

חִבְרוּתָא

Chavruta

Learning partnerships

I Can't Learn Without You

Zac Kamenetz

We had already missed several of our weekly calls to pore over texts together — each inspiring the learning process. “Why are words of Torah compared to fire? ... Just as fire does not kindle by itself, so, too, words of Torah do not survive alone.” (*Taanit 7a*) I felt a deep sense of loss when my *chavruta*, or learning partner, told me he was overextended and could no longer study together. His interests and knowledge were so far-reaching that when we learned together it felt like Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the master known as the Piazeznar Rebbe, was convincingly referencing Shakespeare, Kantian ethics, and Evyatar Banai’s new album. It was as though the Piazeznar Rebbe’s small volume on spiritual practice, *Bnei Machshava Tova* (*Conscious Community: A Guide to Inner Work*), was our third partner in study. I also treasured our pre-learning check-ins, when we would chat about our work, marriages, and fathering. Most of all, I would miss how intensely vulnerable I felt while learning with him — almost every major idea presented in the text was an opportunity to be very real with each other about the state of our spiritual lives. It was the first time I felt like I had encountered what Martin Buber called genuine dialogue, where “the turning to the partner takes place in all truth ... by accepting him as my partner in genuine dialogue I have affirmed him as a person.” (Martin Buber, *Genuine Dialogue*, 1954) Turning toward another person over a piece of text has meant more than affirming my learning partner as a person. I’m presented with innovative ways of expression and opportunities to take on new personas.

Rabbis of the mishnaic and talmudic periods recognized a fundamental importance of companionship along with the fundamental preoccupation of learning Torah:

“R. Hama b. Hanina said: What is the meaning of the verse ‘As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the wit of his friend?’ (Proverbs 27:17) Just as one [piece] of iron sharpens another, so scholars sharpen each other in legal [debate].” (*Taanit 7a*) When I sit down with someone else to learn, I only know the experience of being someone else’s partner; I don’t know what it feels like to be my partner. Vulnerable to critique, I’m exposing my level of interpretive and textual recall — and I’m unable to hide my imagined sophistication or ignorance. I allow my partner to push me toward precision or recognize my hard work. This model of learning still feels relevant and countercultural. In a world that often values both singular intellectual acumen and an over-friendly pluralism of ideas, principled *chavruta* learning produces new, cooperative knowledge and layers of experience, rather than merely affirming the self and its preset assumptions.

In a way, learning with a human partner — listening, asking for clarification when needed, and sharing my own perspective — wakes me up to the fact that Torah itself is a silent learning partner in need of a voice. It is said that when the children of Israel were standing to receive the Torah on Mount Sinai, they wanted to hear the Ten Commandments from God’s own mouth, as it says “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” (*Sh’mot Rabba* 21:3) The wholehearted intimacy generated by learning with another person creates or recreates a covenantal model in which the text is not just words on a page but the breathy presence of the Divine in our midst, seeking to be heard.

Rabbi **Zac Kamenetz** is the student of Leonard Cohen, Ram Dass, his wife Jen, and their daughter. He is the director of Jewish Living and Learning at the JCC of San Francisco and co-director of Beloved Berkeley. Connect with him at belovedberkeley.org.



Photo by Neil Goldberg
“Chavruta study at Svava: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva”
2017

NiSh'ma

On this page, our three commentators examine a line from a story included in the Talmud about unexpected outcomes of arguing — how constructive engagement and debate can bring us closer together. Our online version is interactive, and we welcome your comments. —S.B.



Arik Labowitz: Is it really possible that two people could argue with heated vengeance and then part as lovers? How are we to understand this line?

The talmudic principle that the premise of any and all arguments is *l'shem sh'mayim*, for the sake of heaven, offers some guidance. Although winning may appear to be the point of an argument, the higher purpose is to reveal a small facet of the mysteries of the Divine — to distill an idea so that it becomes a reflection of truth in the world.

It is no wonder that our rabbinic sages could feel so impassioned about a point and, at the same time, be able to see the goodness in each other. They needed one another to get to the truth. This is no small task, and it requires both partners in learning to be dedicated as well as willing to forego their own agendas.

So much more than opposition is the recognition that the very one who opposes you is really as vital as a lover. As with any intimate relationship, dispute can be the very mechanism by which we truly see each other *panim el panim*, face-to-face, with nothing left to hide. If only we felt safe enough to take such a risk.

