



# Chai Mitzvah Teen Mussar Program

CHAI MITZVAH MUSSAR TEEN PROGRAM: TOPIC 4

## Interpersonal Relationships Spiritual Friendship/*Chevruta*

by Rabbi Pamela Wax

Chai Mitzvah teen program materials are designed for use in a religious school setting, by youth groups, or as a club in any school.

The Chai Mitzvah program includes learning, social action, and ritual. Teen program materials include texts to spark discussions, suggestions for increasing meaning in ritual observances, and examples of volunteer opportunities for each topic that can inspire the group towards creative ideas for social action. There are also links to additional information on each topic. Activities are varied, to accommodate groups of different levels and interests. Choose the discussion questions and activities that best suit your group.

### icons

- introduction
- text
- conversation
- notes for leaders
- links to additional information
- practices to cultivate the *middah*
- activities specifically designed for groups
- suggestions for meaningful ritual observance
- social action opportunities



4

CHAI MITZVAH MUSSAR TEEN PROGRAM TOPIC 4

# Spiritual Friendship/*Chevruta*



## notes

The Hebrew word for friend, *chaver* (m) or *chaverah* (f) is from an Aramaic word, *chevruta*, which is the term used for the relationship between study partners. While the value placed on friendship originally focused on enabling Torah study, it could easily be extended beyond this to the companionship, support, challenge and comfort that we know friendships offer us. Having a *chevruta* partner is built into the spiritual practice of Mussar. In order to work on developing one's character, it is helpful to be accountable to someone else and to have someone else support you in your efforts (and vice versa). In this fourth lesson, we will explore the importance of spiritual friendship in three different commentaries, two of which are from an extended teaching on friendship written by the great 12th century Jewish scholar Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, also known as Rambam or Maimonides. Each commentary responds to the same teaching "Acquire for yourself a friend." that is found in Pirke Avot 1:6.

In light of this session's topic, study the text in paired *chevruta* study, rather than in groups. At the end of the lesson, explore the impact of the experience of such *chevruta* study. How might this kind of one-on-one conversation lead to deeper friendship? Consider finding a longer-term *chevruta* partner for the rest of the program in order to support one another in Mussar practice.



## introduction

Fill out the Friendship Finder on Supplement Page A. Refer to it to see if you are the kind of friend, or have the kind of friends, that the following texts praise.



## text 1

"How does one acquire a friend? By eating together, drinking together, reading together, studying together... and revealing one's secrets: both Torah secrets and everyday secrets."

*Avot d' Rabbi Natan*



## conversation

- Are there other ways that one acquires a friend in addition to those listed in this text?
- It is likely that you have shared "everyday secrets" with a friend. How do you understand "Torah secrets," and how is this a means to acquiring a friend?

# Spiritual Friendship/*Chevruta*



## text 2

“Acquire for yourself a friend.” Note the language of acquisition. It does not say “Make a friend” or “Become friendly with others.” The point is you should always have a friend who will help you better all aspects of your conduct, as our Sages commented (Babylonian Talmud Taanit 23a), “Either friendship or death.” If one does not easily find a friend, one must make efforts in this direction. If necessary, one should procure his/her friendship until true friendship is established. One should not cease accommodating oneself to the other person’s nature until such friendship has been established. Thus, the ethical masters have taught, “Do not establish friendship according to your nature; establish friendship according to your friend’s nature.”

*Maimonides, Shemonah Perakim, commentary to Pirke Avot 1:6*



## conversation

- What is the ultimate goal of true friendship according to this text?
- Do you have a friend who “helps you better all aspects of your conduct”? How does s/he do so? (You may wish to share this text with her/him.)
- Are you this kind of friend to others? What do you think some “do’s and don’t’s” for this kind of friendship should be?
- The lesson of “Acquire for yourself a friend” grows out of a desire to be closer to others. Rather than distancing yourself from others or thinking that someone is not worthy of being in your peer group, (1) make an effort to bring that person into your social group; (2) judge him/her favorably. What has been your experience, both positive and negative, of doing these two things?
- Choni the Circle-Maker was a legendary character in the Talmud who woke up in a time-warp after seventy years to find that people no longer knew him or believed that he was who he said he was. He died of a broken heart. The rabbis’ conclusion to this story of Choni was “friendship or death” (in Aramaic the expression rhymes as *chevruta o metuta*). What does this expression mean to you? What are the repercussions of not having friends?
- Maimonides’ text goes on to say that to be a true friend means to accommodate oneself to your friend’s nature rather than expect a friend to accommodate to yours. Do you have examples of friendships that did not survive disagreements? Can you think of ways you might respond to your friends differently, based on this teaching?



