systematic effects on the brain in these areas that we can measure.

If all you can do is slightly increase the probability of these transient experiences occurring, it is just selling the spirit short. It's not taking full advantage of who we are and what our capacities to do good on this planet are. And those capacities I see very much as rooted in the brain.

Another component, another constituent of meaning and purpose, is having a strong motivation to pursue goals, positive goals, and having enthusiasm for those goals. And those are all things that give us hooks in terms of how we can go about measuring this. Another major domain that I think is important for us to consider that was mentioned implicitly in some of the remarks is what the consequences are of having a strong sense of meaning and purpose that is of a very positive sort and embodies these kinds of virtuous qualities. One of the consequences, I think, of having a strong meaning and purpose is that when obstacles occur, they will be transformed into opportunities. And the transformation of obstacle into opportunity is something that I think can be seen in everyday life. So rather than obstacles being sources of frustration that may produce irritation and anger, obstacles are celebrated as opportunities to reinforce and renew and reinvigorate sense of purpose. And this was actually related to a comment that Nancy made early this morning about returning back to an object of concentration in meditation practice when the object of the concentration is lost. It's an opportunity—an opportunity to re-invigorate one's sense of purpose. So we can look at how individuals respond to obstacles as a way of assessing their sense of purpose. So daily hassles, which modern life is just replete with, will be responded to very, very differently by an individual whose sense of purpose is oriented toward these kinds of positive virtuous qualities. Let me also say that in addition to consequences on the brain—and this goes back to some comments that Yitz made earlier this morning—I think that these qualities have biological consequences for the body in ways that actually may be relevant to physical health and illness, which is a whole other area and relates to connections between certain religious behaviors and health that have been the object of study over the past few years. So I'll end there, and we can continue in discussion.

DISCUSSION INTERLUDE 2

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER Have you [*turning to Davidson*] ever thought of studying someone like Adin Steinsaltz instead of the Dalai Lama? I'm just puzzled [that those of us] around the table, when we are looking for spiritual models, we always seem to look "outside the house." There are some people in our own community, and I'm wondering if we studied them if that would aim us in a different direction.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS It would be interesting to nominate who we could study . . . I just want to bring up something that occurred to me; there are certain assumptions on the table that I want to move to the fore. I think, Ritchie, that when you talk about responding to obstacles and positive virtues, you are working under certain assumptions that I think are more Buddhist in terms of what those qualities are. Whereas, and I am putting you up as the straw man, Yitz, if the goal is to redeem the world and I have that strong focus that I need to heal the world, that's my goal. So, when an obstacle comes my way, I might plow that person over, or I might act in a way that is not Buddhist and peaceful and compassionate because I need to make that thing happen. For example, the establishment of the State of Israel and the preservation of the State of Israel involves a lot of violence. I think there's an issue that when we're really goal focused—is that good?

We don't have the time to do it right now, but I think there's an interesting place to explore, "to serve *Hashem*," not God. There is in that name (which we don't really explore, we don't deal with deeply), *yud-heh-vav-heh*—that's the God we worship, at least in the Bible—a sense of actually serving the present moment, that which is continually renewed—now, now, now. But I think if we have a God conception that calls us to *serve a goal* and not be responsive *to the very moment*, it might not bring about what you imagine it should bring about.

RABBI NANCY FLAM I just wanted to respond to what you're [Davidson] wrestling with, what emerged this morning about constancy or lack of constancy, and I'm wondering if we're actually talking about different things. That is, I'm wondering if we're talking about a Sinai moment that was our metaphor, or we can find other ways to talk about it—really being there or really seeing—or in *ḥasidut,* the sense of the veil dropping away. I wonder if these are discrete experiences of a spiritual high or a cultivated *peak* moment, as opposed to that which I would call the cultivation of consciousness, of truth insofar as the human brain can see the truth of what is real. But I think there's another domain; because when we talk about spirituality at the Institute, we talk of a cultivation of consciousness and character, or consciousness and soul traits, or consciousness and qualities that reflect the divine in human form. What we work on is a cultivation of *both* consciousness and character. We certainly work on the creation of more constant soul qualities that will manifest in generosity, patience, kindness, truthfulness, et cetera. We're less focused, actually, on spiritual highs or peaks. So I just wonder if perhaps what Yitz and Larry were talking about were more discrete moments of peak *knowing* in some way, which maybe you can map neurologically, and we're talking about yet a different kind of training of the mind toward a certain kind of equanimity and expression of what we would call soul characteristics.

RABBI YITZ GREENBERG I want to follow on Nancy's comment because I was thinking along the same lines. The opening section of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah has a section called *Hilkhot De'ot,* which is sometimes translated loosely as "rules and laws of ideas." You look at it and think that he's going to tell you the top ten ideas. But it turns out that what he means by *de'ot* is really "virtues" or "character traits," which are a very different thing. So I think there will be a distinction between what I think is a fleeting experience—a sense of God's presence, the sense of total knowing, of being at a peak, which it is just not possible to maintain. But the Torah can strive to instill permanent character traits that guide our response to life. Maybe I'm wrong about peak experiences. I haven't had the training with the Dalai Lama, and maybe if I meditate, I would be high all the time. I just find that possibility, spiritually, very doubtful. Having read the literature on saints' lives and on Jewish and great religious figures, most of them have

shorter or longer periods of great absence of God—of great spiritual downers and devastation. I think about the generation of the Holocaust and anybody who feels and senses God's presence all the time during that period—well, you're a better man or woman than I am. I think it's just not workable.

That said, the idea of shaping character or virtue, where the person is changed, is doable. This is a classic *musar* vision, the idea that you can actually restructure your character. I really believe this is achievable. If you have a tendency to bad temper, could you train yourself to not react the first time? Or if you have a real sense of God or a greater perspective or a real sense of purpose, could you in fact dismiss what otherwise could be very aggravating? Feeling the presence of God, you can override what otherwise could be totally unnerving and be able to stay on message or on path. This goal I think is more traditionally Jewish as well as more plausible. In fact, one of the ways of interpreting the purpose of halakhic observances is that they are meant to train you, that is, shape character. Audrey said earlier that we like to think that kosher is not just training not to eat this or that, but it's training for delayed gratification or mastery or purpose in choosing what I eat. The Talmud says: Do you think God really cares whether the slaughtering cut is done to the front of the neck [as it is] or from the back of the neck? Rather the commandments [rules] were given to purify [= train] people.

