

- In Yoma 77, Side 2, it is observed that "Tesuhva – returning to the right path of Halacha – is of great moment, since it leads to the lengthening of one's latter days."
- Ritual also plays its role in this dimension. In Menachot 44, Side 2, the text observes that "he who wears tefillin regularly, will live to a good old age."
- Nor is Talmud Torah overlooked as a contributing factor to adding years. In Avot, Chapter 2, it is observed that "whoever learns a great deal of Torah, will be blessed with long life."
- The significance of observing mitzvot is highlighted as well. In Kiddushin 39, Side 2, a sage notes: "Whoever learns a great deal of Torah, will be blessed with long life."
- The importance of a life that is lived in accordance with regularized standard (quite possibly referring to the notion of "asey Toratekha Keva") is reflected in the observation appearing in Berakhot 22, Side 1, that "a person who is diligent in regulating the affairs of his life (hamachmir Atzmo) will find his years and days lengthened."
- The same notion of sound standards in personal affairs appears in a more mundane but none-the-less meaningful fashion in Berakhot 54, Side 2: "An individual who spends a great deal of time at meals, and who also spends a good deal of time in terms of addressing his 'natural functions' will live to a 'good age'."
- Return to the right path is of great moment since it leads to lengthening one's latter days (Yoma 77, Side 2).
- He who wears tefilin regularly will live to a good ripe old age (Menachot 44, Side 2).
- Whoever learns a great deal of Torah, will be blessed with long life (Avot, Chapter 2).
- Whoever observes but one mitzvah will find that his days are lengthened (Kiddushin 39, Side 2).
- A person who is very diligent with regulating the affairs of his life (hamachmir atzmo), his year and his days will be lengthened (Berakot 22, Side 1).

- XV. On the other hand (other, that is, than the categorization of age is penultimate criticism), there is a type of "hopeful realist" reflected in Sukkah 53: "How fortunate are we in our older years, that they bring in their wake atonement for our youth." (This, of course, lends itself to various theological interpretations, all worth exploring – Ed.)
- XVI. As to the "appreciation of values" and the perspective which comes with age, there is the observation (which warrants being described and "profound", and which is deserving of careful declension) in Nedarim 40: "If young people say to you – 'build', and older people say to you 'destroy', be sure to follow the advice of the elders and do not listen to the young. Why? The building of youngsters is very frequently destructive and the destruction of the elderly is very frequently constructive (building)."
- XVII. This is related to the notion that, with age, wisdom helps to transform; whereas ignorance distorts. This appears in (source unclear): "Those elderly who are ignorant, as they grow older, find their ability to think becomes totally disintegrated; on the other hand, those who have grown old in Torah (who are learned) are not thus – as they grow older, their ability to think becomes more settled (and more mature)."
- XVIII. And yet, in any event, all opinions and interpretations to the contrary notwithstanding, there is the refrain in Vayikra 19:32: "One rises before seyvah and gives every respect to the elderly" – the aged warrant respectful concern which is clearly shown to them. It is more than "feeling" – it is action. (The usual interpretation should be added at this particular juncture as to the "types of aging" – intellectual and chronological.)
- XIX. The tradition also fosters the point of view that the aged represent sacred repositories even when "locked", and are then, too, to be rendered respect. In Yerushalmi. Moed. Katan. 3, 1 appears the following significant statement: "As to an old man who has forgotten his learning because of the pressure of events – one should look upon him as if he was vested with the uniqueness (the kedusha) of the Ark", i.e. the Torah is the Ark. It is "mute" – until studied – but it is precious even when not "speaking". So, too, the Talmid Halham who has been "mute-ized" by the passage of time.
- XX. The needs of the elderly, a constant refrain in the tradition, are reflected (for example) in Ruth Rabbah 6: "It is very important that a man never cease to visit the elderly, in order to greet them." (While the psychological insight of this particular observation should be self-evident, but, nevertheless, needs elaboration re: companionship and ego buttressing.)
- XXI. And finally, what may really be the "best lot" at any stage of life, is set down in the 7th verse of Anim Zemirot, in the slogan: "The wisdom of years when one must render judgment; and the vigor of youth when one must do battle."
- XXII. The tradition goes beyond describing the needs and consequent derivative action of aging. It indicated as well various suggestions, all of a moral nature, which may result in a person living to a "ripe old age."

