UPGRADE

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER



OPENING THE CONVERSATION

It's no secret that miscommunication and hurt feelings are part and parcel of many interpersonal interactions, leading to resentment, complaints, and aggravation for all involved parties.

Sometimes it's as simple as complaints such as "I want him/her to just leave me alone" or "I wish they would trust me more." Conversely, it could be something more general, such as "I wish they wouldn't think that Brooklyn is the best place to live."

Moreover, it is common for people to believe they have been misunderstood or mistreated by others, especially those closest to them. For example, a parent of a married child may feel that their child only calls to say hello but doesn't really care to share anything and doesn't express interest in hearing about the parent's life. Similarly, one might wish that their sister would realize that repeating her opinion three times in a row with certainty is not considered sharing an idea or offering caring advice, it's nerve-racking and controlling.

These points of grievance are often left unaddressed either because it's uncomfortable to express them or because the person feeling hurt doesn't want to risk losing the small amount of communication that there still is.

WHAT MAKES THEM TICK

Often, the difficulty stems from a lack of awareness of what things look like on the "other side of the table." Here's a typical scenario:

Mother (eager to get some nachas tidbits from her daughter and feel part of her life): *"Hi, Shifra! How's Yossi doing? Is the kriah tutor working out?*

Shifra (annoyed at her mother's pestering plus the very slow progress Yossi's been making): *"Fine. Can I call you later?"*

Mother (irritated, frustrated, and insulted by her daughter's curt response): *"Okay."*

For this reason, my aim in this series is to have people share their thoughts and insights about the small and big challenges that come up in relationships, with the goal of improving and upgrading areas that people are often misconstrued.

The goal is not to determine who feels more misunderstood, but to create changes that can make both people in the relationship more understood, loved, cared for, and connected. People of different ages and stages tend to see things differently. When each becomes aware of the other's point of view, the whole picture changes, making room for more understanding, tolerance, and love to come through.

In addition, understanding the personalities of the people involved (as outlined in my book, *Get Along with Everyone*) automatically gives a new insight into what's really going on. Take this scenario:

Sima Gold just gave birth to her 10th child, at age 44. One hour before Shabbos, her cousin Chaya walks in with a complete Shabbos package, from soup to nuts. After smothering Sima with kisses and hearing that the baby is asleep, Chaya promises to come visit on Shabbos afternoon because she is so excited and would love to see the baby. After all, most people their age aren't having babies anymore.

Eventually, she leaves, and, dizzy and overwhelmed, Sima unpacks the contents of the box. Why on earth did she send me this? *she thinks.* I have big girls who can help me cook for Shabbos, and if I would need help, I would ask for it. One hour before Shabbos she delivers all this—what does she think I am, a schlemazel? And why is she coming over tomorrow? Doesn't she remember how one feels three days after giving birth?

Chaya, on the other hand, arrives home on a high. What a devoted friend and cousin I am. I knew she could use my help—those purple rings under her eyes said it all. There's nothing like some fresh, *heimishe* food and a warm visit to help her get back to herself, *she thinks.*

Who is wrong? Who is right?

It's not about making that judgment call; it's about understanding what makes each of them tick.

It's easy to get distracted by the facts, especially the "he said/she said" back-and-forth, which makes it difficult to really understand what's going on beneath the surface and how to interpret what was actually said. Once one gets a better grip on the intentions, feelings, and triggers of the other person and themselves, they can expand their horizons and move forward from a more objective place to bring about the wanted results.

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THE PARENT–CHILD CONNECTION

As Yidden, we know how important the parent/in-law-adult child relationship is, as *kibbud av va'eim* is one of the 10 mitzvos engraved on the *Luchos*. On Pesach, the importance of the parent-child connection is stressed, with the central mitzvah being "*v'higadeta l'vincha*," the commandment of a father teaching his son about the *nissim* of Mitzrayim. This does not only apply to little children. Many people join their parents' Sedarim many years after they have flown the nest and have grown children of their own. The reason for this is to emphasize the importance of passing the Torah tradition from father to son, which ensures the beautiful and unbroken chain of our *mesorah*.

As such, this relationship is the first topic we will address. Look out for the next issue, where we will feature common questions and answers, anecdotes, and comments about the topic sent in by people like you. If you are on either side of the adult child-parent/in-law relationship (or both), feel free to share your thoughts on this topic by sending an email to rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com.Your words and feedback will be kept anonymous, and any identifying details will be changed to protect your privacy.

It is my hope that sharing thoughts from both sides of the table, as well as the added feedback and comments based on my years of experience in the field, will be eye-opening and enlightening.

Rabbi Shimon Gruen, author of the best-selling book *Get Along with Everyone*, helps families with shalom bayis and chinuch through classes, workshops, teleconferences, and one-on-one counseling. His clientele is diverse, as his universal method resonates with people across the Jewish spectrum.

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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: reader comment

If you didn't have a relationship with your child in their youth, it's obvious that they won't have a deep relationship with you once they grow up. Children and parents don't become close for the first time in their adult life.

For those with adult children who haven't had that relationship until now, it doesn't hurt to start showing interest in your child's life, without coming across as overbearing and asking personal questions. This way, perhaps the relationship will gradually evolve. It's not hopeless! It's about showing care and concern about your child and their family—tuning in, remembering, "Oh, how's the kid with the ear infection?" etc.

I think parents need to tune into their children's needs as they grow up. Every child needs parental approval and a listening ear, and if it's not going to be you, it'll be someone else, perhaps someone you don't approve of. It's about listening to them. Whatever interests them should interest you. Trust me, it's not easy. It's often an act. I'm not super-interested in the game they played during recess when I'm in the middle of making supper, running to change a dirty diaper, have a babysitter coming in an hour that I want to tidy up for, and also need to get dressed and ready to leave. But I can listen and ask questions and feign interest because it's my child, and I want to invest in our current and future relationship.

And that being said, it's perfectly okay to tell a child, "I'd love to hear about that game, but right now, I'm a bit overwhelmed because I need to be ready in a few minutes, and I have a few things to finish first. Can you tell me about it at breakfast tomorrow? Or can you help me clean up so that I can be calmer and ready to hear?"

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

Relationships sure do require investment, and often, effective investing is done on the other person's terms. This includes showing interest in what's important to them, asking questions they feel comfortable answering, and engaging in ways that are meaningful to them.

Many parents feel, and rightly so, "Do I have to go running after my kids? What happened to good old *kibbud av v'eim*?" These parents may be 100 percent correct, and they are not obligated to do so. Still, success, especially in relationships, often comes from being smart, not from being right.

Developing a strong relationship with married children can be done by remembering to show interest specifically in the way the



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other party appreciates it (based on feedback given in the past and following up). This is a great way to spread goodwill and build a relationship, even in situations where it was strained before.

Disagree

As to your blanket statement of "Children and parents don't become close for the first time in their adult life": it's sad when this belief that things can't dramatically change discourages parents from investing in this all-important relationship. Instead of making their best effort, they're primed to think, "What am I going to gain from this? I'll just do what it takes to survive."

In terms of the statement itself, I beg to differ. Fortunately, it isn't necessarily true. Many relationships thrive once the children grow up and leave their parents' home. Once the parents (and children) are past the difficulties of childrearing and the constant challenges brought about by living together, there's so much room for the parent-child relationship to blossom.

In general, changes in dynamics are opportunities for growth. For example, moving into or out of the house brings with it the potential for change, and it's often up to you to decide how to utilize that change. When parents and children are separated in a technical sense, this can create emotional distance as well, or, by the same token, it can be a reason to feel more comfortable and get even closer. By putting in the energy and thought to learn the new patterns and opportunities that come along with the change, you may be able to achieve what you haven't been able to achieve in the past.

Don't be discouraged by the fact that there's no instant recipe for change. Change is often gradual and happens slowly. Even if someone's not responding the way you want right away, keep on investing.

I would add...

The idea shared here is wonderful and works with many. However, while many people love when others show interest in their life, there are those who have an aversion to the very same overtures. As always, when parenting children, "*Chanoch l'na'ar al pi darko*" is so important, and saying "Well, I'm doing the same thing for all my kids, so this child must be the



problem" is a serious mistake. If you connect with many of your children by taking an interest in their lives, and one child doesn't like it, pick up on those cues. Stop being right, and don't pursue something that can actually be counterproductive.

It would be wonderful if adult children, or anyone for that matter, would gently speak up and articulate their feelings by saying something like "I'm sure you don't mean anything, but it bothers me when you ask about *xxxxx*. Can we please discuss other topics?" However, if someone isn't being very clear with you about the kind of communication they like or appreciate, it's important to try to figure it out on your own and learn their pattern. If something's working, do more of it. If something's not working, try something else.

This reminds me of...

Beware of unspoken vibes. There's a lot more to communication than just saying the right things.

This reminds me of a married young man who complained to me about the way his mother asks him so many personal questions about his life. He went on and on about how the way she doesn't stop asking him about his day hits a raw nerve.

Suddenly, he stopped and said, "You know, it's funny because my father does the same thing. But with him, I appreciate those same questions."

