

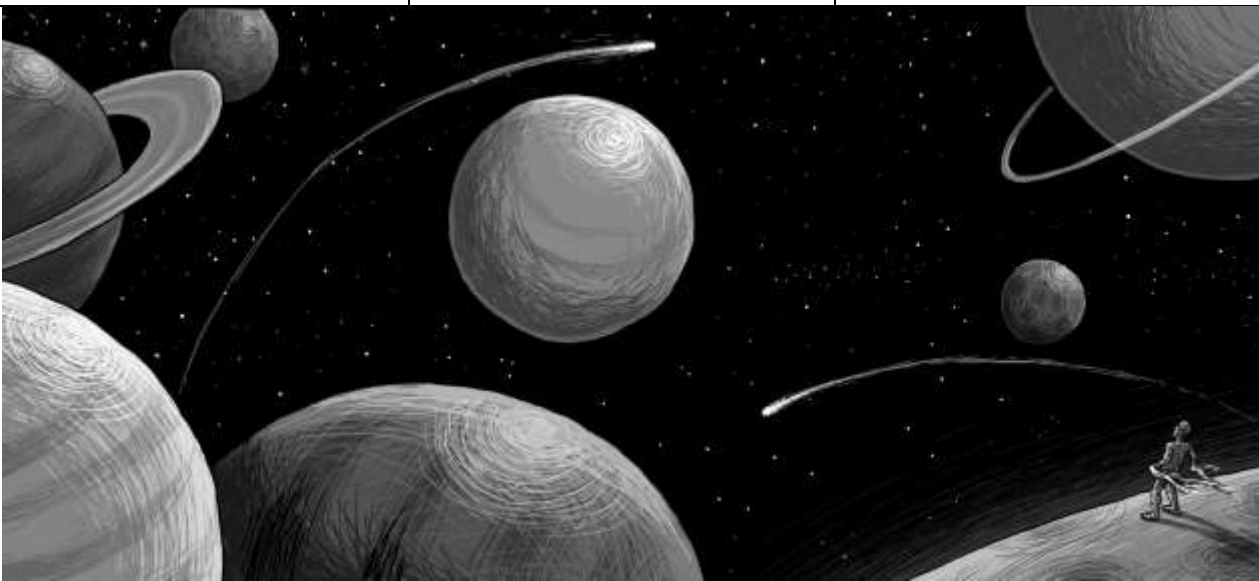
What do we do when unhappiness comes? An example from Jewish Scripture

