

Chapter 11

Positive Psychology and Judaism



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In the second half of the twentieth century, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson led a sect of ultra-Orthodox Jews who are known as Lubavitch Hasidim. Over the course of his life, Rabbi Schneerson underwent profoundly difficult personal hardships. Born in the Russian empire in 1902, he lived through pogroms, two world wars, a typhus epidemic, the persecution and exile of his father, violent political revolutions, the murder of his brother, grandmother, and other relatives by the Nazis, and a life of childlessness (Kalmenson, 2019). Yet due to being steeped in thousands of years of traditional Jewish teachings, Rabbi Schneerson developed what Kalmenson (2019) describes as a “positivity bias,” which he cultivated by “actively seeking the positive aspect or opportunity in any given situation, believing deeply in God’s ultimate goodness and immanent presence, and living with purpose, responsibility, and meaning” (p. 19).

Although Jewish teachings throughout the ages are vast and the lived experiences of Jews varied, it is helpful to frame them through the prism of the “positivity

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E. B. Davis et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10274-5_11

bias.” Through embodying Judaic values, many Jews have been enabled to live spiritually rich and positive lives, despite extraordinary hardships and persecution. Jewish thought, beliefs, and practices have millennia-long histories that can inform the comparatively new field of positive psychology. Collaborations between positive psychologists and Jewish philosophers, leaders, and adherents are recommended to understand Jewish concepts of well-being and spirituality. Such collaborations may further enrich the field of positive psychology and provide practitioners with additional resources to inform research and practice. Towards that goal, this chapter is a brief introduction to Judaism and the Jewish people, followed by a discussion of aspects of Jewish tradition and culture that are pertinent for positive psychology and the psychology of religion/spirituality (R/S).

Introduction to Judaism

With historical roots stretching back nearly 4,000 years, Judaism is a monotheistic religion that affirms belief in one transcendent and immanent God who, as recounted in the Pentateuch, created the world and entered into a covenantal relationship with the Jewish people. After miraculously redeeming the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt, God revealed Himself to them at Mount Sinai and presented them with the Torah. Besides the Pentateuch, the Jewish biblical canon also includes 19 later works of the Prophets and the Hagiographa. The prophets weaved ethical exhortations into the story of the tribes of Israel as they entered the Land of Israel, established the monarchy of King David, built the Temple, were exiled from Israel in 586 BCE, and returned to build the Second Temple. The Hagiographa includes books such as Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, which contain ethics, wisdom, and spiritual guidance (Baskin, 2011).

Within traditional Judaism, the written biblical texts are supplemented by the Oral Law, which elucidates and elaborates on the written text, explaining and interpreting the laws and narrative of the Bible. Shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Oral Law was compiled and organized in the form of the *Mishna* and other literary works. Scholarly rabbinic debates concerning these texts were collected and redacted in the Talmud until approximately the seventh century CE (Hezser, 2004). During the Middle Ages, a plethora of rabbinic works emerged, encompassing Hebrew Bible and Talmud commentary, law, poetry, Jewish philosophy (comparing Judaism with Neoplatonic and Aristotelian concepts), and Kabbalah (Tirosch-Samuelson, 2003). During this period, the different cultural traditions of *Sephardim* (Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, and the Middle East) and *Ashkenazim* (Jews from Northern and Eastern Europe) developed (Ben-Shalom, 2004).

In the modern period, in response to the Enlightenment, the streams of Judaism that comprise the twenty-first century landscape emerged. Although currently there are several denominations, each with its own subcategories (see Baskin, 2011), we

focus primarily on three: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Orthodox Jews generally follow Jewish law (known as *Halakha*) and tradition as it has been interpreted in the Talmud and practiced throughout the ages. The Conservative movement also refers to traditional Jewish law as a source for contemporary practice but is more open to revision and adaptation of codified Jewish law. Major distinctions between Conservative and Orthodox practice relate to issues of egalitarianism in worship, Sabbath observance, and adherence to dietary laws (Baskin, 2011). Reform Judaism (or Liberal or Progressive Judaism) does not believe that Jewish law is binding, and it is thus more likely to alter traditional concepts to conform to modern values (Gehl, 2014).

