

SOURCEBOOK FOR COMMUNITY LEARNING: JANUARY

Interpersonal Relationships

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4–Interpersonal Relationships: Family & Friends

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

i introduction

This story, reprinted from the book *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*, serves as a foundation to begin thinking about the intimate, personal relationships in our lives.

✂ text

I was sitting on a beach one summer day, watching two children, a boy and a girl, playing in the sand. They were hard at work building an elaborate sand castle by the water's edge, with gates and towers and moats and internal passages. Just when they had nearly finished their project, a big wave came along and knocked it down, reducing it to a heap of wet sand.

I expected the children to burst into tears, devastated by what had happened to all their hard work. But they surprised me. Instead, they ran up the shore away from the water, laughing and holding hands, and sat down to build another castle. I realized that they had taught me an important lesson. All the things in our lives, all the complicated structures we spend so much time and energy creating, are built on sand. Only our relationships to other people endure. Sooner or later, the wave will come along and knock down what we have worked so hard to build up. When that happens, only the person who has somebody's hand to hold will be able to laugh.

From When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough, by Rabbi Harold Kushner

? conversation

- What allowed the children in this story to laugh through the wave that knocked down their castle?
- Is Rabbi Kushner's expectation of tears the normal expectation or would you have expected a different reaction from the children?
- What is/are the message/s that you take away from this story?
- How has this message played out in your life?



RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS

i introduction

What do children owe their parents? The biblical commandments that form the basis of the relationship between children and parents come from Exodus when Moses receives the Ten Utterances, also referred to as the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. These commandments are later repeated in Leviticus. There is a slight change of wording from Exodus to Leviticus. In the Leviticus telling the word יָרָא (*y.r.a.*) has been translated by many as “revere.” Everett Fox uses the term “to hold in awe” which captures some of the subtleties of the Hebrew in the English. It is this translation which is used to translate both the biblical and rabbinic passages containing the Leviticus word.

text

Biblical Commandments

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּן יְמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ:

¹² Honor your father and your mother, in order that your days may be prolonged on the soil that the Eternal your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:12

אִישׁ אִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו תִּירָאוּ וְאֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

³ Each person — his mother and father you are to hold in awe, and My Sabbaths you are to keep: I am the Eternal your God!

Leviticus 19:3

Rabbinic Understandings

ת"ר איזהו מורא ואיזהו כיבוד? מורא לא עומד במקומו ולא יושב במקומו ולא סותר את דבריו ולא מכריעו כיבוד מאכיל ומשקה מלביש ומכסה מכניס ומוציא איבעיא להו.

Our Rabbis taught: What is “awe” and what is “honor”? “Awe” means [that a child] must not sit in the [father’s] seat nor stand in the [father’s] place, nor contradict the words of [the father], nor tip the scale against him [by siding with his opponents in a dispute]. “Honor” means that a child will provide [the parents] food and drink, clothes and covering, and lead him in and out [when they are old and need a helping hand].

Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 31b

נאמר, (שמות כ) כבוד את אביך ואת אמך, ונאמר, (משלי ג) כבוד את ה'. מהונוג מה להלן בחסרון כיס אף כאן בחסרון כיס.

It is written, “Honor your father and mother” [in Exodus]. It is written, “Honor God with your substance” [in Proverbs]. Just as with there (Proverbs) you must honor even if it costs you financial loss, so too here [in Exodus] you must honor even if it costs you financial loss.

Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 32a

ת"ר מנין שאם אמר לו אביו היטמא או שאמר לו אל תחזיר שלא ישמע לו שנאמר (ויקרא יט) איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתותי תשמרו אני ה' כולכם חייבין בכבודי.

From where do we learn that if [one’s father] told him: “...Do not return [a lost object — even though this is the law]” that [the child] should not listen to him (the father)? From the verse, “You shall each hold awe for his mother and father, and keep my Sabbaths — I am God” — you are all (you and your parents) obligated to honor Me.

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 32a

Later Understandings

As Moses descended from Mount Sinai bearing the Ten Commandments, rabbinic tradition imagined one tablet to contain five statements intended to govern our relationship with God, while the second recorded five brief laws governing relations between people. Oddly, the fifth commandment, “You shall honor your father and mother,” was included on the first tablet. Long ago, the Rabbis understood this apparent error of placement to suggest a profound truth: that honoring one’s parents is to be understood essentially as an act of worshipping God.