<p>Overview</p> <p>Happiness is almost universally desired, but none of us enjoy only happiness in life. Resilience in the face of trouble is a virtue admired in all religions, and – rather recently – in many schools. This unit of work offers the teacher a way of studying ancient wisdom which opens up questions about God, faith and life’s tragedies through narrative.</p> <p>The work has an investigative, problem-centred character: teachers will facilitate this learning, but not often lead it: the aim is for students to articulate their own ideas with increasing depth and clarity, supporting their viewpoints with reasons and arguments.</p>	<p>Age Group: 12-16</p> <p>Contexts</p> <p>This unit connects well with work on questions of meaning and purpose in RE for both 11-14s and 14-19s. The artwork can be studied under common themes like ‘exploring sources of wisdom and authority’ or ‘exploring forms of religious expression.’ The work connects most closely to Judaism and Christianity, where the book of Job is scripture. In Islam Prophet Ayyub (Job) is a key figure too.</p> <p>You could also use this in relation to learning about the problem of suffering at GCSE or Standard Grade</p>
<p>Essential knowledge: Suffering, unhappiness and religion: some problems</p> <p>The ‘problem of suffering’ for religious believers is that we experience and observe suffering that may be profoundly painful and enduringly damaging in life. But if there is a great God full of love, the maker of all and the lover of each, then why do we suffer? Why does not God help us?</p> <p>For believers in one God (including of course, Jews and Christians as well as Muslims, Sikhs and Baha’is), the questions raised by suffering or unhappiness might be reframed: Where is God when unhappiness comes? How can faith be maintained in unhappy times? Does God allow our unhappiness for any kind of purpose?</p> <p>The experience of unhappiness goes with the problem of suffering: some see unhappiness as the primary description of what evil does to us. But unhappiness is universal, a part of every life. The Biblical book of Job, scripture to Jewish and Christian people (and Job / Ayyub is a Prophet in Islam as well), offers a narrative response of real profundity to the issue: how do humans respond when unhappiness comes? The pinnacle of the narrative is the final encounter between Job and God, which raises fresh questions: does the experience of God’s presence through suffering dissolve (rather than solve) the problem in some way? If so, how?</p>	<p>Resources / Links / On the web:</p> <p>As a support to this article, writer Lat Blaylock has recorded a 5 minute version of the story, using the art work of Si Smith, which you can show to pupils.</p> <p>BBC’s recent RE 14-19 series ‘A Question of Faith’ includes a programme on suffering in which an atheist, Muslim and Christian visit a children’s hospice and explore the issues arising. See: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01w6tw7</p> <p>Well known theologian and philosopher William Lane Craig blogs on the problem of evil, and engages the issues with depth. Higher achieving students could review it and select strongest and weakest lines for themselves: www.bethinking.org/suffering/the-problem-of-evil</p>
<p>Essential teaching and learning</p> <p>This unit asks students to think about religious and atheist responses to unhappiness and suffering in life. They will develop their skills in interpretation from a study of the biblical book of Job, in which an innocent person’s happiness is destroyed by disasters, leading to profound questioning of God: why does He not do something? Is He responsible for our sufferings? In modern terms, the narrative also explores the ‘argument for God from religious experience’: if a suffering person senses God is with them, does that make a difference? The book of Job is not just a philosophic response to a rational problem: it is a visceral engagement with what it means to be human as well.</p>	

Learning Activities: Five lessons to explore responses to unhappiness

<p>1. Speculate: raising questions and developing initial responses Begin by giving pairs or threes of students the picture page (p19), and ask them to stick it onto a larger piece of paper, and consider what story the pictures might tell. Get them to write some questions about the pictures around the edge. Use the usual enquiry prompts: who / what / which / where / when / why / what if... Pass their paper to another pair. Tell the students that the 7 pictures are part of modern artists' response to the book of Job, part of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The book is all about unhappiness, God and human suffering. In the book, an unhappy person accuses god of picking on them, using lots of similes and metaphors. Does this information help them to answer any of the questions on their new page?</p> <p>2. Working with the Story of Job. Next give the students a set of 8 text cards, cut out from a copy of page 20: one is a title card, the others tell the story of Job and use some of the imagery, poetry and questions of the book to raise more questions. Students are to match the cards to the 7 pictures – stick them on a larger sheet of paper, draw lines to link them and write the reason for the match onto the line. Can they sequence the text cards? Can they now answer some of the questions raised in activity 1? Can they add four more questions, not about the story, but questions for God about unhappiness?</p> <p>3. Exploring responses to unhappiness in the light of the Job story. On page 22 there are three viewpoints, one Jewish, one Christian and one atheist, on suffering, God and unhappiness. Give students a copy of the page, and invite them to read these aloud, highlight the sentences they disagree with in each one, and discuss the questions raised for themselves. What is surprising about these responses to unhappiness?</p> <p>4. Ranking 9 Responses. Next give the students a copy of page 23. This resource extends their learning by giving some contemporary responses to unhappiness. They might cut up the worksheet – they will enjoy this – and organise the responses in a 1-9 ranking, or a diamond 9 ranking. The task sheet gives them some ways of writing about their own ideas.</p> <p>5. A booklet of reasons and arguments: a possible creative addition. Give students an 8 page blank booklet – 2 sheets of folded and stapled A4. Ask them to create their own book of ideas for coping with unhappiness, using the pictures from the book of Job and their own ideas and thinking. One of the 7 pictures goes on each of pages 2-8 of the booklet. After initial work in class, this can make a good homework activity to enable pupils to deepen the learning. Suggest they might include wise advice, song lyrics, quotations and (most importantly) their own ideas.</p>	<p>Outcomes + Achievements Students can demonstrate achievement in relation to these NBRIA / CES standards.</p> <p>Description of achievement Students can...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with meaning: Compare their own and others' responses to questions of meaning and purpose, leading to reasonable explanations of their own and others' views, in the light of religious teaching • Use sources of wisdom and authority appropriately to explain aspects of each area of study and as evidence for particular points of view • Use a range of sources of wisdom and authority appropriately to provide explanations of aspects of each area of study, using these sources with increasing sophistication and as evidence to support particular points of view • Construct Arguments Present an argument for a particular point of view, showing an awareness of different views • Construct a sustained argument, based on critical analysis of different views • Make Judgements: Arrive at judgements that are supported by evidence
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Seven images from the Job narrative



