

## חברותא

### *Friendship*

**H**ow good is friendship! So much so that our commentators (Meiri, Mishlei, 17:17) said, “A man without a friend is like the left hand without the right hand.” – on condition that he is a good friend, G-d fearing, and one who stays away from evil. Our Sages (Yevamot 63a) recommended, “Go up a [spiritual] level and choose an eminent person [to emulate].” It is good for a man to have a close friend, an ally, a companion to whom he may reveal all of his secrets and take counsel with on every matter that he considers doing. Even if he is a tremendous scholar, he should still take advice from a lesser person. “... and one who listens to advice is a wise man.” (Mishlei, 12:15), because “Two are better than one...” (Kohelet, 4:9) Who is greater than the Holy One Blessed Be He, who said (Breishit, 1:26), “Let us make man...”? Our Sages (Sanhedrin 38b) interpreted this to mean that G-d consulted with the ministering angels in order to teach man the

lesson that even a greater person should consult with a lesser individual. This is because sometimes a person's eye can trick him. Additionally, according to a person's sharpness will be the potential for mistake, and every man is deceitful. As such, when a person takes advice, even if he does not benefit, he will not lose anything; if it is not correct in his eyes, then he will do that which is correct in his eyes. We have also learned (Mishlei, 3:5), "Do not rely upon your understanding; salvation results from an abundance of advice." (Mishlei, 11:14) Especially the study of Torah requires a partner, one who will sharpen the other partner in halacha. The admonition of our Sages (Taanit 7a) on the verse (Yirmiyahu, 50:36), "A sword is against the sorcerers; let them be considered as fools." is well-known. (They say that this refers to Torah scholars who study alone, and, as a result, become more foolish.) May G-d save us and protect us! Yet one must choose good friends who are amenable to each other in halacha and are willing to admit to the truth. This is not true about people who are not agreeable – they attack each other with cynical words, and great is the prosecution, animosity, and competition. In situations such as these, their absence is preferred. If a person cannot find a good partner, let his students be his partner. Has it not already been said (Taanit 7a), "I have learned much from my teachers, and even more from my friends, but from my students more than from anyone else."

Behold, in regard to rulings and judgments, a person needs to be from among those who fear rendering halachic decisions and one should never make a ruling alone, in order that he not make a mistake, and that he not get a "splinter from the beam" (Sanhedrin 7b). If he is in a place where there are no men, he must be a friend unto himself – this means that he must investigate

alternative possibilities and explore various approaches which contradict his own opinion. He must do his utmost to see his own failing and imperfection. As a result, his righteousness will shine, and he will render a totally truthful decision. Similarly, when he engages in Torah study, and a question or answer which appears attractive in his eyes comes to him, he must make every effort to contradict and negate it. Consequently, due to his extensive internal debate, the truth will be clarified. Friendship is the most beneficial when those who fear G-d and give importance to His name speak with each other. This is our obligation, and this is befitting unto us. Recommend advice as to what is the straight path; each man assist his friend; and let him say to his brother, “Be strong, and let us strengthen each other for the sake of our G-d!” Genuine love and friendship is only feasible between people who are similar and who are equals in character and intellect. Then brothers will dwell together and they will not be divided. However, this is most uncommon in the world. “Consequently, if a person finds a true friend, he should hold him tight and not let him go.

Just as a good friend brings redemption to the world, in contrast, a bad friend causes great evil, for it is impossible that one will not learn from him and imitate his actions. If not voluntarily, then out of deference or shame. Even if one will be spared from slanderous speech, he cannot avoid hearing evil. Even if he will be saved from doing wrong, he will not be spared violating the obligation of reproof. The young man will bear anguish and sighing. Therefore, every man must be careful and stand on guard over his sons to separate them from immoral friends and to seat them between the knees of Torah scholars – “For man is a social being who makes friends...” (Mishlei, 18:24), and “The one who

goes to sages will become wise...” (Mishlei, 13:20) In any case, if he does not have a good friend, he should consult his wife – just as we found (Berachot 27b) regarding Rebbe Elazar ben Azaryah, when the Sages wanted to appoint him the head of the Sanhedrin. Our Sages (Baba Metzia 59a) said, “If you wife is short, bend down and listen to her words.” And it is written (Malachi, 2:14), “... and she is your friend, the wife of your covenant.”

