OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION:

I wish my parents would be more understanding and realize that when a child gets married, they're marrying a spouse from a different family. Naturally, I won't necessarily do things the way they were done in my parents' home.

Certain priorities, perspectives, and principles may shift at times, and the values and customs my parents stressed may not mean as much to my spouse. Sometimes, my spouse wants to do things differently from the way they were done in my parents' home.

Is there any way I can soften the blow to my parents when they see the differences that come up as I build my home? Do they have the right to show disapproval and aggravation when these differences come up?

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

1. First allegiance

A married woman's first allegiance is to her husband. The fact that this isn't always clear is not only a cause of hard feelings between parents and children, but also a cause of much unnecessary marital strife. A man will also often be guided by *da'as Torah* that being there for his spouse and considering how something will affect his home comes before pleasing his parents.

The fact that you married someone who is different and doesn't do things exactly as your parents want is normal and to be expected. The right thing to do is to make sure that your home is peaceful and respectful. Like in many other areas in life, you can't please everyone all the time, and attempting to do so is bound to end up with you stuck between two places. There are parents who are more respectful and understanding of situations like this, while others are less. As much as you want to please everyone, you can't; you're limited.

Of course, one needs proper Torah guidance to understand the details and applications of this idea.

2. All or none?

Often, people swing between extremes. "If I'm not pleasing my parents anyway, if I don't have their approval, if I can't make them happy, then there's no point in even trying. Let me just do whatever I want."

There are so many ways to be as considerate and respectful as possible, even if it won't accomplish the full job. Even just behaving a certain way in their presence is sometimes helpful and not all that stressful.

The fact that once someone is married certain aspects of *kibbud av v'eim* change doesn't mean that there's nothing left. You must always fulfill this mitzvah to whatever degree you can.

If there's anything you can do to be more considerate of how they feel about your and your husband's choices without rocking your own boat or being negatively affected by it, there's no reason to resist. It's well worth it.

3. Various ways to show honor and respect

When you're focused and motivated to make your parents feel good by emulating them, respecting them, and building a relationship with them, then the few instances in which you can't please your parents will pale in comparison to the bigger picture. There are so many ways and opportunities to make parents feel valued, such as by asking their opinions and advice, taking care of them, and just spending time together.

People often don't realize how when someone gets stuck on one point of "Why don't you do this the way I want?" it's really just an emotional response to something that's underlying. When married children have the right attitude, a lot of these nuances—where they're actually doing the right thing by doing what married couples should do—will fall away instead of causing aggravation.

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4. Hands-on training

When you marry off your own children, remember what this feels like. Many people have a double standard; they expect from their children something very different from what they would want their parents to expect of them. In other words, most people see their children as continuations of themselves, while they don't see themselves as a continuation of their parents. This can cause people who suffered from this phenomenon to unintentionally do the same thing to their own children.

It's important for parents to realize that although they're older than their children and may be smarter than they, at the end of the day, they had their chance to take care of them and guide them in their decisions. They had the opportunity, at least to some extent, to look for a *shidduch* for their child that they felt was most compatible and most similar to the family's values and principles. But that's where it ends. There comes a time when you have to let people be. Just like you make your choices, you have to let other people make their choices.

Aside from being incorrect, mixing in and offering unsolicited opinions (whether explicitly or in a subtle manner) often causes undue stress and possible damage to the child's marriage and places a strain on one's own relationship with their child.

It's important for everyone to realize that as much as you want to please your own parents, whether because you believe it's the right thing or because you're able to, it's not something you should impose on someone else. It's important to know when it's time to step back and say, "I did mine; you do yours. We're all trying our best."

Summary

In short, focus on your marriage while maintaining a positive relationship with your parents. There are so many ways you can give them appreciation and respect. And remember, just as you need your space, so will your adult children need theirs down the line, *im yirtzeh Hashem*.



Rabbi Shimon Gruen, author of the bestselling book *Get along with Everyone*, consults and guides individuals in the areas of *shalom bayis* and *chinuch* through classes, workshops, teleconferences, and one-on-one counseling. He specializes in guiding and counseling based on a very deep understanding of personality assessment. Many of his classes can be found on TorahAnytime.com.

Are you on either side of the adult child-parent/in-law relationship? Feel free to share your thoughts by contacting Rabbi Gruen at rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com.
Your correspondence will be kept anonymous and identifying details will be changed to protect your privacy.