Arik Labowitz is a visiting spiritual leader for several Jewish communities on the West Coast and runs a thriving and independent *b'nei mitzvah* program in Berkeley, Calif. He has recorded two albums of Jewish music and can be reached at ariklabowitz.com.



Maya Bernstein: All this talk of lovers and risk in Arik Labowitz's commentary brings me back to perhaps the riskiest Divine move of all: God's creation of human beings. "Let Us make human in Our image!"

The grammatical puzzle of the plural is the ontological mystery of Torah learning — no act of transformative creation happens on its own. The Torah risks one of its foundational principles, the oneness of God, God's very singularity, to emphasize this concept. How radical! Even God does not create alone!

The medieval commentator Rashi claims that the "let Us" is a conversation between God and the angels; Nachmanides, the medieval scholar known as Ramban, argues that God is speaking to the dust of the earth. The *midrashim* are a cacophony of vengeful arguments — you're going to create *humankind*? Are you mad? You're going to fuse the Divine, the eternal, the sparks of holiness, with the mundane, the ephemeral, the dregs of the earth?

Well, yes, "the very one who opposes you is really as vital as a lover." And humankind was created through that love. It is unnatural to ever feel safe enough to take such a risk — to create together with those who are so different from us, so opposed, so opposite, that not only do we think differently and act differently from them but we are also actually vengeful toward them. And yet, the mold of creation has been formed. And it is highly unsafe. And — perhaps — it is the only path forward to create life, to create love.

Maya Bernstein co-directs the certificate in facilitation program at Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies and is on the faculty at Yeshivat Maharat and the Wexner Foundation. She is a co-founder of and associate at UpStart.



Marc Labowitz: I approach the line in Arik's commentary about people arguing with "heated vengeance" and parting as lovers by way of another verse where God asks: "Is not My word like fire and like a hammer that breaks down a stone?" (Jeremiah 23–29)

When we are involved in the words of Torah, עוסקין בתורה, when we put speech to Divine use, our words can melt or break down that which has been carved into stone.

Derived from two Greek words — "*dia*," which means "through," and "*logos*," which means understanding — sitting in dialogue is Divine. Through dialogue, we can "break down stone," misunderstandings, biased assumptions, and fears. Through the friction of discourse and even disagreement, our sages came to a greater clarification of their own opinions and an understanding of one another's truths, as my brother Arik wrote: "It is no wonder that our rabbinic sages could feel so impassioned about a point and, at the same time, be able to see the goodness in each other. They needed one another to get to the truth."

The process of learning Torah is a noisy one; students become heated and agitated. Just walk into any *beit midrash* and you will find the discussion deafening. But these heated arguments are vastly different from the shouting matches on the floor of Congress and the unruly debate formats that pass for discourse on television and public radio. When we sit involved in Divine dialogue, we are mutually uplifted. As civilization becomes more diverse and the likelihood of misunderstanding between neighbors increases, we need to understand the difference between shouting matches, which leave us feeling empty, and restorative *Torahdig* dialogue, which allows us to part as lovers and friends.

What enabled our sages to confront each other with serious matters and yet part as friends was the principle and practice of *libun hilchasa*, a talmudic term that refers to all law emerging from heated debate. I like to understand *libun hilchasa* as warmth generated through dialogue. Through this warmth, we can achieve mutual understanding that, in the words of Jeremiah, "melt stone." And in so doing we part as dear friends, for we have fostered love through the warmth of dialogue.

Rabbi **Marc Labowitz** is a teacher, lecturer, and award-winning composer serving as the rabbi of Temple Adath Or in South Florida. He can be reached at rabbimarc@taocenter.net. He and Arik Labowitz are brothers.

שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה הי
עושין מקנאין זה לזה
וכשנפטרין דומין כשהן
אוהבים מנעוריהם:

"And the sages said: 'Whenever they sit, involved in the words of Torah, they would seem as though they are vengeful of one another. And when they part, they would seem as though they were lovers from their youth.'"

— Avot D'Rabi Natan 1:1

Jewish sensibilities are approaches to living and learning that permeate Jewish culture. The ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors they express — emanating from Jewish history, stories, and sources — provide inspiration and guidance that help us to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. Sensibilities are culturally informed senses. This month, *Sh'ma Now* explores the Jewish sensibility of **chavruta** — how learning and working collaborations transform the partners and projects.