One of the ways of interpreting the purpose of halakhic observances is that they are meant to train you, that is, shape character.

The other comment that I wanted to make to Richie—I find your material fascinating, and you are not at all guilty of scientific reductionism (a tendency that I also find problematic). But to follow through, I think that what Yakov was trying to say about the Jewish-Buddhist difference, I would rephrase as follows. In part, a Buddhist approach involves much less personal confirmation of worth, growing out of being loved or being in relationship, or being connected. Buddhism much more involves the notion of abolition of ego and of transcending the self in order to be in harmony with the universe. I think that's a major difference between Jewish (and probably Christian tradition) and Buddhist tradition. This judgment—as to building a sense of self or trying to abolish ego—leads to very different outcomes in terms of giving one a sense of purpose. One outcome that I think Buddhists have to struggle with today: Is there a meaningfulness to work and creativity? Historically, to a significant extent, worldly activities were deemed to be of secondary significance. Buddhist philosophy is wrestling with this now as people have moved and live in western settings, in a free-market, capitalist atmosphere. I remember a conversation we had with the Dalai Lama in which he said that he was struggling to come up with some new understanding—a philosophy or theology of work—because until now, labor and professional service was considered trivial or secondary. In their tradition, worldly activity was perceived as focused on a dimension of being that was mostly surface and illusion. Yet for the Tibetan refugees in the West, work has become central in their lives. Therefore, he had to find some greater meaning in the world, in the work, in this material life.

This comparison is made without denying the fact that in the Jewish tradition you have schools of thought with the same tendencies to dismiss this worldly activity. However, historically, these approaches were more limited; they won a more marginal position. For example, you have in kabbalistic and other sources tendencies that point to the same model as Buddhism; they urge the individual to rise above ego activity in order to get into the deeper rhythm of the cosmos. In discussing life's purpose, you do have to allow for such genuine cultural differences or disagreements. So, what's the consequence for our research? I think it raises the issues of what values we privilege. Yakov is worried that you are going to privilege passivity as against willingness to use force, but I think it's probably a broader issue about what we privilege in expressing a sense of purpose as opposed to what is seen as of less value or significance. One has to become aware of cultural differences in order not to slip into a certain framework that pre-judges or prejudices the research outcome.

DR. MAURICE ELIAS Let me share a little reflective path between what Richie said and what Nancy said. When you said the Sinai experience . . . the Sinai experience, from my non-expert point of view is really a relatively ineffective intervention. [*laughter*] It didn't effect a lot of people deeply in terms of inculcating in them a sense of purpose.

TRAVIS But longitudinally—look at it longitudinally! [*laughter*]

ELIAS That's exactly right—think about what it took. It really took a system to be created to integrate not only experience but skills and attitude and conversational contexts for continuity. All those things are very, very important and without that, I think that obstacles actually *will* get the better of us. So, in other words, I think that part of saying that someone has a strong sense of purpose is thinking about what it takes to get to that point. It's not just an individual characteristic; there are contextual factors, there's a skill set, there's a set of beliefs that are strong, some powerful, directed emotions, and so forth. And then I think about what we do in Jewish education, and I think Jewish education in many instances can be thought of as a series of obstacles thrown in front of individuals without a strong sense of purpose. And therefore, there is very little motivation to get around those obstacles. This is especially true as we reach the pivotal age of adolescence, when we lose at least 75 percent of after-school religious school students. They see little reason to fight the obstacles. Rather, as you [Kushner] were saying before, they conclude, "So, I'll get a different purpose. Because this is painful and difficult for me and why should I go through this? Where's it going to get me?" I think that the balance of the context and strength of the sense of purpose and the way in which people are exposed to obstacles is a very important balance that we have to think about.

DR. ROBERT ROESER I don't know if this is helpful—I just want to clarify something Richie said, from the research side. I think that there's *attention* and *intention* that we're talking about. There are two key components here, and there are pedagogies aimed at affecting each. Meditation is the classic training in attention regulation. And I think what Nancy was saying earlier about constructivist teaching, how to you help kids discover meaning, is about the development of intentions or purposes or values. Attention is the energy that our intentions invest. And one of the things we don't talk about enough is the role of memory. What we really want to do is create a set of experiences—there was this idea once of a spiral curriculum where you teach youth a concept that is appropriate at one age in one way and then you teach it again in another way at another age—so that they develop a mental habit, a set of intentions, a value-belief system that is strong in memory and serves, eventually, to automatically direct attention toward the intentions instantiated in the belief system (e.g., do good works). The last thing I want to add is that this idea of the cognitive and emotional being separate—[we] now know pretty much that all belief systems and that all learning are both cognitive and emotional in nature, so we don't need to make this false dichotomy. To some extent all of our beliefs are colored with an emotional valence of positive-negative-neutral. This is related to the huge problem, of course, about what constitutes "good" or "noble" intentions and ignoble intentions. And that's where psychology is not that great. You know that the people who drove those planes into the World Trade Center had incredible attention regulation and incredibly strong intentions. They had these two components. We can't solve this problem, I mean, that's a different problem than science is equipped to handle fully.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN I think this has to be said. I think there has been, so far as what I've seen today, sort of an assumption here that Yakov and Rachel and Larry and I are sort of talking about the generic Judaism, and that's just not so. I think [that] what [is] not exposed is the fact that we have, or at least I have, this understanding, that Yakov has his understanding, and my understanding is a radically different understanding of what the tradition is all about. I won't speak for anyone else. I do not believe that Sinai was a historical event . . . and issues of authority, issues of what constitutes the tradition, issues of what is binding, understanding how Judaism got started in the first place. I tend to be a religious naturalist, that this is the word of the community. Therefore we have different understandings of what are the sacred books. Yakov talks a great deal about Hasidic, kabbalistic [ideas]. This has nothing to do with my own curriculum of what I teach or what I would like to teach or how I would want to teach Judaism. I am just wondering at what point in this inquiry one has to begin to expose the varieties of Judaism, the theological issues, and the fact that when Yitz speaks of pluralism—which he almost alone has been promulgating—the notion, which is a radical pluralism, is very legitimate; and we have to take into account that this is going to lead to very, very different pictures of what constitutes happiness. At some point we're going to have to stop talking about a generic Jewish sense of purpose and meaning: Jewish purpose, Jewish meaning, Jewish happiness. There is no Judaism; there are Judaisms and many different theological assumptions, many different issues, [many] ways of handling authority, and many different portraits of what

constitutes the tradition, what constitutes the curriculum, what constitutes the sacred canon. My canon is not Yakov's canon, for example. That's okay. So, I hate to throw sort of a monkey wrench—a complication into the inquiry—but I think it's going to be a much more complex endeavor than I have been able to gather until now.

