

Friendship

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Ohev Yisrael has always been a congregation of friends – but, somewhere along the line, things became strained; some old friends moved on, and some friendships cooled. There were reasons such as “differences in vision” and “differences in leadership style,” but none of the reasons were justifiable, and the result was a diminishing of friendship that grieved God.

Friendship for a believer is not an option. The ability and willingness to be a friend is not only a godly trait – it is, in fact, one of God’s attributes, for God says in Isaiah 41:8:

“But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend.”

God’s friendship with Abraham is referenced again in James 2:23 where we read:

“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”

Not only Abraham, but Moses too, for in Exodus 33:11 we read:

“So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

One of the characteristics of friendship is a willingness to sacrifice for your friend – to put your friend’s welfare before your own. We see, in the New Covenant Scriptures, in John 15:15, how Yeshua possessed his Father’s capacity to be a friend to men, and declared his friendship to his disciples by telling them:

“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

Now we were created in God’s image, and we too have the capacity to befriend and to receive friendship from God and from one another. In terms of human friendship, Scripture gives us the amazing example of the relationship of David and Jonathan; we read in 1 Samuel 18:1:

“Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul exhorts us that:

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

So the Scriptures that reveal God's friendships with Abraham and Moses, Yeshua's friendship with his disciples, and Jonathan's friendship with David, are for our benefit – examples for us to emulate. Through the Scriptures, God is showing us that we must befriend one another as they did, and that means loving one another. For Proverbs 17:17 tells us:

“A friend loves at all times.”

And John 15:13 tells us:

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”

In addressing his friends, Yeshua said:

“These things I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:17).

If we are Yeshua's friends, that commandment is meant for us!

Make no mistake! Ohev Yisrael was always intended to be a congregation of friends; in fact it is almost prophetic that Ohev has chosen to call its small groups “*chavurot*” which means “friendship gatherings.”

You know, Ohev used to have a thriving *chavurah* system with strong leadership; those groups were known by other names but they were *chavurot* nonetheless. Then, over time, membership dwindled, some of the groups closed down, and the small group meetings largely came to a halt.

Well, that was never what God wanted because small groups are the most natural places where we develop close friendships in the Lord, where discipleship can occur, and from where the Good News can go forth. Yeshua himself led a *chavurah* – it was a *chavurah* of 12 disciples. And when it was time for Yeshua to leave, to go to the Father, eleven of his *chaverim* went on to form other *chavurot* that, in turn, begot others, until today, Ohev's re-emerging *chavurot* can be traced, in spirit, to that first *chavurah* of Yeshua.

Friends – *chaverim*: Ohev's future as a congregation and as an instrument of God, depends upon our being friends and staying friends. And friends don't always agree with each other on things. In fact, Proverbs 27:17 assures us:

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

And we do not stay friends by merely saying nice things to each other, for in Job 17:5 we read:

“He who speaks flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children will fail.”

No, we stay friends by being forthright with each other, by caring about each other, by treating each other with loving respect, and by upholding each other in the way we speak. Psalm 15:1-3 says it this way:

“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;”

And as friends, God expects us to depend upon one another, protect one another, and support one another, as we have need and as we can fulfill each other’s needs. In this, Proverbs 27:10 exhorts us:

“Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.”

There is a song that bids friends farewell in God’s peace; the words are:

Shalom chaverim

Peace be to you, friends

L’hitra’ot, shalom.

Until we meet again, shalom.

Let’s sing it together. If you are not familiar with it, try to follow along.

Shalom chaverim, shalom chaverim

Shalom, shalom,

L’hitra’ot, l’hitra’ot

Shalom, shalom.

Prayer

Lord, let this be a new day of friendship at Ohev Yisrael. Be with us Lord as we form new relationships and repair and strengthen old ones. Be with the elders and their wives tomorrow as they seek your face together – that their encounters will not only be with each other, but will be with you – that your Holy Spirit will pierce each heart and heal each soul in your abiding love.

In Yeshua’s Name,
Amen.