It took him time to realize and be able to verbalize why this difference existed. But eventually, he got it.

"When my father asks me questions, I feel like he's nodding along and giving me encouragement and good feedback. I feel that he's happy for me, proud of me, and trusts me. With my mother, though, I can hear her criticism in a small grunt. By the way the questions are asked, I feel like she's almost expecting me to mess up. I don't enjoy the blank feedback that gives me the feeling that she's not impressed with what I did or said."

So often, it's not what you say but how you say it.



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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.

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

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*.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION:

An issue has arisen in our family with regard to the lack of support we feel from our parents. This isn't just speculation. There have been many individual conversations as well as all the siblings together discussing this topic in a solution-oriented fashion.

I'm one of the sons-in-law. At times, I can lend a certain objectivity. At other times, as a human, my personal emotions and baggage can unfortunately cloud and darken my perspective as well.

It needs to be stated that my in-laws did financially support almost all the couples at the onset of their marriages. There were many strings attached and controlling behavior that came along with this support.

In my opinion, there are many missed opportunities for the parents to give a small sense of support, for example, child and in-law birthdays. On the flip side, there are multiple reminders about our parents' birthdays, with set expectations and anticipatory disappointment.

This feeling of disappointment isn't spoken about to our parents, but it's a regularly surfacing perspective of the children and in-laws. At the end of the day, it is, of course, up to the parents how to spend their money, time, and efforts. Yet due to missed opportunities, old, unfulfilled promises, and regularly unmet societal norms and expectations, we, the children and in-laws, feel quite unsupported by our parents.

Most of us try to be flexible, but our parents continue to express the emotional effect their children's distance and inflexibility causes. They expect us to work around them, while we're all struggling with young children, building careers, and significant financial limitations.

We'd like our parents to make us feel that they're putting us first or at least as a high priority. Instead, we feel that our parents force us to work around them. Our parents continue to emphasize their demands. We, in turn, are left feeling unheard and almost dispensable except in the way our parents want.

Everyone can handle what they can handle, but there are facts. Our parents don't have children living at home anymore. They own a large home and have access to millions of dollars as well as a large annual income. They're self-employed and have greater flexibility than they admit.

It should also be noted that we, the children, really want things to be better. It seems each time our parents take a small step forward, they also take two giant steps back.

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

I hear your story, and I feel for you. It isn't easy to feel taken advantage of without getting what you believe is coming to you. Since you're the one writing this letter, I assume you're open to hearing my feedback and advice, and I hope my thoughts will be helpful to you. So here goes:

1. Subjectivity and perspective

Every person will always see things from their subjective angle, and there's almost always a certain amount of accuracy to each perspective. However, each person focuses on how they're made to feel and what the situation means to them, which is automatically blinding. Even just being aware that we all have our subjectivity and that from another vantage point it looks different can defuse the stress of the situation to some extent.

We'd like our parents to make us feel that they're putting us first or at least as a high priority

In your situation, what comes to mind is the Yiddish expression *"Ver es hat di me'ah hat di de'ah"*—whoever has the money has the say. The fact that this concept is often taken out of proportion, leading to resentment to the point that the recipients lose their interest in the money, doesn't change the reality. This is the attitude that Hashem implanted in the world, and it's something one must contend with, especially if the parents helped the children in the beginning of their marriage.

Although much time may have passed since those early days, along with its fair share of unfulfilled expectations, it seems they're still feeling this reality. Add the fact that essentially, there must always remain an element of appreciation just for the fact that your parents helped you back then, and they're naturally harping on this part of the equation more than their children.

Without entertaining right and wrong, simply acknowledging another perspective may help you deal with the current dynamics.

2. The dynamics of the parent-child relationship

Toxic, lopsided relationships, in which one side unrightfully takes advantage of and is less considerate of the other, do exist. However, when it comes to the parent-child relationship, it's important to remember that this relationship is naturally and inherently lopsided. When children are young, their parents nurture them without getting anything in return. That's totally fine; it's the default situation and the definition of *child-rearing*. If this is not enough to demand an ongoing appreciation thereafter, regardless of how things move ahead in the later stages, add the Torah perspective, which is that children must remember that parents don't owe anything to children and children always owe everything to parents. To see this relationship as others that should be built on an equal give-and-take is simply wrong.

It's sad when children feel taken advantage of and abused, yet it's important to realize that because parents are parents, things just have to make that much less sense. It's not about the money they give or promise; it's not about the help they offer; it's all about their superior position as parents. It doesn't have to be equal, and perhaps it should never be. When it comes to other lopsided relationships, it's a different story, and it's sometimes telling of how unhealthy things are and that it's time to make a change.

One needs *da'as Torah* to advise when they are obligated to keep on complying and taking orders from their parents even if they feel they "don't deserve it." There are situations where one will be guided that for the sake of their personal life and/or their obligation to their spouse and children, they can't continue the way things are. It's not about right and wrong, and certainly not something to debate with your parents about, it's simply what the Torah instructs one to do at any given time. It's extremely important, though, to remember that being respectful is a must at all times.

While in other relationships, giving in and working along with someone who's behaving unreasonably can be wrong and damaging, with parents, doing so is simply fulfilling the Torah obligation, which is tremendous. And if it brings side benefits, that's great.



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

3. Acceptance of reality

People often cling to unrealistic hopes that keep them harping on feeling hurt. They feel that the only way to have any relationship with the other person is by hoping that things will improve, because otherwise, there won't be anything left.

I write the above assuming you've tried to communicate with your parents in a calm and respectful manner and have not been successful. There might be room for improvement, but I write the following based on the assumption that there really isn't more to do, as is sometimes the case.

You may have reached a point where there's nothing for you to do other than accept the reality for what it is.

Surrendering and accepting a reality isn't hopelessness; it's being honest and working with what's reasonable instead of hoping for something that isn't. Sometimes, one is dealing with people who, unfortunately, are very self-absorbed or self-entitled and have very little people skills. However many attempts they make to better the situation, they don't see it going anywhere. If this is the case for you, perhaps it's time to accept the fact that while your relationship won't become the one you want it to become, it can still remain a civil and respectful one where you fulfill your obligations of being respectful to your parents/in-laws, even though you're giving up on a more meaningful relationshiop.

Sometimes, you could enjoy a mediocre relationship more when you accept and make the most of what it is instead of constantly trying for more and settling for even less. Interestingly, it's this acceptance that helps many relationships improve.

Remember: the One Who gave us the mitzvah of honoring our parents is the same One Who knows what's best for us. Doing our best to fulfill His commands will ultimately bring us happiness and *brachah* in this world and the next.

Sometimes, one is dealing with people who, unfortunately, are very self-absorbed or self-entitled and have very little people skills

4. Choosing between right and successful

I have no way of knowing whether your parents are actually as aggressive and manipulative as you make them sound. But being that such personalities do exist and it can take an awful lot of introspection for someone to realize how they come across, I think this is an opportunity for anyone reading this to stop and think.

Almost nobody sees themselves as egotistic or narcissistic, and people can generally justify their attitudes and positions, especially parents, who, as pointed out, are owed so much. Still, a general rule in relationships is to contemplate how other people might perceive your actions and behaviors. They may be wrong...but maybe not.

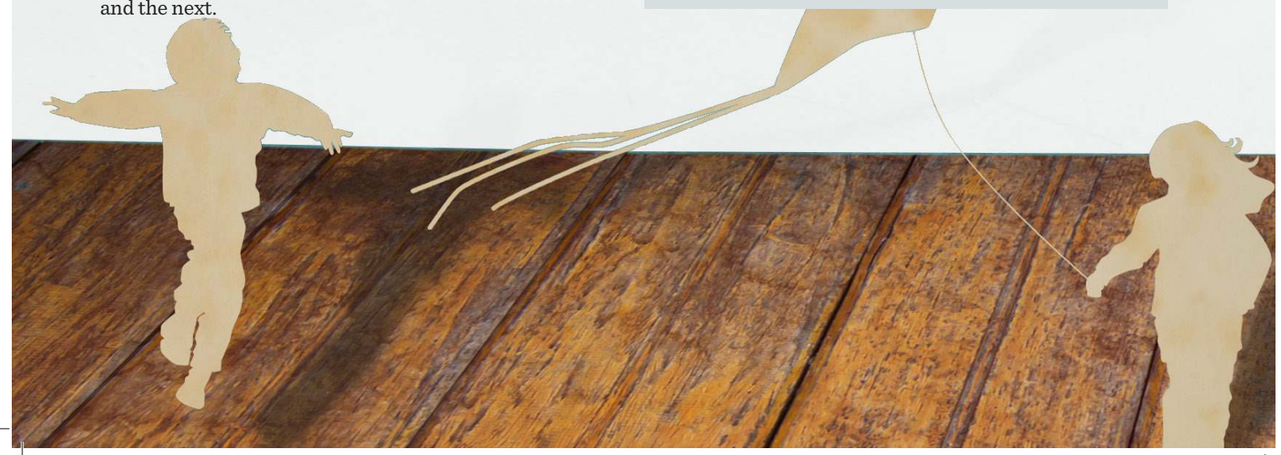
Sometimes, what you think looks reasonable and normal could come across to other people as manipulative and controlling. You might even be happy with the results of getting people to do things the way you wanted and not notice how resentful and uncomfortable they're left feeling.