Demographics

Over four-fifths of the nearly 15 million Jews worldwide live in the U.S. and Israel (DellaPergola, 2020). Depending on how the term Jewish is defined, there are close to 7 million Jewish people in the U.S. (Sheskin & Dashefsky, 2020). Current estimates indicate that approximately 37% identify as Reform, 17% as Conservative, 9% as Orthodox, 32% as nondenominational, and 4% with smaller denominations (Pew Research Center, 2021). In Israel, there are around 6.6 million Jews (DellaPergola, 2020), but their denominations differ—with 22% identifying as Orthodox, 29% as *Masorti* (most similar in practice to Conservative Jews in North America), and 49% as *Hiloni* (secular; Pew Research Center, 2016). Smaller Jewish communities are also found throughout the world, including in Canada, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Russia, Germany, Australia, and Brazil (DellaPergola, 2020).

Judaism and Positive Psychology

In contrast to the disease model (which emphasizes pathology), positive psychology focuses on human strengths, wellness, and fulfillment (Seligman et al., 2005). Jewish thought and tradition are similarly replete with perspectives on psychological health and well-being (see Pirutinsky, 2020). In this section, we survey the Jewish tradition on the topics of (a) happiness and flourishing, (b) character strengths, and (c) spirituality. This brief yet broad overview shows the relevance of a Judaic framework to positive psychology. On the whole, Jewish values, beliefs, and actions encourage a spiritually integrated, strength-based, and PERMA (**P**ositive emotion, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, **A**ccomplishment; Seligman, 2011) model of well-being.

Happiness and Flourishing

The positive psychology literature generally incorporates two types of happiness, each rooted in Greek philosophy: hedonism (concerned with pleasure, comfort, and enjoyment) and eudaimonia (focused on pursuing complex goals that are meaningful to self and society; Delle Fave et al., 2011). Although the original focus of positive psychology gravitated closer to a hedonic view, the PERMA model aims to integrate eudaimonia through a focus on meaning and engagement (Seligman, 2011). We highlight four elements of the Jewish conceptualization of happiness that can contribute to positive psychology's broader conceptualizations of happiness.

Multiple Perspectives It is impossible to describe a single Jewish view of happiness, as there are multiple approaches, with varying emphases. This point is captured in the fact that one of the biblical Hebrew words that is most closely associated with happiness is *ashrei* (Tirosch-Samuels, 2003). As Jonathan Sacks (2014) contends, the word is written in plural form, indicating that the most appropriate translation would be “happineses,” signifying that happiness is not unidimensional. Different paths to happiness are reflected in the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic works, and later Jewish philosophical writings. Pelcovitz and Pelcovitz (2014) highlight the diverse Judaic understandings of happiness by pointing to several synonyms used for it in Jewish literature (*simchah*, *sasson*, *gilah*, *rinah*, *ditzah*, *chedva*) and by identifying the nuances of each word. Research and practice in this area is likely to be most fruitful when acknowledging the individual and contextual nature of happiness, along with its varied sources and expressions.

Blending of Pleasure and Meaning The diversity within the Jewish conceptualization of happiness incorporates elements of pleasure and enjoyment and integrates them into a larger framework of meaning and self-transcendence. One example of this duality relates to the celebrations and customs surrounding the Jewish holidays. On these special days that occur annually, Jews are enjoined to celebrate with festive meals. But this obligation is far from purely hedonistic. These festivals incorporate a spiritual component with the experience of celebrating “before God” (Deuteronomy 16:15), and they are meant to involve providing for the material welfare of the society's poor and vulnerable. Otherwise, as Maimonides states, the “meal is not a rejoicing in a divine commandment, but a rejoicing in his own stomach” (Twersky, 1972, p. 108). Thus, Judaism recognizes that happiness has both hedonic and eudaimonic elements, emphasizing transcending the self by helping others and by acknowledging the presence of God.

Importance of Action Another important element of the Judaic notion of happiness is the role of law and ritual and its relationship to the inner life. Cohen et al. (2013) posit that Judaism emphasizes action, in contrast to beliefs and the cultivation of internal states. However, this emphasis on action does not diminish the importance of belief and internal development. Rather, Jewish tradition suggests it is through committed action that an inner state is cultivated. Jewish spiritual-ethics,

known as *mussar*, emphasize the importance of not being content with mindless acts by accentuating a focus on the inner life. Yet the internal state itself is not enough. It is only through the ritualized act that the proper inner state can be developed and actualized. Ritualized acts both should be done with joy and produce joy (Fishbane, 1995).

