

## How to be a Friend in Judaism Tikkun Leil Shavuot 5783 | Newton, MA

*Are there examples of “friends” in the Tanakh?*

### **Job 2:11-13**

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ שְׁלֹשָׁתָּה רַעֲיֵי אִיּוֹב אֵת כָּל־הַרָעָה הַזֹּאת הַבָּאָה עָלָיו  
וַיָּבֹאוּ אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ אֶל־יֹצֵא הַתִּימְנִי וּבִלְדָד הַשּׁוּחִי וְצוֹפָר הַנַּעֲמָתִי  
וַיִּוָּעְדוּ יַחְדָּו לָבוֹא לְגוֹדֵלְוֹ וּלְנַחֲמוֹ:

וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם מֵרְחוֹק וְלֹא הִכִּירוּהוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ  
וַיִּקְרְעוּ אִישׁ מְעִלּוֹ וַיִּזְרְקוּ עֹפֶר עַל־רִאשֵׁיהֶם הַשָּׁמַיְמָה: וַיִּשְׂכְּבוּ  
אִתּוֹ לְאָרְץ שְׁבַע־יָמִים וְשִׁבְעַת לַיְלוֹת וַאֲיִן־דָּבָר אָלָיו דָּבָר כִּי  
רָאוּ כִּי־גָדַל הַכָּאֵב מְאֹד:

<sup>11</sup>When Job’s three friends heard about all these calamities that had befallen him, each came from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him.

<sup>12</sup>When they saw him from a distance, they could not recognize him, and they broke into loud weeping; each one tore his robe and threw dust into the air onto his head. <sup>13</sup>They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. None spoke a word to him for they saw how very great was his suffering.

*Did the Rabbis have “friends”?*

### **Talmud, Ta’anit 23a**

אָזַל לְבֵיתָהּ אָמַר לְהוֹ: בְּרִיָּה דְחוֹנֵי הַמַּעְגָּל מִי קָיָים? אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ: בְּרִיָּה לֵיתָא, בַּר בְּרִיָּה אִיתָא. אָמַר לְהוֹ: אָנָּא חוֹנֵי הַמַּעְגָּל. לֹא הִימְנוּהוּ.  
אָזַל לְבֵית הַמְדָרְשׁ, שְׁמַעֲיָנָהוּ דְרַבְּנָן דְקִאָמְרִי: נְהִירוּן שְׁמַעְתִּין כְּבִשְׁנֵי חוֹנֵי הַמַּעְגָּל, דְכִי הוּי עֵייל לְבֵית מְדָרְשָׁא — כָּל קוֹשְׁיָא דְהוּוּ לְהוּ  
לְרַבְּנָן הָנָה מְפָרַק לְהוּ. אָמַר לְהוֹ: אָנָּא נִיהוּ, וְלֹא הִימְנוּהוּ, וְלֹא עֲבָדִי לֵיהּ יִקְרָא כְּדַמְבַּעֵי לֵיהּ. חָלַשׁ דַּעְתִּיהּ, בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי, וּמִית. אָמַר רַבָּא:  
הֲיִנּוּ דְאָמְרֵי אִינְשֵׁי: אוּ מְבֹרָחָא אוּ מִיתוּתָא.

[The culmination of the story of Honi Ha-Ma’agel, who slept for 70 years and then returned to his community...]

...Honi went home and asked, “Is the son of the Honi Ha-Ma’agel alive?” They told him, “His son is not, but his grandson is.” He said to them, “I am Honi Ha-Ma’agel!”, but they did not believe him.

He went to the Beit Midrash, where he heard the Rabbis saying, “...His halakhot are as enlightening as they were in the days of Honi Ha-Ma’agel! When he would enter the Beit Midrash, he would resolve every conceptual difficulty that the Rabbis had!” He said to them, “I am him.” But they didn’t believe him and they did not pay him proper respect.

Honi got upset, prayed to G-d for mercy, and died. Rava said: This is what people say— “Either companionship or death [*o chevruta o mituta*]!”