We all want our children to love us, and at times it has nothing to do with being wrong or being obligated to do things differently. It's about what brings the love and connection we all ultimately want. If it's a choice between being right and successful, rather be smart and successful.



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THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: reader comment

Growing up, I was micromanaged by my parents. Everything I did or said was a big deal. Throughout my entire single life, I tried to get my father's approval, but I never felt like I actually did. *Baruch Hashem*, this was all within the range of "normal," meaning, I wouldn't say that I had a horrible childhood or that I grew up damaged under these circumstances.

Contrasting that to my relationship with my parents now, I'm amazed. My parents accept and unconditionally love everything my siblings and I do now that we're building our own homes. They're our greatest supporters (mainly verbally and emotionally, but they also help out financially whenever and however they can) and are so proud of us and our kids. I hope to be like them one day!

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

It may not happen every day, but I can't say I'm surprised by the switch in vibes you're experiencing. As a rule, life isn't static; things change all the time. It's common for parents to relate to their children one way when the children are young and another way when they're away from home or married. With the change in dynamics, there often comes a change in the relationship, hopefully for the better.

We should all strive for change and improvement and never become hopeless. Things can and do change. Sometimes all we have to do is allow the changes to happen and be noticed, and sometimes it's on us to make those changes. Assuming "once a problem, always a problem" is a crippling mistake that has kept many people stuck.

Disagree

You write, "I never felt that I got his approval." Including the word "felt" means that this isn't necessarily a fact, rather an expression of emotions. It's quite common for children not to feel the approval their parents have for them. I don't know if your being so close to your father

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was triggering; perhaps that's why he wasn't able to convey his approval, or maybe it didn't give you the space to feel the approval. Personally, I've heard from many parents that their feelings of approval somehow didn't make it into their children's hearts. This may be because there was a lot of criticism drowning it out, or maybe that's just the way it felt.

I remember a father telling me that he keeps telling other people how happy he is with his children in the hope of his children hearing of his approval through the grapevine. Based on previous experience, praising them directly didn't seem to have any positive impact. Still, even with this backhanded approach of using others as the medium for his praise, the children often waved the messages away. "Really? My father said that? Eh—he doesn't mean it; he's just saying it." This is hurtful to parents who are doing their best to convey their appreciation and approval of their children.

I have no idea how things were in your situation; I'm simply suggesting that maybe your parents' lack of approval wasn't as black-and-white as you think. Maybe your father tried to express his approval in his own way. Now that you're older and smarter, it's good to consider that perhaps your parents were trying to tell you how proud they were of you and how much they loved you. Perhaps at least some of their negative comments came from a good place.

In general, as we age, we tend to notice changes. In truth, often nothing has changed except our perspective. We see things differently because we're older even though essentially, things remained the same. Nevertheless, it's hard for people to hear or accept that when they get older, they'll see things differently. The *sefer Yesod Ha'emunah* explains that few people acknowledge a mistake while they're making it. Only by looking back and realizing that we've made mistakes in the past are we able to admit that maybe the thoughts we currently believe are also mistaken.

Now that you have support from your parents and you're so amazed by the acceptance and the love they're giving you, it's important to look back and say, "Well, maybe then I was too young to notice it and feel it." Now, you can choose to retroactively interpret things differently.

Often, what we get from others, be it parents or spouses, isn't only about what the other person is giving. Sometimes, accepting something in the right way by interpreting it properly, allowing people to make you feel good, is a big part of the puzzle.

I would add...

I want to highlight an expression you used so others can learn from it: "I wouldn't say that I had a horrible childhood or that I grew



up damaged under these circumstances." It's wonderful when people realize that it's not necessarily all or nothing. Often, when people don't feel good about something, they tend to overdramatize it and make it sound terrible to make themselves sound credible. It's usually inaccurate and unhelpful to see the situation that way. Although you pined for your father's approval as a child and never felt like you got it, it still wasn't horrible; it was still relatively okay or "normal."

In general, things aren't terrible, though they can be improved. We should all look to improve ourselves and be accepting of others even when they aren't perfect, especially when it comes to our parents. We can judge them favorably even as we strive to be the best parents we can be.

This reminds me of...

This brings me to yet another point. People today are so busy chewing over their upbringing traumas and all kinds of childhood problems. While this may be because people are trying their best to be the perfect parents, along with a lot of awareness about healthy parenting, it often results in children analyzing their upbringing with a microscope. They look back with complaints about how their parents didn't do everything the right way.

It's even more unfortunate when people take the lessons they learn about parenting and instead of applying it to their own families, realize that they were treated wrongly and go as far as to justify not treating their children right because of the difficulties they endured. Instead of taking the awareness and using it to become better parents, they use the awareness to excuse their mistakes, explaining that they're repeating negative patterns.

You mentioned that you were micromanaged by your parents, and it's important not to go back and do the same, especially as you realize that it honestly wasn't terrible, horrible, or damaging.

Even if and when we notice areas where our parents' parenting was flawed, we should have the maturity to conclude that they surely tried their best. They meant well, and they're doing even better now. And about yourself, too, it's fine to say: I'm going to try my best, I'm going to mean well, and I won't micromanage myself, my parents, or my children.

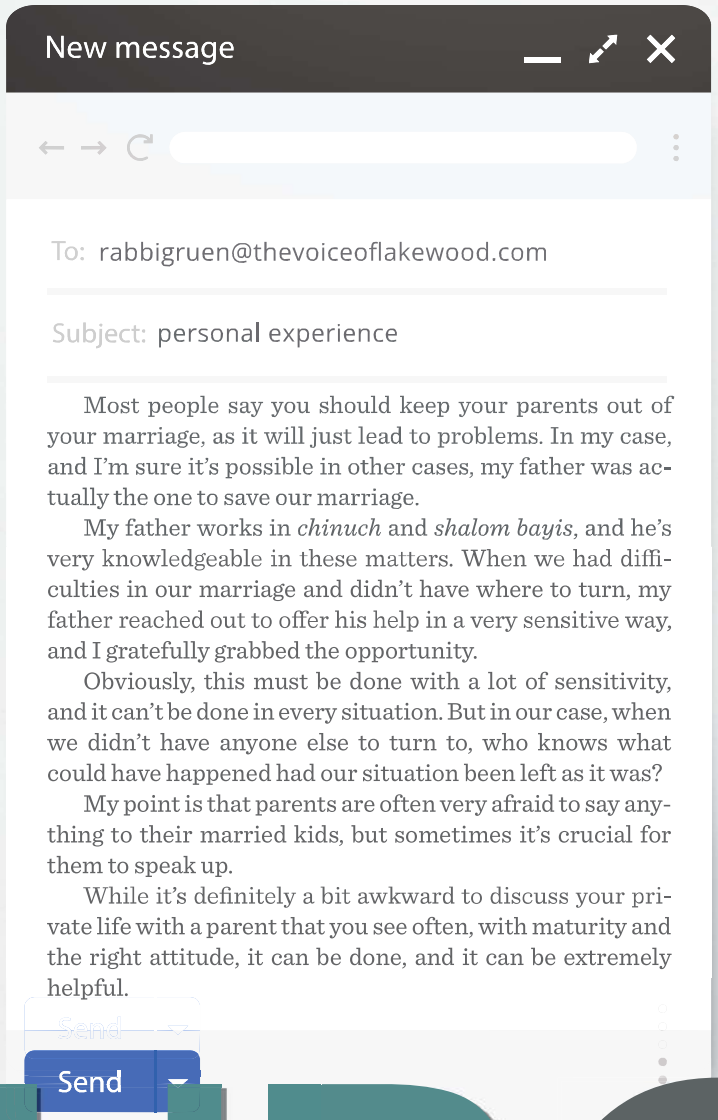


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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP



RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

HANDLE WITH CARE

I agree that there's a time and place for everything. With the right amount of intelligence and sensitivity, there have been parents who've successfully been helpful in improving their children's marriage.

It isn't often, though, that parents can be actively involved and still keep their eyes solely on the end goal while simultaneously making sure to do and say only what's good for the child and the marriage. Naturally, parents are subjective and unintentionally tend to give comments and advice that are more about them or their child's well-being, overlooking the benefit of the relationship. This could be due to their personal agendas or even just the intense emotions they feel for their struggling child.

If one can truly leave their ego and subjectivity out of the picture, which is a tall order, then yes, I agree that there's a time and place for parental involvement in maintaining a child's marriage. For this to work, both sides must be sensitive and mature—the child, who will need to figure out how to accept and implement the advice correctly,



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

and the parent, who needs to know how to offer clear and gentle input properly.

I can't agree more with you that this won't work in every situation. I wish it were simpler to be able to assess when it can or can't work instead of learning the hard way.

Naturally, parents are subjective and unintentionally tend to give comments and advice that are more about them or their child's wellbeing, overlooking the benefit of the relationship

Disagree

CASE BY CASE

While I can't disagree with much once we already established that this isn't for everyone, I'd like to add a caveat to the above.