Happiness is Not the Goal According to several prominent modern Jewish thinkers, happiness is an important but not the central value in Judaism (Soloveitchik, 1983; Sacks, 2014). It is not the telos as it may be in an Aristotelian eudaimonic conceptualization. Although serving God should be done with joy (Deuteronomy 28:47; Psalms 100:2) and that service should lead to a joyous life (Psalms 19:9), serving God through the commandments is the ultimate goal. Judaism, in Sacks' (2014) words, involves "the pursuit of holiness, not the pursuit of happiness" (p. 32). Happiness may come as a result of living according to the will of God, but it is not the aim.

These Judaic notions of happiness provide an important counterpoint to the dangers of self-absorbed, overly hedonic happiness. Judaic happiness does not negate the place of pleasure but insists that pleasure must be balanced with self-transcendence. Balancing internal and external aspects of happiness offers a well-rounded perspective. It also helps us consider that happiness should not be pursued as its own goal but should be experienced in pursuit of a higher value.

Character Strengths

Commandment Following the eudaimonic approach, positive psychology encourages the cultivation of character strengths as part of living the good life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The development of character strengths is also essential in the Judaic tradition, with one major difference from the Aristotelian framework. For Aristotle, happiness comes from arriving at a proper disposition by subordinating passions to human reason. According to the Hebrew Bible and the Talmudic sages, human reason also plays a role in character formation. Still, within Judaism, one ultimately subordinates passions and appetites to God's laws, not to human reason (Tirosch-Samuels, 2003). Thus, the character strengths accentuated in the Judaic tradition involve developing personal discipline and ethical behavior for the purpose of fulfilling God's commandments. Not only are traits important for fulfilling the commandments, but character development itself is seen as an independent biblical commandment of emulating God (Blau, 2000). This perspective can transform character development into a deeply spiritual endeavor.

Virtues and Strengths Peterson and Seligman (2004) surveyed the literature of various philosophical and religious traditions and identified six core virtues that they hypothesized must be present for someone to be considered of good character:

transcendence, wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, and temperance. They further conceptualized 24 character strengths, which they described as the processes or mechanisms that define the virtues. In their limited treatment of Judaic texts, they identified some, but not all, of the 24 strengths. Yet Schnall et al. (2014) contend that all 24 character strengths are evident in the classic texts of Judaism. Schnall and colleagues (2014) surveyed the Torah literature related to the five character strengths in the virtue of transcendence: hope, humor, gratitude, spirituality, and appreciation of beauty. Here, we survey the remaining virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, and temperance), followed by a discussion of spirituality.

Wisdom The books of Psalms and Proverbs are replete with references to the importance of wisdom and knowledge of the world and of God. The sages viewed the learning of Torah as an essential, daily commandment to which they devoted considerable time and energy (Tirosch-Samuels, 2003). Judaism recognizes various forms of wisdom and methods for cultivating it. Two primary paradigms include the rationalist perspective and the Kabbalistic tradition. Medieval rationalists like Maimonides believed wisdom is achieved through knowledge of Torah and nature (Hartman, 2010). The Kabbalistic tradition espouses that wisdom is reached through contemplation of God's nature and direct experience of His presence (Scholem et al., 2007).

Courage The importance of bravery in battle is explicit in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:6). Talmudic sages also conceptualized courage as a moral and psychological strength, both in the ethical and spiritual realms. As Ben Zoma states in *Mishna Avot* (4:1): "Who is strong? He who conquers his desires." In addition, the traits of vitality and enthusiasm were encouraged in the context of performing the commandments. For example, Abraham is described as performing God's will with zeal; he serves as a role model for Jews to perform the commandments with alacrity (Genesis 22:3; Talmud *Pesachim* 4a).

Humanity Many biblical and Talmudic works extol the virtues of humanity, which include strengths and traits that manifest in caring relationships with others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Traits like love and kindness are emblematic of how God relates to the world and thus must be emulated through the process of *imitatio Dei*. This requirement to emulate God creates what Wurzbarger (1994) calls an ethic of responsibility, wherein Jews are commanded to help others through *gemilut chasadim* (acts of kindness), including giving charity to the poor, providing hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, comforting mourners, facilitating marriage, and redeeming captives. In fact, according to Rabbi Akiva (Jerusalem Talmud *Nedarim* 9:3), "Love thy neighbor like yourself" (Leviticus 19:17) is the greatest principle in the Torah.

Justice The virtue of justice, including the character strengths of fairness and leadership, also plays a vital role in Judaism. A just judicial system is mandated in the Hebrew Bible, as is stated, "justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20).