## text 3

In general, there are three types of friends: a useful friend [for the sake of “benefit”], a pleasant friend [for the sake of “satisfaction”], and a friend befriended for the sake of a higher purpose, who ethically inspires and instructs...

When both friends yearn for and are directed toward the goal of “the good,” they are ethically inspiring friends to each other. Each one will want to be helped by his/her friend in achieving that good for both of them together. This is the type of friend we are commanded to acquire...

*Maimonides, Shemonah Perakim, commentary to Pirke Avot 1:6*



## conversation

- How might you move a friend from being a “useful” or “pleasant” friend to being a spiritual friend? What kinds of activities might you do with that person that could help nurture that kind of relationship?
- Maimonides says that it is commanded to acquire a spiritual friend. What must we do to earn this kind of friendship?
- Maimonides wrote, “A friend befriended for the sake of a higher purpose refers to a situation where both desire and focus on a single objective: doing good. Each will desire to draw strength from one’s friend, and to attain this good for them both.” Before reading this text, was this something you thought to attain from a friendship? Is it something you value?

## practices

### ***The Deal on Friendship***

Look through your **Middah Cards**. Set aside the middot that you feel are important to friendship. How do the cards you chose compare to the ones your *chevruta* partner chose?


### ***Friendship Features***

Interview a relative: Ask him/her to define the word “friend” in one or two sentences, and have him/her tell about an important friendship in his/her life. Who is/was this friend, and what makes this friendship important? Share the interview with the group at the next class (written, sound recording, or video). What themes does your interview share with the others in the class?

### ***Chaver Calendar: Pay it Forward***

Fill out Supplement Page B with a list of at least 5 kindnesses that friends have done for you. Aim to do those same kindnesses for others in the coming month, and record what happens. Bring back your **Chaver Calendar** and share your experiences with your *chevruta* partner at the next class.

### ***Just Trust***

 There is a quote from *Ecclesiastes 4:9-10* that says “Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone when she falls, for she has not another to help her up.” Put this into action: Pair up with someone else. One partner walks backwards and must trust the other to keep him/her safe for a stroll around the building. After you’ve done this once, switch the roles. Then, discuss. How are “two better than one?”

**Share your ideas** in the Chai Mitzvah Teen Group on Facebook.

[www.facebook.com/groups/ChaiMitzvahTeenGroup/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/ChaiMitzvahTeenGroup/)

## social action

**Do Something!** Volunteer to share tips and tactics to overcome bullying, promote positivity at school, and publicly take a stand with your friends. Join millions of young people that care by signing up for a campaign to actively stop bullying: <https://www.dosomething.org/volunteer/bullying>

**Be Social & Act:** Sign up to do volunteer work together with a friend. You might want to work in an animal shelter, a soup kitchen, visit an elderly person, or collect items to donate. In this way, you can “ethically inspire” each other!

## links to additional information

Much has been written about friendship throughout the ages. Check out some famous quotes on the two websites below. Pick one or two that are your favorites, and use them as wallpaper on your computer or send them as notes to your friends.

Brainy Quote: [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic\\_friendship.html](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_friendship.html)

Your Tango:

<http://www.yourtango.com/2013190143/37-friendship-quotes-famous-inspirational-best-friends-sayings>

- “This I Believe” is an international organization engaging people in writing and sharing essays describing the core values that guide their daily lives. Many of these essays are heard on public radio stations around the country. Listen to this one by a teenager entitled “What Friendship Means to Me.” <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/67643/> Read the guidelines <http://thisibelieve.org/guidelines/> write your own essay based on the *middot* you’ve been studying and submit to “This I Believe.”

# Friendship Finder

Fill in the lists below. Read texts 1 and 2. Are you the kind of friend that the texts praise?  
Do you have the kind of friends that the texts praise? Why or why not?

*Qualities I look for in a friend:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Qualities I bring to a friendship:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Reasons why a friendship ended:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Chaver Calendar: Pay it Forward!

*Kindnesses friends have done for me:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Pay it Forward Calendar:**  
Fill in the date and tell what happened each time.




**Chai Mitzvah** was originally created as a way to engage adults in a Jewish journey throughout their lives. **Chai Mitzvah** teen program materials provide teens, who are in a time of personal discovery, with a way to move forward with their personal Jewish journeys.

It is our hope that **Chai Mitzvah** will serve as a catalyst and ignite deeper Jewish engagement and continued growth into the 21st century.

***Chai Mitzvah** is an unaffiliated, non-profit independent 501(c)3 corporation, funded through donations and grants. Please consider sponsoring a **Chai Mitzvah** program in your community or making a gift today.*