When assessing a situation, it needs to be done on a case-by-case basis depending on all the relevant dynamics. It's well-known that telling a story about the Ba'al Shem Tov on Motza'ei Shabbos is a *segulah* for *parnassah*. One of the tzaddikim commented that while that's a true statement, it includes three inaccuracies. It doesn't have to be a story specifically about the Baal Shem Tov, and not only on Motza'ei Shabbos, and it's a *segulah* for many things, not only for *parnassah*. Telling a story of a tzaddik, whoever and whenever, brings about great *hashpa'os*.

By the same token, I'd like to clarify that it isn't only a father who works in *chinuch* and *shalom bayis* who can help a child, nor is everyone who does fall into that category necessarily right for the job. In most cases, having parents involved in their children's marriage is not the typical path to success. Even the most skilled parents (and sometimes specifically those) are usually not the ones who can or should help their children's marriages. This is not due to their lack of understanding in the area, but due to the parent-child dynamic, which can get in the way of this sensitive topic.

In the situations where it can be done properly, it's not limited only to people in exactly your situation. Sometimes, a well-meaning parent can be the best one to help even when other, more competent options are available. Each situation must be judged on a case-by-case basis to ensure that with the right amount of caution and *siyata d'Shmaya*, the couple gets the right help. Often, you'll need a wise person to help you figure out if this can be a viable option for you before starting on this path or even when you're knee-deep in such a situation already.

I would add...

THE DETAILS

I hope I'm not getting too nitty-gritty, but I will add that when it comes to helping a child in their marriage, one must know where to draw the line. Aside from not every parent being the right one for the job, and neither parent nor child should be offended if and when the other feels



they aren't the right one to step in and help, it's important for both parent and child to be aware that there are many situations where a parent could help a child on a certain level, and there are times they need to step back.

For instance, sometimes parents can be instrumental in supporting a child when their marriage is in crisis mode. But there comes a point where they're not the right people for the job anymore and it's time to hand over the reins.

Other times, a parent could help a child as long as they're *not* in crisis mode. But once something goes beyond their pay grade, they (both) need to know that it's time for them to step down. Even if something looks like it was or wasn't a fit at a certain stage, it's important to realize when that changes.

It's also crucial to mention that while a parent is helping a child, they must make sure the help is healthy and focused. It can often look innocent and supportive, but when over time they become the go-to person for their child to lean on, they become like a second spouse. While it may have originally helped the marriage to some extent, it slowly develops into an unhealthy dependency where, for example, the woman gets from her father what she should have been getting from her husband.

While it may have originally helped the marriage to some extent, it slowly develops into an unhealthy dependency

Whether you turn to your parents or to anyone else for help with your marriage, remember to stay focused on the goal, which is to build the marriage. The fact that there's less stress in the marriage and that you're less angry at your spouse isn't enough of an indicator that your parents, or anyone else who is helping you, is the right match or helping your marriage. Always remember to rethink: "Is this making my marriage healthier? Is the connection with my spouse getting better and stronger?" Check in often to make sure you're working toward the goal.

This reminds me of...

TRUE STORY

I remember when a man came to me, perplexed. This was someone to whom many people turned for advice, and many felt that his words were on target. At some point, one of his sons-in-law reached out to him, and he was supportive and helpful and able to help his daughter's marriage without her even knowing of his involvement. He did it very carefully and very responsibly, I must say.

Then, another child of his was struggling with something personal, and he wasn't able to help that child. He was bothered by this and wondered why he was able to help his son-in-law with a marriage issue, which is even more sensitive, while his child wouldn't let him offer his help.

We discussed how the match, the connection, between a parent and child or anyone else, even a therapist, has to work. The dynamics in each relationship are so different that it's important to be okay with the fact that what works for one may not work for another. This isn't only about something as sensitive as *shalom bayis*, involving another spouse and delicate topics, it's regarding everything else too, almost down to helping to build a *sukkah*!

To the child who's thinking, *If only my father or my mother was able to help me. How come other peoples' parents could?* or a parent who's wondering, *Why can't I help my child? If only they would let me!* remember: the relationship between the helper and the recipient has to click. It often has to do with the personalities of the people involved and some other factors as well, and what works for one doesn't always work for the other.

The bottom line is that one must always evaluate whether the help is actually helping. Does it just feel good, or does it bring the desired success? Does it make you look good, or does it promote true happiness? Does it help only you or all those involved?

Both child and parent need to remember how limited they might be regarding taking or giving help and be responsible and mature about pushing the limits and boundaries or allowing them to be pushed.

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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience

A while back, our children decided to move away. It was a pretty sudden decision which came about without much prior discussion. Initially, this move was supposed to be for a short amount of time, and we were fine with that, but slowly, it turned into something permanent. We don't mind the fact that they're doing what works for them; it's the gradual disconnection between us that we find more hurtful and harder to repair.

We have so little connection with our grandchildren that when we do travel for an occasion, it leaves us wondering why we're spending so much money and energy to be part of an occasion with grandchildren whom we barely know. If only our children would understand the importance of having us be part of their lives and having their children be more connected to their grandparents, the relationship would be so much more meaningful. There's a void and lots of resentment that lingers from this.

I think that children who have children of their own should make it their business to build the connection with their families and understand what it means to their parents to be connected and involved in the lives of grandkids.

It's one thing when you're protecting children from meddling grandparents or when you have to build boundaries just to be able to build a home, but when that's not necessary, children should be aware of what it means to grandparents to be involved and feel connected with the next generation. This is probably also relevant to children who live close by but don't visit often.

In today's day and age where communication is so easy and simple, a phone call, an email, and even a letter are all so accessible. It's a shame that people aren't sensitive to giving their parents the pleasure and opportunity to reap the rewards of the hard work they invested in raising their children. They say that the kids are the work and investment, and the grandkids are the *nachas*; it's a shame to only have the hard part.

d

UPGRADE

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

KEEPING THE FAMILY CHAIN STRONG

I most definitely agree that it's important for children to have a connection with their parents, who deserve that connection even after the children get married and fly the nest. I also agree that it's good for grandchildren to have a relationship with their grandparents and that it's not usually difficult to have this kind of connection. And yes, I'm nodding along when you write about what a shame it is when this connection is lacking.

I'm saying all this so that children who read it can take it to heart. Although it isn't great when parents of married children see these kinds of messages and feel even more victimized when they realize that they should be treated differently, there's no doubt that keeping in touch with parents and grandparents is a wonderful thing.

For those who can understand the importance of building this family connection for the next generation and even for themselves, that's wonderful. And for those who don't, at least acknowledge what it means to the grandparents to feel connected. Even if you keep up with your parents for this reason alone, it's very worthwhile.

It's good for grandchildren to have a relationship with their grandparents, and it's not usually difficult to have this kind of connection

Disagree

THERE'S MORE TO IT

While it's hard to say that I disagree with anything specific that was mentioned, I will acknowledge my reservations in general. Sometimes, parents of married children notice a decision that was made suddenly or become aware of a dynamic that has changed over time. What they fail to realize is that this isn't something unexplainable that mysteriously sprouted out of the blue; it's an outgrowth of an underlying issue with the relationship.

I'm not saying that your children chose the best way to do things, but it's possible that instead of wondering why someone would do something sudden or change a temporary decision into a permanent one, the parents would gain from doing some honest introspection.

Think about it. Why would your children not want to let you know about what's going on in their lives?

Could it be that they felt it was easier for them to make it look like it was done suddenly and without discussion simply because it wasn't easy to discuss their next steps with you?

Perhaps it was easier for them to initially present their move as something temporary and only then turn it into something more permanent?

Could it be that they were afraid of your reaction?

Have you, in the past, reacted in ways that made them feel a bit controlled or intimidated?

Could it be that they don't feel so comfortable?

Allowing children to feel comfortable when they present something will probably make it much easier for them to let you in on their plans and discussions.

It doesn't mean that you can't give your input, but the more comfortable you make someone feel when they communicate with you, the more they'll share with you. It's also important to realize that sometimes one parent is more accepting, validating, and understanding while the other one is not, and the more accepting parent gets hurt or offended from not being involved without realizing that

although the child would share this with you, they'd rather keep your spouse out of the picture. Of course, it's important to make sure this doesn't turn into a *shalom bayis* issue, but it's best to try to understand where they're coming from instead of just looking at it as something unexplainable. In general, almost everything people do is somewhat explainable.

This reminds me of...

TO THE CHILDREN: FIND THAT MINUTE

This reminds me of the period of covid, when people were calling their parents much more often. Due to the heightened concern for each other's well-being, children began keeping tabs on their parents. The stress and fear pushed children to improve an area that was somewhat lacking.

In classes I gave during that era, I encouraged people to keep up this practice. Yes, covid would pass, but the good resolutions and habits people developed should become second nature to them, creating lifelong practices that would benefit both parties.

Your letter reminded me of this because, as we know, people have busy lives. As easy as it is to make a phone call or send a text or an email, children often neglect to do this. In their preoccupation with their long list of daily tasks, they forget about and overlook the power of just one minute of connection.

