

Text-Study

Friendship Across Religions

Jewish Sources:

Source 1:

Avot 1,6:

Joshua ben Perachyah said: Provide for yourself a teacher and get yourself a friend; and judge every man towards merit.

Source 2:

Zohar:

How great and wondrous is the virtue of the love between friends, who adhere together and who speak from heart to heart, and each one loves his friend as his own soul. And this leads them to true repentance, to humility and joy, to the delights of performing the commandments, to soul searching and to overcoming temptation. And through it they attain both worlds, this world and the world to come, and the awakening of the heart with God's love and awe, and the quality of truth and peace, for the divine presence only dwells where there is peace.

Rabbi Abraham Weinberg of Slonim explains: The Divine Presence dwells where there is love and peace generated by friendship.

Source 3:

R. Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1787), a popular hassidic author, reads "friend" as a reference to the soul. Acquiring a friend is engaging in the hard spiritual work that would make a person worthy of his soul consciously dwelling with him. "The soul is called the friend of a person, and the soul does not come to one except through investment and struggle in the service of God".

Rabbi Israel of Kozhnitz (1737-1814): "By making himself and all his limbs a chariot to the divine presence, he will acquire for himself a friend, that is attaching himself to God, and God draws Himself to him and dwells upon his limbs and his entire body".

Questions for Jewish sources:

Source 1:

1. *This is a three-part recommendation for how to lead a virtuous life. What does each of the three components contribute to the person's ability to lead a good life?*
2. *What is the special contribution of having a friend?*

Source 2:

1. *According to this source, in what way does friendship benefit the friends? How are they transformed through having a real friendship?*
2. *According to the source, in what way do friendships benefit the entire world?*
3. *In your opinion, can friendships have such power?*

Source 3:

These sources offer a different interpretation of the first source – acquiring a friend is about cultivating your soul.

1. *Do you find the first (more literal) reading more compelling or are you drawn to this new interpretation? Why?*
2. *Can you think of God as a 'friend'? In what way does this make sense and what are the problems with defining God as friend?*