Jewish Learning with Attitude

Orit Kent and Allison Cook

Yona and Leor were studying Sefer Shemot (the book of Exodus) together in chavruta, arguing about an interpretation of a verse. When their learning came to a standstill, Yona said: "We are totally stuck. Should we just move on?" Leor responded, "We're not stuck. We just don't agree. Let's try to restate each other's ideas to make sure we understand each other." With some effort, they each restated the other's interpretation, including their supporting textual evidence. Through this process, Leor noticed something new in the text, and Yona pointed out new evidence in the text that supported Leor's interpretation.

Chavruta learning is a process of building relationships, or partnerships, with one another and the texts we study. To learn in partnership with others and with texts requires not only developing new content knowledge but also intentionally cultivating relational skills and attitudes. This allows learners like Leor and Yona to reframe their disagreement and experience as "a reason to seek deeper understanding." This attitude is the cornerstone of what we have termed a "partnership learning stance."

Fundamental to partnership learning is a stance of *openness* toward ourselves, other people, and texts. This type of openness creates a space in which each partner — and the text is deemed one of the partners — is valued for what they can contribute while being fully present in their particularity.

Connected to openness is an attitude of *empathy*, a commitment to seeking to understand each partner's point of view. Rather than rushing to judgment, we seek out our partners' ideas and consider, with compassion, what our partners — a person or a text — are expressing.

The third element, *listening*, is both a skill and an attitude, and learners need both: the

skill of listening closely, and the inclination to pay attention to what our partners have to offer whether or not we agree. *Curiosity* and *wonder* help fuel the inclination to listen, which in turn leads to new insights and helps us appreciate our partners.

Finally, an ethic of *responsibility* toward our learning partners and toward the learning endeavor as a whole undergirds the entire enterprise. The relationships between learners, their peers, and the texts are direct, without the fixed or constant mediation of a teacher. In this way, partners take responsibility for the experience of learning even when it's hard.

Many of us come into learning with elements of an ingrained counter-stance. Perhaps we are not inclined to value our peers' ideas and look only to the educator as expert; perhaps we are not open to listening to a text or another person, particularly when we disagree, or perhaps we believe that our job is to get the most out of the learning for ourselves and that it is the educator's job to attend to everyone else.

Ben Azzai, a 2nd-century rabbinic sage, prioritizes the biblical teaching that "God created the human in the image of God." This teaching highlights the integrity of

each person created in God's image and our responsibility for upholding that integrity. Through our research and practice in the Pedagogy of Partnership, we make this core Jewish principle come to life through cultivating partnership learning attitudes and skills that we enact and hone in our day-to-day learning and engagement with others. Partnership learning cultivates attitudes that not only influence how we learn together but can also guide our personal and public lives by nurturing openness, empathy, listening, wonder, and responsibility. These attitudes inculcate an understanding that our own integrity and fullness depend on our capacity for upholding that of others. In this way, learning in partnership provides a training ground for us to learn ways of talking and engaging in Jewish life and the larger world.

Dr. [Orit Kent](#) and [Allison Cook](#) are the directors of the Pedagogy of Partnership, where they teach skills and attitudes for learning together, and provide professional development and educational design services.

Planned Serendipity

Joshua Avedon

Renowned 20th-century community organizer Saul Alinsky told a parable about a group of villagers who, upon witnessing a succession of babies floating by in a fast-moving river, mobilize massive resources at great cost to save them. Although they quickly collectivize the rescue effort and create elaborate response mechanisms, they fail to keep up with the steady increase of waterborne infants. After castigating some rescuers for apparently abandoning the collaborative effort, they learn that the others aren't ignoring the problem but instead are going upstream to stop the babies from being thrown into the river in the first place. Alinsky used the story to make the case for prioritizing resources toward underlying causes rather than just reacting to crises.

Another reading is that working together on an immediate challenge is the best way to create the conditions necessary to initiate systemic change. In other words, collaborations are not just a logical response to complex problems; collaborations are required to adequately reveal a given constellation of issues and how they relate to each other.

The obvious benefits to working collectively (scope, skills, shared responsibility) and the obvious challenges (coordination, conflict, shared responsibility) are only part of the picture.