**Pirkei Avot 1:6**

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנַתְאִי הָאֲרָבִלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם. יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רֵב, וּקְנֵה לָךְ חֵבֵר, וְהוֹי דָּן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת:

Yehoshua ben Perahiah used to say: Appoint for yourself a teacher, **acquire for yourself a friend**, and judge every human being with the scale of merit [in their favor].

**Maimonides, Commentary on Pirkei Avot 1:6**

...ואמר וקנה לך חבר. זכר אותו בלשון קנייה ולא אמר עשה לך חבר או התחבר לאחרים הכונה בזה שצריך לאדם שיקנה אוהב לעצמו שיתקנו בו מעשיו וכל עניניו כמו שאמרו או חברותא או מיתותא

ואם לא ימצאהו צריך להשתדל בו בכל לבו ואפילו אם יצטרך שימשכנו לאהבתו עד שישוב אוהב ולא יסור מהמשך תמיד אחר רצונו עד שתתחזק אהבתו כמו שיאמרו בעלי המוסר כשתאהב לא תאהב על מדותיך ואמנם תאהב על מדת אהוביך וכשיכוין כל אחד משני האהובים אל זאת הצואה יהיה כונת כל אחד משניהם להפיק רצון חבריו ויהיה כונת שניהם יחד דבר אחד בלא ספק. ומה טוב מאמר אריסטוטלוס האוהב אחד הוא [ואתה].



הואוהבים ג' מינים: אוהב תועלת, אוהב מנוחה, ואוהב מעלה. אמנם אוהב תועלת כאהבת שני השותפים ואהבת המלך ומחנהו. ואמנם אוהב מנוחה הוא ב' מינים אוהב הנאה ואוהב בטחון. אמנם אוהב הנאה כאהבת הזכרים לנקבות וכיוצא בהם. ואמנם אוהב בטחון הוא שיהיה לאדם אוהב תבטח נפשו בו לא ישמר ממנו לא במעשה ולא בדבור ויודיעהו כל עניניו הטוב מהם והמגונה מבלתי שירא ממנו שישגיגהו בכל זה חסרון לא אצלו ולא זולתו כי כשיגיע לאדם בטחון באיש זה השעור ימצא מנוחה גדולה בדבריו ובאהבתו הרבה. ואוהב מעלה הוא שיהיה תאות שניהם וכונתם לדבר אחד והוא הטוב וירצה כל אחד להעזר בחבירו בהגיע הטוב ההוא לשניהם יחד וזה האוהב אשר צוה לקנותו והוא כאהבת הרב לתלמיד והתלמיד לרב:

**“Acquire for yourself a friend.”** This was said using the vocabulary of acquisition—note that he did not say **“Make for yourself a friend”** or **“Befriend others.”** The intention is that people must actually *acquire* for themselves a friend, so that all of one’s deeds and manners may be refined through that friend, as it is said (in the Talmud, above) **“Either companionship or death!”**

And if you don’t find a friend, you must strive for it with all your heart, even if it means leading the other person along until they reciprocate the friendship. At that point, you must never stop from following that friend’s will, until the friendship is solidified. As the masters of ethics [*ba’alei ha-musar*] say, **“When you love, don’t love according to your own traits, but rather according to the traits of your friend.”** And when each friend has the intention to fulfill the will of the other, the intention of both of them, without a doubt, will be one. How good is that statement of Aristotle, **“One love, you and the other”!**

**There are three types of friends: a friend for one’s benefit** [*obev to’elet*], **a friend for one’s enjoyment** [*obev m’nucha*], and **a friend for one’s ultimate virtue** [*obev ma’alah*].

A **“friend for one’s benefit”** is like the friendship of two business associates, or of a king and his retinue.

A “friend for one’s enjoyment” is of two types: (a) a “friend for pleasure” [*obev ba-na’ab*] and (b) a “friend for confidence” [*obev bitachon*]. The “friend for pleasure” is like the friendship between men and women and so forth, whereas the “friend for confidence” is a person to whom you can confide your soul. You don’t keep anything from that person, neither in deed nor in speech. And you will make that friend know of all your affairs—the good ones and even the disgraceful ones—without fearing that you will experience any loss because of this, either through the friend or through another person. When a person has such a level of confidence in another, you will find great enjoyment in the other’s words and in their friendship.