If people would incorporate this act of connection into their routine, after having done it for a while or set it up in a way that's manageable, it would be so much easier to stick to. In general, something that's scheduled is easier to do. Knowing what time your parents are reachable and calling then is much more practical than trying your luck at some random time during the day.

I would add...

TO THE PARENTS: YOU'RE RIGHT, BUT ARE YOU HAPPY?

It's very important for children to have a connection with their parents as well as foster a connection between their own children and their grandparents. By the same token, it's important for every spouse to connect with their spouse, and there are many other important relationships to cultivate and priorities to see to as well. However, instead of impressing on someone else what they should do because it's so important—instead of waiting for the other person to do what's right—how about grabbing the steering wheel? There's much that you can do on your end.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not condoning your children's behavior in any way. But instead of waiting around for them to shift their perspectives or perhaps read an article or hear a *shiur* that will inspire them to change, you can be the one to initiate the give-and-take you sorely want. You can make those phone calls or visits, give them compliments, and send gifts.

Instead of waiting for the other person to do what's right, how about grabbing the steering wheel?

It's a shame when people who have the ability to bolster relationships resist doing their part because on principle, someone else should be doing more or someone else is more obligated. In most cases, when it comes to relationships, as much as someone should be doing, the other person could be doing more as well. I'm not saying they must, but they could.

Enabling someone to abuse or take advantage of you is a different story, but actively building a connection, keeping up a relationship, and initiating ongoing healthy communication with children and grandchildren is something parents can do instead of bearing an overload of inner resentment. If you do what you can do to make these relationships blossom, you'll be so much happier.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience

Ever since I got married, I've felt judged and not good enough in my in-laws' eyes. I even apologized to my mother-in-law for marrying her son and not being special enough for her son, who is a very special person. One thing I noticed and feel very strongly about is that when parents really mean the best for their child and the child feels it, they can do or say practically anything. I see it with my parents (I'm not saying this just because they're my parents; my sisters-in-law say the same about them) and friends' parents. The ones that show love and acceptance (even if the child knows it's hard for them to do so) are the ones with whom the children enjoy spending time with and look to give *nachas* to.

Accepting a child and giving over that warm feeling is something that's very hard to teach parents; it's a very subtle thing. Complimenting your child's spouse, praising the couple's accomplishments, and in general making the home a nonjudgmental space are just some ways to go about it. Once the foundation of love and acceptance is cemented, a little comment or an intruding question won't shake the couple up, as the foundation is strong enough.

This is a topic I'm very passionate about, as I struggle to learn how to handle my in-laws, who don't accept any of their children's spouses. I've tried everything, including sending poems and packages and even daring to have an open conversation on the subject.

I think I can write another whole email sharing what it looks like from my in-laws' side, but since it's my concern to see what I can do better, that's what I'm trying to focus on. How can I improve this situation?

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

1. An age-old issue

First of all, I want you to know that you're not alone. Telling mother-in-law jokes isn't nice, but the idea didn't come from nowhere... Being perceived as less-than by your in-law parents is enough to make you feel degraded and unwanted and doesn't lend itself to a harmonious family relationship, to say the least.

But aside from that validation, I want to take this opportunity to address anyone who thinks their in-law child may have written this or feel somewhat similarly. It's easier to go into justifying mode and explain why, in your particular case,



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
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People are sometimes afraid to even acknowledge the other perspective. Say what they would say. Think about what they see. That's it

you're either right for not showing acceptance or it's your daughter-in-law who's just misinterpreting your comments.

You might even be inclined to send her the answer through the editor and give her all the reasons why her parents-in-law don't appreciate her.

Don't do that.

It's important to just sit and realize what it looks like from the other side. Yes, the questioner is offering to hear ideas, and she acknowledges that there is another side. It's still important to realize: What does this complaint say about you? What does it demand of you? What do your comments and gestures sound like and look like to other people? Many of the justifications you have are great, but as long as the other person doesn't relate to them or understand them, they aren't worth much and aren't helpful.

2. On becoming the Chafetz Chaim

You want to know how you can improve the situation. Well, guess what? I don't know if you have to improve the situation. Some people are very hard on themselves and take responsibility for everything. Taking responsibility is generally a mature behavior that's to be admired, yet sometimes it's a bit overdone. This is especially apparent in your case, because, as you related in your opening sentence, you put yourself down by apologizing for marrying your mother-in-law's son. This goes along with what they say about the Jewish people, who are known to apologize just for existing.

As a rule, you can't please everyone all the time. Granted, you must always be polite and respectful in all relationships. Once you've done yours, that's perfect; you're not obligated to make everything work. Sadly, there are people out there who are very hard to get along with, and bending over backward in an effort to please them may work against you.

Recently, someone in a relationship with an extremely difficult person told me, "I think the only way to make this work is to be a Chafetz Chaim and tolerate everything." I answered that while I'm sure the Chafetz Chaim would do a wonderful job in any relationship, just tolerating anything in a relationship is sometimes what enables more of the dysfunction or abuse to continue.

Maybe the fact that you take responsibility for being put down and for not being worthy of your husband is exactly the reason people are taking advantage of you. Taking more on yourself may exacerbate the current dynamics, as well-meaning as you may be.



This is a sensitive point that needs to be understood and applied correctly, but it's something to take into perspective.

3. It takes two

In the above point, I didn't mean to imply that there isn't necessarily a way forward. Very often, with the right tools and guidance, any relationship can be improved.

The first step? You've already mentioned it in your letter: seeing your in-laws' side of the story. Stepping out of one's narrow point of view to see the other side's perspective is a game changer when it comes to resolving conflict and improving relationships.

When I talk to people, I often prompt them to take this step by asking them, "What's your wife seeing? What are your parents seeing?" Usually, they have a hard time verbalizing it. Even in the comfort and privacy of my office, when they try to describe what someone else might be seeing, they often trivialize or negate that point of view as they are trying to express it. For instance: "Yeah, she would say that I'm always late, but it's totally not true," or, "They would say I'm not respectful at all, but that's only because they have crazy ideas about the respect they deserve."

You may be able to tune up your relationship without doing anything more or different. Switching your mindset might be all it takes to turn things around

I try to help people understand that I just asked them to say it. Nothing more. People are sometimes afraid to even acknowledge the other perspective. Say what they would say. Think about what they see. That's it. They don't have to be right in order for you to acknowledge or think about their point of view.

Sometimes, expressing the other side's point of view brings about the introspection and "Aha!" moment that can be the turning point of the relationship: *Oh! If that's what they're seeing, then even if I completely disagree with the perspective, I now understand why they're acting (or reacting in) a certain way. Now I know what it might take to make this relationship better.*

So even if you think that your in-laws are totally off and unjustified in their judgmental attitude, take a minute to think about where they're coming from. Understanding and acknowledging their perspective will already give you insight into what could be done differently.

4. Quality assurance

Aside from anything you might come up with, let me suggest something: Very often, your in-laws might say something like, "Well, you don't come enough," or, "You don't give enough."

What's really underlying these statements is not the practical aspect, because that could be what you've been trying to do more and more already. What they really want is a true feeling of respect.

Sometimes, when you respect someone's opinion or you make them feel important, they need much less of you and your services. Similarly, in our relationship with Hashem, "*Tena beni libcha li*"—Hashem wants our heart, not necessarily our actions. Sometimes one can do more with less heart, but Hashem prefers more heart with less action, and this principle is not all that different when it comes to dealing with the people around us.

This is often the case in the parent-child relationship. There may be one child who's more respectful. He asks his parents for their opinion and makes them feel good. From him, the parents may demand less and even go as far as excusing him for not being able to come often enough. At the other extreme, the child who might be bending over backward and visiting more often may be far less appreciated since the parents don't feel it's coming with the same attitude of respect. They may be misinterpreting the situation, but making sure they see it right will usually get you further than debating the facts.



It's a good idea to think about their side and ponder the following: Could it be that all their complaints (as unreasonable and judgmental as they may be) are simply a reaction to how they feel you think of them?

You may be able to tune up your relationship without doing anything more or different. Switching your mindset might be all it takes to turn things around.

5. Never compare

I completely agree that parents of married children should be respectful and show acceptance to all their children. Yet, the fact that you notice the contrast between your parents and your in-laws is something you have to keep inside. You should be careful not to verbalize or emphasize that to your spouse and certainly not to your children. Sometimes, people don't realize how they subtly bring out such distinctions. Pointing out these things, especially at the wrong times and in the wrong places, aside from being wrong, creates negative vibes with the spouse and the kids.

Even if it's your spouse that brings up such a point about his own parents, you shouldn't say, "Yeah, I also can't stand it." Don't tell your kids, "When we go to that Bubby's house, you have to be very careful because she gets very nervous."

People who feel mistreated often justify such messages, especially when they convince themselves that it's the other person's fault that the relationship is so strained. Even if you do feel unloved and uncared for, you still want to be careful never to express these sentiments to your spouse and children.