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON Let me just say a couple words about that. First of all, just to clarify my role in this research program: I am Audrey's brother-in-law, I don't have any formal role at all; I am a neutral adviser from afar, and I'm happy to be involved to the extent that I am. The comment made, though, is very similar to something within the tradition that I've been working on, meditation research, where it's the same issue, particularly in this culture. People tend to think of meditation as meditation, that when we talk about studying meditation we unwittingly assume that we're always talking about the same thing, but meditation in the Buddhist tradition is, perhaps, very different than in the Hindu tradition and then within each of these traditions there are hundreds of practices, many of which are likely to lead to different consequences. And so I think that you're bringing up an analogous issue in Judaism, and I think that inevitably it [must] be seriously grappled with, and I think this is an issue that is going to be important for continuing, for folks working on the study to consider, and it will have some very important long-term consequences. I am thinking about how to design methods that are particularly sensitive to specific traditions within Judaism. And so I think that's going to be critical.

KUSHNER Can we speak of it meaningfully, just among ourselves, about a sense of occasional fleeting transcendent holiness? Could we? Would most of us initial that?

DAVIDSON [What] I resonate with is the basic distinction between these more fleeting experiences, however you want to label them, versus character traits, and I think one of the soul traits—I like that term—and I think what is particularly important to emphasize, is the *trait* notion, of soul traits. By a trait we mean something relatively enduring, stable across cross contexts. And, I think that with respect to education, what really is most important are these soul traits. If you don't have the soul traits, then having a few fleeting experiences is not going to be particularly helpful and will not lead you on the right kind of trajectory. So I think that it's clarifying to think about soul traits and what those are and how we can best go about identifying them, perhaps by identifying them within different sub traditions within Judaism.

KUSHNER You [Davidson] sort of went off on the "fleeting" part, that was the key part of what I was asking. It seems to be like nails on a blackboard for you.

GREENBERG Paradoxically, [for] the "fleeting"—if you remember it and you come back to it regularly—all you need is the moment of intensity of conviction and experience. You live off that for the rest of your life, for twenty years, for thirty years. Larry, you've lived off that story for thirty-five years.

GILLMAN To go back to something that Yakov said. You know Heschel's definition of "faith" is faithfulness to the moment of insight during the long periods in the desert. If you're lucky, you've got two, three, four, sometimes . . .

KUSHNER But you build from that. The goal is to create a psyche of personality that is able to access those components with higher regularity, higher frequency, but the only thing that we may never agree on is, I don't think you can ever have it on demand. You can't say: do this, do this, and you'll get it for sure.

GILLMAN We're back to that again!? [*laughter*]

TRAVIS Why [do] we teach prayer, *davening*, to our kids [in a way that we are] investing forty-five minutes a day, and it doesn't awaken something in them and turn them on? And to me, that's what the siddur is supposed to do, at least parts of it. And if it's not happening—I mean, why shouldn't people have a profound experience every morning? That's the school I want my kid to go to.

GREENBERG You know where it exists? [*laughter*]

FLAM May I say, Yakov, I think that depends on some of the mind training. That is to say, I think in order for a Jew to have a meaningful experience with the siddur, one has to understand phenomenologically oneself what happens in relation to the words, thinking about Heschel who wrote tremendously about the relationship between the praying soul and the word. One has to, I think, investigate one's experience and know the truth of one's experience, and have colleagues [who are] supportive and classmates and teachers who can hear the truth of one's experience. One can be guided into a more precise opening in that. I think the mind and the heart can be trained

to engage with the siddur. It's probably the hardest task in the Jewish community, and it's a crying need, but I think that, too, can be cultivated.

TRAVIS I agree. And if we don't (whether it is an orthodox school, or—I don't know what's going on in the Solomon Schechter schools)? If kids are saying *pesukei dezimra* and reciting Psalms, which are really ecstatic poetry, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah" and not experiencing it, that does damage to a person.

The mind and the heart can be trained to engage with the siddur. It's probably the hardest task in the Jewish community, and it's a crying need, but I think that, too, can be cultivated.

KUSHNER [Eugene] Borowitz, my teacher, once said he was *davening* for years and years and years in synagogue as a member of the community. And he said, "We were praying (I forget the psalm)," and he said, "all of the sudden one day, I realized I wasn't reciting King David's words, they had become *my* words." So, your question is, how long do you keep paying your dues before you say I'm out of here, or you get to the moment where all of a sudden it pays off?

DAVIDSON Or, are there alternative strategies that we can discern that may be more effective to teach exactly what Yakov is describing to increase the likelihood that this will occur sooner and for longer periods? [*simultaneous conversation*]

TRAVIS Especially in this "clicking" generation. I told my son—he goes to davening every morning—"Don't tell your rebbe, don't tell your teacher. Find one line, get into it, say it a few times." He's thirteen years old. Is he doing it? Does it work? I don't know enough about development, but I know he sits at his computer, and he clicks; and he is excited, and he clicks, clicks, just fine. If he just reads all these words I know *that's* not working but at the same [time] I want him to say the Psalms so later in life they're natural to him, but I don't want to do that at the risk of him being so turned off.

GILLMAN I was invited to speak at a prominent high school. They have eight different *minyanim,* and none of them is working. [*laughter*] I don't know what you expect to happen to these high school kids who are living on the upper west side or upper east side of Manhattan, who have very, very full lives, coming out of homes where we don't know what's going on. We don't know what was discussed over breakfast, what issues are involved between the parents; we don't know what else is in their cell phone as they are coming to school in the morning, and they walk into school at 8:00 in the morning with all of this baggage that they bring into the classroom; and you expect them to walk into the room, you know, flip the switch, and it should be meaningful. I said "Why?" What's wrong with that expectation?

DAVIDSON What's wrong with the expectation that you guys should experiment and try things that may work better?

