

Mishlei 17-17

Friendship

Key Concepts

Friendship is an essential quality among Jews. It reflects the bonding of souls that took place when the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah in heartfelt unison. The subconscious love that Jewish people have for each other is based on this bonding of souls. The Torah expresses that friendship in the form of a stirring mitzvah: **וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעִךָ כָּמוֹךָ**, you shall love your friend as yourself (Vayikra 19:18).

The human soul is inherently alone in this world, but it overcomes that loneliness by connecting to other human beings through the bond of friendship. Although the quality of friendship varies from individual to individual, a person's degree of friendship is signaled by its duration. If his friendship is true it extends throughout his life.

The test of friendship arises during times of adversity when there is a price to be paid for showing the loyalty that is called upon by the bonds of friendship. Such loyalty may be described as brotherhood. Friends who are loyal to each other despite adverse conditions are spiritual brothers.

The quality of brotherhood is a sense of loyalty based on the sense of a shared origin. That sense is especially strong within members of the same family, but it applies in ever expanding concentric circles to members of the same extended family, tribe, nation, or humanity as a whole.

Exploring Mishlei

(יז) בְּכָל עֵת אַהֲבָה קָרֵעַ וְאָח לְצָרָה יוֹלֵד:

***(17) A friend loves at all times,
and becomes a brother in adversity.***

This proverb speaks of the characteristic quality of friendship in terms of love and its continuity through time. The quality of friendship becomes elevated to a higher state when it is transformed to spiritual brotherhood. This occurs when friendship is tested by adversity.

Learning Mishlei

(17) **At all times** — **בְּכָל עֵת**

a person **loves** his **friend** — **אֶהֱבֵהוּ**

with a feeling called friendship.

He becomes a spiritual brother — **וְאָח יוֹלֵד**

in adversity — **לְצָרָה**

Mishlei uses the term **יוֹלֵד**, implying birth, to describe the transformation of friendship to brotherhood. This suggests that a person who feels the bond of brotherhood to another person is feeling something new, a powerful connection that has come into existence.

Additional Insights

[1] Belonging to the same family should actually provide a ready basis for a happy friendship. However, the very proximity in a family presents many opportunities for friction and misunderstandings. (רש"י)

[2] Friendship, on the other hand, is founded on choice, and the very fact that it has developed guarantees that the individuals have come to know and esteem one another. Accordingly, many a friend is more closely "related" than a blood brother. And yet, the peak of a community of souls is found when brothers are also friends, and the bonds of the soul are woven from strands of both family relation and friendship. (רש"י)

[3] A special form of friendship exists among study partners (חברותא) who learn Torah together. The partners should make an extra effort to value and support each other. This means being prepared to yield as soon as one realizes that his partner is correct. It all means that the love continues unabated despite differences of opinion. (המאירי)