A “friend for one’s ultimate virtue” is when the desire of both of them and their intention is for one thing alone: and that is the good. Each one wants to be helped by the other in reaching this good for both of them together. And this is the friend which the Mishnah commands us to acquire, and it is like the love of a teacher for a student and of a student for the teacher.

### *Rabbi Meir and Elisha ben Avuyah [a/k/a “Acher,” “The Other One”]*

#### **Talmud, Chagigah 15a-b**

שאל אחר את ר"מ לאחר שיצא לתרבות רעה מאי דכתיב (איוב כח, יז) לא יערכנה זהב וזכוכית ותמורתה כלי פז אמר לו אלו דברי תורה שקשין לקנותן ככלי זהב וכלי פז ונוחין לאבדן ככלי זכוכית. אמר לו ר"ע רבך לא אמר כך אלא מה כלי זהב וכלי זכוכית אע"פ שנשברו יש להם תקנה אף ת"ח אע"פ שסרח יש לו תקנה. אמר לו אף אתה חזור בך! אמר לו כבר שמעתי מאחורי הפרגוד שובו בנים שובכים חוץ מאחר.

[After Elisha ben Avuyah left Judaism, he and Rabbi Meir continued their relationship. In a lengthy passage from which this is excerpted, Elisha asks Rabbi Meir to interpret a series of Bible verses.]

After he had left [Judaism] for a wicked civilization, Acher asked Rabbi Meir, “What is the meaning of the verse, *Gold or glass cannot match its value, nor vessels of fine gold be exchanged for it* (Job 28:17)?” Rabbi Meir replied, “This refers to words of Torah, which are as hard to acquire as gilded vessels and vessels of gold, but are as easy to lose as glass vessels.”

Acher said to him, “Your teacher Rabbi Akiva did not respond this way! Rather, he said: Just as vessels of gold and vessels of glass can be repaired even after they have broken, so, too, can a Torah student, even though he has sinned, find a way to be repaired.”

Rabbi Meir said to him, “Then you, too, return!”

Acher answered, “I have already heard from behind the Curtain: ‘*Return, rebellious children* (Jeremiah 3:22)—All of you, that is, except for Acher!”

ת"ר מעשה באחר שהיה רוכב על הסוס בשבת והיה רבי מאיר מהלך אחריו ללמוד תורה מפיו. אמר לו מאיר חזור לאחריך שכבר שיערתי בעקבי סוסי עד כאן תחום שבת. א"ל אף אתה חזור כך! א"ל ולא כבר אמרתי לך כבר שמעתי מאחורי הפרגוד שובו בנים שובבים חוץ מאחר. תקפיה עייליה לבי מדרשא...

Our Rabbis taught: There was an incident involving Acher, who was riding a horse on Shabbat, and Rabbi Meir was following after him in order to learn Torah from him. Acher said to him, "Meir, turn back, for I have been counting the steps of my horse and the Shabbat boundary ends here."

Rabbi Meir said to him, "You, too, turn back!"

He replied, "Haven't I already told you that I have heard from behind the Curtain [*ba-pargod*], *Return, rebellious children* (Jer. 3:22)—All of you, that is, except for Acher!"

But Rabbi Meir grabbed him and brought him to the Beit Midrash...

### **Midrash, Kohelet Rabbah 7:8**

לאחר ימים חלה אלישע בן אבויה, אתון אמריו לרבי מאיר אלישע חולה, אזל לגביה אמר ליה חזור בך, אמר ליה ועד פדון מקבלין, אמר ליה ולא כתיב (תהלים ז, ג): תשוב אנוש עד דפא, עד דכדוכה של נפש. באותה שעה בכה אלישע בן אבויה ומת, והיה רבי מאיר שמח ואומר דומה שמתוד תשובה נסתלק רבי. וכיון שקברוהו באתה האור לשורף את קברו, אתון אמריו ליה לרבי מאיר קבר רבך נשרף, נצא ופרש טליתו עליה, אמר ליה (רות ג, יג): ליני הלילה, בעולם הזה שפלו לילה, והיה בבקר אם יגאלך טוב יגאל, מהו והיה בבקר, בעולם שפלו טוב, אם יגאלך טוב זה הקדוש ברוך הוא.