GILLMAN Yeah, but you're stuck with fact that the expectation is that you have to cover the words. Simon Greenberg, *alav hashalom*, was a great man here. He came back from the High Holidays one year and I said, "Professor Greenberg, how do you recite all the *al ḥet*s over and over and over again throughout Yom Kippur?" And he said, "I don't." I said, "You don't?" He said, "No, I don't." I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I find one and I focus on that. Why focus on that one? By the time I figure that out, they've moved on and I rejoin them." Now, at his age, with his stature, he had absolutely no guilt doing that, but our high school kids are expected to say them all, and the model is impossible. At 8:00 in the morning, they're given a prayer book— [*simultaneous conversation*]

DR. TODD KASHDAN What Richie is saying is going back to this idea of being hyper-focused on one area, about having one letter in the Torah that connects with you, but there are other regulatory strategies you can use. One is the example that you brought before about the boyfriend and girlfriend [at] the dinner table; and so the boyfriend is going to meet the family for the first time and [will be] seeing them as the novel entities that they are at that moment. And the idea [is] that we can re-read a book with a level of mundaneness or we can re-infuse, as if looking at it for the first time. We can read the same words, listen to the same songs with a level of attention, a full set of awareness of what we're looking at the first time we do it. That's a mindset we have to cultivate and hopefully it becomes easier and easier to get there.

KUSHNER We're not talking about a slavish rehearsal of halakhically required behavior. We all understand that. And we also know that within sacred Jewish traditions, especially kabbalistic [and] Hasidic [traditions], there are mechanisms, like Greenberg's, for circumventing that, so we all understand that. You show me a Jewish kid who prays three times a day every day for four years in a row, and there's something wrong with the kid. We all understand that. So we need to talk about finding and accessing—what you guys are already doing—trying to find those mechanisms from within our own tradition that help us revitalize it and re-spiritualize it and remind people that the goal, even though it cannot be guaranteed, is going to be more likely if you try it this way or you sit that way or you meditate first this way and then you do the *davening*, as opposed to just keep doing it and doing it.

We need to talk about finding and accessing—trying to find those mechanisms from within our own tradition that help us revitalize it and re-spiritualize it

DR. JEFFREY S. KRESS Okay just a couple comments before the break. First of all, having consulted and worked with a lot of schools with both Jewish and secular settings, I can say this question is one that the teachers struggle with all the time. How can I build meaning when I have to cover the curriculum? We talk about it on one level but know that it is playing out in secular schools, too. I have to teach social studies, meet the standards, et cetera, et cetera, but I wanted to teach some kind of meaning, too. I wanted to recognize one more person who has been a member of the team and who has been especially influential in some of our early work on sense of meaning and purpose, who wasn't mentioned before, Trudy Steinfeld.

[*end of recorded material*]

APPENDIX A

Symposium Participants

RABBI RACHEL COWAN was at the time of the symposium Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality. Currently, she is Senior Fellow of the Institute.

DR. RICHARD DAVIDSON is William James and Vilas Research Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

DR. MAURICE ELIAS is a professor of psychology and the director of the clinical PhD program at Rutgers University.

RABBI NANCY FLAM is Co-Director of Programs at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality and the editor for *LifeLights*.

RABBI NEIL GILLMAN, PhD was at the time of the symposium Professor of Jewish Philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he is currently a professor emeritus of Jewish philosophy.

RABBI IRVING (YITZ) GREENBERG, PhD is the past president of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation and served as the founding president of CLAL—the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

MEGAN KASH-MACDONALD is currently working on a PhD at the Institute of Child Health at University College, London.

DR. TODD KASHDAN was at the time of the symposium Assistant Professor of Psychology at George Mason University, where currently he is Associate Professor of Psychology and Senior Scientist of the Center for Consciousness and Transformation.

DR. JEFFREY S. KRESS was at the time of the symposium an assistant professor of Jewish Education at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish education at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where currently he is an associate professor of Jewish education.

RABBI LAWRENCE KUSHNER was at the time of the symposium Visiting Professor of Jewish Spirituality at the Graduate Theological University in Berkeley and also served in his current position as the Emanu-El scholar-in-residence at Congregation Emanu-El of San Francisco.

DR. ROBERT ROESER was at the time of the symposium an associate research professor at the Institute for Applied Research on Youth Development at Tufts University. Currently, he is a professor of psychology and human development at Portland State University in Oregon.

RABBI YAKOV TRAVIS, PhD was at the time of the symposium an adjunct associate professor at Siegal College. He is Founding Director of Tiferet Institute.

APPENDIX B

Purpose and Meaning

A Review of Their Conceptualization and Measurement

V. Megan Kash

Religiosity and a sense of purpose are qualities shown to have numerous psychological and even physiological benefits (Koenig & Larson, 2001; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005). This cluster of characteristics involves the ability to transcend life's challenges and to identify with a superordinate cause or entity. Overall, these characteristics have historically been neglected in health-related empirical investigation although a recent upturn in this trend is apparent (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005). When religiosity and purpose *have* been included in research, they have most often been studied within adult populations that have experienced a major loss or traumatic life event. This is because the attainment of a sense of religiosity and purpose is presumed to be related to maturity and/or reflection on accumulated life experiences. However, emerging research in developmental theory and positive psychology has challenged these assumptions. Recent findings are beginning to show that adolescents' cognitive capacities may not prevent them from comprehending (as well as benefiting from) such abstract and complex concepts as religiosity and purpose (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005).

Association of Meaning with Problem Behaviors

Among adults, numerous studies have found a linkage between meaning and purpose and psychological well-being (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969; Debats, 1996; French & Joseph, 1999; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Reker & Wong, 1988; Wong, 1989). Conversely, a lack of meaning has been linked to numerous negative outcomes such as drug involvement (Coleman, Kaplan, & Downing, 1986; Noblejas de la Flor, 1997), alcoholism (Schlesinger, Susman, & Koenigsberg, 1990), and anger (Sappington & Kelly, 1995).

Purpose has been found to be negatively associated with depressive symptoms and negative affect (Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). More recently, Mascaro and Rosen found that college students' sense of meaning predicted levels of hope and depressive symptoms two months later, beyond variance explained by baseline levels of hope, depression, social desirability, and the Big Five personality factors (2005). Heisel and Flett found that meaninglessness predicted suicide ideation, beyond the variance explained by depressive symptoms and life satisfaction (2004), while Harlow, Newcomb and Bentler found that purpose in life mediated the relationship between depression and suicidal ideation (1986).

Two studies examined the association between purpose and substance use and abuse among younger adolescent populations (middle and high school students), with both finding a significant negative association (Minehan, Newcomb, & Galiaig, 2000; Sayles, 1995). These results were maintained across ethnicities (African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian) and gender.