For Further Reading

A more in-depth discussion of the skills and attitudes that support an approach to partnership learning, see Orit Kent and Allison Cook. "A Portrait of Three Partners." In *Portraits of Jewish Learning: Viewing Contemporary Jewish Education Close-In*, edited by Diane Tickton Schuster (forthcoming 2019) and "Intentional Chavruta Learning: Cultivating Ethical and Spiritual Growth in Learners." *Think, The Lola Stein Institute Journal* (Fall 2013). 22-23; Orit Kent, "A Theory of Havruta Learning," *Journal of Jewish Education*, 76:3 (2010), 215 – 245 and "Interactive Text Study and the Co-Construction of Meaning: Havruta in the DeLeT Beit Midrash." PhD diss., Brandeis University. 2008; Elie Holzer with Orit Kent, *A Philosophy of Havruta* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013). .orit Kent, . 22-23;

For further explanation of the term "stance," see Orit Kent and Allison Cook, "Havruta Inspired Pedagogy: Fostering an Ecology of Learning for Closely Studying Texts with Others," *Journal of Jewish Education* 78:3 (2012) 227-253.

Just as important, the collaborative process creates an exchange of knowledge, connections, and social capital.

In the previous essay, Orit Kent and Allison Cook make the case that *chavruta* isn't just a way to learn about a text but is also a way to build learning relationships. Their implicit maxim, "How we learn is what we learn," also applies to social benefit work: How we go about creating social good is just as significant as the work itself.

Chavruta, partnership, is a technology for understanding a topic, and it is also a way to develop the skills and frameworks necessary for solving problems. Creative interrogation, resilient listening, and in-depth analysis all foster the kind of milieu most likely to effect systems-change. Working collaboratively helps us learn — to gain wisdom, to be in relationship, and to resolve (and tolerate) conflict.

No social issue is an island; each exists within an organizational landscape and a societal ecosystem. Addressing only one piece of a systemic problem rarely results in pervasive or lasting change. But working together we are more likely to instigate widespread change and also to break out of our nonprofit silos. Individually, organizations can fall into mission-related solipsism, which leads to tunnel-vision, competition among natural partners, and a general attitude of scarcity that diminishes our ability to consider novel solutions to vexing problems. Organizations working on the same issue are frequently pitted against each other — for funding, attention, or relevance. When several nonprofits compete for resources, the result is a zero-sum game: for one to win the others must lose. This is true even if the organizations have varied ways of approaching problems and complimentary or synergistic solutions. Collaboration — whether among funders or program operators — is a force multiplier for good.

A field effect emerges when organizations work together on common agendas. And connected organizations allow new and spontaneous collaborations to burst into being. In turn, innovations and micro-collaborations boost the energy of the entire system. This kind of "planned serendipity" is one of the more arcane yet truly powerful side-effects of *chavruta* partnerships. The collective response builds problem-solving infrastructure that buttresses both the current effort and future endeavors.

Being part of a collaborative shifts perspective and opens possibilities. A wider lens reveals untapped resources

and unseen interdependencies. Whereas organizations are rewarded for their focus and activities, collectives are rewarded for their broad view and big-picture outcomes. Partnerships help narrow missions evolve into a shared vision.

A midrash on Alinsky's parable: Some villagers rescue newborns, others work on the root cause, and, through their *chavruta* partnership, they become baby-saving experts, building a society where all babies are warm, dry, and safe from harm.

Joshua Avedon is the co-founder and CEO of Jumpstart Labs (jumpstartlabs.org), a global research and design laboratory for creative philanthropy and social change.

Expanding the Table: *Chavruta* as a Partnership Model

Aliza Kline and Sarit Wishnevski

From preparing food that others have grown, harvested, and packaged, to sharing the meal with a table full of friends, Shabbat dinner echoes the teaching of Rabbi Nehorai in *Pirkei Avot* 4: "Do not rely on your own understanding." In other words, we can't do it alone.

For OneTable, a Shabbat dinner-centric initiative, we've connected the essence of Rabbi Nehorai's warning with the essence of the *chavruta* model — learning with and from another. And we've elevated that model as we explore what types of partnerships to develop. Like in the *beit midrash*, study hall, we are seeking a fuller and deeper connection in inter-organizational collaboration. We are hoping our collaborative enterprises lead to new insights and solutions, and higher quality engagement and learning opportunities for participants. With *chavruta* as a conceptual guide, we hope to avoid transactional relationships and create collaborative partnerships that grow our organization and equip a new generation with the skills and tools necessary to create and share Jewish ritual and community.

