



Yehoshua ben Perachiah and Nitai of Arbel received from them. Yehoshua ben Perachia says, "Make for yourself a Rabbi, acquire for yourself a friend and judge every person as meritorious."

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

OUR QUESTIONS

- 1 Make or accept upon yourself a Rabbi? Why do I need to do this?
Can't I just go to a Rabbi or Rebbetzin when and if I need them?
- 2 Acquire for yourself a friend." What's wrong with the word "make" for yourself a friend, like we used in reference to a Rabbi?
- 3 And what do we really mean by a friend anyway? I never acquired a friend before, doesn't it sound a little over the top? Friends seem to just happen, they aren't made or acquired.
- 4 Judge every person favorably. That's a very nice sentiment and good advice, but what does it really have to do with making and acquiring friends and Rabbis?
- 5 By directing us to judge favorably, does the mishna suggest that maybe our default is not to? Do you agree with that and is there anything in the phrase itself which may suggest an approach that can help us judge favorably? (Hint: "All People" and lit. "side of merit")

COMMENTARY: RABBI MORDECHAI ROTTMAN

SYNOPSIS:

Connecting with people who can help us fulfill our potential is crucial for those of us who seek to grow spiritually. Specifically, there are two types of people with whom a person must form an association if they are to succeed in their mission. One is a teacher, the other a friend -- a teacher to teach us Torah and a friend to help us fulfill that which we have learned.

A Deeper Look:

Since the Mishna tells us to attain a relationship with a rabbi, it is important to note that the true role of the rabbi can often be misunderstood. Some people think that a rabbi is like a satellite hookup to the Creator. A Jew, however, is not dependent upon the rabbi to serve as a conduit through which G-d's influence is extended to the world. Each and every Jew has this power. Within Judaism, there are no irreplaceable sacraments that only the rabbi can perform. Although we do find that the rabbi often does officiate at weddings, circumcisions, bar-mitzvahs, funerals and so on, these things can be performed by any learned Jew, providing they are well-versed in Jewish Law. Essentially, responsible rabbinic ordination today ensures that only those qualified people will be involved in these functions.

So, what is the rule role of the rabbi?

The true role of the rabbi is to be a teacher of the Torah. The successful relationship with G-d is entirely up to us.

Attaining a rabbi for oneself means finding a person who can orient us spiritually using the guidelines of the Torah. He should possess the scholarship to accurately show us the way and the confidence to stand up to us when we oppose him. The rabbi we choose should be able to guide us with sensitivity and prudence within the framework of the Torah. He should be G-d fearing and scrupulous, not a "yes man," intent on finding favor in the eyes of his congregants, nor a man who sacrifices the tradition of our forefathers on the altar of his ego. He is strong and wise, compassionate and just, unwavering in his commitment to G-d, Torah and his love of humanity. (This life guide can be a Rebbetzin as well) It is important to note that the advice in the Mishna is being given to unlearned Jews and scholars alike. Even one who is learned may be too subjectively biased to make a correct decision in many circumstances that require objectivity. Everyone needs a teacher, even a teacher.

Next in the Mishna is to, **"Acquire a friend."** What kind of a person is considered a friend? The Torah teaches us that a true friend is one who desires only good for us. He helps us to make the right choice and encourages us to fulfill our potential. If he sees us slipping spiritually he lets us know with kindness and concern. A "friend" who watches us fall and does nothing to prevent it from happening, is not a real friend at all.

So, while a teacher may show us the way, it's the friend that helps us get there. A friend sees us in our normal, everyday behavior and can therefore assist us in areas the rabbi cannot.

How does one acquire a friend? The currency of friendship is not a dollars and cents affair. It is an unselfish interest in another person which comes from a love of humanity and genuine compassion for mankind. The best way to have a friend is to be one.

The third idea in the Mishna is to judge each man favorably. This means that when we see someone doing an act which can be construed as either a positive act or a negative one, we should give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that the act is not a negative one.

Too often the opposite takes place. Not only do we fail to give people the benefit of the doubt when they are engaged in questionable actions, but we attribute negative intentions to their positive actions! Thus, when a man announces publicly that he will donate such and such an amount to charity, some people say to themselves, "He's only doing this to draw attention to himself." This is the opposite of judging each man favorably.

The juxtaposition of the first two ideas in the Mishna with the third one has a very important point to make as well. For if one does not judge people favorably, he will constantly find fault with his rabbi, his friend, and everyone else around him, leaving himself unguided spiritually, isolated emotionally and unable to enjoy the benefits of a teacher, rabbi or a friend.

SUMMARY:

The road to spiritual achievement is not a road that can be traveled alone. One needs a teacher and a friend as he travels along the road of life: a teacher to lead him and a friend by his side. Judge these special people favorably and you will be assured a lasting relationship for many years to come.