

## **This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2)**

We are under the impression that the barometer which determines the quality of a friendship is time spent together socially, in conversation and the frequency of communication. Conversely, one who has no external relationship, does not visit or go out to lunch/dinner, manifests limited communication, is not much of a friend. *Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, cites the *Midrash Mishlei* (12) that sheds a different light on the criteria for meaningful friendship.

Shlomo *Hamelech* says, *Mirmah b'lev choshvei ra, u'l'yoatzei shalom simchah*, "There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but, for the counselors of peace, there is joy" (12:20). *Chazal* say: "Whoever converses with his friend, eats and drinks with him, but (also) will (occasionally) speak *lashon hora* about him, is called *ra*, evil. [He is not a friend]. If one has nothing to do with his fellow, however, does not go out with him for lunch or dinner, does not engage in conversation, but would never speak negatively of him – he is called *shalom*, peace, by Hashem."

We see from the above *Midrash* that our criteria for defining friendships is unlike that of the Torah. In the Torah's perspective (which becomes ours), *lashon hora* defines relationships. One can spend all the time in the world with a person, take vacations with him, share in family *simchos*, do everything together, but also speak *lashon hora* about one another – he is not a friend. He is *ra*, evil. The friendship is superficial, a relationship of convenience, but, at the end of the day, a sham relationship. If one can speak negatively of his fellow, he is not his friend. Conversely, if one hardly speaks with the other fellow, but would never speak of him in a degrading manner – he is a friend.