Elisha ben Avuyah became ill, and they told Rabbi Meir, "Elisha is sick." Rabbi Meir went to visit him, and said to him, "Turn back." Elisha said, "Having gone this far, would I even be accepted?" Rabbi Meir replied, "Is it not written, *You return human beings to dust* (Psalm 90:3)? That is to say, up to the time that life is crushed out?"

At that, Elisha ben Avuyah wept—and died.

Rabbi Meir rejoiced, saying, "My Rabbi seems to have been in the midst of doing Teshuvah at the moment he departed!"

But when they buried him, a fire came and scorched his grave. They went and told Rabbi Meir, "The grave of your master is on fire!"

He went out, spread his Tallit over it, and said to them, "*Stay for the night* (Ruth 2:13)—that is, in This World which is all night. *Then, in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good: Let him redeem* (Ibid.)—that is, "in the morning," in the World That Is All Good; and "he will act as a redeemer"—this is the Holy and Blessed One.

*In Halakha*

**Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 225:1** (R. Yosef Karo, Tzefat, 16th C)

הרואה את חברו לאחר שלשים יום אומר שהחיינו ואחר י"ב חודש מברך מחיה מתים,  
והוא שחביב עליו הרבה ושמח בראייתו:

[Laws Regarding the “Shehecheyanu” blessing.] One who sees a friend for the first time after 30 days should say “Shehecheyanu,” and after 12 months should say the blessing “*m’chayeh metim*” / ‘Who gives life to the dead.’

This applies [only] to people who are very beloved and whom we are exceedingly happy to see.

**Commentary of the Mishnah Berurah** (R. Yisrael Meir Kagan, Poland, 1838-1933)



(א) חברו - ואין חילוק בין איש לאשה והיינו אם רואה אשתו ואמו בתו ואחותו כיון שהוא שמח ונהנה בראייתם. כתבו הפוסקים דאם ראה חכם מחכמי ישראל מברך עליו אשר חלק וכדלעיל בסימן רכ"ד ס"ו וגם שהחיינו אם הוא שלשים יום שלא ראה אותו:

**A friend.** There is no difference in this regard for a man or a woman. That is: A man says these blessings upon seeing his wife, his mother, his daughter, or his sister when he is delighted to see them.

The Poskim add that if one sees a Torah sage, one should add the blessing *Asber Chalak* (“Who has given some Divine wisdom to human beings”) and also “Shehecheyanu” if 30 days have elapsed without seeing that person.

*A Kabbalistic Manifesto of Friendship*

**Manifesto of the Beit El Kabbalistic Community, Jerusalem, 1754; trans. Lawrence Fine<sup>1</sup>**

...We, the undersigned, twelve of us, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Judah, agree to love one another with great love of soul and body, all for the purpose of giving satisfaction to our Creator through our single-minded association, although we are separated. Each man's soul will be bound to that of his associate so that the twelve of us will be as one man greatly to be admired. Each one of us will think of his associate as if the latter were part of his very limbs, with all his soul and all his might, so that if, G-d forbid, any one of us will suffer tribulation, all of us together and each one of us separately will help him in every possible way. The main principle is that each of us will rebuke his associate when, G-d forbid he hears of any sin the latter has committed. This embraces the obligation of the undersigned to bind ourselves together in the mighty bond of love. We take it upon ourselves from now onward, even after we have departed this life and gone to the world to come, that each one of us will endeavor, both in this world and the next, to save, perfect, and elevate the soul of each one of our circle to the best of his ability, and with every kind of effort to do everything possible for the others' eternal bliss.

...

To sum up, from now and forever after we are met together, we are associates, we are joined, we are bound to the others as if we were one man, we are companions in all matters of every kind. Each of us resolves to help, encourage, and give support to his associate, helping him to repent, rebuking him and participating in his tribulations, whether in this world or in the next, and all in the ways of faithfulness and ever more so.

