



Who is a Jewish Insider? Or, How do we know which Jews we can trust?

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Definitions from: The Talmud, The Steinsaltz Edition: A Reference Guide

חבר *Lit. an associate, a colleague.* In the Talmudic period, this referred to a person who became a member of a group dedicated to the precise observance of mitzvot. A person who wished to enter such a society had formally to accept its practices in the presence of three other members. The main stress of these groups was the strict observance of the laws of terumah (תרומה) and tithes (מעשרות) and careful adherence to ritual purity, so much so that they would eat even non sacrificial food (חולין) in a state of ritual purity. In practice, all Torah scholars were חברים. However, many of the common people (see הארץ) and even some Samaritans were included in this category. Acceptance as a חבר removed an individual from the category of an הארץ and his statements regarding tithes and ritual purity were accepted as true and were relied upon. In later generations, the term חבר took on a more restricted meaning and was used to refer only to important scholars.

עם הארץ *A common, uneducated person (lit., “the people of the land”).* A term specifically used in the Mishnaic period to refer to an ignorant person who is not scrupulous in his observance of the commandments. At times the term was used to refer only to those who were far from Torah practice, but it also referred, on occasion, to those who maintained a certain level of religious observance. The opposite of an הארץ is a “colleague” (חבר). There were many restrictions governing relations between “colleagues” and “common people”, particularly in the areas of ritual purity and tithes. For example, an הארץ and his clothes were considered ritually impure, and contact with him imparted ritual impurity. Similarly, with regard to tithes and certain other prohibitions, the word of an הארץ was not accepted. These restrictions were relaxed during the festival season. Towards the end of the Mishnaic period most of the restrictions governing the עם הארץ were rescinded, partly out of fear of causing division within the Jewish people and partly because there was a significant improvement in the religious observance of the masses. Thus, though the colloquial usage of the term עם הארץ remains, it no longer has Halakhic significance.



AN OPT-IN GROUP--CHOOSING TO BE AN INSIDER

MISHNAH DEMAI CHAPTER 2

המקבל עליו להיות חבר, אינו מוכר לעם הארץ לח ויבש, ואינו לוקח ממנו לח, ואינו מתארח אצל עם הארץ, ולא מארחו אצלו בכסותו. רבי יהודה אומר, אף לא יגדל בהמה דקה, ולא יהא פרוץ בנדרים ובשחוק, ולא יהא מטמא למתים, ומשמש בבית המדרש. אמרו לו, לא באו אלו לכלל.

One who takes it upon himself to be a *Chaver* [one who scrupulously observes tithes and purity laws] may not sell to an ignorant person wet or dry [produce], nor buy from him wet [produce], nor be the guest of an *Am HaAretz* nor host him as a guest [when he is clothed] in his [own] garments. Rabbi Yehudah says, "He may not even raise small animals, nor be unrestrained regarding vows and entertainment, nor become defiled by [contact with] a corpse, and frequent the house of study." They said to him, "These are not included in the general principle."

NOT A LICENSE TO DISCRIMINATE-- DIFFERENT BUT FAIR

MISHNAH DEMAI CHAPTER 6:9

חבר ועם הארץ שירשו את אביהם עם הארץ, יכול הוא לומר לו, טל אתה חטים שבמקום פלוני ואני חטים שבמקום פלוני, אתה יין שבמקום פלוני ואני יין שבמקום פלוני. אבל לא יאמר לו, טל אתה חטים ואני שעורים, טל אתה הלח ואני אטל את היבש.

A *Chaver* and an *Am HaAretz* [one who is lax in observing purity laws] who inherited from their *Am HaAretz* father: he [the *Chaver*] can say to him: "You take the wheat from such-and-such area and I the wheat from such-and-such area, you the wine from such-and-such area and I the wine from such-and-such area." However, he may not say to him: "You take the wheat and I the barley, you take the fresh and I will take the dried."

WHEN THINGS GET MORE COMPLICATED: MUST WE HAVE PURITY WITHIN PURITY LAWS?

THE TALMUD BRACHOT 30B

SHOULD WE CANCEL SOMEONE?

