Personal Prayer – Priscilla W. Stein
TBZ
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Last year I entered a new stage of life… the stage in which friends pass away. In 3 months, I lost 4 close friends who I’d known more than forty years. More recently, a woman who has been a very special friend for 50 years passed away on Labor Day. I was maid of honor at her wedding.

My friends’ final days in hospice were difficult to know how to handle.

I was stressed and afraid… afraid of seeing my friends’ diminished strength and capacity… of saying or doing the wrong thing… of facing my own decline….and, above all else, of losing them. So many painful emotions crowded in that it would have been easy to stay away.

To my surprise, our conversations in those visits were not dramatic good byes. Nor were they tearful. They were conversations like we always had, grounded in warmth and intimacy. Or, when conversation was no longer possible, I simply sat quietly, touching hands, softly singing or reading Psalms.

_Yehi Ratzon Milanecha_- May it be Your will that “good bye” conversations are unnecessary, that the years spent in friendship speak for themselves.

I’ve learned much here at TBZ about Jewish customs surrounding death. Nothing in Judaism that I am aware of, however, addresses a person’s unanswered, unseen grief upon losing a friend. This strikes me as a very odd omission because Judaism addresses just about everything else.

I’m choosing to discuss friendship today because it’s an area of our lives that we often take for granted and don’t always talk or think about enough.

Friendship is one of our most precious relationships. There is something special in meeting another human being and discovering that particular point of connection.

Not every friendship has to be deep or best friends forever. But real friendship occurs when each person is honest, respectful, and cares about the other.

Unlike family, friends choose each other. It’s often much easier to open up to a friend than a family member.

With friends, we can explore different aspects of our personalities and stretch our limits.

Friends share our values (well, mostly).

Friends don’t come with guilt or preconceived expectations and obligations.

We are not taught how to be friends. We learn together through conversation, shared experiences, setting boundaries.

For me, certain qualities shine in all my friendships. They include trust, loyalty, curiosity, and an open heart. I can be myself.

Time, measured in years and memories, is an important element of friendship. Long-term commitments enrich our lives far more than rubies or gold.

Balance is key to healthy friendship. Each person must bring something to meet the other’s needs.
In getting to know our friends, we come to more fully know ourselves.

For many of us, modern mobility has meant that we don’t have family close by. And so friends become even more important. Our friends know when we had a great day, and when we didn’t. And as family is dispersed and grows in different directions depending on where and how they live, we may come to feel even closer to our friends with whom we connect regularly throughout the year.

For years, I gathered my family here at TBZ on Rosh Hashanah. They flew in from California, Chicago, Texas, Florida and New York. We all looked forward to these visits, which were great. But my family doesn’t observe the holidays the way Geoff and I have grown to observe them at TBZ, and we missed being here, fully present, not distracted by our relative’s wishes to come and go throughout the service. So now we have our family reunion at a different time of year, and Geoff and I spend the holidays with our community, our friends, who make up the fabric of our daily lives.

Friends inspire us to be our higher selves, our best selves, and forgive us when we fall short of these goals.

_Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha_ - May it be Your will that we honor our friends so they always feel our love and their importance in our lives.

_Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha_ - May it be Your will that our moments of loneliness be few and far between.