Overall, the literature seems to reveal a consistently negative association between purpose and internalizing symptoms, at least among adults. With regard to externalizing behaviors, a stronger sense of purpose seems to be a protective effect against substance abuse, which has been replicated for adolescents. Yet, much less seems to be known about how an adolescent's sense of purpose relates to other dimensions of externalizing behavior such as aggression, delinquency, and

crime. Although researchers interested in youth's sense of purpose have theorized that purposelessness can lead to social problems such as antisocial behavior (Damon, 1995), this relationship has yet to be documented in the literature.

The Construct of Meaning and Purpose

The conceptualizations of meaning and purpose have changed both across time and between researchers. Frankl, often considered the forefather of meaning research, used the concepts of meaning and purpose interchangeably in his writings. A Nazi prison camp survivor, he firmly believed, "it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us" (1959, p. 98). Frankl conceived of meaning and purpose as essentially the same thing—a unique, dynamic, ever-changing motivation that "differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour" (p. 113) and drives individuals to seek his or her "own specific vocation or mission in life" (p. 113). More recently, theorists have proposed models for defining meaning that include a distinction between meaning and purpose.

In describing the etymology of the word "meaning" as it is used within the meaning and purpose literature, Klinger (1998) concludes that researchers' conceptions of meaning include both of the dictionary definitions listed for the word. "To mean" is defined as "to have in the mind as a purpose: to *intend,*" and as "to serve or intend to convey, show or indicate: to *signify*." Meaning should therefore be conceived of as both an intention and a signifier, and in this framework, meaning in life would necessarily include one's purposes in life. Meaning as a superordinate concept containing purpose is also similarly conveyed in Reker's definition of meaning: "existential meaning is the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment" (2000, p. 41).

Baumeister's model of personal meaning is often cited for its comprehensive approach to the examination of the components of meaning. Baumeister (1991) proposes four needs for meaning—purpose, efficacy, value, and self-worth. Purpose includes the need to set and meet objective goals for oneself and experience a sense of fulfillment. Efficacy encompasses the need to feel in control of one's environment. Value relates to the need to justify one's actions in a moral sense, and self-worth is the need to feel one is a valuable member of society. While it seems likely, as Baumeister conjectures, that the attainment of all four of these needs would lead to the greatest satisfaction in life, a scientific investigation of the validity of this model would be a monumental undertaking. One major impediment to a verification of this theory is the confounding relationship of Baumeister's definition of meaning with numerous other distinct constructs. The breadth of Baumeister's theory can also be evidenced by his definition of meaning as "shared mental representations of possible relationships among things, events and relationships. Thus meaning *connects* things" (p. 15).

Reker and Wong have also posited a model for the construction of meaning (Reker & Wong, 1988). Their concept of meaning includes three interrelated components. The primary component is *cognitive* and includes beliefs and schemas. The latter two are born out of the first and include *emotional* and *motivational* factors. The emotional factors are the feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment brought about by establishing a set of beliefs (cognitive component) and/or by the striving for a goal or achievement (motivational component). Similarly, the motivational factors are conceived of through the cognitive or emotional components, or both. While Reker and Wong's operationalization of meaning seems to be a relatively better fit for empirical inquiry, it, too, is confounded with affective variables such as depression and happiness.

Both Baumeister's and Reker and Wong's theoretical models discuss meaning as a broader, more inclusive concept than purpose; Klinger's review of the evolution of meaning similarly defines meaning as a larger concept. These researchers tend to view purpose as the motivational aspect that interacts with other components to create a comprehensive sense of meaning in life. Thus, according to these researchers, purpose can be conceived of as including a sense of internal drive to seek higher-level, far-reaching goals in life, whereas meaning is the overall result of seeking goals in life, which includes the process of pursuit as well.

While Baumeister, Reker, and Wong have clearly articulated a distinction between meaning and purpose, there are still many other theorists in this area who continue to equate the two concepts. For example, Martin Seligman considers the *meaningful life* one of the three routes to happiness, defining the meaningful life as the application of one's signature strengths in the service of "something larger than we are"

(Seligman, 2002, p. 260). Seligman's definition appears to include behavioral as well as motivational factors, but makes no specific distinction between meaning and purpose (2002). Even more explicitly, Ryff and Singer state that having purpose in life means "feeling that there is meaning in one's present and past life" (1998, p. 707). Damon, Menon, and Cotton Bronk (2003) found that "many of the lines of research" reviewed in their recent review article on the development of purpose in adolescence made no differentiation between meaning and purpose. Yet, Damon and colleagues chose to focus on purpose over meaning for their research, explaining that they found the "externally oriented quest" of purpose more akin to what they had in mind. They define purpose as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (p. 121). Damon, Menon, and Cotton Bronk go on to make an important distinction between noble and ignoble purposes, noting the divergence in their desire for promotion or destruction of humanity. A purpose that is marked by moral commitment, as defined by Colby and Damon (1992), should be considered an important component to any definition of purpose.

In short, meaning is generally regarded as a multifaceted, multidimensional concept that includes both intention and signification and involves numerous facets of one's life. In contrast, purpose focuses more on the *intention* dimension of meaning and is typically viewed as the goal-seeking aspect of meaning. While no research could be found specifically on the life-span development of these two interrelated concepts, it seems possible that a sense of purpose may be first to develop during childhood and adolescence, with the more comprehensive, complex notion of meaning emerging later in adolescence or adulthood. Although not specifically mentioned in their article, it is notable that Damon's team leads the field in the study of children and adolescent purpose and has explicitly chosen to study purpose over meaning.

Purpose versus Religiosity/Spirituality

Overlap between the construct of meaning and purpose and the constructs of spirituality and religiosity often lead to confusion. The concept of spirituality emphasizes transcendence and a sense of connection to nature and the universe as well as oneself, whereas religiosity emphasizes the level of commitment to an institutionalized religious tradition (Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). Both religiosity and spirituality *can* lead to a sense of purpose, but they do not constitute the *only* routes to a sense of purpose.

Purpose can be defined as being broader in scope than either spirituality or religiosity, with its uniqueness stemming from the focus on the extent to which a person recognizes that their life has meaning. This recognition is reflected in a future-orientation in which one becomes inspired by the virtues of a role model, strives for a goal, discovers his/her "calling" after a significant life event (Van Dyke & Elias, 2007), *or* defines their place in life by a unifying connection with all things (spirituality) *or* an attachment to a particular religious worldview (religiosity). As Fry defined the search for meaning among adolescents, "personal meaning . . . must balance not only present satisfactions and hopes for the future, but must also balance the commitments to the self versus commitments to a somewhat larger sphere of influence (i.e., the family or community)" (2000, p. 106).

