

Goals for a moral life shared

THIS IS the season in the calendar of the Jewish faith devoted to introspection, self-scrutiny and repentance.

I share with all the readers of the Observer & Eccentric this perspective on the goals of a moral life.

1) **A GROWING MIND:** Never have people been as conscious as today of the importance of good health. The feats of medical science are reported daily in the press, celebrated in the mass media and eagerly discussed in our informal conversations.

But in our concern for our physical well-being, we ought not to neglect the cultivation of our spiritual resources, the aspiration to wisdom and knowledge that is the hallmark of the growing mind.

Knowledge is one of the best guarantees we can acquire against the constriction of the habitual and the familiar. To learn something we have never known before is to enter the domain of surprise and wonderment. It is to savor an experience of adventure.

To be truly educated means to be open to a new challenge of thought all the time. A knowledgeable person is not someone who once read a book and never got over it. A knowledgeable person is one who continues to learn and to seek knowledge.

2) **THE HELPING HAND:** Implanted deep within the human spirit is the capacity to seek out the needs of others and to know the delight

that comes from the act of service itself.

Has a child ever slipped a hand into yours, just because he wanted to walk beside you? Have you ever seen your gift or your word evoke on a face darkened by distress, a transforming smile of joy? Then you have experienced the delight that is truly the enlargement of life itself.

So many of us strike bargains with our conscience and "give charity" as if it were a kind of transaction arranged with an eye to the balance sheet. The highest form of charity isn't a gift, but a righteous deed. It is not done mechanically. It is accompanied by an experience of helpfulness and sense of humanity.

Charity involves imagination and insight. Some people refuse to participate in philanthropy. As they put it, they ask for nothing from anyone and, therefore, need give nothing in return. But they are profoundly mistaken.

Each of us has come into the world, into a community, into a country built by the labor and sacrifice of untold generations. The greatest benefactor cannot give to society as much as society has given to him.

moral perspectives



Rabbi Irwin Groner

3) **A BRAVE HEART:** Of enormous importance to our world is the virtue known as moral courage. This is the readiness to expose oneself to sacrifice, sometimes even to suffering, in order to uphold and advance a moral principle.

The greatest heroes of history are those who were ready to endure moral disapproval, contempt, rejection or even worse, rather than depart from what they saw as the right course.

The quality of moral courage is asked of each of us. In the pressure of our collective lives, we accept without question the standards of our group and the questionable practices of our day.

We encounter an increasing number of little compromises that circumstances urge us to make. They are petty, seemingly insignificant yieldings of a higher motive to a lower impulse. Sometimes the good is identified with what is accepted and prevalent.

Many a teenager has tried to convince his dubious parents by the logic of "everyone is doing it" as though numbers determine values. Or else we say, "Go fight city hall."

A wise man said, "You can determine a man's character by what he stands for, but even more accurately by what he won't stand for."

The person of moral courage will declare: "This is what I choose as right. I will not surrender to the great god of conformity. I seek to impart to my children independence of will and judgment that will enable them to be different from others, when the principles of truth and integrity are at stake."

Rabbi Irwin Groner is with Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield.

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