This idea is also expressed in midrashic literature... Scripture equates honoring them [parents] with honoring God, and cursing them with cursing God... Maimonides addresses the mitzvah (commandment) of honoring parents in the section... otherwise dedicated wholly to heresy. This (placement) implies that, for Maimonides, a person who fails to honor his or her parents properly is to be compared to a heretic who renounces the obligation to honor God.

Rabbi Danny Nevins in The Observant Life, p. 674



conversation

- Read the biblical commandments under “What children owe their parents.” How would you define “honor” and to “hold in awe”?
- Read the first two texts from Kiddushin under the heading “Rabbinic Understandings.” How do the Rabbis of the Talmud define the distinct acts of “honoring” and “having awe”?
- Which of these commandments and understandings follow your understanding of “to be in awe” and “to honor”? Where do you differ?
- What can be challenging about the Rabbis’ understanding of a child’s obligations to his or her parents?
- Read the *Bava Metzia* text from the “Rabbinic Understandings” section. What are the Rabbis asserting about the relationship between children and parents?
- Is this teaching in some way surprising to you? Does it align with your understanding of Judaism or in some way challenge a previous understanding?
- Read the quote under “Later Understandings.” Why do you think honoring your parents is considered tantamount to honoring God in Jewish tradition? Similarly, why is failing to honor your parents compared to heresy and renouncing God?

RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN

introduction

What are the obligations of parents to children? The Talmud source reflects the fact that traditionally the commandments for child-rearing were seen as the obligation of the father. In modern times, the obligations outlined in our traditional sources are seen as the responsibility of both the father and the mother.

text

Biblical Understandings

חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעֶר עַל־פִּי דְרָכֹוּ גַם כִּי־יִזְקִין לֹא־
יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה:

Train a child in the way he ought to go; He will not swerve from it even in old age.

Proverbs 22:6

Rabbinic Understandings

ת"ר האב חייב בבנו למולו ולפדותו וללמדו תורה ולהשיאו אשה וללמדו אומנות וי"א אף להשיטו במים רבי יהודה אומר כל שאינו מלמד את בנו אומנות מלמדו ליסטות. ליסטות סלקא דעתך? אלא כאילו מלמדו ליסטות:

The father is bound in respect of his son, to circumcise, redeem (perform a *pidyon ha-ben* if the son is a firstborn), teach him Torah, take a wife for him, and teach him a craft. Some say, to teach him to swim, too. Rabbi Judah said, "He who does not teach his son a craft, teaches him to be a bandit (to join a band of bandits)..." And some say, "[He must teach him] to swim, too." What is the reason? His life may depend on it.

Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 29a-32b

יומא חד הוה אזל באורחא חזייה לההוא גברא דהוה נטע חרובא אמר ליה האי עד כמה שנין טעין אמר ליה עד שבעין שנין אמר ליה פשיטא לך דחיית שבעין שנין אמר ליה האי [גברא] עלמא בחרובא אשכחתייה כי היכי דשתלי לי אבהתי שתלי נמי לבראי.

Once, while the sage Honi was walking along a road, he saw an old man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, "How many years will it take for this tree to give forth its fruit?" The man answered that it would require 70 years. Honi asked, "Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?" The man answered, "I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted it for me. So, too, will I plant for my children."

Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 23a

Later Understandings

If you truly wish your children to study Torah, study it yourself in their presence. They will follow your example. Otherwise, they will not themselves study Torah but will simply instruct their children to do so.

Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk



conversation

- Read the *Kiddushin* text from the Babylonian Talmud. Explain each of the obligations listed.
- How would you group the obligations of a parent to a child listed in this text? Assign a heading to each group.
- Based on the categories you created, what modern obligations might you add to each of these groups?
- Think about your role as either parent or child. How did or do your parents fulfill these obligations? Did you or do you work to fulfill each of these obligations as a parent?
- What is the message of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk?
- In what way do you “study Torah in your children’s presence”? Which of your actions do you hope your children are watching and one day copying?
- Think of the values you hope to pass on to your children. Are there actions that you currently do or could begin doing to help your children internalize these values and make them a part of their own lives?
- Read all of the sources again. What is the goal of Jewish parenting based on these sources?