The operational definition used in the author's research defines a sense of purpose as being: (1) future or goal-oriented, (2) a moral attempt to connect to something larger than oneself, and (3) intrinsically-motivated.

Development of Purpose among Youth

William Damon is the most often-cited researcher in the area of meaning and purpose among children and adolescents. Damon describes adolescence as the age at which youth begin to formulate their sense of self, incorporating some larger framework for defining their individual meaning and purpose in life. Some semblance of purpose is deemed necessary to avert a life of depression, addiction, and deviance, while bolstering one's sense of productivity and social connection (Damon, 1995). Developmental theories on the emergence of moral identity posit that a sense of purpose in youth is related to pro-social behavior, strong morals, and high self-esteem (Damon & Gregory, 1997).

Damon lists a number of factors from the more general field of child and adolescent development that likely contribute to the development of purpose in youth: genetics, gender, social/historical/economic conditions, culture, parenting,

birth order, sibling and peer relations, neighborhood and community factors, and schooling. The relative importance and relation among these factors differ depending upon which theorist one is reading, but all agree that adolescents adapt to this "stage" of development by the adoption of behavioral and/or emotional responses. Common responses include anxiety and avoidance, attachment and affiliation, popularity and status-seeking, and shame and guilt. The type of response that ensues depends upon the combination of the aforementioned factors and the relative weight of each for the individual involved. Because the field of research that examines the development of purpose in youth is in its nascent stages, little is currently known about which factors play a more important role than others.

Measuring Meaning and Purpose

Given that researchers have been unable to settle on a consensual working definition for the constructs of meaning and purpose, measuring such ill-defined variables is a continual challenge. The complications stem from the varying emphases placed on the different domains (cognitive, emotional, motivational, and perhaps behavioral) of meaning and purpose, as well as the blending of these domains with predicted outcomes of meaning and purpose (particularly emotional and behavioral). Reker and Chamberlain (2000)concluded that the multiple components, varying sources, and breadth and depth of meaning attached to the construct of purpose pose significant challenges to its measurement. Given the complexity of these constructs, it seems unavoidable that in using standardized quantitative measures to tap into these constructs, one inherently imposes limits on their conceptualization. One example of this can be seen in the harsh critique of the Purpose in Life test (PIL) (Crumbaugh, 1968), the most commonly used quantitative measure of purpose, as essentially being a measure of depression (Dyck, 1987).

Despite the critiques, the PIL is still often used in research studies due to its basis on Viktor Frankl's theories, reliability, and 20-item ease of use (Reker & Cousins, 1979) Although the PIL has been used with adolescents (as cited in Damon, Menon, and Cotton Bronk, 2003, p. 122), the conceptualization of purpose does not encompass the concern for the external world and therefore is unlikely to be a sufficient measure using the aforementioned definition of purpose. Robbins and Francis developed a measure based on the PIL for use with adolescents, but similarly failed to account for the dimension of concern for the world beyond oneself (2000). Damon's review of existing measures of life purpose for use with adolescents led him to conclude that no single measure "captures all of the essential facets of purpose that we are interested in" (Damon, Menon, & Cotton Bronk, 2003, p. 121).

Other quantitative measures of meaning and purpose used with adults have been developed but were found to be employed less frequently in research. The Life Attitude Profile (LAP) is a 56-item measure that measures the degree of existential meaning in one's life and the level of motivation to find meaning (Reker & Peacock, 1981). The LAP is made up of items from the PIL test, as well as three other scales and original items and factors in seven dimensions such as futuristic aspiration, zest for life, and meaningfulness in life. The Life Regard Index (LRI) developed by Debats measures the degree to which one attests to have a coherent philosophy of life through a series of fourteen Likert-scale items. The LRI yields two subscales—a fulfillment subscale and a framework subscale with sufficient reliability (Debats, 1998); however, the fulfillment subscale has also been criticized for being confounded with other affective measures. A recently developed questionnaire called the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) shows promise as a brief 10-item measure of the level of engagement and motivation one has for meaning in life (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

Assessing Purpose and Meaning through Narrative

One way of avoiding the definitional challenges found in the use of quantitative measures of religiosity and purpose is to use more open-ended, qualitative measures that allow for an individualized articulation of one's personal definition of religiosity or purpose. Hill and Pargament describe a need for alternatives to standard paper and pencil measures of religiosity, especially within younger samples, who many struggle with comprehending the concepts and language used in the scales (2003). Standardized measures of spirituality have been shown to be biased by social desirability (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993); thus, more unobtrusive measures of these constructs are clearly warranted. One such measure proposed by Hill is the use of implicit methods that analyze response

time as a means of tapping into the salience of one's existential beliefs (1994). Damon and colleagues review one study that reviewed adolescents' diaries for examination of mentions of purpose as its study method (2003).

In studying the presence and impact of purpose and meaning among children and adolescents, one cannot neglect the parallels that can be drawn to the process of identity development. Consolidation of life experiences with one's future goals and sense of self within the larger world are a part of developing an identity. Many researchers have studied this process by examining narratives people have written about their lives and experiences. Positioning oneself within the larger context of the time and space is part of Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, and Wagener's conceptualization of the development of spirituality in children and adolescents, as described in the following (2005, p. 9):

> One way to think about this core developmental dimension is to focus on the human capacity (and inclination) to create a narrative about who one is in the context of space and time. Persons are active participants in creating this narrative, working with "source" material that comes from and is handed down by family and social groups, but superimposing on this material a great deal that emerges from personal experience and personal history.

A narrative framework for studying the lives of individuals has also been utilized extensively by McAdams in his theory of "selfing" as the narration of one's experience to create a unified identity. In an attempt to understand one's life story across the broad contexts and changes inherent in maturation, McAdams posits that the process of consolidating life experiences into a coherent story must begin early in life. He theorizes that life experiences and the interpretation of those experiences during childhood and adolescence lay the groundwork for the later formulation of an enduring sense of identity (McAdams, 2006). Writing about important personal and stressful life experiences has also been shown to lead to positive mental health benefits (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Pennebaker and colleagues have proposed that deriving meaning from stressful events is a critical element to successful adjustment. One can conclude from these studies that narrative writing facilitates the establishment of identity and the perception of meaning through the interpretation of one's life events. This meaning-making process of writing forms the impetus for the current study's analysis of essays to measure the preadolescent's sense of purpose and meaning, offering another variation in the development of unobtrusive measures of meaning and purpose. The author has studied preadolescents' expressions of meaning and purpose by examining the expressions of purpose along the dimensions of word choice, voice, and content in an essay. The main drawback to this method is that ponderings on meaning and purpose arise from chance as they are not specifically elicited through the writing prompt. A more explicit writing prompt related to meaning and purpose could improve the quality of the responses obtained.

