

The Secrets to Healthy Relationships



For thousands of years Jews have been studying in pairs or in groups, respectfully debating each other, learning the stories and legal texts of Judaism, and investigating their past as a means for enriching their present. Tonight, we continue to engage in the millennia-old practice of exploring the written word as a means to connect with our tradition, open ourselves up to our inner selves, make sense of the world around us, and inspire us to action. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

*This evening's event is part of The Well's **CSI: Coffee. Study. Interpret.** series, in partnership with Repair The World: Detroit, and is made possible in part by funds granted by The Covenant Foundation. The statements made and the views expressed, however, are solely the responsibility of The Well.*

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 606

Transgressions between people are not subject to atonement on Yom Kippur unless the offender appeases the offended party. Even if one aggrieved another with words alone, this appeasement is necessary. If one cannot effect appeasement at first, one must return a second and a third time, taking along three people. If the offended party will not be appeased after three visits, one may desist. If one was a victim of slander, one need not forgive.



Martin Luther King, Jr.

A selection from “Loving Your Enemies”

Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church 11/17/57

Another way that you love your enemy is this: When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, that is the time which you must not do it. There will come a time, in many instances, when the person who hates you most, the person who has misused you most, the person who has gossiped about you most, the person who has spread false rumors about you most, there will come a time when you will have an opportunity to defeat that person. It might be in terms of a recommendation for a job; it might be in terms of helping that person to make some move in life. That's the time you must do it. That is the meaning of love. In the final analysis, love is not this sentimental something that we talk about. It's not merely an emotional something. Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all men. It is the refusal to defeat any individual. When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system.

Discussion Questions:

- *Are you moved by MLK's understanding of love? Is it healthy to love your enemy?
- *Do you approach the relationships in your life (including with yourself) from a place of love?



יהושע בן פרחיה אומר, עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר, והוי דן את כל האדם לכהן זכות:

Ethics of the Rabbis - Pirkei Avot, 1:6

Yehoshua son of Perachiya taught: Make for yourself a teacher, acquire for yourself a friend, and when you judge others - give them the benefit of the doubt.

R. Moses Maimonides - The Rambam - Commentary to Pirkei Avot - 1:6 (On acquire for yourself a friend)

In general, there are three types of friends: a friend befriended for the sake of *benefit*, a friend befriended for the sake of *satisfaction*, and a friend befriended for the sake of a *higher purpose*. Examples of friends befriended for the sake of benefit are two [business] partners, or the relationship between a king and his army.

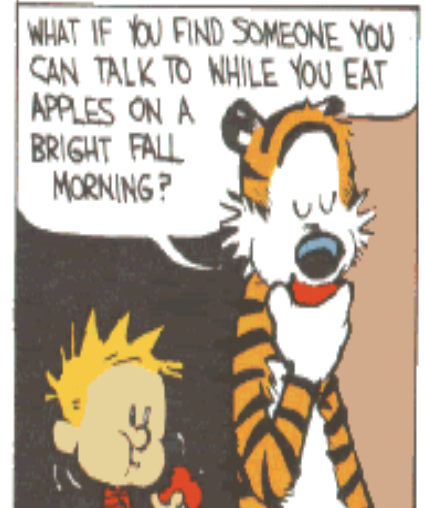
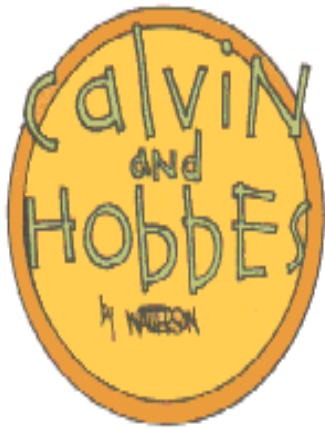
There are two types of friends befriended for the sake of satisfaction: a friend whom one trusts and a friend who grants one pleasure. An example of a friend who grants one pleasure is the relationship between partners during marriage and similar relationships.

A friend whom one trusts refers to a person on whom one can rely without withholding anything from her, neither deed nor word. She reveals to him all her matters - both good and bad - without worrying that she will shame her - either in private or in public. When a person is able to trust a friend so thoroughly, she will derive tremendous satisfaction from talking to her and sharing her company.

A friend befriended for the sake of a higher purpose refers to a situation where both desire and focus on a single objective: doing good. Each will desire to draw strength from the other in order to attain this good for them both. This is the type of friend [the *mishnah*] commanded us to acquire - for example, the comradeship between a teacher and her disciple, and between a disciple and his teacher.

Discussion Questions:

- *Can you think of a friend who falls into each of the three categories shared?
- *How in general do you categorize your relationships, if at all?
- *Who is the teacher you've had the strongest friendship with? What made it so?



Discussion Questions:

- *Do friendships come naturally to you?
- *What do you look for in a friend?