UNDERSTANDINGS OF FRIENDSHIP



introduction

Adele Reinhartz, in the introduction to the “Book of Ruth” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, points out that the story of Ruth is the story of the move from emptiness to fulfillment. The theme is expressed in two spheres — the agricultural and the personal as the characters move from a place of famine and loss to a land of bounty, marriage, and the birth of a child who is ultimately traced to King David. The love and loyalty expressed through the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is the most positive biblical portrayal of women’s relationships.



text

Biblical Understandings

³ וַיָּמָת אֶלְיִמֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נַעֲמִי וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ: ⁴ וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֵאֲבוֹת שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רוּת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים: ⁵ וַיָּמוּתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מִחֵלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמְאִישָׁהּ:

³ Elimelech, Naomi’s husband died; and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about 10 years. ⁵ Then those two — Mahlon and Chilion — also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband.

⁶ וַתָּקָם הִיא וְכַלְתֵּיהָ וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה בְּשׂוּדָה מוֹאָב כִּי־פָקַד ה' אֶת־עַמּוֹ לְתַת לָהֶם לֶחֶם: ⁷ וַתֵּצֵא מִן־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה־שָׁמָּה וּשְׁתֵּי כַלְתֵּיהָ עִמָּהּ וַתֵּלְכֶנָּה בְּדֶרֶךְ לָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה:

⁶ She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that the Eternal had taken note of His people and given them food. ⁷ Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

⁸ וַתֹּאמֶר נַעֲמִי לְשְׁתֵּי כַלְתֵּיהָ לָכֵּן שָׁבְנָה אִשָּׁה לְבַיִת אִמָּהּ [יעש] יַעֲשֶׂה ה' עִמָּכֶם

⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Turn back, each of you to her mother’s house. May the Eternal deal kindly

הַסֵּד כְּאִשֶּׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי: ⁹ יִתֵּן ה' לָכֶם וּמִצָּאֵן מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה וְתִשָּׂק לָהֶן וְתִשָּׂאנָהן קוֹלָן וְתִבְכִּינָה: ¹⁰ וְתֹאמְרֵנָה לָהּ כִּי־אֲתוּךָ נָשׁוּב לְעַמִּי:

¹¹ וְתֹאמֶר נְעָמִי שׁוּבָנָה בְּנֹתַי לָמָּה תִּלְכְּנָה עִמִּי הַעוֹד־לִי בָנִים בְּמַעֲי וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאֻנְשִׁים: ¹² שׁוּבָנָה בְּנֹתַי לָכֵן כִּי זָקַנְתִּי מִהַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ כִּי אֲמַרְתִּי יִשְׁלֵי תִקְוָה גַם הָיִיתִי הַלְּלוּהָ לְאִישׁ וְגַם יִלְדְתִי בָנִים: ¹³ הֲלֹהֶן תִּשְׁבְּרֵנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ הֲלֹהֶן תִּשְׁעֲנָה לְבַלְתִּי הָיוֹת לְאִישׁ אֵל בְּנֹתַי כִּי־מֵרְלִי מֵאֹד מִכֶּם כִּי־יִצְאָה בִּי יְדָה:

¹⁴ וְתִשְׁנֶה קוֹלָן וְתִבְכִּינָה עוֹד וְתִשָּׂק עֲרָפָה לְחֻמוֹתֶיהָ וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ: ¹⁵ וְתֹאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבַמְתוּךָ אֶל־עַמָּה וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבֵי אַחֲרַי יְבַמְתוּךָ:

¹⁶ וְתֹאמֶר רוּת אֶל־תִּפְגְּעִי־בִי לְעִזְבוֹךָ לְשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַי כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֲלֹךְ וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיִנִי אֲלִין עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֶל־הַיְדֹף אֶל־הָיִ: ¹⁷ בְּאֲשֶׁר תִּמְוֹתַי אָמוֹת וְשֵׁם אָקְבֹר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה ה' לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הַפְּנוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:

¹⁸ וְתֹרָא כִּי־מִתְאַמְצָת הִיא לְלָקֵת אֶתָּה וְתִתְחַדֵּל לְדַבֵּר אֵלַיָּהּ: ¹⁹ וְתִלְכְּנָה שְׁתֵּי־הֶם עַד־בֵּאֲנָה בֵּית לְחָם ...

with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me!
⁹ May the Eternal grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!” And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping ¹⁰ and said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.”

