



# NEVER SAY A MEAN WORD AGAIN

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*This tale from medieval Spain has a classic message: The best antidote to meanness is kindness.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Jewish literature contains many valuable thoughts about friendship. *Pirkei Avot* (in English, *Ethics of the Fathers*), a collection of ethical teachings and sayings from ancient rabbis, advises its readers to “Acquire for yourself a friend.” In Hebrew, this phrase is *Keneh lecha chaver* – literally, “Buy yourself a friend.” Although this may seem a strange idea at first glance, there are important lessons about friendship to be learned from it. For example, one should take at least as much care in choosing a friend as one would take when deciding on an important purchase. The ideal friend should be a person of substance, someone who inspires and challenges, and who brings out the best in others. Also, acquiring a true friend takes sacrifice, just as making a significant purchase sometimes does. A strong, healthy friendship requires sacrifices of time and effort; however, the benefits one receives from such a friendship will cause these efforts to feel like a joy rather than a sacrifice!

After counselling people to “Acquire for yourself a friend”, *Pirkei Avot* advises us all to “Judge every person favorably.” This is a powerful reminder to look beyond appearances, cultural differences, and social status to see the very best in everyone. When we give another person the benefit of the doubt and set aside our preconceptions, we may just find a new friend standing in front of us!

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

**New Friends** -- There is an ancient Hebrew proverb that asks, “Who is the bravest hero? He who turns his enemy into a friend.” Talk with your children about the people in their lives. Is there a classmate who is difficult to get along with? Encourage your children to find ways to deal with such a person kindly and with compassion. The outcome could be as it is between Samuel and Hamza in this story: new friendships may be created!

**New Cultures** -- *Never Say A Mean Word Again* depicts children from two different cultures. If your family is fortunate enough to be acquainted with someone from a culture different from your own, make a special effort to learn together about that person’s culture and traditions. You can do this by sitting down together and asking questions of your friend and by finding books at your local library or reading online about their culture. Help your children understand cultural differences and similarities, while learning that we can be good friends with people who are very different from us.