Using the insights I've elucidated above, I'm sure you, with your good intentions, will be able to bring this relationship to a better place.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: Shabbos plans

My husband is the youngest in his family. When we got married, my in-laws pressured us to come to them for Shabbos almost every single week so they wouldn't be alone. If we planned to stay home, we were made to feel guilty about it.

At the time, it was helpful not to have to prepare for Shabbos (I was in school and working full time), but in hindsight, it feels like it was not the right thing to do. I think it is important for a couple to establish themselves in those first few years; they need that sacred time together to build their marriage. I wish my in-laws would have known that. I think they should have been encouraging their children to build their own lives, as hard as it may be for them as parents.

Send

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

BUILD YOUR OWN NEST

Parents should encourage married children to bond with their spouses and to establish their marriages right at the start. Although they're cutting the proverbial apron strings, they can still appreciate and enjoy the connection the children have with them, and they should still make sure that it's well balanced by the connection the child has with their spouse. If it ever looks like there may be a clash between the parent-child and the husband-wife relationships, it's always better for the parents to err on the side of caution and let their children connect with each other first.

Here's a common example: Often, children turn to their parents to help them out, either because they're used to doing this or because they don't yet know how to do things on their own. It's fine for parents to appreciate the fact that the children turn to them for help or advice, and it's great when children take advice from parents, who are older and wiser than they. But it's still very important to promote healthy bonding and building early on. Prompting the children with lines like "What does your spouse say?" or "What does your husband think? Did you discuss it with him? I think the two of you could figure it out on your own" can go a long way in encouraging them to connect to each other.

As long as the kids are the ones reaching out, it's fine to guide them and help them. Still, letting and encouraging them to turn to each other is very important. A couple can sometimes be turning to the parents together



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

but still need to be encouraged to talk to each other, to bond with each other, not just to do things together.

Different strokes for different folks; each argument has its merit. But when it comes to attitudes, there clearly is right and wrong

Disagree

NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

As with most things, there isn't only one way to do things. It's important to know what works for you (and your spouse) and not make the mistake of doing something just because "that's the way it should be." And your in-laws don't have to agree on what the "right way" to do things is, either.

For some couples, the opportunity of spending time at home, just the two of them, is the preferable way of maximizing the early years of marriage. Interestingly, for others, bonding with their parents as they enter a new stage in life is of utmost importance, and they see their early years of marriage as a prime opportunity to do so. They know that once they have a family with children of their own, they'll be resentful if they haven't remained connected with their family when it was easier to go over and join them for a meal.

On a different note, some will say that sitting at the parents' Shabbos meals at the outset of marriage is an opportunity for the new couple to learn how to create a Shabbos meal together, while others will say they want to follow their own style.

It's important for parents to know this as well. Some parents look at their married children and think, *Why are you coming over every Shabbos? You should be bonding!* If this is what works for them, it's best to let them be. They may enjoy coming to the parents and resist the burden of having to make their own meals for the time being. Why not let them take pleasure in the walks to and from the meals if that's how they bond? As long as the parents are technically okay with having the kids over, there's no reason to get stuck on how it "should be."

Different strokes for different folks; each argument has its merit. But when it comes to attitudes, there clearly is right and wrong. There's a good attitude and there's a bad attitude, a positive one and a negative one. Almost any choice you make can be done with the right intentions, feelings, and vibes.

This reminds me of...

SAME STORY, DIFFERENT NARRATIVE

Here is one of my favorite jokes:

Two women meet for coffee, and one tells the other, "Well, Ruthie, how are the kids?"

"To tell you the truth, my David married a witch," says Ruthie. "She doesn't get out of bed until eleven. She's out all day spending his money on



Heaven knows what, and when he gets home, exhausted, does she have a nice hot dinner for him? Ha! She makes him take her out to dinner at an expensive restaurant."

"What a shame. And how about your daughter?"

"Ah, now there's a lucky girl. Shira married a saint. He brings her breakfast in bed, he gives her enough money to buy whatever she needs, and in the evenings, he always takes her out to dinner at a nice restaurant."

In the same way, two daughters-in-law could easily describe their feeling over-welcomed for meals with their not-so-young parents-in-law in two opposite narratives. Even if you hadn't mentioned that it was actually helpful for you to go to your in-laws back then (because you didn't have to cook for Shabbos), it's incorrect to assume that "they're out to get something from me." As you know, it's possible that your in-laws were just trying to give to you even though it really was hard for them. They aren't young and they could have made an easy, small Shabbos meal. It's always important to step out of your box for a minute and broaden your vision to include the other side of the story.

But aside from seeing things *differently*, there's an additional point of seeing *more*. There's more to a relationship than your own needs. We often get stuck in the rut of thinking selfishly and only see things in terms of our own benefit. We wonder, *Why don't they care about me?* This is not only with children. Parents of married children might think, *Why can't our children understand us and do what's best for us? We invested so much in them already.*

Not everything has to be smooth and comfortable in order to make it work, and at any point in your life, there are always ways to strengthen your relationship

It's important to realize that everything about relationships is a two-way street, especially when it comes to parents who invested their lives in getting their children to where they are. The children's needs are important, and so are the parents'. There's often room to meet both, when done right.

Rav Avigdor Miller used to say that you should make sure to keep a good, respectful relationship with your parents after you get married so that they'll leave you their inheritance when they pass on. Now, I assume that a great man like him didn't mean just to play the game in order to get the money. He meant to point out that the game is not over till it's over, and you both need each other. Don't take advantage and think that because you're married, you can now be selfish. Their intentions notwithstanding, it's important to incorporate what works for them and for you into one healthy decision of how and what to do.

I would add...

DEAL WITH YOUR OWN CARDS

While it's true that "a couple should establish themselves in the early part of the marriage," not always can this happen in the dream set-up one has envisioned for themselves. Hashem throws different challenges and circumstances at us, and we have to "roll with the punches" and work with whatever we've been given. It can be a medical crisis or financial stress or many other issues that unfortunately get in the way of "enjoying the early stages of life" the way we envisioned or wanted.

Sometimes, people get thrown offtrack, and then there's the wistful feeling of "Oh, we weren't able to bond; we never had 'that' *shanah rishonah* experience." Someone actually just told me that he's been married for 15 years but is still suffering from not having had *shanah rishonah* the way it was "supposed to be." It's sad to be so stuck on how it "should have been" when you can't turn back the clock.

Life might not always follow the path you want it to follow. Within the less-than-ideal situation, you can and should still do whatever you can to get close, work together, and get to know each other. Not everything has to be smooth and comfortable in order to make it work, and at any point in your life, there are always ways to move ahead and strengthen your relationship to be as good as possible. As the old quote goes, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." How true that is about our relationships, regardless of where in life we're holding.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience

When it comes to the relationship between children and parents or parents-in-law, there's so much room for misunderstanding even when people truly mean well. Remember: getting insulted is a choice. Things will happen. People will say things. It's up to you to decide how to interpret each statement or action. Will you be insulted or hurt, or will you look at that comment or event with objectivity and accept the lesson it's supposed to teach you?

Many times, statements can be interpreted in two ways. Often, it just depends on who's saying it. When you realize that from certain people it can have a good meaning, you can give yourself that narrative—*this is what they meant, they meant no harm, they're concerned about me*, etc.

As a personal example: My mother-in-law told me that my *sheitel* could use some touch-ups. I was schmoozing with a friend after Shabbos and asked her what she thought about my latest *sheitel*, mentioning my mother-in-law's comment. Her reaction was, "That's so tactless! Aren't you insulted?"

That left me wondering: Why does it need to be taken that way? Why can't this statement be interpreted to mean that she would love for me to look my best? Does anything she says automatically need to be translated with a negative slant, as in "She thinks I'm a slob"? She just said my *sheitel* could be improved.

When I would call my grandmother to let her know of an upcoming mazel tov, she would inevitably ask when I found out the good news. If it was too long ago for her liking, she would say, "Oh, so you told me late!" That would be followed by, "When did you call your other grandmother? Was it before you called me?"

It's easy to get annoyed by these statements, but really, the above rule can be applied here as well. She can rejoice with the good news or dwell on the technical details of when and to whom it was delivered first. One can always find a reason to be upset.

One more point: Even when it's not an interpretation issue, you can be *dan l'kaf zechus*. It isn't about being extra holy, it's about making your life happier. If someone tells me something hurtful, I rationalize it in my head. *She's obviously upset about something, and I happened to have been the first person to cross her path. She definitely wasn't trying to hurt me. I know she loves me because she always looks out for me/helps me, etc. so it must be something else.*

I can assure you, it works.

Send



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Letting go and choosing to view things positively is a recipe for better relationships and more happiness

Agree

HAPPINESS IS HOMEMADE

I'll begin where you ended. Your last point was well put; people who have a positive outlook on life and judge others favorably have a happier and higher-quality life. On the flip side, those who focus on the dark side and bear grudges suffer, sometimes needlessly. As the quote goes, "Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person will die."

If only people would overcome their bad feelings toward others, even just for selfish reasons, they would give themselves the gift of happiness, contentment, and peace. Let go of the buts, as in "but they shouldn't have," "but they're wrong," and "but how could they?"