¹¹ But Naomi replied, “Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? ¹² Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, ¹³ should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Eternal has struck out against me.”

¹⁴ They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law.”

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Eternal do to me if anything but death parts me from you.”

¹⁸ When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; ¹⁹ and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem...

Ruth 1:3–19

? conversation

- Biblical names often give the reader insights into the characters of the narrative. How do the meaning of the names in this text fit the characters:
 - Orpah — back of the neck
 - Ruth — friend or companion
 - Naomi — pleasant
- Both Ruth and Naomi are seen as engaging in acts of *chesed* (kindness), loyalty, and commitment that go beyond the bounds of law or duty. What acts of *chesed* do you see in Naomi’s actions? What acts of *chesed* do you see in Ruth’s actions?
- Re-read verses 16–17. Why do you think Ruth specifies lodging, people, and God as the basis of their relationship? How do these elements enhance a friendship? Are these elements necessary for friendship? What other elements can serve as a foundation for friendship?

i introduction

David and Jonathan

Shimon Bar-Efrat notes in his introduction to the “Book of Samuel” in *The Jewish Study Bible* that the first book of Samuel consists of narratives whose central concern is with the personal lives of the leaders portrayed in the text. Their dreams, feelings, and desires are depicted realistically describing both the negative and positive qualities of the leaders. The text below follows David’s slaying of the “giant” Goliath. King Saul asks his military general to summon the boy who killed the Philistine and this narrative picks up following David identifying himself to King Saul as the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Here we have the beginning of the story of one of the great friendships recorded in the Bible — the friendship of Jonathan (King Saul’s son) and David (the future king of Israel). It is important to recall that throughout the book, Saul is depicted as an unstable character who is ultimately not suitable to be the king of Israel. On the other hand, David is portrayed in a very positive light with many talents and great strength. He is depicted as respectful and loyal to Saul and even when he sins we see him engaging in full repentance.

T text

Biblical Understandings

18 ¹ When [David] finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan’s soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself. ² Saul took him [into his service] that day and would not let him return to his father’s house.

³ Jonathan and David made a pact, because [Jonathan] loved him as himself.

⁴ Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt.

⁵ David went out [with the troops], and he was successful in every mission on which Saul sent him, and Saul put him in command of all the soldiers; this pleased all the troops and Saul’s courtiers as well... ⁷ The women sang (when David and Saul returned from a successful battle against the Philistines) as they danced, and they chanted: Saul has slain his thousands; David, his tens of thousands! ⁸ Saul was much distressed and greatly vexed about the matter...

⁹ From that day on Saul kept a jealous eye on David....

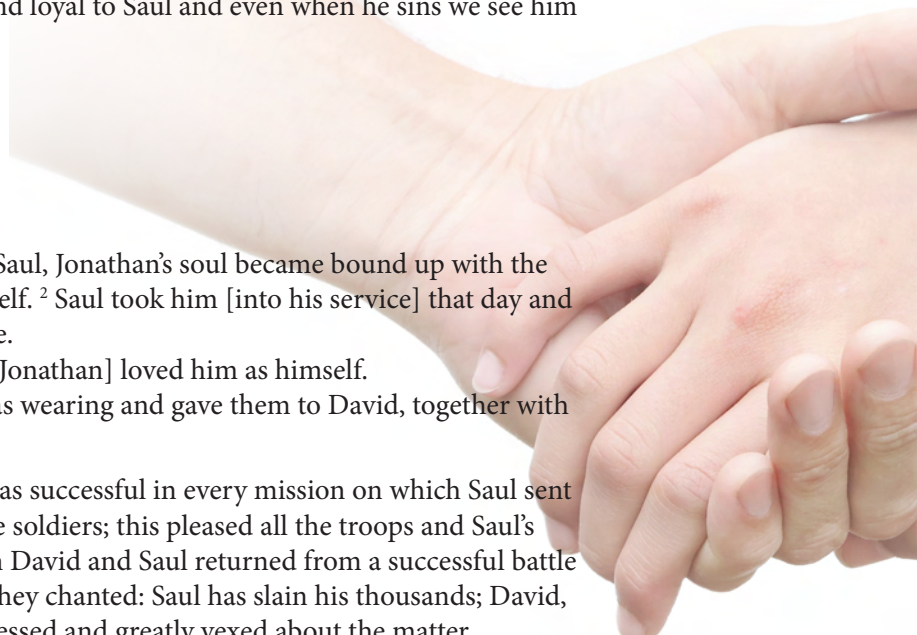
Samuel I 18:1–9

19 ¹ Saul urged his son Jonathan and all his courtiers to kill David. But Saul’s son Jonathan was very fond of David, ² and Jonathan told David, “My father Saul is bent on killing you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; get to a secret place and remain in hiding. ³ I will go out and stand next to my father in the field where you will be and I will speak to my father about you. If I learn anything, I will tell you.”

