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From Survival to Flourishing: Visions and Practices for a Jewish Future

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I. Beyond Survival: Diagnosing the Problem

1. Judah Hain, "The Danger of Jewish Self-Defense" *The YARID* (2026), 29.

A community that defines itself primarily by defending Judaism will eventually forget how to cultivate it. ... [I]n the attempt to defend ourselves from external threats, we risk neglecting the more difficult task of defending Judaism from our own complacency.

2. Leo Eigen, "That Which Stands: Reclaiming Covenant in American Jewish Life" *The YARID* (2026), 12.

Describing Judaism exclusively through the vocabulary of "securing" and "maintaining," or clinging to lingering feelings of trauma, guilt, and victimhood in order to engage people sells short our aspirations...A reactive Judaism becomes unmovable and unmoved: it offers–and, perhaps more importantly, asks–the bare minimum.

3. Carolyn Bernstein, "Toward a Renaissance of Jewish Disagreement" *The YARID* (2026), 50.

Every community develops its own signals of belonging. The specific symbols differ, but the dynamic stays the same: we can recognize what camp someone belongs to while losing some of the habits required to understand how they arrived there.

II. From Survival to Flourishing

4. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (2012), excerpts.

If, therefore, there is some end of our actions that we wish for on account of itself...clearly this would be the good, that is, the best. And with a view to our life, then, is not the knowledge of this good of great weight, and would we not, like archers in possession of a target, better hit on what is needed? (2)

Happiness [or flourishing, *eudaimonia*] above all seems to be of this character, for we always choose it on account of itself and never on account of something else. (11)

5. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), 23.

Desire for flowers comes after actual enjoyment of flowers. But it comes before the work that makes the desert blossom, it comes before cultivation of plants. Every ideal is preceded by an actuality; but the ideal is more than a repetition in inner image of the actual. It projects in securer and wider and fuller form some good which has been previously experienced in a precarious, accidental, fleeting way.

III. Visions and Groundings

Covenant

6. Leo Eigen, "That Which Stands: Reclaiming Covenant in American Jewish Life" *The YARID* (2026), 13.

In order for the covenant to resonate with American Jews now, in a largely secular age, its drama must be translated into lived experience: it must be active rather than distant, ethical rather than entirely spectacular, and woven into contemporary life so that it is immediate, participatory, and real.

Diaspora

7. Maeve Korengold, "The Homes We Carry: Diasporism and the Future of Jewish Life" *The YARID* (2026), 54.

It may seem that Jewish flourishing depends on stability within a single nation, a moment when Jewish difference fades comfortably into the background of majority society. Yet, for most of its existence, Jewish civilization's resilience, creativity, and intellectual life have not been anchored in territory or political sovereignty. ... Instead, the source of Judaism's vitality has been diaspora. In an era of institutional uncertainty for American Jews, contemporary debates over the future of Jewish life revolve entirely around the State of Israel. This focus forgets that diaspora has been the heart of Jewish tradition for thousands of years.

Messianism

8. Nathan Kahana, "The Messianic Ideal" *The YARID* (2026), 40.

The Messianic ideal presupposes belief in the Messianic era; it allows us to view the events that occur in our time as meaningful by virtue of their ultimate destination, while simultaneously recognizing that the destination is predestined and not subject to change.

IV. Caring, Practice, and Intrinsic Goods

9. Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (2004), 23.

It is by caring about things that we infuse the world with importance. This provides us with stable ambitions and concerns; it marks our interests and our goals. The importance that our caring creates for us defines the framework of standards and aims in terms of which we endeavor to conduct our lives. A person who cares about something is guided, as his attitudes and his actions are shaped, by his continuing interest in it. Insofar as he does care about certain things, this determines how he thinks it important for him to conduct his life. The totality of the various things that a person cares about – together with his ordering of how important to him they are – effectively specifies his answer to the question of how to live.

10. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (2012), 13.

