

# Pirkei Avot 1:6

## Translation

**Joshua ben Perachyah and Nittai the Arbelite received the Torah from them. Joshua ben Perachyah said: Provide for yourself a teacher and get yourself a friend; and judge every man towards merit.**

## Maimonides

*Fashion a teacher for yourself.* Meaning to say, even if he were not suited to be a teacher to you, nevertheless, make him into a teacher for yourself so that you conceive of him that he is teaching, because of this you shall succeed in the study of wisdom. For what a man learns on his own is not on a par with what he learns from someone else, for what he learns on his own is beneficial, however, what he learns from someone else will endure with him longer and it is

clearer. [This will obtain] even if he were his equal in wisdom or beneath him; thus they explained through the interpretation of this counsel. He said, *acquire a friend, for yourself.* He mentioned it in the terminology of "acquisition," and he did not say "fashion a friend for yourself" or "befriend others." The intention by means

of this is that it is necessary for a man to acquire a friend for himself in order that his deeds and all his interests will be improved through him, as they said: Either fellowship or death. If he would not find him, he should persevere in it with all his heart, even if it would be necessary that he draw him to his friendship until he will become a friend. Let him not turn aside from always adhering to his will so that his friendship may become firm, as the moralists said: When you befriend, do not befriend on your standards; rather, befriend on the standard of your friend. When each of the two friends concentrates on this counsel, the purpose of each of the two will be to promote his friend's will. Thus, the purpose of both jointly will undoubtedly be a single matter. How excellent Aristotle's statement, "The friend is one [with yourself]" (N. E.). There are three types of friends: the friend of usefulness, the friend of pleasure, the friend of virtue. Concerning the friend of usefulness—[his friendship is] as the friendship of partners, or as the friendship of a king and his army. The friend of pleasure, however, is of two types: the friend of enjoyment and the friend of trust. Concerning the friend of enjoyment—[his friendship is] as the friendship of males for females, and the like. The friend of trust, however, obtains where a man would have a friend in whom his soul would trust.

## Maimonides (cont)

He would not be guarded of him either in deed or in speech, and he would make known all his interests to him—the good as well as the unseemly, without being apprehensive of him that through all this he would incur disgrace either before him or before someone else. For when a man attains this measure of trust in a person, he shall find great pleasure in his words and in his great fondness. The friend of virtue obtains where the desire of both, and their purpose, will be related to a single matter, namely, the good, wherein each will wish to assist his friend in attaining that good for both jointly. This is the friend that he counseled to acquire, and it is as the friendship of the master for the disciple and of the disciple for the master. *And judge every man in the scale*

*of merit.* Its meaning is [as follows]: Were there a man concerning whom you would not know whether he was righteous or wicked, and you were to observe him perform a deed or utter a word, that if you were to interpret it in one way it would be good, and if you were to interpret it in another way it would be evil, accept him according to

the good and do not consider him evil. However, if the man were known to be a righteous man, renowned for good acts, and an act of his was observed all of whose qualities denote that it is an evil act, and no man is able to construe it as good except with great difficulty, and it is a far-fetched possibility, it is proper that you accept it as good, since there is some possibility of its being good, and you are not permitted to suspect him. Concerning this they said: "All who suspect the upright will be smitten with bodily afflictions" (Shabbat 97a). Thus, were there a wicked man, and were his deeds widely known, and subsequently we observed him perform a deed all of whose indications denote that it is good, and yet it contains a slight possibility of being evil, it is proper to be guarded of him and not believe that it is good since it contains the possibility of being evil. Concerning this it is said, "Though he makes his voice to be pleasant, do not believe him. . . ." Were there an unknown man, and the deed did not incline to one of the two extremes, the way of saintliness requires that you judge in the scale of merit, [that is, by placing it toward an extreme,] whichever extreme of the two extremes it may be.

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִיטַי אֶרְבֵּלִי  
הָאֲרָבֵלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם. יְהוֹשֻׁעַ  
בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רֵב,  
וְקִיֵּן לְךָ חֵבֵר, וְהָיוּ דָו אֶת כָּל  
הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת: