

Let's talk about our phones, technology, and friendships.

Our phones have made it easier than ever to keep in touch with people. Social media means that friends are never further away than the touch of our screens. At the same time, though, technology means that we can travel greater distances and that people might move away more often.

The fact that people can move so easily affects everyone's friendships in one way or another. Those who move find themselves having to gain a new circle of friends, while those who are left behind lose some of their oldest and closest companions and have to make new friendships. Technology has therefore made it both easier and harder to maintain friendships, presenting our generation with a unique challenge.

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot tells us to acquire for ourselves a friend. The Sages teach us that the purpose of a friend is to expand our personalities and broaden our way of thinking. It's the areas in which we don't think the same or see eye-to-eye that offer us room to grow and provide us with the opportunity to develop different areas of our personality. It is our differences that make us grow.

The Torah tells us about Adam and Eve— the first "friendship" that ever existed between people. God looked at Adam and said, "It is not good for man to be alone." God ended Adam's loneliness by creating Eve, a being with a vastly different temperament than Adam. We see that true companionship doesn't come from being with someone who is identical to you, but from being with someone who is different from you.

Then there is the issue of friend versus acquaintance. This distinction between friends and acquaintances is especially relevant to our generation. I have a thousand followers on Instagram. Does that mean I have a thousand friends? No. Even with all that social media, loneliness is more prevalent today than in previous generations, with *The New York Times* calling loneliness a "national epidemic." The reason for this is that instead of building a solid friendship with a small group of people, people's relationships with one another are becoming superficial.

The times when we make the best friends are those times when we spend intense, meaningful time together. It could be during summer camp or as a member of a sports team. For me, it was during my semester in Israel during my junior year of high school. Learning and traveling with people led to deep and amazing friendships. We would connect so much on our long hikes.

And my best friends? They have come from my time in USY. Our youth groups at Congregation Etz Chaim provide a place where true friendships can form. We spend quality time together working as a team planning projects, hanging out during lounge nights, and attending fun events. Our friendships begin when we're in the younger groups, and grow deeper and more meaningful as we progress through to USY. You can probably find this connection in any youth group – like NFTY, BBYO, or USY.

In this time of loneliness and superficial relationships on social media, reach out and see what amazing real friendships you can create. Think of this New Year as a time to develop new friendships, because those deep friendships mean everything.

I hope you all have a happy and healthy new year, full of new connections. Shana Tovah.