

ברית

Brit

lit. alliance

Nurture Community

The Jewish approach includes seeking to be in relationships and communities – bound to others and agreeing to shared norms and obligations/commitments.

The Hebrew word *brit* – often translated as ‘covenant’ - occurs over 280 times in the Tanakh. A *brit* can be a treaty, an alliance, an agreement, a pledge, a promise, or an undertaking on behalf of another. A *brit* can take place between two individuals, between a leader and their people, between G!d and an individual, and between G!d and a group of individuals.

In human societies we all make use of various types of such agreements, from marriage agreements to mortgages. *Brit* connotes not only an arrangement, but one that is consciously determined with a set of mutual obligations that imply a commitment to one another’s well-being. It is maintained through norms and guidelines that describe the nature of the relationship, what can and can’t happen within it and how its parties will treat one another. A *brit* also has an element of solemnity or sacredness, which is why it is often marked by a ritual ceremony.

Relationships and communities don’t just happen by accident, but rather work best when their ‘rules’ are made explicit and are mutually agreed upon, as in a marriage contract (ketubah) or a set of community principles.

1. In the 1st century BCE, the great sage Hillel the Elder used to say: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am only for myself, what am I?”
2. The Jewish prayer for those who are in mourning, the Mourner’s Kaddish, can only be said in the presence of a *minyan*, a group of 10. This ensures that when someone is going through an emotionally vulnerable experience they will be surrounded by a community, and not alone.

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. Who are you allied with? In what ways? How does that feel? How do you maintain your connectedness?
2. What are your favorite group norms or communication guidelines to use when having an important conversation?
3. What does it take to truly show up for other people? Describe a time when you felt others really showing up for you.