

# House of Sages

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FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS

16TH FEBRUARY, 2025

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## COME & LEARN

Women's friendships, whether in ancient literature or modern times, can be life-sustaining — even in the most challenging circumstances.

- *Francine Klagsbrun*



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## SOURCE 1: FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN

*Writer and Jewish Feminist Activist*

Women's friendships, whether in ancient literature or modern times, can be life-sustaining — even in the most challenging circumstances.

### FRAMING QUESTIONS:

- What comes to mind when you hear of female friendship?
- What are some of your expectations for your friendships?

## RUTH AND NAOMI

Context: The book of Ruth begins as Orpah and Ruth, two sister-in-laws, lose their husbands and due to famine are forced to travel to the land of Judea with their mother-in-law. Upon realizing she has no more sons for the two women to marry, their mother in law begs the girls to leave. Orpah turns, but Ruth takes a different stance.

### SOURCE 2: RUTH 1:16-17

Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the LORD do to me-b if anything but death parts me from you.”

When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her;

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת רַחֵם אֱלֹהֵי־יְבוֹנִי לְעִזְבֹּךְ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי אֶל־אִשׁוֹר תֵּלְכִי אֵלַי וּבְאִשׁוֹר תֵּלִינִי אֵלָיון עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי:

בְּאִשׁוֹר תָּמוּתִי אֲמוֹת וְשֵׁם אֶקְבֹּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכִהּ יוֹסִיף כִּי הַמּוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָךְ:

וַתֵּרָא כִּי־מִתְאַמְצֶת הִיא לָלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ וַתַּחֲדַל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ:

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## SOURCE 3: BIRDS OF A FEATHER, VERSE 1, BILLIE EILISH

I want you to stay  
'Til I'm in the grave  
'Til I rot away, dead and buried  
'Til I'm in the casket you carry  
If you go, I'm goin' too, uh  
'Cause it was always you (Alright)  
And if I'm turnin' blue, please don't save me  
Nothin' left to lose without my baby  
[Refrain]  
Birds of a feather, we should stick together, I know  
I said I'd never think I wasn't better alone  
Can't change the weather, might not be forever  
But if it's forever, it's even better

### REFLECTION QUESTION:

How do these two sources relate to each other? How are they similar and how are they different?

## RIVKAH AND DEBORAH

Context: there is very little mention of this relationship, only glimpses seen through two disconnected verses. However the mere mention of the character of Deborah is enough to make us think twice about who she is and more importantly her relationship to Rivkah.

## SOURCE 4A: GENESIS 24:59

So they sent off their sister Rebekah and **her nurse** along with Abraham's servant and his entourage.

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה אֶחָתָם וְאֶת־  
מִנְקֵתָהּ וְאֶת־עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת־  
אֲנָשָׁיו:

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## SOURCE 4B: THE TORAH: A WOMEN'S COMMENTARY, GENESIS 24:59 BY TAMARA COHN ESKENAZI AND ANDREA WEISS

**her nurse.** [Heb. menekta (her wet nurse). From Exodus 2—where Moses' mother is hired to nurse him for Pharaoh's daughter—we learn that wet nurses were sometimes paid (see at Exodus 2:910). Carol Meyers points out that most Israelite women (and their ancestors) probably nursed their own children, except perhaps for women in elite classes.

In this account, the nurse apparently has remained in the household long after Rebekah was weaned, implying that they have a special bond; she might function as a surrogate mother or companion for young Rebekah in a foreign land. Genesis 35:8 will mention this nurse again by name, with a notice of her death and burial in Beth

### SOURCE 5: GENESIS 35:8

Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Bethel; so it was named Allon-bacuth (the plain of tears).

תָּמַת דְּבִרָה מִיִּנְקוֹת רַבְקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר  
מִתַּחַת לְבֵית־אֵל תַּחַת הָאֵלֹן וַיִּקְרָא  
שְׁמוֹ אֵלֹן בְּכוֹת:

### REFLECTION QUESTION:

What type of relationship do you imagine they had? Does her mention imply any significance?

### JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

Context Jephthah promises God that if he wins the battle he will offer a sacrifice of the first thing that exits his house. When his daughter exits the house she becomes the sacrifice. While the text doesn't explicitly state what the sacrifice is, the commentary generally understands the sacrifice to be her inability to marry. Upon her learning this news this is her response.

### SOURCE 6A: JUDGES 11:37

She further said to her father, "Let this be done for me: let me be for two months, and I will go **with my friends** and lament upon the hills and there bewail my maidenhood."

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־אָבִיהָ יַעֲשֵׂה לִי הַדָּבָר  
הַזֶּה הַרְפָּה מִמָּנִי שְׁנַיִם חֳדָשִׁים  
וְאֵלְכָה וַיִּרְדְּתִי עַל־הַהָרִים וְאֶבְכֶּה  
עַל־בְּתוּלִי אֲנֹכִי וְרַעִיתִי:

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## SOURCE 6B: STEINSALTZ ON JUDGES 11:37

**I and my friends** will go off and weep, and then I will return to you.

## SOURCE 7: WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS: A BASIS FOR INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RESOURCES AND THEIR CONNECTION TO POWER AND OPTIMISM (NIH)

Friendships among women can provide critical social resources and promote overall wellness, feelings of self-worth, and empowerment. Findings from studies that examine these relationships among women indicate that the quality of friendship support is more important than the mere number (Billings & Moos, 1984).

**Supportive friendships**, which are characterized by intimacy, nurturance, loyalty, and prosocial behaviors, **are associated with heightened psychological and physical well-being** (Cable et al., 2013).

### REFLECTION QUESTION:

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Why do you think Jephthah's daughter chose to go specifically with her "companions" to the mountains?

### REFLECTION SPACE:

What do you want from your friendships? How can you be the best friend to those you care about?

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