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 58b

It was taught before Rabbi Nahman bar Isaac: He who shames a fellow person in public, it is as though he shed blood. Rabbi Nahman replied: Indeed! In the face of the embarrassed person, we see the redness leave and paleness take its place.

Proverbs 22:24-25

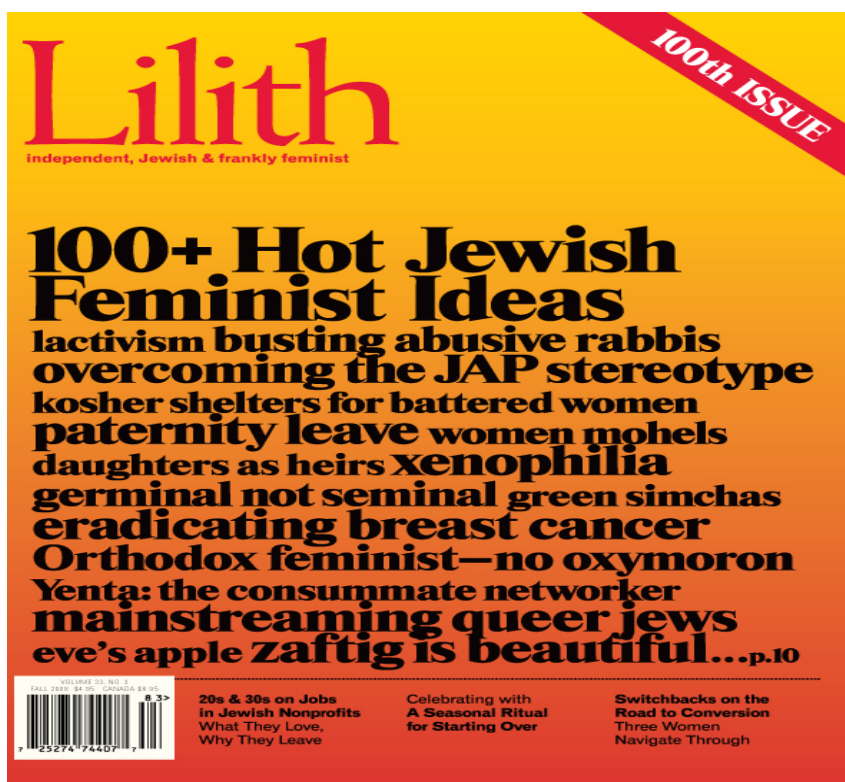
Make no friendship with a person that is given to anger; And with a wrathful person you shall not go; Lest you learn their ways, and trap your soul.

Discussion Questions:

- *Our tradition is pretty emphatic that public shaming is not acceptable. Are you surprised that the ancient rabbis liken it to killing the person being shamed? Are there other unhealthy relationship interactions that come to mind that you'd classify similarly?
- *According to the second text, what is the danger of having a friend who is full of anger? Do you agree with the reasoning? Why focus on anger rather than another negative trait?

The Alphabet of Ben Sira, ca. 700-1000CE

After God created Adam, who was alone, God said, "IT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE." (Genesis 2:18) So God created a woman for Adam from the earth, as God had created Adam himself. God called her Lilith. Unfortunately, Adam and Lilith began to quarrel. She said, "I will not lie on the bottom during sex," and he said, "I will not lie beneath you. I want to be on top. After all, you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am meant to be in the superior one." Lilith answered, "We are equal to each other! Were we not both created from the earth?" Alas, they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced God's Ineffable Name and flew away.



Discussion Questions:

Lilith is often referred to as the mother of Jewish feminism – there's even a Jewish feminist magazine that bears her name!

*What does the story above suggest about the Jewish tradition's perspective on healthy sexual relationships? Are you surprised, given the time period in which it was written?

Talmud, Brachot 62a

Kahane went and lay down under the bed of Rav (who was his teacher). Kahane heard Rav talk, laugh, and have intimate relations with his wife. Kahane said to himself, "is the mouth of my teacher like one who has never before tasted food?" Rav heard his student, and said, "Kahane! Are you here?! Get out! This is not proper behavior!" Kahane replied, "This too is Torah, and I need to learn."

Discussion Questions:

- *Who are your role models (if any) as it relates to healthy sexual relationships?
- *Are you surprised that the ancient rabbis included sex in their understanding of "Torah" (used in this sense as a broad word to encompass all of Jewish wisdom)?
- *Is there a healthy relationship here between teacher and student? Think back to the categories proposed by Maimonides on slide #4...

End note

The story is told of Rebbe Zusya, the great Chassidic master, who lay crying on his deathbed.

His students asked him, "Rebbe, why are you so sad? After all the commandments and good deeds you have done, you will surely get a great reward in heaven!"

"I'm afraid!" said Rebbe Zusya. "Because when I get to heaven, I know God's not going to ask me 'Why weren't you more like Moses?' or 'Why weren't you more like King David?'"

I'm afraid that God will ask: "Zusya, why weren't you more like Zusya?"

And then what will I say?