Businesspeople are commanded to be honest and perform their jobs with integrity (Leviticus 19:35). Abraham argues before God, asking God to be fair in His treatment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:13–23), thereby serving as a paradigm for fighting for what is right and just (Sacks, 2007). Moses and others serve as examples of leadership, and several contemporary works outline lessons of leadership from the Bible (Brown, 2013; Sacks, 2015) and Talmud (Schnall & Greenberg, 2012).

Temperance Character strengths incorporated into the virtue of temperance (forgiveness, prudence, humility, and self-control) play a prominent role in Jewish literature. Granting forgiveness is encouraged, and someone who refrains from doing so to one who sincerely repents is considered cruel (Talmud *Bava Kamma* 92a). In a strong endorsement of prudence, the Talmud states, “Who is wise? He [or she] who foresees the consequences [of their actions]” (Talmud *Tamid* 32a). In addition, humility is identified as the crown jewel of a trait encouraged by the sages (Tirosh-Samuels, 2003). Finally, many commandments encourage exercising self-control when it comes to eating and sexual relations. Based on this fact, Cohen et al. (2013) conceptualize self-control as a possible protective factor that may account for some of the positive correlations between Jewish R/S and both mental and physical health, an idea which has found empirical support (e.g., McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Pirutinsky, 2014).

Spirituality

As defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), spirituality is demonstrated by people who possess clear beliefs about the meaning and purpose of the cosmos and believe in a transcendent, nonphysical element that infuses their life with a higher purpose and impacts their actions accordingly. Thus defined, spirituality relates to several Judaic concepts, such as the notion of divine providence, which incorporates the belief God is omniscient, guides both historical events and also everyday occurrences, rewards those who observe the commandments, and punishes those who do not (Schnall et al., 2014). A central example is the *shema* affirmation, which is recited daily and incorporates biblical passages about the unity and love of God, commitment to the commandments, and belief in reward and punishment (Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and 11:13–17). Moreover, in the mystical literature, everyday human behavior impacts the spiritual world, imbuing mundane and religious activities with cosmic, spiritual import (Scholem et al., 2007).

Prayer, identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as an essential component of spirituality, plays a central role within Judaism. In addition to the ancient biblical accounts of meaningful prayers, the Talmud outlines the obligation for Jews to engage in formal prayer three times a day (*Berakhoth* 26b). According to some, prayer is the most significant form of divine service (*Berakhoth* 32b). Prayer is not

limited to making requests for the fulfillment of physical needs; it also involves yearning for connection to the Divine (Schnall et al., 2014).

Moreover, although Peterson and Seligman (2004) counted spirituality as one of the 24 character strengths, the Jewish tradition conceptualizes spirituality as a meta-trait. The Talmudic sages encourage “doing everything for the sake of Heaven” (*Mishna Avot 2:12*), interpreted by later commentaries as an imperative to infuse even mundane activities with sanctity (Lamm et al., 1999). This notion would align with Piedmont’s (1999) claim that spirituality is a distinct personality dimension that directs, drives, and selects behaviors in both secular and religious contexts. It is also consistent with Pargament and Mahoney’s (2005) sanctification theory, which contends that any object or action can be psychologically imbued with an element of sacredness.

Research on Judaism, Positive Psychology, and Psychology of R/S

Well-Being There is limited but growing research related to Judaism and well-being (Cohen et al., 2013). Rosmarin et al. (2010a) surveyed both Jews and Christians and found that greater gratitude and spirituality were associated with reduced depression and anxiety in both groups. Similarly, Vilchinsky and Kravetz (2005) found that, among both religious and secular Israeli Jewish students, religious belief was negatively associated with psychological distress and positively associated with psychological well-being. Additionally, Pirutinsky et al. (2011) report that intrinsic religiosity moderated the association between poor physical health and depression among Jews. There also is evidence that Jewish practice prospectively predicts remission of depressive episodes (Pirutinsky & Rosmarin, 2018).

Character Strengths The research related to character strengths within the Jewish population is limited. In a sample that included participants from different religious traditions, including Jews, Rosmarin et al. (2011) identified gratitude towards God as a construct distinct from general gratitude. They hypothesized that gratitude to God can cultivate transcendence and interconnectedness beyond general gratitude and may be experienced more frequently and in more diverse situations. They found that such spiritual gratitude uniquely predicted mental well-being over and above general gratitude. A subsequent study also found that gratitude to God is more enduring in the face of emotional distress than general gratitude (Rosmarin et al., 2016).

