

What was the first sign of civilization? Margaret Mead is purported to have been asked this very question, What was the first sign of civilization? Not cooking utensils, or fire or common living areas, as one might think. Rather “A broken femur that has [healed, is the first sign of civilization]. A thigh bone with a mended fracture.

In the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are dinner for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. **Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts,** Mead says.”¹

In biology class we learn about “Survival of the fittest”, that the strongest, toughest, and meanest ones are the ones who are going to survive. But think of it. This has led to racism, war and in-fighting wiping out whole populations.

Vanessa Woods and Brian Hare are Evolutionary anthropologists at Duke University². (That fine university in the South where some wonderful rabbis come from.) They want to find out which traits actually allow homo sapiens

¹ <https://www.truthorfiction.com/margaret-mead-femur-quote/>

² Duke professors - Brian Hare, professor in the department of evolutionary anthropology and the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at Duke University and Vanessa Woods, a research scientist in evolutionary anthropology and an award winning journalist
<https://alumni.duke.edu/forever-learning/20-captivating-duke-summer-reads#hareandwoods>

to survive when other smarter, equally technologically savvy human groups go extinct. So they study the great apes.

First the Chimpanzees. They are known for being - very aggressive, lots of fighting, lack of trust, and a strong male dominated hierarchy. If there is a pile of food, they will eat all of it.

They also study Bonobos. Who are known for their lack of aggression and fighting. They have no fear of their babies being attacked by larger males. They cooperate and would share a pile of food, even with strangers. And they solve most of their problems with grooming each other and kissing, and actually, with sex. They engage in sexual activities to introduce themselves, to relieve stress, to resolve conflicts or disagreements, and to procreate. Hmm.

I made a mistake and showed the Handsome Rabbi Moskowitz my sermon. I can't figure it out -He keeps wanting to be a bonobo.

It turns out that human beings are closely related to the Chimpanzee and the Bonobo- we have a combination of aggressive tendencies and loving, cooperating ones. But one type is more important than the other for our long term survival.

They point out that: "Around 50,000 years ago, Homo sapiens made a cognitive leap that gave us an edge over other species. What happened?" It wasn't survival of the strongest/fittest. "In fact, what made us evolutionarily fit was a remarkable kind of friendliness. A virtuosic ability to

coordinate and communicate with others that allowed us to achieve all the cultural and technical marvels in human history.”³

They call this “**Survival of the friendliest**”

The capacity to cooperate with each other and to communicate in order to be a **caring society that lifts up all its members.**

But there is a problem. We still have our chimpanzee side and can be the meanest, most exclusionary group of all the animals. While we are conditioned to connect with and take care of each other we also see others, as well, others - as threats. (Hare and Woods)

What can we do to cultivate the friendliest part and insure survival? Hare and Woods find that being inclusive, expanding our group and reaching out to others is the key. Maybe it is as simple as Rabbi Shammai teaching “Greet everyone with a cheerful face.”

What does it take to make a new friend?

I am travelling to Israel with a group of Jewish educators. I sit next to Nina, one of the only other Rabbis on the trip and we talk for 8 hours. Over the course of the week we become fast friends. Her kids are a little bit older than mine but we both send our kids to Solomon Schechter, we were both married to male Rabbis, we are both educators, etc. I make a really good new friend.

³ Survival of the Friendliest. Vanessa Hare and Brian Woods. Book description

Why do you become really good friends with some people and others do not move past the acquaintance level?

Sometimes it is time. Spending time together, knowing someone many years- think of childhood friends with whom you have shared history. seeing each other frequently - a work friend, or someone you serve on a committee with- you are just there when stuff happens.

Having things in common- Being fans of a team or a performer - What are Lady Gaga's followers called? Little Monsters Or I'm partial to Parrotheads as we are big Jimmy Buffet fans. Having an intense experience, like a trip or summer camp, Having a common goal - putting on a fundraiser for a cause for which you both care . And sometimes it is just Serendipity - living in the same neighborhood, being in the same classes, working or playing on the same team.

This still doesn't answer the question - what moves someone from a colleague, an acquaintance, a teammate - to a friend?

There needs to be vulnerability - willingness to share real stuff. To reach across an invisible boundary and connect on a different level. To have that, you need trust. Being willing to look for the good in another person. Knowing that they are really there for you and won't turn on you.

This can happen in the most unlikely scenarios. Rami and Bassam - both lose children. Rami is an Israeli who's 13 year old daughter, Smadar, is killed in a bombing by a Palestian homicide bomber in Jerusalem. Ten

years later, Bassam, who is a Palestinian, loses his little girl, Abiri. She is hit by a rubber bullet from an Israeli soldier while she walking home from a candy store afterschool. The bullet hits her skull and she dies after trying to get through a checkpoint to get out of the West Bank. Rami and Bassam both hate the other side and therefore, each other, not without reason. Something remarkable happens. They are both asked to come to a meeting of the Parents' Circle. A group that brings Palestinians and Israelis who have lost children together. There they allow themselves to listen, really listen to each others' stories. They allow themselves to become vulnerable. Vulnerable enough to share their own story with a stranger from the other side and open enough to listen to a story that they don't want to hear. Bassam and Rami become friends, real friends and travel together, to this day, as warriors for peace.⁴

This is so hard to imagine. We are living in divisive times when it feels like the right and the left, and the far right and the far left are never going to be able to come together and move forward.