<p>When unhappiness comes The Story of Job <i>Ancient Wisdom?</i> <i>Getting angry with God?</i></p>	<p>While sores erupted over all his body, and his friends made irritating comments blaming him for his pains, Job was broken to the point of despair by his loss. “I am surrounded by dogs! Jackals wait to eat my dead flesh! My body is corrupted by sickness! God, what are you doing? Why don’t you put in an appearance? I’d like to drag you to court! You’re supposed to help us!”</p>
<p>There was a man who lived long ago, out East, who was blessed in every way. He had 5000 camels, 3000 cattle, 500 donkeys. He had 3 daughters and 7 sons.</p> <p>He always praised God for all the good things he received and his life was admired by all who knew him. His name was Job. Then guess what happened.</p>	<p>“God, they say you’re so high and mighty Everyone is supposed to bow and be silent I won’t be silent! You (yes, you) are the one who hurts me You’ve failed to be my protector You’re supposed to be my defender But it’s you who attacks me You who leaves me suffering You crush me like a bug God. My woe is all your fault.”</p>
<p>One day came Satan the Evil One to God’s court saying ‘Well, he only praises you for all you give him. Take his stuff, and he’ll curse you to your face.’</p> <p>Then God said ‘Try. But I think not.’</p> <p>In one day then came thieves, and raiders, robbers and plunderers who stole or killed all Job’s cattle, flocks and herds.</p> <p>That same day came a whirlwind upon the house where all his children partied, to flatten it and kill them all. Job was devastated.</p>	<p>“Humans think it’s hard to mine diamonds Tunnelling deep into the core of the earth That’s easy compared to working out what God is doing. Diamonds are cheap compared to knowing your plan O ‘God of Love’. Where are you when it hurts down here on Earth, you ‘Mighty One’? Are you hiding? It’s time you showed up to defend yourself. Come on. Speak!”</p>
<p>‘Naked I came to birth, Naked I will return to Earth. God gave, and God takes’ said Job, never cursing his maker. But in deep sorrow he asked his friends [and God as well] hard questions: “Why can’t the day of my birth be blotted out? Why must we suffer the time of our lives in pain? What’s the point? What is God playing at? Why must I endure this utter unhappiness?’</p>	<p>Then God did speak to Job, out of a whirlwind: “Job, you ask so much, but you know too little. You ask so many questions: let me ask you some. Where were you when I spun the stars into space? What do you know of the ages of time and the acres of eternity? Can you walk the star fields and see the end from the beginning?”</p> <p>Then Job was very moved. ‘Up till now, people told me about you, but now I’ve seen you with my own eyes’ he said. ‘I am sorry. I am satisfied.’</p>

“I’m David, and I’m Jewish. Most people know what the Nazis tried to do to the Jews – there is a source of unhappiness even worse than poor old Job. The holocaust led some Jews to stop believing G-d is good and great. But Job never did that: he wanted God to speak. Most Jews also continue to have faith. My own way of looking at it is that God’s knowledge and goodness is to mine like a giant to an ant: from human perspectives we see so little (which is what Job notices at the end). Sometimes people find goodness through suffering, sometimes rescue comes after despair. Sometimes it doesn’t. But the Almighty has made this world, with both beauty and sorrow in it. I choose still to trust in G-d, despite the sufferings that have come upon Jewish people. In that sense. I am with Job as he feels at the very end of the story.”