⁴ So Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul. He said to him, “Let not Your Majesty wrong his servant David, for he has not wronged you; indeed all his actions have been very much to your advantage.” ⁶ Saul heeded Jonathan’s plea, and Saul swore, “As the Eternal lives, he shall not be put to death!”

⁷ Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all this. Then Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he served him as before....

Samuel I 19:1–7



20 ¹ David fled from Naioth in Ramah; he came to Jonathan and said, “What have I done, what is my crime and my guilt against your father, that he seeks my life?” ² He replied, “Heaven forbid! You shall not die. My father does not do anything, great or small, without disclosing it to me; why should my father conceal this matter from me? It cannot be!”

³ David swore further, “Your father knows well that you are fond of me and has decided: Jonathan must not learn of this or he will be grieved. But, as the Eternal lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.”

⁴ Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want, I will do it for you.”

⁵ David said to Jonathan, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and I am to sit with the King at the meal. Instead, let me go and I will hide in the countryside until the third evening. ⁶ If your father notes my absence, you say, “David asked my permission to run down to his home town, Bethlehem, for the whole family has its annual sacrifice there. ⁷ If he says, ‘Good,’ your servant is safe; but if his anger flares up, know that he is resolved to do [me] harm. ⁸ Deal faithfully with your servant, since you have taken your servant into a covenant of the Eternal with you. And if I am guilty, kill me yourself, but don’t make me go back to your father.”

⁹ Jonathan replied, “Don’t talk like that! If I learn that my father has resolved to kill you, I will surely tell you about it.” ...

¹⁴ Nor shall you (David) fail to show me (Jonathan) the Eternal’s faithfulness, while I am alive; nor, when I am dead, ¹⁵ shall you ever discontinue your faithfulness to my house — not even after the Eternal has wiped out every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth. ...

¹⁷ Jonathan, out of his love for David, adjured him again, for he loved him as himself. ...

³⁰ Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan. “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!” he shouted. “I know that you side with the son of Jesse — to your shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness! ³¹ For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kinship will be secure. Now then, have him brought to me, for he is marked for death.” ³² But Jonathan spoke up and said to his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” ³³ At that, Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down; and Jonathan realized that his father was determined to do away with David.

³⁴ Jonathan rose from the table in a rage. He ate not food on the second day of the new moon, because he was grieved about David, and because his father had humiliated him.

³⁵ In the morning, Jonathan went out into the open for the meeting with David... ⁴¹ David emerged from his concealment at the Negeb. He flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer.

⁴² Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the Eternal: May the Eternal be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!”

Samuel I 20:1–42



conversation

- Identify the characters in Chapter 18:1–9 and describe their relationships.
- Why do you think Jonathan chooses David as a source for his love in 18:1? Can you describe what initially attracted you to the people you consider your friends?
- Do the events of Chapter 19:1–7 change your description of the relationships in Chapter 18? Explain.
- Chapter 20 is a turning point in all of these relationships — loyalty of family and friendship are tested. What fears underlie the promises that David and Jonathan express to one another? What is the source of those fears?
- Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with the narrative describing a son who chooses to be loyal to a friend over loyalty to a parent? How does this resonate with your modern experience of life?
- Trace the word “love” throughout this narrative. Who gives love and who receives love? Is there a balance? How does this impact your understanding of the friendship of Jonathan and David? How does it resonate with your understanding of friendship?

Rabbinic Understandings of Friendship

יהושוע בן פרחיה וניתאי הארבלי קיבלו מהם. יהושוע בן פרחיה אומר, עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר; והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות.