Spirituality The aforementioned studies on gratitude fit a growing trend within the psychology of R/S that examines whether virtues contextualized in a religious belief system function differently from general character strengths. Prominent models of positive psychology present spirituality as one characteristic among others that

compose a specific virtue, such as Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification, which places spirituality as one of several character strengths that make up the virtue of transcendence. However, spirituality may be a component whose influence affects all other character strengths rather than a standalone trait. Similar to how framing gratitude in a religious framework of meaning changes the expression of gratitude, religious attributions can transform other strengths, such as granting forgiveness and expressing love. In that vein, Kor et al. (2019) administered several measures of both character strengths generally and spirituality specifically to 1,352 middle school Israeli adolescents (85% of the participants were Jewish). Their ensuing longitudinal factor analysis indicated that, at least among Jews, spirituality was a discrete factor independent of the classic tripartite model of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intellectual strengths. In other words, spirituality is not simply a distinct character strength among many others that fit neatly into one virtue, but an overarching property that imbues all other character strengths with an additional layer of meaning. Spirituality as an independent factor remained stable over time and contributed to higher subjective well-being and prosociality. The study supports the contention that, within Judaism, spirituality can be conceptualized as a meta-trait that influences other character traits.

Internal/External Another theme within the literature on spirituality is the distinction between internal and external manifestations of religious life, including how they relate to well-being. The body of research exploring these differences is mixed, and a review is beyond the scope of this chapter (e.g., Schnall et al., 2010, 2012). However, it appears that for some Jewish individuals, internal components of religiosity such as personal (as opposed to ritualized and codified) prayer, religious motivations, and attachment to God may be more reliable predictors of flourishing. For example, in a cross-sectional study, Levin (2013) found that, among 1,849 Israeli Jews, personal prayer was associated with elevated life satisfaction and well-being, but synagogue attendance and formal prayer were not. Relatedly, in another cross-sectional study, Lazar (2015) found that the quality of prayer—prayer behavior, prayer type, and belief in prayer—predicted elevated life satisfaction better than attending formal prayer did. On the other hand, Pirutinsky et al. (2011) reported that for non-Orthodox Jews, social support mediated (explained) the relationship between religiosity and coping with health difficulties.

Finally, furthering the distinction between internal and external components of R/S, Pirutinsky et al. (2020) investigated the congruence of Jewish adherents' implicit attitudes and explicit beliefs about God. They reported that congruent, positive, implicit attitudes and explicit beliefs predicted the highest levels of life satisfaction. The lowest levels of life satisfaction were found among those with positive implicit attitudes and low levels of explicit positive beliefs. This finding suggests that integrated conscious and nonconscious beliefs are an important factor in determining religion's impact on well-being (see Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume).

Religious Coping Additional research focuses on the use of religious coping mechanisms to enhance well-being. British Jews who utilized religious coping

methods after a major stressor were more likely to report positive affect (Loewenthal et al., 2000). Rosmarin et al. (2009a) created and validated a Jewish Religious Coping Scale (JCOPE) and found that positive religious coping predicted lower levels of anxiety, and negative religious coping predicted higher levels of depression and anxiety. The JCOPE added concepts particular to Judaism, such as “I look forward to *Shabbat*,” “I talk to my rabbi,” and “I try to do *Mitzvot* (good deeds).” Rosmarin, Pargament, and Mahoney (2009b) created a Trust in God Scale, based on an eleventh-century Jewish text, which draws on the strengths of spirituality, particularly trust in an omnipresent and benevolent God. These researchers found that divine trust was related to higher personal happiness and lower depression and anxiety. Based on these concepts, they developed a spiritually integrated treatment for anxiety. A subsequent study found that those who participated in this spiritually integrated treatment reported reduced worry, stress, depression, and intolerance of uncertainty (Rosmarin et al., 2010b).

Based on the literature in the broader population, there are several conceptual theories that can explain the healing power of religious coping in Judaism. First, the strengthened interpersonal connections utilized by religious individuals in times of distress, such as speaking with one’s rabbi, may increase a sense of ethnic identity and communal support (Pirutinsky & Mancuso, 2011). Relatedly, the cycle of religious life (e.g., Sabbath and holiday meals, congregational service) may provide opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and a social support system, although limited research suggests that this mechanism may be more relevant to non-Orthodox Jews (Pirutinsky et al., 2011). Second, adherence to Jewish practice may strengthen one’s sense of higher, spiritual purpose in life (see Park & Van Tongeren, Chap. 6, this volume). These religious practices may also provide a potent form of behavioral activation that can protect against disengagement, sadness, and depression (Krumrei et al., 2013; Pirutinsky & Rosmarin, 2018). Finally, prayer and other efforts to connect with God can foster positive emotions which can protect against worry and despair that emerge from anticipating further pain and helplessness (Rosmarin et al., 2009b; see Chap. 20, this volume).