דתינא עם הארץ שקיבל עליו דברי חבירות ונחשד לדבר אחד נחשד לכל התורה כולה דברי רבי מאיר וחכמים אומרים אינו נחשד אלא לאותו דבר בלבד

As it is taught: an *am ha'aretz*, (i.e., one who is unreliable with regard to ritual impurity and tithes), who accepts upon himself the matters of *ḥaver* status (i.e., that he will be stringent in all matters observed by *ḥaverim*, including *teruma*, tithes, and *ḥalla* etc.) but subsequently he was suspected with regard to one matter (in which others saw him act improperly), he is suspected with regard to the entire Torah. This is the statement of Rabbi Meir. And the Rabbis say: He is suspected only with regard to that particular matter.



MUST BE ALL IN!

ת"ר הבא לקבל דברי חבירות חוץ מדבר אחד אין מקבלין אותו

The Sages taught: one who comes to accept upon himself the matters of *ḥaver* status except for one matter, (which he does not wish to observe) he is not accepted, (and he is not trustworthy even with regard to those matters that he does wish to accept upon himself.)

Who, When and How to Join The Group?

ת"ר הבא לקבל דברי חבירות אם ראינוהו שנוהג בצינעה בתוך ביתו מקבלין אותו ואחר כך מלמדין אותו ואם לאו מלמדין אותו ואחר כך מקבלין אותו ר"ש בן יוחי אומר בין כך ובין כך מקבלין אותו והוא למד כדרכו והולך:

The Sages taught: one who comes to accept upon himself the matters of *ḥaver* status, if we have seen that he practices such matters in private, within his home, he is accepted, and afterward he is taught the precise details of being a *ḥaver*. But if we have not seen him act as a *ḥaver* in his home, he is taught first and afterward accepted. Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Whether in this case or that case, he is first accepted, and he then continues to learn in the usual manner, i.e., as a *ḥaver* he learns from others how to behave.

PASSOVER-- THE ULTIMATE INSIDER HOLIDAY

TB PESACHIM 3A-3B

בעו מיניה מרב נחמן בר יצחק, המשכיר בית לחברו בארבעה עשר חזקתו בדוק או אין חזקתו בדוק

R. Nahman b. Isaac was asked: If one rents a house to his neighbor on the fourteenth, does it stand in the presumption of having been searched or not?

למאי נ"מ לשיטתיה דליתיה להאי דלשיליה לאטרוחי להאי מאי

What difference does it make? Let us ask him!

— He is not present to be asked: hence what about troubling this one [the tenant]

אמר להו רב נחמן בר יצחק תניתיה **הכל נאמנים על ביעור חמץ** אפילו נשים אפילו עבדים אפילו קטנים

— Said R. Nahman b. Isaac to them, We have a teaching: **All are believed concerning the removal of leaven**, even women, even slaves, even minors.

מאי טעמא? מהימני לאו משום דחזקתו בדוק דקסבר **הכל חברים הם אצל בדיקת חמץ**

Now why are they believed? Is it not because it stands in the presumption of having been searched, as [the Tanna] holds, **All are haberim in respect to the searching of leaven**.



דתניא חבר שמת והניח מגורה מליאה פירות אפי' הן בני יומן הרי הן בחזקת מתוקנים
For it was taught: If a haber dies and leaves a store-house full of produce [crops], even if they
are but one day old, they stand in the presumption of having been tithed.

TRUST KEEPS US TOGETHER

TALMUD BAVLI HAGIGAH 22A

תניא, אמר רבי יוסי: מפני מה הכל נאמנין על טהרת יין ושמן כל ימות השנה - כדי שלא יהא כל אחד
ואחד הולך ובונה במה לעצמו, ושורף פרה אדומה לעצמו. אמר רב פפא: כמאן מקבלינן האידנא סהדותא
מעם הארץ, כמאן - כרבי יוסי.

...It is taught: Said R. Yose: Why are all trusted all year to say that wine and oil [designated for
sacrifices] are pure? So that each person will not go off and build their own altar and burn
their own red heifer. Said R. Pappa: According to whose opinion do we now accept testimony
from amei ha'aretz? According to R. Yose.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN COMMUNITY?

In his essay, "Pluralism, Integrity, and Community," Rabbi Ethan Tucker defines community as
intentional interdependence:

"Community means being in a relationship with someone in a way that makes you vulnerable
to them, dependent on their interpretations and decisions. Living in community with
someone means sacrificing some degree of autonomy... We form community with others
when we allow others' choices and decisions to have consequences for us. We all need groups
of people in our lives that we trust. This trust is what allows us to form close community.¹"

¹ Ethan Tucker, "Pluralism, Integrity, and Community, Part 1: Parashat VaYikra 5776," *Hadar Institute*,
<https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/pluralism-integrity-and-community-part-1>.