We further take upon ourselves the obligation to follow every enactment, rule, or good custom agreed upon by the majority of our circle, both as a group and as individuals, unless we are prevented by forces beyond our control.

We take upon ourselves the obligation never to praise one another, even if it is clear to everyone that one associate is superior to another both in age and in wisdom. None of us will rise fully to his feet before any other associate, but we shall merely rise a little as a token of respect and we shall not say much about it. We shall conduct ourselves as if we were one man, no part of whom is superior to any other part. Though we have eyes of flesh, our heart knows our own worth and the worth of our associates, and there is no need to give expression to it in words.

We further take upon ourselves the obligation never to reveal to any creature that we have resolved to do these things.

We further take upon ourselves never to be annoyed with one another in any way, whether because of his rebuke to us or because of anything else, and if one of us offends his associate the latter will forgive him at once with all his heart and with all his soul.

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<sup>1</sup> In Lawrence Fine, *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 210-214.

All this we have taken upon ourselves under the penalty of the ban and by an irrevocable resolve in accordance with the laws of our sages of blessed memory. We are resolved to keep all these things, and we give them the full force of all the regulations that have been issued from the days of Moses our teacher, on whom be peace. And let the pleasantness of the L-rd our G-d be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands upon us: yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. Help us, O G-d of our salvation, for the sake of the glory of thy Name.. As an indication of our sincerity we hereby sign this in the holy city of Jerusalem, may it be speedily rebuilt and established, on the week of the sidra: *Behold I give unto him my covenant of peace* (Numbers 25:12). May the L-rd bless His people with peace. All this is lasting and firm, the thing is right, true, and established.

Shalom Mizrachi di-Yedi'a Sharabi, pure Sephardi  
Yom Tov Algazi  
Samuel Alhadif, pure Sephardi  
Abraham Belul, pure Sephardi  
Aaron Bacher Elijah ha-Levi, pure Sephardi  
Menachem ben Rabbi Joseph  
The Young Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, pure Sephardi  
Joseph Samanon, pure Sephardi  
Solomon son of my master and father Bejoash  
Jacob Biton  
Raphael Eliezer Parhi, pure Sephardi  
Hayyim De La Roza

Addenda

Now we have met together and the majority of the members of our circle have agreed to add to our circle the undersigned, as well as the two golden flutes who add their signatures and bind themselves with every kind of formula so that it is all irrevocable

Abraham Ishmael Hayyim Sanguinetti

And afterwards we met at the request of Rabbi Jacob Algazi, who wished to join our holy circle. Since I agree to keep all these matters with a firm resolve and with full acceptance of the terms, I append my humble signature, lowly as a worm.

Israel Jacob Algazi  
Raphael Moses Gallico, pure Sephardi

I, too, accept all these terms and conditions willingly,

The young Abraham ben Asher, pure Sephardi

I, too, accept all these terms with the utmost willingness, behold I am a young man,

Saul, son of our master Rabbi Abraham, our master of blessed memory

### Some Conclusions from Jewish Texts about Friendship (NG)

1. **A friend doesn't disappear** when times are rough.
2. **Even if friends don't see each other often**, or are separated by a long distance, a friend is present for the other when needed.
3. **A friend doesn't project his or her own issues** onto the other, but listens carefully to what the other person needs.
4. **Friends aren't afraid to share** their shortcomings and failures with the other, because they know the other's love will not falter and the other person can be trusted.
5. **Friends share delight** in the other's successes, and aren't competitive, envious, or guilty of *schadenfreude*.
6. **When one makes a friend with this level of trust, it is a pleasure** and delight to be in each other's company.
7. **Friends don't give up** on the other person, and are committed to the relationship for the long haul, as we see in the commitment of Rabbi Meir to Elisha ben Avuyah.
8. **Real friends make the other person a better person.** They're not afraid to share criticism—as long as it clearly comes from a place of love. Conversely, a friend listens carefully to the criticism of the other, because the other person is trustworthy and committed to a friend's well-being.