Happiness and Loneliness in ספר דברים
A PBL Exploration

As the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be on the wane (בעזרת ה׳) we should consider how our attitudes towards happiness and loneliness may have changed throughout the ordeal. Even our very definitions of those terms may be fundamentally different than they were three years ago.

How does the תורה portray happiness and loneliness? How can we use תורה wisdom to reframe the way we understand these states of being, and use it to improve our own lives, and the lives of others?

> ★ **The goal of this project is to develop a תורה-based initiative to promote happiness and/or to alleviate loneliness in your community. You may work with one partner or independently.**

Part I: Brainstorming

In small groups, discuss the questions below for 6-8 minutes. Notice how your answers vary, and consider what factors have influenced your thinking. Take brief notes in a new document and prepare to share your thoughts with the broader class.

- Happiness:
  - What are words in Hebrew and in English that are associated with this feeling? How do they differ from one another?
  - How would you define happiness?
  - What makes people feel happy?

- Loneliness:
  - What are words in Hebrew and in English that are associated with this feeling? How do they differ from one another?
  - How would you define loneliness?
  - What makes people feel lonely?

- Can loneliness and happiness coexist? Why or why not?
- How did the pandemic affect your own experiences with happiness and loneliness? How did you see it impact the people around you?

Part II: Defining the Terms

Read this article by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, זצ״ל, about the concept of happiness as found in פרשת ראה, and its inherent connection to loneliness. Then choose 3

passages that resonate with you, copy and paste them into your note-taking document, and write an explanation as to why you found those passages meaningful.

Part III: Research

Search throughout ספר דברים for references to either happiness or loneliness, based on Rabbi Sacks' interpretation of those ideas. (You can use a concordance[1] (קונקורדנציה) to aid in your search, whether a paper edition or the virtual tool on alhatorah.org, after you've identified key words.)

Select a minimum of 4 separate מקורות from anywhere in ספר דברים. No more than 2 should come from within the same פרשה.

For each source, explore the following angles:
1. What's the context in which this idea occurs?
2. What terminology indicates that this פסוק/ים is referencing happiness or loneliness?
3. Is the תורה portraying it as a positive or negative state of being? How?
4. Is the תורה portraying it in a prescriptive way (something that should be), or a descriptive way (something that just is or will be)?
5. How is this idea similar to or different from your initial thoughts about what makes people happy or lonely?

Next, utilize a variety of מפרשים to deepen your understanding of each source. Choose any commentaries found in the standard מקראות גדולות or additional ones available online at alhatorah.org.

For each מקור, select at least 2 commentaries to enhance your understanding.

Submit a 1-2 page report on your research, making sure to share your ideas with clarity, accuracy, and good writing practices.

Part IV: Initiative

Take what you've learned and devise an initiative to promote happiness and/or alleviate loneliness in your community. This can take the form of a campaign, program, event, or some other demonstrable way to accomplish this goal.

Questions to consider:
● Who is your target audience?
● What exactly do you hope to accomplish?

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[1] A concordance is an alphabetical list of (root) words that appear in תנ״ך, with citations.

- How long will it take?
- How will you define success at achieving your goal?
- How will you measure your success?
- What resources will you need to implement your initiative? (This can include materials, support from others, time, money, etc.)

When your initiative is ready to be implemented, you will give a brief presentation to your classmates, teacher, and a small group of community leaders who are involved in similar work. They will provide you with constructive feedback to help you further improve your plans and achieve your goal.

Use this rubric to guide your work:

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Submitted on due date	All components of assignment are turned in on or before due dates	Some components of assignment are turned in on or before due dates	Few or no components of assignment are turned in on or before due dates
Brainstorming Notes	Notes are typed clearly, shared, and include thorough answers to bulleted questions based on group discussion	Notes are typed, somewhat clear, shared, and include answers to some bulleted questions based on group discussion	Notes are missing or not typed, unclear, and do not include answers to bulleted questions based on group discussion
Rabbi Sacks Notes	Article read and thoroughly comprehended; 3 passages copied and explained in light of personal resonance	Article read and partly comprehended; 1-2 passages copied and explained in vague sense	Article not read; no passages copied or explained in light of personal resonance
Report on מקורות with מפרשים	4 sources selected from throughout ס׳ דברים, explained clearly with the help of 2+ commentaries apiece; ideas	2-3 sources selected; may all come from same פרשה; explained somewhat clearly with the help of 1	0-1 sources selected; explanation lacks clarity; report is not submitted or is not typed or is less

	organized into well-written typed 1-2 page report	commentary apiece; ideas presented in typed report that lacks clarity or good writing skills	than 1 page or betrays lack of basic understanding of the sources
Presentation to Group	Brief yet clear and informative presentation; student demonstrates preparation, confidence, and enthusiasm; viable initiative	Presentation is somewhat too short or too long; student demonstrates some preparation, confidence, and enthusiasm; initiative may not be viable	No presentation prepared; student demonstrates lack of preparation, confidence, and enthusiasm; initiative is not viable
Implementation of Initiative	Smooth implementation; positive response from target audience; genuine, real-world impact	Bumpy implementation; mixed response from target audience; somewhat of a genuine, real-world impact	Initiative not implemented; negative response from target audience; leaves no positive impact or leaves a negative impact

Part V: Reflection

After the initiatives have been implemented, evaluate your work and reflect on what you and others have gained from this experience. Are you more attuned to your own happiness or loneliness, and that of the people around you? Are you motivated to continue with your initiative, or with other efforts to increase happiness and alleviate loneliness? How has this project impacted your relationships in all three realms: בין אדם לעצמו and בין אדם לחבירו, בין אדם למקום?

Watch this interview with Rabbi Sacks and a BBC presenter from the beginning of the pandemic, and ponder how his thoughts sit with you now, and whether his words would have had the same effect on you back in March of 2020. Discuss with your original small group.

Part V: Conclusion

Sum up your main takeaway from this project in precisely 5 words, and prepare to share them with the whole class.