[W]e posit the work of a human being as a certain life, and this is an activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason, the work of a serious man being to do these things well and nobly...

11. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (2008), 188 – 189.

Consider the example of a highly intelligent seven-year-old child whom I wish to teach to play chess, although the child has no particular desire to learn the game. The child does however have a very strong desire for candy and little change of obtaining. I therefore tell the child that if the child will play chess with me once a week I will give the child 50 cents worth of candy; moreover I tell the child that I will always play in such a way that it will be difficult, but not impossible, for the child to win and that, if the child wins, the child will receive an extra 50 cents worth of candy. Thus motivated the child plays and plays to win. Notice however that, so long as it is the candy alone which provides the child with a good reason for playing chess, the child has no reason not to cheat and every reason to cheat, provided that he or she can do so successfully. But, so we may hope, there will come a time when the child will find in those goods specific to chess, in the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity, a new set of reasons, reasons now not just for winning on a particular occasion, but for trying to excel in whatever way the game of chess demands. Now if the child cheats, he or she will be defeating not me, but himself or herself.

There are thus two kinds of good possibly to be gained by playing chess. On the one hand there are those goods externally and contingently attached to chess-playing and to other practices by the accidents of social circumstance- in the case of the imaginary child candy, in the case of real adults such goods as prestige, status and money. There are always alternative ways for achieving such goods, and their achievement is never to be had *only* by engaging in some particular kind of practice. On the other hand there are the goods internal to the practice of chess which cannot be had in any way but by playing chess or some other game of that specific kind. We call them internal for two reasons: first, as I have already suggested, because we can only specify them in terms of chess or some other game of that specific kind and by means of examples from such games (otherwise the meagerness of our vocabulary for speaking of such goods forces us into such devices as my own resort to writing of 'a certain highly particular kind of); and secondly because they can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question. Those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods.

V. Practices for Jewish Flourishing

Inquiry and Debate

12. Judah Hain, "The Danger of Jewish Self-Defense" *The YARID* (2026), 29.

Nurturing a civilization means sustaining the habits that have defined Jewish life at its best: intellectual rigor, honest argument, the willingness to sit with difficult questions.

13. Carolyn Bernstein, "Toward a Renaissance of Jewish Disagreement" *The YARID* (2026), 47.

Mendelssohn envisioned something far more durable than polite agreement: a culture in which argument itself safeguards survival. Jewish continuity, in his view, would not be secured by some arbitrary ideal of ideological purity, but by trusting that a people strong enough to contend with itself would be strong enough to fight antisemitism. By treating disagreement as a source of intellectual vitality rather than communal weakness, Jews could remain united by shared responsibility rather than enforced consensus. ... Two hundred years later, enforced compliance and an insistence on uniformity bring emotional comfort, but agreement for its own sake produces no higher wisdom.

Sacrifice and Commitment

14. Shilo Sapir, "A Judaism Worth Living For" *The YARID* (2026), 60.

I spent countless hours posted in the darkness of night, standing guard by the windows of the buildings we were sheltering in. In the stillness of night, there was nothing to do but think. And what I came to understand, slowly, was this: throughout my life, I had not sacrificed because I was already committed. I had become committed because I had sacrificed.

The willingness to search through mud for the remains of someone you never met, yet still call your brother, is not the expression of a pre-existing feeling. It is the feeling itself, generated through the act. Sacrifice does not follow from commitment; sacrifice creates commitment.