וקנה לך חבר כיצד? מלמד שיקנה האדם חבר לעצמו, שיאכל עמו, וישתה עמו, ויקרא עמו, וישנה עמו, וישן עמו. ויגלה לו כל סתוריו: סתר תורה וסתר דרך ארץ שכשיושבין ועוסקין בתורה, וטעה אחד מהם הלכה או ראש הפרק, או שיאמר על טמא טהור או על טהור טמא ועל אסור מותר ועל מותר אסור - חברו מחזירו ומניין שכשחברו מחזירו וקורא עמו, שיש להם שכר טוב בעמלן? שנאמר: (קהלת ד) “טובים השנים מן האחד, אשר יש להם שכר טוב בעמלם.”

רבי אליעזר אומר: ... יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך, ואל תהי נוח לכעוס. ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך...

יהי ממון חברך חביב עליך כשלך...

Joshua ben Perahyah says: Set up a master (*rav*) for yourself. And acquire for yourself a friend/companion-disciple (*chaver*). And give everybody the benefit of the doubt.

Pirkei Avot 1:6

“And acquire for yourself a friend/companion.” How so? This teaches that a person should acquire for him [or her] self a friend/companion, a person with whom to eat, with whom to drink, with whom to study Scripture, with whom to study *Mishnah*, with whom to sleep [in the same house], and with whom to reveal all of the person’s secrets: the secrets of Torah (i.e. the methods and principles of logical deduction and reasoning) and the secrets of *derekh erez* (the way of the world, i.e. common decency or the way things work in the world); that when two sit studying Torah, and one of them makes a mistake [in] a matter of law (*halakhah*) or of a chapter heading... [or says] of the forbidden that it is permitted or of the permitted that it is forbidden – the friend/companion will correct the other. And where do we hear that when the companion corrects the other and studies together that they are well rewarded for their labor? It is said, [in Ecclesiastes 4:9]: Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor.

Avot d’Rabbi Natan 8:3

Rabbi Eliezer says, “Let the respect owing to your companion be as precious to you as the respect owing to yourself.”

Pirkei Avot 2:10

Rabbi Yose says, “Let your fellow’s money be as precious to you as your own.”

Pirkei Avot 2:12



conversation

- How does Rabbi Natan define what it means to acquire a friend?
- How does this list compare to Ruth's declaration in Chapter 2:16–17?
- Which of these elements resonate with your experience of acquiring friends?
- What would you add to this list or remove from this list?
- What role do secrets play in friendship? Do you agree or disagree that a friend is someone with whom you share secrets?
- In the second section, Rabbi Natan refers to the “work” of studying with and correcting a friend. What “work” is being referred to when talking about correcting a friend and why is it worthy of reward?
- What do the two other statements from *Pirkei Avot* add to the rabbinic definition of friendship?

Modern Understandings



introduction

This final text comes from the book, *Restful Reflections*, by Rabbi Kerry Olitzky and Rabbi Lori Forman, first published in 2001 that includes Jewish quotes and personal, modern reflections on those sources.



text

During our lifetime we acquire many kinds of friends... In each of them we may encounter a bit of the divine... they are angels, sent by God with a particular mission, sent by the Holy One of Blessing to teach us something... We have friends that we know from childhood and other friends from college. We have friends from community involvement and friends from work... Yet the one true find is a friend who loves us unconditionally. This is the person who goes out of his or her way to be there for us. This is the friend whom we call upon in moments of crises and know that he or she will drop everything and come running. This is the friend who always makes time to listen to our concerns, our dreams, and even our complaints.

Rabbi Lori Forman



conversation

- How does Rabbi Forman define a friend?
- Can you identify friends in your life who fall in the category described by Rabbi Forman?
- Are there people who would identify you as a friend according to Rabbi Forman's definition?
- How is Rabbi Forman's definition of friendship similar to or different from the friendships described in the Bible and rabbinic texts?



session themes/essential questions

Honoring parents and raising children are not simple tasks.

Interpersonal relationships are complicated and evolving, involving tensions around favoritism, competition for attention, and tensions between the generations.

Notes on Session 4

It may be challenging to thoroughly discuss all of the personal relationships highlighted in this section. Likewise, depending on your group, not all participants will be involved in raising children or in the act of caring for parents if their parents are no longer living. It is important to be sensitive to all of these issues and potentially select only one or two of these relationships to explore as a group.