Implications and Applications for Clinical Practice

Clinicians working with a Jewish client must be aware of Jewish interdenominational diversity and refrain from assumptions about Jewish R/S merely because the client identifies as Jewish (Schiffman, 2016). Even within a particular denomination, Schnall (2006) notes that “Orthodox Jewry is a diverse group, with many subgroups, and that members of the subgroups differ to a greater or lesser degree in their language, diet, worldview, dress, and even religious practice” (p. 277). The same is true of Reform Judaism (Gehl, 2014) and other Jewish subgroups.

Based on the framework and research presented, assuming a Jewish client is receptive, it may be beneficial to integrate religious themes within a therapeutic or

coaching context. Clinicians can enhance commitment and motivation to therapeutic tasks, as well as bolster their efficacy, by framing happiness within a meaningful religious framework, explicitly framing therapeutic goals as a functional path to the fulfillment of commandments and connection to God, and sanctifying and spiritualizing the entire enterprise of character development.

Clinicians can also use biblical and rabbinic statements or other culturally familiar concepts to discuss tenets of positive psychology. Spiritually integrated clinical treatments often draw on biblical verses and religious proverbs to facilitate the acceptance of new positive cognitions (Pargament, 2007). In addition, religious stories may play a prominent role in treatment (Schnall et al., 2016). Positive psychology interventions drawing on Jewish tradition can utilize these same sources.

Finally, the distinction in the research between internal and external components of R/S has important implications. Interventions that aim to integrate Jewish tradition and positive psychology may benefit from addressing both the explicit (more doctrinal) and implicit (more experiential) aspects of spirituality. For example, an intervention utilizing traditional texts to advance ideas regarding gratitude or transcendence may be more effective when coupled with activities that promote personalized experiences such as prayer, meditation, and journaling.

Implications and Applications for Research

Research related to positive psychology and the psychology of R/S within the Jewish population is scarce. Judaism differs from other religions in significant ways (Cohen et al., 2013), and research specifically targeting Jewish variables is warranted. There is a clear need for more methodical and targeted research programs to help advance this field.

For example, to propel a more robust research agenda in the Jewish community, Levin (2013) called on researchers to stratify analyses denominationally. Cohen et al. (2013) noted that lack of denominational differentiation limits what conclusions can be drawn about potential influences. In a move in this direction, Cherniak et al. (2021) investigated how differences between the denominations, including the centrality of ritual practice and gender-based obligations in ritual, may modify the link between R/S and well-being. Relatedly, researchers can take Beck and Haugen's (2013) suggestion to use empirical methods to explore the theological assumptions of Christians and do the same with Jews, which would assist in identifying to what extent the textual heritage and beliefs are internalized and serve as factors to increase well-being.

Additionally, researchers could follow the lead of Rosmarin et al. (2009a) in generating measures that specifically reflect the character of Jewish R/S and other positive psychology constructs. Future research can also build on Rosmarin et al. (2011) and explore how other character strengths, in addition to gratitude, such as forgiveness, humility, and compassion, may present differently when infused with religious/spiritual meaning.

Although this chapter continued the theoretical groundwork linking positive psychology's virtues to concepts in Judaism, there is an additional need to analyze the nuances of each trait through the prism of classic Judaic literature and culture. Similarly, more systematic applied research that will further develop and evaluate clinical and educational interventions is necessary. A collaboration between positive psychologists and Jewish studies scholars, Jewish community leaders, and those who integrate Jewish thought and practices into their lives, could lead to greater understanding and application of millennia-old Judaic wisdom.

Conclusion

The field of positive psychology is enhanced by taking into account the nuanced differences in relationships between psychology and well-being for each religion. Understanding Jewish conceptualizations of happiness, character, and spirituality deepens and further enlightens our understanding of the broader mechanisms by which virtues and character traits enhance emotional well-being and functioning. This benefit is bidirectional, as positive psychology, with its cutting-edge scientific research and empirically supported strategies, offers innovative angles and practical strategies for the practice of Judaism. Judaism, with its close to 4,000 years of history, offers tried and true wisdom and perspective that can enhance the field of positive psychology. Integration of the two has begun, yet there is still much more work to be done.

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