

ARE HUMANS MEANT TO BE TOGETHER OR ALONE?

Overview

This resource unpacks the issue of **Loneliness** through the value of **Community**.

At-a-Glance

This resource provides an opportunity to think deeply about the value of community in the context of a world of increasing loneliness. It prompts us to think about the ways we ourselves might be different when we are alone and when we are together with others. It draws on the opening chapters of the Bible where humans are described as being created both as individuals and also among others, in community. The art of Hillel Smith featured below highlights that duality. Learners will engage in exercises to assess how they are different when alone and when with others, and how those differences do or do not impact potential feelings of isolation and loneliness. It concludes with an opportunity to think about the ways we can be our best selves while both alone and within the context of communities.



MATERIALS AND SET-UP

Time estimate:
35-40 minutes

Best Uses:

- For group reflection
- For both formal and informal settings
- For more artistically oriented activities

Materials Needed:

- Print-out or digital device to look at the Parsha Poster
- Paper and pens or markers for drawing
- Printed copies of Take Action prompt



FRAME THE ISSUE (10 MINUTES)

At our core, we are designed to both live in community with others and to exist on our own. How are we different in these different spaces? Are we our “best” selves when alone or when we are with others? The answer might not always be the same, as we change and develop over time, and of course, we are not all made the same way.

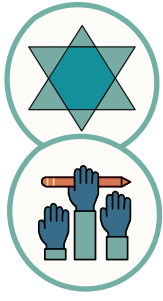
That tension leads us to think about what a strong community can offer us – whether we are physically together with others, or whether we are alone. Being **alone**, as we know, is quite different than being **lonely** – as one can flourish when alone, but loneliness holds us back and brings us down.

Knowing that we are part of a strong community might allow us to flourish whether we are physically present with others or not, since having such a community by definition means that we are not lonely. Let’s explore the complexity of all these different relationships through the activities below.

Use the prompts below to introduce the topic, grounded in both facts and lived experiences.

The crisis of loneliness that the modern world is experiencing poses a grave threat to both physical and mental health, and has especially impacted teens, who report increased levels of anxiety and depression as a result of more lonely and isolated lives.

- ▶▶ Who do you reach out to when you feel lonely? Does it help to be in communication with them?
- ▶▶ Think of a time when you were alone and felt great about yourself. What about that moment made you feel so good?



ANCHOR IN JEWISH WISDOM + ACTIVITY (15 MINUTES)

The opening chapters of the Bible and the story of the creation of Adam and Eve offers us many entry points for thinking about what it means to live as individuals within communities. We will explore some texts below and reflect on them together in an art analysis and activity.

Genesis Chapter 2 describes how God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life. After Adam was created, God placed him in the lush and fertile Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. At this point in the narrative, Adam was still the only human in existence and God's work was not yet complete. God acknowledges the incompleteness of his work and says that it was not good for man to be alone. (Genesis 2:18) and decides to make a "fitting counterpart" [*ezer k'negdo*] for him.

So God put Adam to sleep and performed a surgery of sorts, removed one of his ribs, then healed the wound, and from that rib he created Eve.

When God brought Eve to Adam, he responded that she is:

"Bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh."

(Genesis 2:23)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

- ▷▷ If God was going to create Eve anyway, why do you think He *first* created Adam alone?
- ▷▷ How do you understand the phrase "fitting counterpart" that God uses in his plan to create Eve?
- ▷▷ What is meant by Adam's description of Eve as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"?
- ▷▷ Do you agree that it is "not good" for people "to be alone"? Are there times that perhaps it is?

OBSERVE AND ANALYZE:

Hillel Smith is an artist, graphic designer and creator of the Parsha Poster project – a series of posters "advertising" the *Parshat Hashavua* (weekly Torah portion). The posters use innovative Hebrew lettering, and each one integrates the Hebrew name of the *parsha* somehow into the illustration. Smith uses a bold, graphic aesthetic to tell Biblical stories in a new way.



Scan here for Hillel Smith's Parsha Poster on the first *parsha* in the Torah, *Bereishit*.

The illustration represents the verse "it is not good for the Human to be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for him" from Genesis 2:18.

- Analyze the art. What do you notice? What do you see? Describe it.
- What feature of this Parsha poster do you like the most? The least?
- If you had to give these characters names, what would you call them?

DRAW, OBSERVE AND SHARE:

On a blank sheet of paper:

Draw by yourself: What does being alone look like to you?

Spend three minutes drawing.

Draw by yourself: What does being in community look like to you?

Spend three minutes drawing.

Observe: Now look at your images. What are the defining features of each?

Share with others: Join in pairs and share your art and the observations you made.



MAKE MEANING & TAKE ACTION (10 MINUTES)

Alone in Community: Use the exercises below to reflect on the conversation we just had and consider how you might find ways to be both alone and in community at the same time, allowing you to flourish while on your own, yet not feel isolated or lonely.



- Scan the QR code, and use the accompanying worksheet for the activity below.
- List three activities that you prefer to do while on your own. (ie, running, reading, listening to music.) Place them in the circle in the center.
- For each, think about *why* you prefer to do it on your own.
- Now, for each activity, go one by one and think of the different "communities" that you can be (or perhaps already are) a part of that can support those solo activities.
 - For each activity, around the center circle, write the names or descriptions of all the different communities that can support you (i.e. a running group, a book club.)
- Spend a few minutes looking at all the data you collected and share your activities with one another in a full group.

Take Action:

- ▶▶ Divide into small groups.
- ▶▶ Of your three options, choose one activity that you prefer to do solo, but **wish** you had some kind of community with which to share it, but as of now **do not**.
- ▶▶ In your small groups share the above “wish” and together brainstorm suggestions as to possible communities/groups that you can be a part of. As you leave today, commit to finding out more about how to access them.



CLOSE WITH INTENTION (5 MINUTES)

In the exploration we have just experienced, we took an issue that is plaguing our society – loneliness – which is increasing in its scope and intensity and which has dramatically impacted our mental health – and explored it through the value of community. Doing so allows for a deeper engagement with the difference between being alone and being lonely, and how knowing that we are parts of communities can provide frameworks for us to flourish, even when we are alone. You might feel different about the questions explored above at different points in your life. That is okay, we are all continuously evolving. We hope that now you feel more comfortable trying to piece together the many dimensions of who you are and how you exist alongside others.

Close with a prompt:

- ▶▶ As a result of this conversation I am now thinking differently about ...