

What we're doing: instigated questions and provoked answers.

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A newsletter.



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

In December, Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah was honored to present, in partnership with The Jewish Education Project, a Jewish Futures Conference on the theme of happiness.

While the value of the theme felt obvious to us, we often found ourselves justifying its relevance in a Jewish context. We Jews may be happy, but we're not happy-go-lucky. From the outset, however, **we understood happiness as not simply about frivolity and laughter, but about a deeper sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, and meaning.** As human beings who live in the world—a world that often makes that kind of happiness a challenging proposition—the **pursuit of happiness is, in some ways, an act of resistance:** resistance to mortality, resistance to banality and numbness, resistance to the everyday barrage of horrors that we call the news. We are a people committed to the never-ending work of repairing and perfecting the world, and that means our version of happiness is not blithe or superficial, it's an act of meaning-making and—especially in trying times—it can be an act of rebellion.

So what highlights might I share with you? I came away from the conference holding two key insights. The first emerged from our keynote speaker Dan Ariely's description of the "hedonic treadmill," the observed tendency of humans to quickly return to a relatively stable level of happiness despite major positive or negative events or life changes. Research compares lottery winners and accident victims and notes that, after the initial impact of whatever great or terrible thing has happened, happiness typically returns to its average levels. In

other words, we tend to have a happiness “set point,” and while specific experiences can temporarily bump us up or down, we tend to return to that set point over time.

The implications of this are profound. It means that we can’t achieve happiness in any kind of permanent way—**happiness is a situation to be managed more than it is a problem to be solved**. On the one hand, that feels a little demoralizing. On the other hand, **we Jews have great tools** for dealing with situations to be managed: rituals, recurring practices that jog us out of the ruts into which we fall. Jews are masters of creating rituals that do just that: whether it’s prayer, which reminds us of the transcendent behind the mundane; Shabbat, which disrupts the relentless routine of work; *matzah*, which upends our hubris by reminding us of our origins as slaves; or the 10 days of *teshuvah*, which impress upon us the critical-but-discomfiting work of repairing our relationships. The dilemma of the hedonic treadmill suggests that we ought to find ways to distribute through more of the year Sukkot’s ritualized *z’man simchateinu* “time of our happiness.”

The second insight emerged from Rabbi Shira Stutman’s conference teaching about whether happiness is an intrinsic or an instrumental value in Judaism (citing numerous sources, Shira took it as a given that happiness is a value in Judaism—she suggested that **Jews might have as many words for happiness as the Inuit have for snow**). Her Solomonic conclusion, of course, is that it must be both. The myriad words for happiness that flow through the seven blessings recited at Jewish weddings—*gila*, *rina*, *ditza*, *chedva*, etc.—function both as incentives to inspire us to consecrate Jewish lifecycle events and the outcomes that rich Jewish life yields. The activist Jane Barry writes in her book of the same title, “What’s the point of revolution if we can’t dance?” **Even while we’re engaged in the hard work of creating a future in which human happiness and fulfillment are widely shared, we’ve got to find places and spaces for happiness in the here and now.**

May 2017, with all of the challenges and obstacles that confront us, be a year rich with opportunities for celebration, joy, and happiness.

Best,
Aaron



The Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom

Awarded December 2016 to Pearlstone Center and Ask Big Questions
(from left: Joe Kanfer, Marcella Kanfer Rolnick, Josh Feigelson, Jakir Manela, Mamie Kanfer Stewart, Josh Rolnick)

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GIVING

[Mechon Hadar](#) recently completed the second year of a three year grant made to support the [Center for Jewish Communal Music](#), which strives to provide practical resources, training, and leadership development with an aim of seeding a field in which engaged prayer life can take hold in Jewish institutions around the country.

One of the things they've learned from their work to date is that in order to create innovation in communities those communities need “multiple ‘touch-points’ with role models who can instruct them, as well as tools and resources that can support leaders within the community.”

To respond to this need, [Joey Weisenberg](#) has conducted numerous trainings and residencies – and now the Center seeks to extend the impact of those inspirational sessions by providing additional tools and resources, this time, virtually. The Center for Communal Music has recorded [every element of weekday, holiday and Shabbat prayer services](#), with the majority posted on its [webpage](#). (The remaining recordings are in post-production / sound editing, and will be online soon.)

These resources have been downloaded 565,620 times in the past year. We've been fascinated to see the intricacies of challenges that arose and admire the way the Center adapted and addressed them – such as recording tunes with both male and female voices, to be more accessible for any vocal range.

As they enter into the next year of work Mechon Hadar is looking at additional ways of supporting and furthering the existing training in order to create lasting change. We look forward to sharing Mechon Hadar's future learning with you and hope you'll check out the resources at <https://www.mechonhadar.org/tefillah-music>



Berakha (Blessing) & Intergenerational Philanthropy

How can Jewish teachings about, and practices for, blessing inform healthy attitudes toward money and toward intergenerational philanthropy?