But there is hope. Did you see the heartwarming ad with two candidates for the Governor of Utah campaigning together. Spencer Cox, a Republican and Democrat, Chris Peterson. Pledging to respect the results of the election. And reminding to Utahans and the rest of us

"We can disagree without hating each other,"

"We can debate issues without degrading each other's character,"⁵

⁴ Apierogon Colum McCann

⁵ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/republican-democrat-opponents-utah-governor-joint-advertisement/>

They get that Survival of the Friendliest, is what is going to help us overcome these times of great division and intolerance.

So did Rabbi Eliezer who said:

Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own; Be not easily provoked to anger; Repent one day before your death. (Pirke Avot 2:10)

He is telling us to listen with a respectful, open mind, and to avoid a knee-jerk, angry reaction. And to heed this message, so apt on Yom Kippur, Repent one day before your death.

This begs the question, how do you know when that will be? To which the rabbis answer, you don't, so think of every day as the penultimate.

My dear colleague, Rabbi Darah Lerner, who confronts her own mortality as she is currently battling aggressive ovarian cancer, teaches, [Yom Kippur]... is a time when you are supposed to experience a little death," "And what that is supposed to do... is to get you to take your life seriously in ways that many of us don't do unless we're confronted with a profound something like death."⁶

Isn't it interesting that the rabbis link this teaching of confronting our mortality with honoring our friends, and being slow to anger.

⁶ angordailynews.com/2021/09/05/news/bangor/bangor-rabbi-learns-from-cancer-treatment-that-every-day-involves-a-little-death/?fbclid=IwAR3uqiBBHDoVARS3PHignotVG7u2Eg0W7qj6EnYhyD3gL1Z6gmuHI9xYXbU

Our repentance can begin by applying Survival of the Friendliest skills to our lives. The best way to strengthen our “friendliness muscle”, is to make **new friends**. To be open minded in order to expand our world.

Let’s take our view of who belongs in the Jewish community. Not every Jewish family is a husband and a wife and a daughter and a son who speak with a *thick Long Island accent*. The Jewish family is much larger than we think.

Marra B. Gad shares in her memoir, *The Color of Love*, how when she is young she walks into her own temple, where she goes to Religious School, and is treated like an outsider with people asking her, “are you lost?” “do you want to know where the bathroom is?”, “can I help you find the sanctuary?” Marra is ½ black and ½ white.

She even has her own Jewish family members, particularly a great aunt, treat her like “the help”. I cringe reading her memoir because I could hear people I know saying the same awful things her aunt says to her, not aware, I hope, of how hurtful they are being. A Stanford study found that 80% of Jews of Color, Blacks, Asians, Latinos, have experienced discrimination in Jewish settings. Not our friendliest moment.

We have a tendency to judge and even persecute anyone who is different from us. Billy Planer, in reaching inside and outside the Jewish community says, we need to learn “The lessons of giving a damn, realizing that we are all connected, that there is no other...just Another,...

we need to speak to people who don't look, think, pray, love, talk, and vote like us.” He has created an amazing teen tour, Etgar 36, that many of our kids have participated in, that has this reaching out and understanding, as its primary goal.

I wanted to give examples of what a great job we are doing in our community of welcoming Jews of Color, of welcoming LGBTQ+ Jews, of welcoming people who are like us but not exactly us. ... We could use some work in this area.

We have done a great job at including interfaith families. A few years ago I gave a sermon that reflects a sentiment of which I am still proud. That we have welcomed interfaith families and “ger toshav” - non-Jews married to Jews or ones who are raising Jewish children, into our TBT community with open arms.

But we have not done enough to expand our “in group” to fully include, Jews of color, Lesbian, Gay, Trans, and Queer Jews. We have not done enough to make all Jews who are considering our community feel welcome, as evidenced by the low numbers of membership and participation we see.

Let’s put this on our agenda and work together to include everyone. While we still need to reach out and be more inclusive, we are doing many things that embody Survival of the Friendliest.

We have created a new program called **the Village**. We have been selected by UJA Federation as a thriving forward thinking congregation to partner with DHJC and create a synagogue village. The goal is to create community for active older adults, think 60+. I'm not technically eligible yet but I really like things they are doing.

It is hard to make new friends when your kids are done with school. It is challenging to figure out what to do with yourself once you retire and can no longer define yourself by your work.

The Village fosters avenues for purpose and meaning, And creates opportunities to have fun, share your gifts and talents and engage in common interests.

We have a tremendous response. The Village is beginning now with day trips, with groups coming together for crafting, genealogy, sports-playing and attending, walking, cooking and dining. It will be whatever you make of it. Our hope is that it will grow into a support network to help people stay in their homes, in our community, for as long as they like. You'll hear more about it. Please, let me know if you are interested in being part of our Synagogue Village.

While the Village is connecting us internally, the Sharing Table is helping us to reach outside the TBT community. The Sharing Table is based on the idea of "Give what you can, Take what you need."

We continue to ask you to bring items that aren't covered by SNIC and food stamps - such as paper towels, toilet paper, sanitary products, toothbrushes and toothpaste, detergents, etc.

But we also need your help. We need volunteers to restock the Sharing Table, which is actually a shed in the back of the parking lot, each day and to lock it up at night. Maybe you could volunteer to do this when you come to drop off or pick up from Religious School or before you go to lunch on a specific day every week. You might even get to meet some of the people who are benefiting from the Sharing Table. We are really proud of this effort, but we need your help to keep it going. To exercise our Friendliest genes.

We have a choice to make.

Do we want to be like the Bonobo or the Chimpanzee?

Can we practice survival of the friendliest?

Can look for the good in others and share our stories, even the ones that make us vulnerable?

Can we reach out to others and include them completely?

Can we rely on cooperation to help us survive?

Can we take care of someone else's broken femur?