Notes on Relationship with Parents Texts

Rabbi Nevins quotes Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik to note that Jewish law does not attempt to regulate the emotional side of the parent-child relationship. Reverence is interpreted as involving the acknowledgement of parental authority and honor is about requirements connected to ensuring physical comfort. While love can and often does flow from a supportive environment of love, honor, and reverence, there seems to be an acknowledgement that emotions cannot be dictated by laws. Likewise, humans show devotion to God through fulfillment of the commandments with the hope that the act of engaging in mitzvot will lead to the awakening of love for God.

Notes on Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 29a

Below are explanations of each obligation and one way to title each of the categories coming from the text (based on the work of Rabbi Joel Wasser). As the group considers these actions and their purpose/s, consider how we continue these practices in modern times and how we can perpetuate the legacy intended by each obligation.

Circumcise — Entering the Covenant: Whether the *brit milah* circumcision ceremony for a boy or a *simchat/brit bat*/naming ceremony for a girl, the obligation to formally bring a child into the covenant signifies that the infant is part of a greater whole and purpose including contributing to the Jewish people.

Redeem — Concretize historical conscience: The *pidyon ha-ben* (redeeming the first born male) ceremony is performed only for the mother's firstborn male child and serves as a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt and the tenth plague when God killed all firstborn males in Egypt, sparing the firstborn males of the Israelites. Rituals such as this connect our personal past to our national past. These rituals proclaim that we are a continuation of the Jewish people and are a link in the chain of the unfolding history of the Jewish people.

Teach Torah — Transmitting Judaism: There are many ways to define the word Torah — literally as the Bible itself, or to include the oral law contained in the *Mishnah* and Talmud, later commentary, Jewish law, and even modern Jewish practice and thought. However defined, the obligation represents the parental obligation to perpetuate the moral, religious, and intellectual legacy inherited by the Jewish people. Parents are obligated to concern themselves with the intellectual and spiritual growth of the Jewish people and to passing on this inheritance to their children.

Take a wife/spouse/partner — Companionship or propagation: This obligation can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, we learn from Adam at the beginning of the creation story that it is “not good for a person to be alone.” Judaism asserts that human beings need other human beings in their lives and advocates for a life of community rather than seclusion. On the other hand, Judaism also teaches the importance of contributing to the growth of the Jewish people. This can be interpreted literally as bringing children into the world or raising children in our homes, as well as more broadly as contributing in other ways to the growth of the community.

Teach a craft — Independence: Rabbinic Judaism is not only concerned with our intellectual and spiritual lives. There is also a commitment to our practical lives as well and the need to lead productive, contributing, self-sustaining lives. Judaism embraces the realities of the world and values the ability for each individual to sustain him or herself.

Teach to swim — Protection: Another important value in Judaism is *pikuach nefesh* — literally saving a soul, but often understood as saving a life. This commandment begins with giving our children the life skills they will need in order to keep themselves from harm’s way and the threats of the world that may emerge as children assert greater independence. We are obligated to give children the skills they need to protect themselves in order to keep them safe.

Notes on Parent’s Obligations to Children

In his article in *The Observant Life*, Rabbi Danny Nevins explains that the first obligation of parents is to provide their children with the physical and material environment that will allow them to grow up properly. Once parents move beyond feeding, sheltering, and clothing their children, parents are obligated to guide their children to develop good character. He goes on to say that the goal of Jewish parenting is to raise children to adulthood by teaching them to sanctify life and to serve as God’s partners in perfecting the world. He reminds the reader that children don’t move towards this goal on a single path or in a straight line. Instead, parents need to help each individual child to discover their own unique interests and to develop the skills that will allow them to contribute most richly to the world around them.

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P. 2:

From *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough*, by Rabbi Harold Kushner. 1987, Fireside. Permission pending.

P. 4:

Excerpted from Rabbi Danny Nevins, “Between Parents and Children,” *The Observant Life*, Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz (editors), p. 674, 2012, with the permission of The Rabbinical Assembly.

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 NOTES



Chai Mitzvah was created as a way to engage adults in a Jewish journey throughout their lives. **Chai Mitzvah** encourages adults to take some time to reflect on where they are Jewishly and what they would like to achieve.

There are five steps to becoming a **Chai Mitzvah**:

1. Attend nine study sessions, with a specially designed curriculum.
2. Identify something Jewish you want to learn.
3. Take on or deepen an existing Jewish ritual.
4. Engage in a social action project.
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