It's not easy to find the right partner — and that's where *chavruta* learning can be the most helpful. For example, a vibrant New York-based congregation approached OneTable to create private dinners exclusively for their members. Our platform (to create authentic, sustainable, and valuable Shabbat dinner experiences) could certainly deepen congregational

community but our goal is to create open tables, not private dinners. We worked with the congregation to create a dinner series hosted by members but open to anyone, resulting in an increase in participation among members and guests at the table who were new to the community.

We have also experienced *chavruta* relationships that start strong but encounter pitfalls along the way. Repair the World, an organization that aims to make meaningful service a defining part of American Jewish life, is among our most successful partnerships. Our demographics are clearly complementary, as we both engage Jewish young adults in major urban areas. We co-created a series of justice- and service-themed Shabbat dinners. Repair faculty contributed resources drawing on Jewish and justice texts and OneTable framed them as part of a Shabbat dinner ritual and discussion. Both organizations aimed for participants to feel ownership over the dinner and for Shabbat to serve as a platform for discussing pressing issues while also, critically, serving as a respite, to replenish the energy of young activists.

However, when reviewing our partnership strategy, we learned that while our focus on Shabbat dinner was clear and helpful, it was frustrating to Repair the World that we did not more actively promote volunteering and service work, their primary agenda. The first step toward retooling to nurture a healthier collaboration was to engage our staff in service opportunities, demonstrating our commitment to Repair the World's mission. Then, using our platform, we streamlined opportunities for hosts to access Repair the World's resources. This past spring, Repair the World organized service trips to Houston for rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Harvey, and invited us to provide the Shabbat dinner — a moment of rest, replenishment, and awe to frame and elevate days of service. Jointly, we will work with Repair the World fellows to better understand how they seek to build community and how Shabbat can replenish them for the often-exhausting work they do.

Friday night creates opportunities for people to be in Jewish community and inspires peers to take on what for many is a new Jewish practice. The Talmud offers a powerful image for peer learning: "Just as iron sharpens iron, so too do two students sharpen one another." (*Taanit* 7a) The soul of *chavruta* is rooted in strengthening one another. If we start from a place of learning, our partnerships grow stronger,

more collaborative, and come from a place of curiosity and empathy. We turn toward our partners to learn and to co-create resources that speak to different audiences and are applicable to Friday night. As with *chavruta*, these collaborative partnerships provide added dimension and enrich the experience.

Aliza Kline is the founding executive director of OneTable, founding and former executive director of Mayyim Hayyim, a builder, Jewish ritual sharer, parent, partner, and friend.

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Consider & Converse: "chavruta" is a guide that walks you through this issue, inspires reflections, prompts questions, and provides ways to connect this reading with other meaningful experiences. It is found online at www.forward.com/shma-now.



Photo by Neil Goldberg, "Chavruta study at Svava: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva" 2017

Consider & Converse

A Guide to “*Chavruta*” —
Transformational
Partnerships

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the Jewish sensibility of “*chavruta*”/ **how different sorts of partnerships can transform us and our experiences**. Traditionally, *chavruta* is a learning partnership where two people study a text together. I was especially intrigued by the triangular nature of *chavruta* — the understanding that each person and the text itself (deemed one of the partners) is valued and valuable. The process of *chavruta* learning creates an atmosphere and experience where a text is understood in new ways, more deeply, and with the potential of being transformative. I wondered whether we could apply this disposition of *chavruta* — curiosity, listening, openness, empathy — to the relationships established within and among Jewish nonprofits. How might we build stronger, more collaborative relationships based on deeper insights gained from listening, caring, being patient and vulnerable, and sharing from a position of trust?

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or “meaning-making” as solely an individual activity. That’s why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and prompts for individual contemplation and informal or structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation, inviting a small group of friends and family to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal can be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at <http://forward.com/shma-now/>.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other’s comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen, before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

