

You shall love your fellow as yourself. (19:18)

How does one define friendship? Obviously, varied responses might address this question. The one which I feel is most appropriate is: "A true friend is consistently willing and prepared to place the happiness of the other above the friendship." A good friend does not fear being brutally honest concerning his friend's shortcomings if he thinks that it will save him from failure. It goes without saying that the friend will use common sense in conveying his message. A good friend will not refrain from telling his friend something that he might not want to hear – something that might even impede the future of the friendship. A friend will neither shy away from correcting his friend when he is wrong, nor will he be compassionate about his feelings, if he feels that continuing on this path is courting disaster. Thus, when the friend asks, "How could you? How dare you?" the answer will be, "Because I am your friend. I care about you – even more than I care about me."

We refer to the *Talmud Bava Basra* 16B for a classic exposition on the concept of friendship. *Chazal* teach that *Iyov* had three close friends who came to be with him during his time of need. How was it that they were all able to reach his home at the same time – given that they each lived approximately eight hundred miles from him? *Chazal* explain that they each had a crown with the faces and names of the other three engraved on it. When suffering befell one of them, the appearance of his face on the crowns of his three friends would change. Another opinion is that they each had three trees that were named for each one of their friends. When the tree which bore the name of their friend withered, they understood that this was a sign that an affliction had struck that friend. *Rava* concludes the *Chazal* with the statement: "This bears out what people say, *O' chavrei d'Iyov, O'missusa*, 'Either friends like those of *Iyov* or death.'"

Chazal make a powerful statement defining the terms of friendship. Does a willingness to travel hundreds of miles to support a friend define friendship? Furthermore, how did they all know simultaneously that *Iyov* was suffering? If they were all equidistant from him, they all had to discover his predicament at the same exact time, so that they could drop everything and travel to be at his side.

The **Ben Yehoyadah** explains that there are two types of friends. One is present to share in the good times: when everything is going smooth; life is well; the sun is shining in one's face. When the "wheel of fortune" appears to be turning to what seems not such good times, this friend's phone does not work. He disappears, because he is only a "good times" friend. Such a friend is obviously not much of a friend. Indeed, with friends like that, one does not need enemies.

The other type of friend is one who is present in both good times and bad. He never forsakes his friend. When the going gets rough, he is there. When trouble looms on the horizon, he is present. He is also there for the good times – because he is always present. This is a true friend.

A higher level of friendship, however, was evinced by *Iyov's* friends – one which I feel defines true friendship. This is a friend who is always present for the good and also for the bad. As soon as he

hears that his friend is in peril, that he is afflicted, that things are not as they should be, he immediately drops his personal plans and joins his friend. He is a “reactor,” reacting to the news when he is informed. While his actions are certainly laudatory, there is yet a higher – more desirable – more definitive form of friendship. I refer to he who is constantly looking out for his friend, who asks and seeks, questions and contemplates, worries and cares, wondering, “Does my friend need me? Is he doing well? Could I be doing something to help? Perhaps he is covering up a problem?” This is a true friend. He does not wait for that phone call in the middle of the night, “Help!” He sits by the phone making calls, trying to find out whether everything is truly all right or whether something is brewing, something which he could circumvent.

Iyov’s friends had the crown or a tree. In any event, they did not one day walk in and see a change in the tree, a discoloration of the crown. They treated their crown/tree as a message center, constantly looking at it to make sure that all is well. Some parents (I was like that) often place their moist finger by their sleeping baby’s nose. Their minds never waver from their child. A good friend’s mind never wanes from his friend.

Perhaps I should not turn to secular sources for support, but this is meant to underscore that true friendship is recognized by all men. When the King of Belgium wished to honor Herbert Hoover for his humanitarian services to the Belgian people following World War I, the President demurred, saying, “You have stood at the gateway of civilization and held back the tide of aggression, while we have only shared with you what we had to give. For that, one does not ask honors.” The king, however, wishing to recognize Hoover’s personal helpfulness, created a new order to which only one man belonged. The title was, “Friend of the Belgian People.” A true friend seeks no recognition; otherwise, he is not a true friend.