“I’m Jackie, and I’m an atheist. It is puzzling to me that people go on believing in this so-called ‘God of love’. It is rather obvious to me that if god was real, then the suffering and unhappiness of things like HIV, cancer, tsunamis and earthquakes would not happen. Job’s story of tragic events doesn’t surprise me: these things happen because we are fragile humans on a planet of titanic forces. What surprises me is that god-believers carry on with what I think is a superstitious idea. Some believers say this is some kind of test from God, but that implies a god who is an experimenter on humans – not very loving. I think when sadness comes we can comfort each other, work hard against it, take advice. I sometimes try to ignore it! The world is rather random, including good and bad. That’s the way of it. Best to live your life as well as you can, avoiding the worst and making the most of the good bits. Max the happy and min the sad.”

“I’m Sam. I’m a Christian. I love the story of Job because it shows there isn’t really an argument that will tell us why we suffer. Instead, Job has a kind of spiritual experience. He gets really angry about suffering of course – who wouldn’t? Tragedies hit him like a hammer one after the other. I like the way the story shows that friends who will stick with you may get shouted at, but at least they hang in there. Then at the end when God speaks out of the whirlwind, I think Job feels sorry for some of what he says – he uses bad language to God of course. And he perhaps feels kind of overwhelmed as well. Christians believe that God suffers with us – that’s what the story of Jesus on the cross shows. God’s love involves entering into our pains, and walking beside us as we suffer. When unhappy things happen to me, I find it’s true: God can be with me in sad times. His presence can be hugely important to me.”

Rank 9 Responses: what do you do when unhappiness comes?

Here are 9 responses to unhappiness. Which ones do you think are closest to Job's responses? What do you think of these responses? Which ones are close to your own responses? Are there any responses from which you could learn, or which you might try out when you are unhappy? Read these aloud carefully with a partner, and weigh them up: Which ones make sense to you?

<p>“Unhappiness leads to rage and fury. This may not solve much, but it is natural, and it can be helpful to blow your top and get the rage against the machine going. Let it out.”</p>	<p>“In my spiritual life I use contemplation, sitting still and focusing on an image of Christ and some words from the Gospel. For me, this is a great way to achieve calmness when I'm unhappy.”</p>	<p>“Unhappiness can be good, in a weird way: when I am unhappy, I try to look for the reasons why, and see if I can change my life and live more at ease with myself.”</p>
<p>“When I'm unhappy, I pray for peace in my heart and the ability to change my situation. I ask God for help.”</p>	<p>“Occasionally in my life, at times of deepest distress, I've felt a strange and unexplainable sense of the presence of God. You can't buy this, but it is priceless. I think Job felt it too.”</p>	<p>“The main thing that helps me with unhappiness is distraction. I go out with friends, have a few drinks, and try to drown my sorrows. It usually works (till the next morning)”</p>
<p>“In the Jewish Bible, a poet says to himself ‘Why are you downcast, my soul? Why are you anxious inside me? Hope in God. You will praise him again.’ I try to be patient with my unhappiness.”</p>	<p>“Unhappiness can attack you through circumstances: you lose someone, you don't get what you want. But it's how we respond that matters: I fight back with positivity.”</p>	<p>“Come out fighting. Take no rubbish. Don't let them grind you down. Stick it to the Man.”</p>

Questions for discussion and written work

- Take time to reflect on the responses to unhappiness that you have studied. Which of the nine above are close to yours?
- Religions offer their followers roads to happiness, in many ways. Four of the nine ideas above deal with this. Which ones do you disagree with most, and why? Agree with?
- The website ‘Action for Happiness’ asks you to write 5 pieces of guidance about coping with unhappiness. Discuss your ideas, then write your five point plan.
<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/>
- ‘The Book of Job is relevant to Christian believers today because it explore, but does not answer the problem of evil.’ How far do you agree or disagree?
- ‘The biggest challenge to belief in a loving God is the experience of meaningless suffering’ How would a Christian respond to this charge?