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Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Rabbi **Zac Kamenetz** [page 1] introduces readers to the idea of partnership learning through his own experiences with his *chavruta*. He draws on a verse from Proverbs, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the wit of his friend,” (27:17) and the discussion of this verse in Talmud, “Just as one [piece] of iron sharpens another, so scholars sharpen each other in legal [debate]” (*Taanit* 7b) to explain the power of partnered learning. He writes, “In a world that often values both singular intellectual acumen and an over-friendly pluralism of ideas, principled *chavruta* learning produces new, cooperative knowledge and layers of experience, rather than merely affirming the self and its preset assumptions.” We are living in a divisive, polarized America. How might some of the principles of partnership learning be used to bridge the divides among us—especially among Jews? How might they be adapted to nurture conversations among people with drastically different viewpoints on the future of democracy in America?
- **Aliza Kline & Sarit Wishnevski** [page 4] draw on their experiences working with OneTable, a Shabbat dinner-centric initiative, to examine a model for Jewish organizational partnership. They are hoping that their “collaborative enterprises lead to new insights and solutions, and higher quality engagement and learning opportunities for participants. With *chavruta* as a conceptual guide, we hope to avoid transactional relationships and create collaborative partnerships that grow our organization and equip a new generation with the skills and tools necessary to create and share Jewish ritual and community.” What are the skills and tools you need to make collaborations more viable and profitable? How do you best learn those professional skills? What examples of successful partnerships do you use as models?
- **Joshua Avedon** [page 3] draws on the work of community organizer Saul Alinsky to examine the potential successes and failures of collaborative partnerships. Looking from a birds’ eye perspective, he writes that “collaborations are not just a logical response to complex problems; collaborations are required to adequately reveal a given constellation of issues and how they relate to each other. The obvious benefits to working collectively (scope, skills, shared responsibility) and the obvious challenges (coordination, conflict, shared responsibility) are only part of the picture. Just as important, the collaborative process creates an exchange of knowledge, connections, and social capital, as a multi-stakeholder network coalesces to address specific issues.” He applies the maxim, “How we learn is what we learn,” to nonprofits: “How we go about creating social good is just as significant as the work itself.” He concludes: “A field effect emerges when organizations work together on common agendas. And connected organizations allow new and spontaneous collaborations to burst into being. In turn, innovations and micro-collaborations boost the energy of the entire system. This kind of ‘planned serendipity’ is one of the more arcane yet truly powerful side-effects of *chavruta* partnerships.” Can tools used in one arena be readily adapted to other arenas? How so? Which obstacles undermine collaborative partnerships and what are the necessary tools to address those obstacles? How might the discipline of *chavruta* be applied to your projects?

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Reflective Questions

can help one to integrate the ideas in these articles with one's own sense of self.

- **Orit Kent and Allison Cook** [page 3] write about the “Pedagogy of Partnership,” a method they’ve developed to strengthen and deepen learning opportunities. They see *chavruta* learning as “a process of building relationships, or partnerships, with one another and the texts we study.” They have identified several fundamental ingredients to the process, including “a stance of *openness*,” and the capacity to listen and have empathy. As well, “an ethic of *responsibility* toward our learning partners and toward the learning endeavor as a whole undergirds the entire enterprise.” How do these principles of *chavruta* learning apply to your experiences in formal and informal learning environments? Can you imagine using them as you guide a conversation about a fraught topic? How might you rein in animosity during a difficult conversation by remembering these pedagogical lessons?
- In *NiSh'ma*, [page 2] our simulated Talmud page, three commentators examine a line from a talmudic story about unexpected outcomes of arguing — how constructive engagement and debate can bring us closer together: “And the sages said: ‘Whenever they sit, involved in the words of Torah, they would seem as though they are vengeful of one another. And when they part, they would seem as though they were lovers from their youth.’” *Avot D’Rabi Natan* (1:1) **Arik Labowitz** questions whether it is “really possible that two people could argue with heated vengeance and then part as lovers” and explains that our sages could feel “impassioned about a point and, at the same time, be able to see the goodness in each other.” Arik’s brother **Marc Labowitz** responds that when “we put speech to Divine use, בתורה עוסקין, our words can melt or break down that which has been carved into stone.” He goes on to write “The process of learning Torah is a noisy one; students become heated and agitated. Just walk into any *beit midrash* and you will find the discussion deafening. But these heated arguments are vastly different from the shouting matches.” And **Maya Bernstein** shares an essential learning — that “no act of transformative creation happens on its own. The Torah risks one of its foundational principles, the oneness of God, God’s very singularity, to emphasize this concept.” When have you begun a conversation opposed to your partner and ended feeling surprisingly changed and open-hearted? What contributed to the change in your attitude and experience? And when have you walked into a conversation expecting warmth and understanding and left feeling betrayed and misunderstood? What contributed to the change?