Viewing others favorably is doing yourself the biggest favor.

A set of mechutanim weren't getting along because of their difference in opinion regarding an important decision for their married children. Mixing into their children's choice was wrong in and of itself, but on top of that, a tremendous fight exploded. Time passed, and the children made their decision. The mechutanim wanted to move on but claimed they couldn't do so without the help of a third party, in this case, a rav.

"What are you hoping the rav will do?" I asked.

"We want the rav to hear us out and say who's really right and who's wrong. We don't see how we can make peace if we don't iron this out."

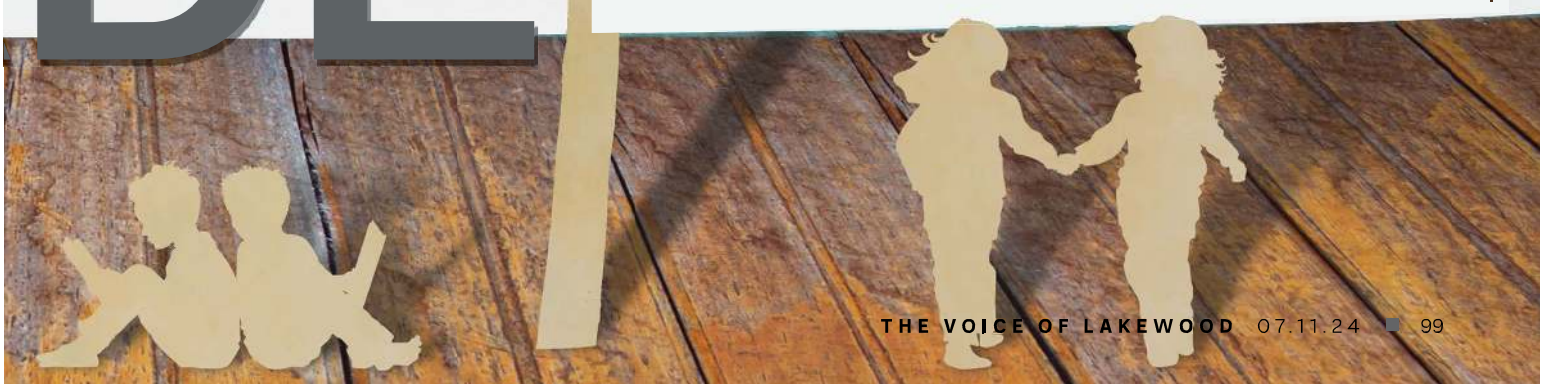
How foolish. The decision had been made; who cared if you were right or wrong? Getting stuck on the principle of the matter, especially when it's irrelevant, is a waste of time and energy. Letting go and choosing to view things positively is a recipe for better relationships and more happiness. Isn't that what we all want?

This is certainly the case in the example you mentioned, where a comment could be interpreted in two ways. It's easier to stay positive when it isn't even clear that someone had ill intentions in the first place. For some, it's easier and more natural to judge favorably and take things in a positive manner, but even for those who find it difficult, offering someone the benefit of the doubt is often doing yourself the biggest favor. And yes, very often, people really didn't have negative intentions when they said something that was somewhat offensive, and it's up to you to take it as it was intended and perhaps even appreciate their love and concern for you rather than getting insulted due to the fabrications going on in your own mind.

Disagree

WORK ON YOURSELF, NOT OTHERS

You say that getting insulted is a choice. But is it really? Hashem wired people differently, and there are some people who are intrinsically more



sensitive than others, as discussed at length in my book *Get Along with Everyone*. With their personality package, these people have less of a choice about how insulted to get when demeaning words are thrown at them. If you're able to ride above your ego and view insults objectively, hats off to you. But to impose these standards on others isn't fair.

You successfully neutralized what could have been understood as an intruding comment. But judging your grandmother for not having the sense, ability, or emotional stability to do the same is wrong. I'm not saying that it's right of her to get all worked up by the late notification of your *simchah*, and the way she expressed it may have been out of bounds. Still, how can you judge her and think that she could have done better?

Don't get me wrong; this isn't a carte blanche for all those who become easily offended not to work on themselves and keep dwelling on the wrongs done to them. However, to those out there who have been blessed with the tools, wisdom, and ability to recover quickly or even not feel the sting of a biting comment, while you're certainly blessed and perhaps deserve credit for investing energy and self-work to get there , make sure to apply those standards to yourself only; don't look down at others who can't or don't do as you do.

Rule of thumb: We should judge others favorably and work on ourselves. We shouldn't expect others to judge us favorably and work on themselves.

In relationships and in life in general, it's not an even deal; we should have double standards. We should work on ourselves and at the same time try to make it easier on other people. Be super-sensitive to the feelings of others and take care not to hurt them, but when they hurt you, judge them favorably and forgive them for having wronged you.

This is what Dovid Hamelech said in Tehillim (112:5): "*Tov ish chonen u'malveh yechalkel devarav b'mishpat*— Praised is the man who is generous and lends (to others) while reserved and calculated (when it comes to himself)."

This reminds me of...

NO OFFENSE, BUT...

Anyone on the receiving end of a hurtful comment should definitely learn to judge favorably and interpret things correctly whenever possible. But this doesn't excuse anyone for saying something insensitive.

There are people who have a knack for making statements that have dual connotations. Since these statements can be interpreted both negatively and positively, they never assume responsibility for offending others. After all, "That's not what I meant!"

It's often up to the listener, the recipient of the hurtful comment, to detect the good that lies within the words

Hashem, who sees into the recesses of our hearts, knows our true intentions and will judge us accordingly, even when the words we spoke aren't overtly forbidden. One should never say these kinds of comments with the rationalization that people should be *dan l'kaf zechus*.

Parents of married children sometimes take the liberty of saying comments with the subconscious excuse of "Well, I'm a *bubby*/mommy, so I'm allowed to say this" or "I only meant your good; why would you take it the wrong way?"

It's very important to be honest with yourself and judge your comments both based on how someone else might take them and based on what you really mean. Often, we do mean to criticize and say less-than-pleasant things with the face-saving factor of having a ready line of defense, i.e., "I didn't mean it in a derogatory way."

Don't rely on the fact that something could be rationalized or explained better later. If your words can be understood in a negative light, keep the comment to yourself.

I would add...

FIND THE LOVE

While we're on the topic of properly interpreting or accepting comments or actions, a particular cringe-worthy incident rises to the surface of my mind.

When I was learning in yeshivah, I once sat at a *shiur* delivered by the *rosh yeshivah*. Among the *talmidim* sitting around the table were top-level learners, average *talmidim*, and weaker students who were drawn to the *rosh yeshivah*'s *shiurim* thanks to his warmth and charismatic personality.



There we were, in the middle of a *shiur*, when out of the blue, a 20-year-old *bachur* seated to the right of the *rosh yeshivah* planted a kiss on the *rosh yeshivah*'s cheek.

We were taken aback by this uncalled-for display of awkward "affection," which seemed highly inappropriate and completely off-key.

A split second after the initial gasp, without a flinch, the *rosh yeshivah* spontaneously smiled broadly and remarked, "He loves me."

By choosing to focus on the positive aspect of that awkward public kiss, the *rosh yeshivah* successfully diffused the tension. What amazed me most was how he pulled it off on the spot in such a natural, casual way. It goes to show how one can take something others would have totally misinterpreted. That lesson left an indelible impact.

In general, when people say things, they usually don't have a single intention, whether negative or positive. Do they only mean to hurt us? No. Are they just trying to show how much they love and care about us? Perhaps that's not either 100 percent true. It's often up to the listener, the recipient of the hurtful comment, to detect the good that lies within the words.

Remember, by finding the love within a comment or action, you'll make a happier life for yourself and for those around you.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION:

My father often asks me to take care of things for him, and I sometimes have to push him off because it takes away from my husband's time. Previously, my husband and I would constantly fight about this, and I would feel guilty if I didn't help my father with whatever he needed right away. Thanks to therapy, I've learned to work through this, yet the problem still arises from time to time.

For example, when I arrive at my father's house to help him, he's usually not ready for me. I help him as much as I can, but when it's time for me to go, he agitatedly asks why I can't stay longer. I tell him, "Look, I was here for X amount of time, and I explained to you before I came that this is the time I can give you. We accomplished what we could, and we'll continue next time."

Moreover, when it comes to my father's time, all else can wait, but when it comes to my time, there's no acknowledgement whatsoever. Whenever we invite him for supper, he's always late, even if we made up a specific time. My husband comes straight from work and wants to get started right away, and we sit around, wondering whether we should start eating or not. My father saunters in after a while, telling us, "Oh, it's fine, nothing happened, just relax" with no apology or sign of remorse for his late arrival.

We've learned to minimize the time we visit to avoid all this frustration, but really, we're just brushing the issue away. We've tried speaking to my father about it, but he doesn't seem to understand.

We've asked my mother to explain it to my father, but she, of course, takes his side, which a wife should do. But I feel that in this case, it's making the situation worse.

What can I do?