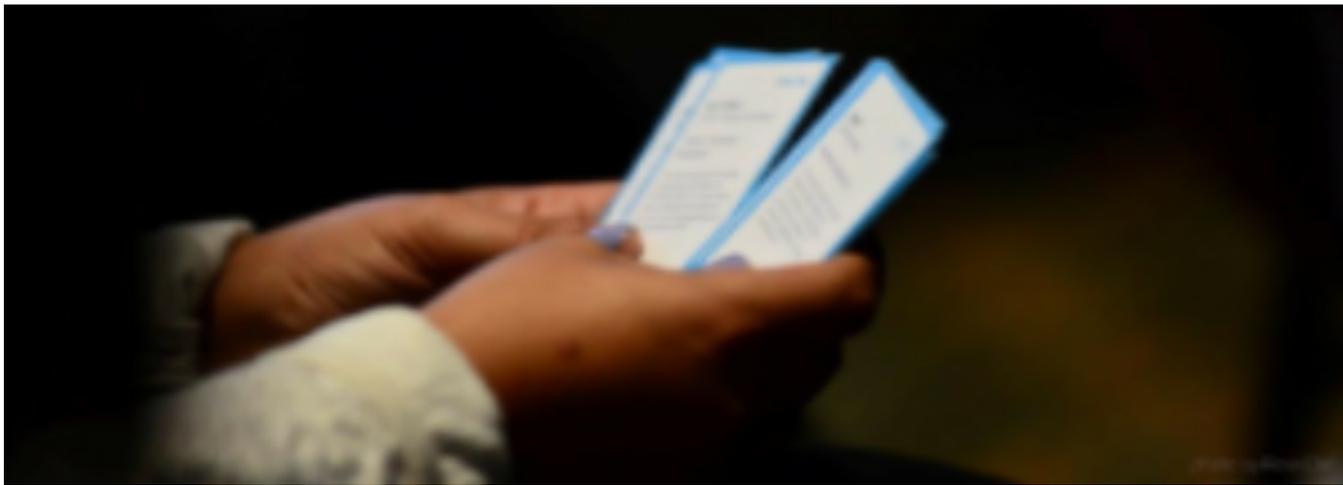
Our like-minded funder peers are invited to this opportunity for conversation and cocktails as part of the Jewish Funders Network, with board and staff from [Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah](#), to explore how

understanding and using blessings can enrich philanthropic practice.

Thursday, January 19th, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Brooklyn, NY

RSVP to Merav Fine, merav@jfunders.org, for full details



LEARNING

You've seen the sensibilities card deck, now check out accompanying source sheets!

[Sefaria](#) - a living library of Jewish texts online - has launched [a new iOS app](#) and has redesigned its website. More than any other online resource, Sefaria enables educators and laypeople alike to create source sheets from its massive Jewish textual archive. Now, you can also export source sheets to GoogleDocs to custom design your own layouts and much more easily edit the documents.

If this all weren't exciting enough, we are also thrilled that Sefaria now hosts ready-made source sheets based on the new Hillel curriculum featuring [our favorite 10 Jewish sensibilities](#). If you have used the Jewish Sensibilities Deck and are looking for additional resources to take the ideas one step deeper, check out jewishsensibilities.org for links to each of these source sheets.

Thanks to our partners at the [Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Experience at Hillel International](#) for making [such a cool curriculum](#) full of engaging texts, accompanying videos, activities and riveting questions. If you use any of these please let us know, as we are always interested in learning from your experience.

SHARING

We appreciated [this call for Jewish literacy](#) among Jewish professionals - a well put argument to walk our talk!

For Happiness conference attendees who want [more Laughter Yoga](#) (or new readers who are immediately curious) - there are [videos](#).

Summer ideas for high schoolers: don't miss the relatively new JTS' [JustCity Leadership Institute](#), which is a great chance to work with AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps, Camp Ramah, United Synagogue Youth, and American Jewish Society for Service - and get a taste of New York City! Applications due April 4th.

We love art where the artist wrestles with Jewish wisdom - including [Hillel Smith's](#) project, [Parsha Posters](#) - the completed series is about to be exhibited at UCLA Hillel, [opening January 26](#).

Speaking of art, don't miss the chance to check out the [artwork created by Ariel Burger for the Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom](#), posted on our blog with an artist's statement offering insight into both the work and process. (And mazel tov to [Rabbi Burger](#) on receiving an [Ignition Grant from the Covenant Foundation](#) for the Illuminated Jewish Stories project.

If you're a Day School educator, don't miss [this innovation challenge](#), just for you - applications due TOMORROW, Jan. 12! Encouragement and support for productive disruption to the status quo.

Still proud of the work done to create the new Upstart, from big ideas to all the details and intricate integration that makes it work - [here's a checklist to help learn from their process](#) when you consider your next collaboration!

What else should we be sharing?

[Click here to send us your recommendations!](#)



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