In conclusion, while an array of measures assessing meaning and purpose have been developed, only one (the PIL) has been used with adolescents; and none adequately measure purpose using the definitional criteria set forth here. Some adaptation of the previously developed measures to account for an appreciation for the world beyond oneself is recommended if quantitative assessment is desired. Alternatively, a non-obtrusive measure of meaning and purpose through the coding of a youth's writing sample may also provide a clear picture of a youth's sense of meaning and purpose.

REFERENCES

Batson, C. D., Schoenrade, P., & Ventis, W. L. (1993). *Religion and the individual: A social-psychological perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of life*. New York: Guilford.

Colby, A., & Damon, W. (1992). *Some do care: Contemporary lives of moral commitment*. New York: Free Press.

Coleman, S. B., Kaplan, J. D., & Downing, R. W. (1986). Life cycle and loss: The spiritual vacuum of heroin addiction. *Family Process, 25*, 5–23.

Crumbaugh, J. C. (1968). Cross-validation of a Purpose-in-Life test based on Frankl's concepts. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 24*, 74–81.

Crumbaugh, J. C., & Maholick, L. T. (1969). *Manual of instruction for the Purpose-in-Life test*. Munster, IN: Psychometric Affiliates.

Damon, W. (1995). *Greater expectations: Overcoming the culture of indulgence in our homes and schools*. New York: Free Press.

Damon, W., & Gregory, A. (1997). The youth charter: Towards the formation of adolescent moral identity. *Journal of Moral Education, 6*, 117–131.

Damon, W., Menon, J., & Cotton Bronk, K. (2003). The development of purpose during adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science, 7*, 119–128.

Debats, D. L. (1996). Meaning in life: Clinical relevance and predictive power. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 35*, 503–516.

Debats, D. L. (1998). Measurement of personal meaning: The psychometric properties of the Life Regard Index. In P. T. P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications.* (pp. 237–260). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dyck, M. J. (1987). Assessing logotherapeutic constructs:Conceptual and psychometric status of the Purpose in Life and Seeking of Noetic Goals tests. *Clinical Psychology Review, 7*, 439–447.

Frankl, V. (1959). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. Boston: Beacon.

French, S., & Joseph, S. (1999). Religiosity and its association with happiness, purpose in life, and self-actualisation. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 2*, 117–120.

Fry, P. S. (2000). The development of personal meaning and wisdom in adolescence: A reexamination of moderating and consolidating factors and influences. In G. T. Reker & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Exploring existential meaning* (pp. 91–110). London: Sage Publications.

Harlow, L. L., Newcomb, M. D., & Bentler, P. M. (1986). Depression, self-derogation, substance abuse, and suicide ideation: Lack of purpose in life as a mediational factor. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 42*, 5–21.

Heisel, M. J., & Flett, G. L. (2004). Purpose in life, satisfaction with life, and suicide ideation in a clinical sample. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment, 26*, 127–135.

Hill, P. C. (1994). Toward an attitude process model of religious experience. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 33*, 303–314.

Hill, P. C., & Pargament, K. I. (2003). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: Implications for physical and mental health research. *American Psychologist, 58*, 64–74.

Klinger, E. (1998). The search for meaning in evolutionary perspective and its clinical implications. In P. T. P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: A handbook of psychological research and clinical applications* (pp. 27–49). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Koenig, H. G., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Religion and mental health: Evidence for an association. *International Review of Psychiatry, 13*, 67–78.

Koenig, H. G., McCullough, M. E., & Larson, D. B. (2001). *Handbook of religion and health*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mascaro, N., & Rosen, D. H. (2005). Existential meaning's role in the enhancement of hope and prevention of depressive symptoms. *Journal of Personality, 73*, 985–1014.

McAdams, D. P. (1996). Personality, modernity and the storied self: A contemporary framework for studying persons. *Psychological Inquiry, 7*, 295–321.

McAdams, D. P. (2006). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live*: Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Minehan, J. A., Newcomb, M. D., & Galiaig, E. R. (2000). Predictors of adolescent drug use: Cognitive abilities, coping strategies, and purpose in life. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse, 10*, 33–52.

Noblejas de la Flor, M. A. (1997). Meaning levels and drug abuse therapy: An empirical study. *International Forum for Logotherapy, 20*, 46–51.

Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science, 8*, 162–166.

Pennebaker, J. W., & Seagal, J. D. (1999). Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 55*, 1243–1254.

Reker, G. T. (2000). Theoretical perspective, dimensions, and measurement of existential meaning. In G. T. Reker & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Exploring existential meaning* (pp. 39–55). London: Sage Publications.

Reker, G. T., & Chamberlain, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Exploring existential meaning*. London: Sage Publications.

Reker, G. T., & Cousins, J. B. (1979). Factor structure, construct validity and reliability of the Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) and Purpose in Life (PIL) tests. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 35*, 85–91.

Reker, G. T., & Peacock, E. J. (1981). The Life Attitude Profile (LAP): A multidimensional intrument for assessing attitudes toward life. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 13*, 264–273.

Reker, G. T., Peacock, E. J., & Wong, P. T. P. (1987). Meaning and purpose in life and well-being: A life-span perspective. *Journal of Gerontology, 42*, 44–49.

Reker, G. T., & Wong, P. T. P. (1988). Aging as an individual process: Toward a theory of personal meaning. In J. E. Birren & V. L. Bengston (Eds.), *Emergent theories of aging* (pp. 214–246). New York: Springer.

Robbins, & Francis. (2000). Religion, personality and well-being: The relationship between church attendance and purpose in life. *Journal of Research in Christian Education 9*, 223–238

Roehlkepartain, E. C., Benson, P. L., King, P. E., & Wagener, L. M. (2005). Spiritual development in childhood and adolescence: Moving to the scientific mainstream. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. M. Wagener, & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *Handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 1–16). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. (1998). Middle age and well being. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health, 2*, 707–719.

Sappington, A. A., & Kelly, P. J. (1995). Self-perceived anger problems in college students. *International Forum for Logotherapy, 18*, 74–82.

