

Supplementary Materials for “Mitzvah”

Additional Questions for Congregational Leadership

1. “A higher standard of practice by a critical mass of Conservative Jews seems to me essential to the future of our Movement. Mitzvah is essential to any kind of Jewish life.” [p. 19]
 - a. Do you think your community should raise its “standard of practice” of mitzvot?
 - b. What are some strengths and weaknesses in how your community presents the idea of mitzvah to congregants?
 - c. Identify a mitzvah that you feel particularly strongly about. How might you communicate your sense of the value of this mitzvah to a broader group of congregants?

2. “Debate over the source of authority for the commandments has always been a feature of Conservative Judaism at every level.” [p. 19]
 - a. What possible sources of authority does Chancellor Eisen suggest?
 - b. Which is closest to your own belief? Which do you think is most prevalent in your community?

3. “Conservative Judaism has long embraced the paradox first articulated by the sages: we freely take on the ‘yoke of commandment’ and then, having done so, recognize that we were obligated by mitzvah all along. The opportunity to walk the way of mitzvah is at once obligation and gift.” [p. 20]
 - a. How does this paradox help mitigate the dichotomy between freedom and obligation that Chancellor Eisen discusses at the beginning of the essay?
 - b. Are there ways in which the dichotomy between autonomy and a sense of obligation play out in your own community?

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4. “Several mitzvot on that halakhic list seem especially crucial to Conservative Jewish life right now.”
[p. 20]
 - a. Read Chancellor Eisen’s list and consider which of these mitzvah-areas are most important and least important in your own life. Do the same for your community.
 - b. Reflect on the list again: would you like to change the focal areas for yourself or for your community? If so, why?