

The Importance of Friendships

Background: High schools are challenged with students' constant use of technology, both during class and during their breaks. They have shifted away from creating in-person relationships and friendships in favor of posting about their lives and seeing others' posts on social media.

Objective: These sources are intended to be used either to (1) establish a class community in which students are encouraged to build friendships and relationships with one another or (2) as part of programming to help students consider their interactions in a world filled with technology and social media.

I. Friendships in Tanach

(1) Samuel I 18:1-4

וַיְהִי כִּכְלֹחוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל־שָׂאוּל וַיִּקְשֹׁל יְהוֹנָתָן וַיִּקְשָׁרָה בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָּוִד (ויאהבו) [ויאהבהו] יְהוֹנָתָן כְּנַפְשׁוֹ:

When [David] finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself.

וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שָׂאוּל בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְלֹא נָתַן לְשׁוּב בַּיּוֹם אֲבִיו

Saul took him [into his service] that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

וַיַּכְרֹת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד בְּרִית בְּאֵהָבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ כְּנַפְשׁוֹ:

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

וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־הַמְּעִיל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ לְדָוִד וּמִדְּיוֹ וְעַד־חַרְבּוֹ וְעַד־קִשְׁתּוֹ וְעַד־חַגְרֹו:

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

(2) Melachim II 2:1-2

וַיְהִי בְּהַעֲלוֹת יְהוָה אֶת־אֵלְיָהוּ בְּסַעֲרָה הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּלְךְ אֵלְיָהוּ וְאֵלִישָׁע מִן־הַגִּלְגָּל:

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha had set out from Gilgal.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלְיָהוּ אֶל־אֵלִישָׁע שְׁבֹנָא פֹה כִּי יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי עַד־בֵּית־אֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלִישָׁע חַי־יְהוָה וְחַי־נַפְשִׁי אִם־אֶעְזָבְךָ וַיֵּרְדוּ בֵּית־אֵל:

Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel." "As the LORD lives and as you live," said Elisha, "I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

(3) Kohelet 4:9-12

טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן־הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלָתָם שְׂכָר טוֹב בְּעֵמָלָם:

Two are better off than one, in that they have greater benefit from their earnings.

כִּי אִם־יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת־חֲבֵרוֹ וְאִילוֹ הָאֶחָד שָׁיִפֹּל וְאֵין שָׁנִי לְהַקְיָמוֹ:

For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him!

גַּם אִם־יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנַיִם וְחֵם לָהֶם וּלְאֶחָד אֵיךְ יִחָם:

Further, when two lie together they are warm; but how can he who is alone get warm?

וְאִם־יִתְקַפֵּן הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נֶגְדוֹ וְהַחוּט הַשְּׁלֹשׁ לֹא בְמַהֲרָה יִנְתַּק:

Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him. A threefold cord is not readily broken

Prompt: What are the principles of friendships and relationships based on these mekorot from Tanach?

II. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks on Friendship

(1) [Teaching Resources, RabbiSacks.org](https://www.rabbisacks.org/teaching-resources)

A 2018 research exercise showed that the average person in Britain had 554 friends online, but only five true and close friends. That is a measure of the difference between real and electronic friendship – between people you can turn to for help and who will make some sacrifice for you if you need it and people with whom you merely exchange information. Social media has an enormously positive role to play in allowing people to stay in touch with one another, share experiences and knowledge, and enhance interactions within a real community. But real interpersonal friendship needs an investment of time, intimacy and a degree of privacy.

(2) Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *Morality*, (Basic Books, 2020), p. 29

There are people who find solace in solitude. They are alone without being lonely. But for the most part, life is about relationships. That is why loneliness can be depressing and dangerous.

Prompts: Do you think it's more difficult for people to create friendships today because of social media? How does Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks perceive the importance of friendships?

III. Modern day Research on Friendship

(1) [Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar](#)

“Friendship doubles joy and cuts grief in half” – Francis Bacon

Nourishing foods, exercise, and sunshine may all help keep us healthy, but the best predictors of our well-being are the relationships we have with our family and friends. The day to day interactions and conversations, combined with the love we exchange, provide innumerable benefits and help sustain us as we go out into the world.

Do you take your nears and dears for granted OR appreciate your family and friends?

(2) [Ben Healy, *The Atlantic*, How To Make Friends According to Science](#)

People who have strong social relationships tend to live longer than those who don't.

So what should you do if your social life is lacking? Here, too, the research is instructive. To begin with, don't dismiss the humble acquaintance. Even interacting with people with whom one has weak social ties has a meaningful influence on well-being. Beyond that, building deeper friendships may be largely a matter of putting in time. A recent study out of the University of Kansas found that it takes about 50 hours of socializing to go from acquaintance to casual friend, an additional 40 hours to become a “real” friend, and a total of 200 hours to become a close friend.

If that sounds like too much effort, reviving dormant social ties can be especially rewarding. Reconnected friends can quickly recapture much of the trust they previously built, while offering each other a dash of novelty drawn from whatever they've been up to in the meantime. And if all else fails, you could start randomly confiding in people you don't know that well in hopes of letting the tail wag the relational dog. Self-disclosure makes us more likable, and as a bonus, we are more inclined to like those to whom we have bared our soul.

The academic literature is clear: Longing for closeness and connection is pervasive. Which suggests that most of us are stumbling through the world pining for companionship that could be easily provided by the lonesome stumblers all around us. So set aside this article (after you've renewed your subscription and clicked every ad on the website, of course), turn to someone nearby, and try to make a friend. You both could probably use one.

Prompts: What has been your experience in making and/or maintaining friendships? Do you think having friends is an important part of life?