Sayles, M. L. (1995). *Adolescents' purpose in life and engagement in risky behaviors: Differences by gender and ethnicity* (Doctoral dissertation). University of North Carolina: Greensboro, NC.

Schlesinger, S., Susman, M., & Koenigsberg, J. (1990). Self-esteem and purpose in life: A comparative study of women alcoholics. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education, 36*, 127–141.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York: Free Press.

Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,53,* 80–93.

Van Dyke, C., & Elias, M. J. (2007). How forgiveness, purpose, and religiosity are related to the mental health and well-being of youth: A review of the literature, *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture, 10*, 395–415.

Wong, P. T. P. (1989). Personal meaning and successful aging. *Canadian Psychology, 30*, 516–525.

Zika, S., & Chamberlain, K. (1992). On the relation between meaning in life and psychological well-being. *British Journal of Psychology, 83*, 133–145.

APPENDIX C

Purpose Rubric *from* Laws of Life Essays

	Questions to Consider	4	3	2	1
CONTENT The many different implicit messages found in the essay.	Does the essay reveal a **sense of purpose** in the writer? In addition to the proposed Law of Life, does the essay either **explicitly or implicitly** suggest that having purpose is important in the life of the writer? Is a sense of purpose **implicitly** or **explicitly** found in the essay?	The essay reveals that the writer has a **specific purpose**, is **inspired** by something or someone, wants to **make a specific difference** in the world, thinks about **matters larger than the self**, admires **role models** for a specific reason, strives for a **goal**, wishes to fulfill his or her **potential** in a certain area, feels **responsibility** to/for something, and/or is **determined** to accomplish something. The writer defines his or her sense of purpose with **specificity**, describing a specific goal or situation, however big or small, through which his or her purpose is brought to life. The reader should be convinced that the writer's sense of purpose is **intrinsic** and comes from within.	The essay reveals that the writer has a **general sense of purpose**, wants to **"make a difference in the world"** without saying in what way, admires **role models** without giving a specific reason why, wishes to fulfill his or her potential without giving a particular area for improvement (i.e. be the best that one can be), and/or feels that **responsibility or determination in general** is important. The writer speaks of his or her purpose in **general terms, without proposing a specific goal or situation** that his or her sense of purpose has embodied, or through which his or her sense or purpose will be realized.	The essay reveals that the writer has a sense of purpose, either **specific or general**, but that the reasons behind his or her sense of purpose are **extrinsic** and come from **pressures outside of the self**. The writer possesses "purpose" in order to live up to another's expectations or standards, do what he or she is supposed to do, or gain external rewards such as money or power.	The content of the essay is **irrelevant** to the expression of purpose. There is **no implicit or explicit mention of goals, making a difference, or thinking beyond the self**.
VOICE The degree of sincerity and genuineness in the feelings and convictions of the writer.	If the writer were reading his or her essay aloud, would his or her tone of voice convey a sense of **sincerity** that purpose is important in his or her life? Is the writer **motivated** by his or her purpose? Is the writer **energetic** about and **emotionally connected** to his or her purpose?	The writer comes across as **extremely sincere** and **genuine** in his or her assertion that purpose is indeed very meaningful in his or her life. The writer is unafraid to **boldly** and **honestly** state his or her convictions and does so in an **emotionally connected** and **energetic** manner.	The writer comes across as **reasonably sincere** and **genuine** that purpose is meaningful in his or her life. The writer seems **honest** in his or her convictions, but **lacks emotional connectedness and energy** to his or her purpose.	The writer's level of sincerity and genuineness seems **ambiguous** to the reader. The **writer lacks energy and emotional connectedness** to his or her convictions, but the reader is **uncomfortable claiming that the writer is being insincere** about his or her purpose. The reader feels **uncertain** whether or not the writer is indeed being sincere and genuine about his or her purpose.	There is **no mention** of purpose in the essay. The writer seems **insincere** to the reader in his or her statement that purpose is important in his or her life.
WORD CHOICE Words used in the essay.	Does the writer's **choice of words** communicate a **sense of purpose**? Does the writer mention any of these terms without necessarily making them the central message of the essay? What are the **explicit** statements found in the essay?	The writer chooses to include in his or her essay one or more words that describe purpose, such as a **calling, goal, potential, determination, inspiration, responsibility**, or **intention**, as well as a desire to **serve**, **contribute** to the world, see the **world** not only in terms of him- or herself, be like a **role model**, **strive** for something, and/or fulfill a **mission**. The writer uses these words within a context that conveys **his or her own sense of purpose**.	The writer includes in his or her essay one or more words that describe purpose, such as a **calling, goal, potential, determination, responsibility**, or **intention**, as well as a desire to **serve**, **contribute** to the world, see the **world** not only in terms of themselves, be like a **role model**, **strive** for something, and/or fulfill a **mission**. The writer uses these words within the context **of another story that is not directly connected** to the purpose of the writer.	The writer **does not include any words that specifically convey a sense of purpose**, but from the general wording of the essay, the reader is **uncomfortable claiming that the essay lacks purpose**. The wording that the writer chooses is **ambiguous** concerning his or her sense of purpose, and it leaves the readers **questioning** its presence in the essay.	The writer does not use any specific words to convey a sense of purpose, and from the general wording of the essay, the reader feels comfortable stating that **essay lacks purpose**.

Source: Van Dyke, C. J., & Elias, M. J. (2010). How expressions of forgiveness, purpose, and religiosity relate to emotional intelligence and self-concept in urban, fifth-grade students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 78 (4), 481–493.

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America is a preeminent institution of Jewish higher education that integrates rigorous academic scholarship and teaching with a commitment to strengthening Jewish tradition, Jewish lives, and Jewish communities.

JTS articulates a vision of Judaism that is learned and passionate, pluralist and authentic, traditional and egalitarian; one that is thoroughly grounded in Jewish texts, history, and practices, and fully engaged with the societies and cultures of the present. Our vision joins faith with inquiry; the covenant of our ancestors with the creative insights of today; intense involvement in the society and State of Israel with devotion to the flowering of Judaism throughout the world; service to the Jewish community, as well as to all of the communities of which Jews are a part: our society, our country, and our world.

JTS serves North American Jewry by educating intellectual and spiritual leaders for Conservative Judaism and the vital religious center, training rabbis, cantors, scholars, educators, communal professionals, and lay activists who are inspired by our vision of Torah and dedicated to assisting in its realization.