Prayer/Internal Conversations and Alignment

15. R. Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan II, 25.

הַהִתְבּוֹדְדוּת הוּא מַעֲלָה עֶלְיוֹנָה וּגְדוֹלָה מִן הַכֹּל, דְּהַיְנוּ לְקַבֵּעַ לוֹ עַל־כָּל־פָּנִים שָׁעָה אוֹ יוֹתֵר לְהִתְבּוֹדֵד לְבַדּוֹ בְּאֵיזֶה חֶדֶר אוֹ בַּשָּׂדֶה, וּלְפָרֵשׁ שִׂיחָתוֹ בֵּינוֹ לְבֵין קוֹנוֹ... וּתְפִלָּה וְשִׂיחָה זוֹ יִהְיֶה בַּלָּשׁוֹן שֶׁמְּדַבְּרִים בּוֹ... וּבִלְשׁוֹן אַשְׁכְּנַז יָכוֹל לְפָרֵשׁ כָּל שִׂיחָתוֹ. וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִם לְבָבוֹ יָשִׂיחַ וִיסַפֵּר לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ, הֵן חֲרָטָה וּתְשׁוּבָה עַל הֶעָבָר, וְהֵן בַּקָּשַׁת תַּחֲנוּנִים לִזְכּוֹת לְהִתְקָרֵב אֵלָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ מֵהַיּוֹם וְהָלְאָה בֶּאֱמֶת, וְכַיּוֹצֵא בָּזֶה כָּל חַד לְפוּם דַּרְגֵּהּ.

...

וַאֲפִלּוּ אִם לִפְעָמִים נִסְתַּתְּמִין דְּבָרָיו, וְאֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לִפְתֹּחַ פִּיו לְדַבֵּר לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ כְּלָל, אַף־עַל־פִּי־כֵן זֶה בְּעַצְמוֹ טוֹב מְאֹד... וְגַם יוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ שִׂיחָה וּתְפִלָּה מִזֶּה בְּעַצְמוֹ. וְעַל זֶה בְּעַצְמוֹ יִצְעַק וְיִתְחַנֵּן לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ, שֶׁנִּתְרַחֵק כָּל־כָּךְ, עַד שֶׁאֵינוֹ יָכוֹל אֲפִלּוּ לְדַבֵּר. ...

וְדַע, שֶׁכַּמָּה וְכַמָּה צַדִּיקִים גְּדוֹלִים מְפֻרְסָמִים סִפְּרוּ, שֶׁלֹּא בָּאוּ לְמַדְרֵגָתָם, רַק עַל־יְדֵי הַנְהָגָה זוֹ. וְהַמַּשְׂכִּיל יָבִין מֵעַצְמוֹ גֹּדֶל מַעֲלַת הַנְהָגָה זוֹ, הָעוֹלָה לְמַעְלָה לְמַעְלָה, וְהוּא דָּבָר הַשָּׁוֶה לְכָל נֶפֶשׁ מִקָּטֹן וְעַד גָּדוֹל, כִּי כֻּלָּם יְכוֹלִים לִנְהֹג הַנְהָגָה זוֹ, וְעַל־יְדֵי זֶה יָבוֹאוּ לְמַעְלָה גְּדוֹלָה. אַשְׁרֵי שֶׁיֹּאחַז בָּזֶה.

Hitbodedut (solitary prayer) is the highest and greatest practice of all—that is, to set aside for oneself in any case an hour or more to seclude oneself alone in some room or out in the fields, and to express oneself in conversation between oneself and one's Creator. ... This prayer and conversation should be in the language one speaks... [for in that language] one can fully express oneself. One should speak and recount before Him, blessed be He, everything that is in one's heart: both regret and repentance for the past, and to request,

through supplication, to merit drawing close to Him, blessed be He, from this day forward in truth—and anything else of this kind, each person according to his level.

...

Even if, at times, his words become blocked and he cannot open his mouth at all to speak before Him, blessed be He, nevertheless, this itself is very good. .., [H]e can make this very inability into a conversation and prayer within himself. He can cry out and plead before Him, blessed be He, about this very thing: that he has become so distant that he cannot even speak. ...

Know that many, many great and renowned righteous people have related that they reached their spiritual level only through this practice. And the wise person will understand for himself the great virtue of this practice, which rises higher and higher. It is something equally accessible to every soul, from the smallest to the greatest, for everyone can practice this way of conduct, and through it they can attain a great spiritual level.

Fortunate is the one who holds fast to this.