

# They Make Us Better

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Recent studies on college roommates suggest that our cognitive styles — whether we face adversity with optimism or despair — are not fixed. After only three months roommates influence each other: the resilient ones changing the approach of the pessimists and vice versa. Once more the ancient wisdom is reaffirmed: we are not only known, but shaped, by the company we keep.

Lot is prepared to sacrifice his daughters to the people of Sodom. The Rabbis note that if you choose to live in a wicked place, you will eventually be shaped by immorality. Surrounding ourselves with kind people increases our own kindness. The example of others who perform *mitzvot* will motivate us, too.

In *Middlemarch* Eliot writes, "'The theater of all my actions is fallen,' said an antique personage when his chief friend was dead; and they are fortunate who get a theater where the audience demands their best." Part of our mission in life is not only to be a good friend, but to seek good friends in both senses of the word: those upon whom we can rely, and those who are of good character. It will change us and make us better.