- VII. But there is another "every-man" who takes a more neutral point of view and the Psalmist quotes him (Psalm 4:10) as asserting: "The days of my years... they are 70, and with a very especial effort (with strength) they are 80... and so be it!
- VIII. The nadir of pessimism is reflected in the quotation set forth in Tractate Shabbat 46b, contained in the refrain (which seems to echo Isaac): "Man sits and asks himself (or "anticipates") – when will my candle flicker out?" (A total preoccupation with terminus)
- IX. On the other hand, the prism of the tradition also refracts a "ray" of levity (or, perhaps, it should be called "maturity") in connection with "getting on." In Niddah 9a, the following appears: "Who is to be considered an old woman? Anyone who is called "mother" and is not ashamed of that appellation." (In a way, this is the "Jewish Benjamin Franklin"; the aphorist.)
- X. The tradition also has firm appreciation of the importance of familiar surroundings to those who are aged, and the security attendant thereon. In Midrash Eicha appears the following: "Truly, it is woeful for those who are elderly and who, in their aged years, find that their house has been destroyed" – i.e. this is the rabbinic "sociologist" (or the "gestaltist") commenting on the trauma which follows wrenching away from (or destruction of) familiar settings.
- XI. Our tradition also has the "statistical" (but with valuational implications) where the aged is concerned. This view is reflected in the Tractate Avot 5:24 in which it is pointed out: "At 60, one becomes aged; at 70 one has achieved the very fullness of age; at 80 one evidences the strength of perseverance; at 90 one begins to "wander" (in thinking and in speech) and at the age of 100 the individual is as if he were dead and had left this world."*
- XII. Indeed the fear of senility ("as if we were dead") is reflected at many points in the tradition. For example, in Bava Kama 82b: "When we were young, we aspired to be older (to be mature) and, now that we are older, we have become like infants" (confused, requiring care).
- XIII. And, then, there are certain hints of yet further incisive appreciation of the nature of aging in this intellectual aspect – the realization that with the passage of time a change ensues in the way in which one looks at the world, and concomitantly in the mode of thought. In Shabbat 152b appears the rather brief statement (which lends itself to drash): "The intelligence (the perspicacity) of older people has a tendency to change."
- XIV. Related thereto is the refrain on that which experience brings in its wake, as reflected in Talmud Yerushalmi, Tractate Berachot aleph – dalet: "The words of elderly people are much sharper (more to the point? more critical? more demanding? more penetrating?) than ever the words of the prophets." This may well be a reflection of the view that the dimension of experience is more potent in social guidance than the "charisma" of futuristic projection.

QUOTATIONS FROM JEWISH SOURCES DEALING WITH THE ZAKEN

- I. Aging to all intents and purposes, is a "stimulus," i.e. a factor which elicits response. Thus, one should not look in the tradition to find only one view of the aged but, rather, to find a panoply of views, some examples of which are set forth below.
- II. There is the cynicism which comes with age and which precludes, in the mind of the aged individual, the possibility of anything useful happening. This is reflected in Genesis 18:12, "And Sarah laughed within, saying (or thinking): after I have withered, will I have an adornment (joy)?"
- III. And then there is Isaac, the only one regarding whom Divinity is referred to as "pahad Yitzhak". (Here a discourse is necessary, on why this is so, involving the Akedah, as indicating the preoccupation from the very early years with death and with fear). In Genesis 27:2 he is observed as saying "Indeed, I have become quite aged, I do not know the day of my death." Any number of other formulations might have been possible (and indeed we will see that in the case of other aged "prototypes", other formulations were employed) but Isaac is preoccupied with death.
- IV. The "warrior," on the other hand, has an altogether different view of aging. In his instance there is a certain robustness and a parallel sense of ego/security. This is noted, in particular, in Joshua 14:10 wherein Joshua is quoted as saying: "And I find it noteworthy (comforting?) that I am today 85 years old; I am as strong today as I was in the very time when Moses gave me my charge; as my strength was then, so is my strength today – be it for war, or be it generally in terms of leadership role!" (He is not preoccupied with terminus.)
- V. On the other hand, an aged individual who has had a great deal of trouble acquits himself in an altogether different (and much more pessimistic) fashion. This is typified by the comments of Barzilai to David. In Samuel II. 33-36, he is quoted as saying: "How many are the days of my years – that I should even consider going with the King to Jerusalem? I am 80 years old today, and do I really still know the difference between good and bad?" (That is to say – does anything really mean anything to me at this juncture?) "If I eat, or drink, does food or drink have taste – does it afford pleasure – do I really hear the sound of song? And (accordingly) why should your servant be a burden to my master the King?" Thus the tempest – tossed looks back with bitterness and looks to the future as if it were but a threat.
- VI. And then there is "every-man" who echoes the well-nigh universal refrain of the aged via the Psalmist (Psalms 71:9): "Do not cast me aside when I am old; when my strength has come to an end (or wavers), do not desert me."