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

1 *Torah first*

I'm glad you took steps to learn how to deal with the feelings of guilt and codependency. Therapy helps many people sort out their emotions and deal with challenges. It's crucial to point out, though, that any advice you receive, whether in therapy or anywhere else, must always be in line with the Torah and coming from a Torah perspective.

If therapy pulls anyone away from doing what the Torah requires, whether as part of *kibbud av v'eim* or in their relationship with their spouse, in the name of helping you feel less guilty, codependent, or anything else, that's terrible. As Torah-true Yidden, every step we take and every action we do must first and foremost be evaluated through a Torah lens.

According to the Torah, a married woman's first allegiance is to her husband, and only after that comes the obligation of honoring her parents. Remember, though, that as long as her husband has no objections, i.e., there's no contradiction between her two obligations, a married woman is required to honor her father just like anyone else. The details and extent of this obligation are some-



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thing a *rav* should help you understand, not a therapist. Once the Torah guidance is clear, you can turn to other forms of help to make it easier for you to do what's right with more confidence and less guilt. Every person and couple should be in contact with a *rav* for all *she'eilos*, including sensitive relationship-related issues.

As Torah-true Yidden, every step we take and every action we do must first and foremost be evaluated through a Torah lens

I'd add that putting a husband first isn't something that the husband should have to enforce. While there's much more to understanding the details and limits of a woman's obligations and responsibilities to her husband in general, in regard to the father-vs.-husband aspect, the Torah's idea is clear, and I invite and encourage you to get clear Torah guidance on the topic.

2 Respect begets respect

A lot of the frustration on your part and the resistance on your father's end may be because you're trying to appeal to him using logic. This is a common mistake people make in relationships. The more you explain yourself, the more frustration you'll have, and perhaps you'll even cause more resistance on the other side.

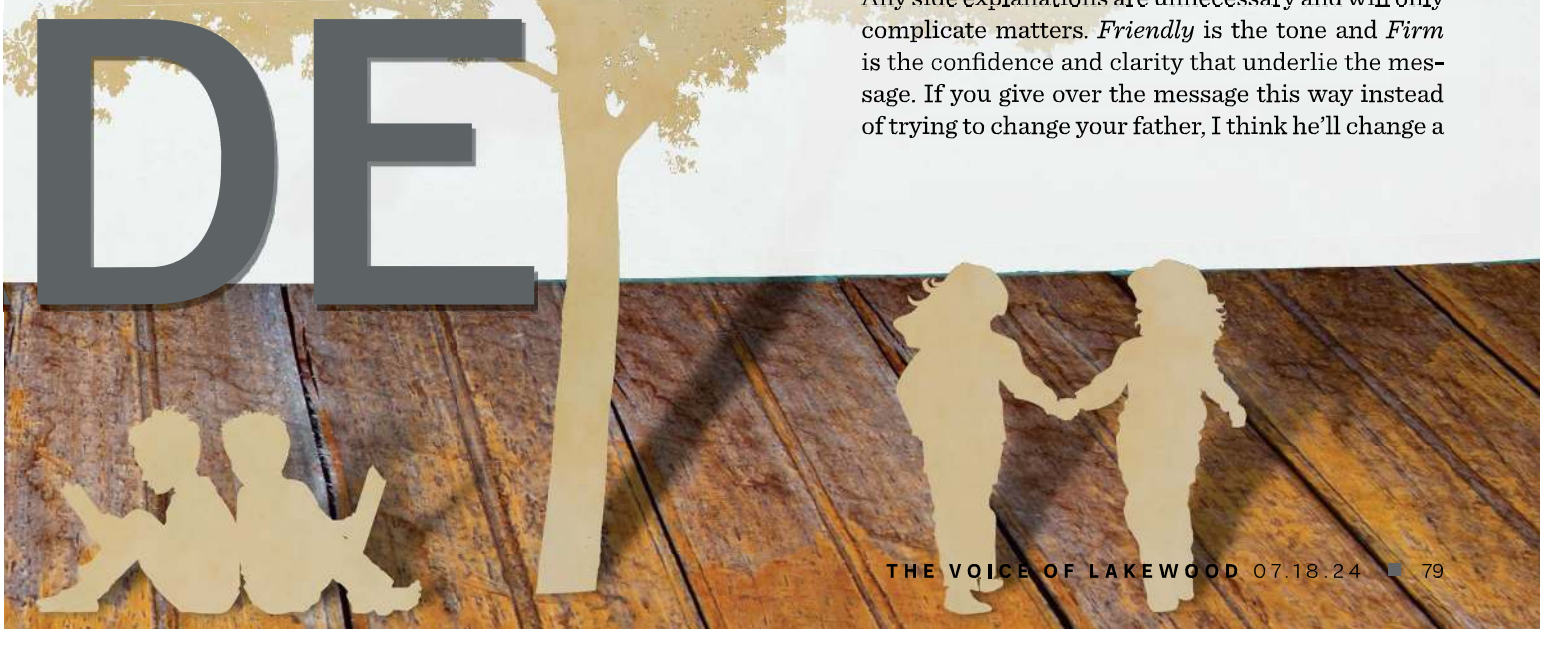
Surely, if you haven't tried to explain yourself to someone, go ahead and try. It would be a shame not to communicate because you decided on your own that it won't work. But if you've tried not once but a few times, and it didn't work, it's time to realize that it's not the explanation that wasn't working; rather, chances are that you're using a logical explanation for an emotional issue. Logic and emotions are two completely different languages. All this is aside from the fact that trying to "educate" your father isn't respectful and is most often unproductive.

More specifically, the one line you stuck in (was this the therapist's idea?), "Look, I was here for X amount of time, and I explained to you..." seems unnecessary and unproductive. It rings of negativity and connotes, *Well, I told you. It's your problem if you can't handle it.* Aside from being unproductive, it's disrespectful and perhaps a violation of *kibbud av v'eim*.

Additionally, telling your father at six o'clock, "I said I'm leaving at six..." sounds somewhat degrading; he's your father, not a little boy. If you want to make it clear that you'll be leaving at six, then aside from clarifying it in advance as you did, perhaps remind him respectfully at 5:45 in a calm voice, "I have another 15 minutes, Tatty; I have to leave at six. Let's see what we can still accomplish in this time. I'd love to do whatever I can."

Even at six, when you do need to go, it won't hurt to say, "I'd love to stay longer, but I need to go." And go. By telling him in advance, before it's emotionally challenging and relevant, and then by following through, you've set yourself up for a pleasant visit and a peaceful parting. When he sees that you had a plan and it actually happened, he'll be able to come to terms with it, even if this may take a few times to penetrate.

In my book, *Getting Along with Everyone*, I talk about using the BIFF formula—be Brief, Informative, Friendly, and Firm in challenging situations. *Brief* and *Informative* mean sticking to the point that needs to be communicated in a brief manner, only mentioning the facts that need to be shared. Any side explanations are unnecessary and will only complicate matters. *Friendly* is the tone and *Firm* is the confidence and clarity that underlie the message. If you give over the message this way instead of trying to change your father, I think he'll change a



lot faster on his own, especially with the consistency and respect in your approach and attitude.

Sometimes, people run after you because you're running away from them. The more you resist, the more they'll come back to you for more. When you give them what they need before they ask, be it emotional or technical help, they won't feel the need to take as much from you.

3 Make it work

You feel that minimizing your time at your parents' home is a way of brushing the issue under the rug. I respectfully disagree. Not everything in life has a neat solution, and there are situations that are best dealt with by avoiding them. I'm not condoning the ostrich approach to life's challenges, but there are times when the best way to deal with something is to stay away from it.

Sidestepping the candy store isn't necessarily the lazy way out. As much as you want to teach your child not to demand whatever catches their eyes, sometimes, staying away from temptation is the best way to deal with it, in the same way the Torah suggests that a *nazir* stay away from a grapevine. Leave the struggle for when it's necessary, as there will be more than enough challenges they will have to deal with in life.

Not everything in life has a neat solution, and there are situations that are best dealt with by avoiding them

Visiting your parents a bit less can sometimes be helpful not only in avoiding stressful situations, but even in keeping up the relationship without the burnout and resentment that may come from doing much more. And when you do visit, remember to clarify your availability and schedule in advance, and do interject those friendly reminders I mentioned before it's time to go.

4 Don't do unto others...

I would want to address the parent here, but I'm trying to stick to addressing the writer, so I'll phrase it this way:

When you get older, please remember how you're feeling now. Without conscious effort, many people fall into the same tendencies they resented years before. Children mature and grow up gradually, and without being aware of the changing stages, you can find yourself parenting your little boy who's already 20. Yes, he's still your son who's obligated to be *mechabed* his parents, but he's in a different league already.

In case you think this will never happen to you, I'll explain to you why it takes a lot of inner work to make sure you keep the right boundaries. As a rule, parents see their children as extensions of themselves much more than children see themselves as extensions of their parents. Often, people want their children to please them and do things as they expect or as they taught them, while they don't do the same for their own parents. In their mind, this makes sense, because "why would I need to do things their way? I'm an adult!" Somehow, they don't realize that their own children have also grown into adulthood.

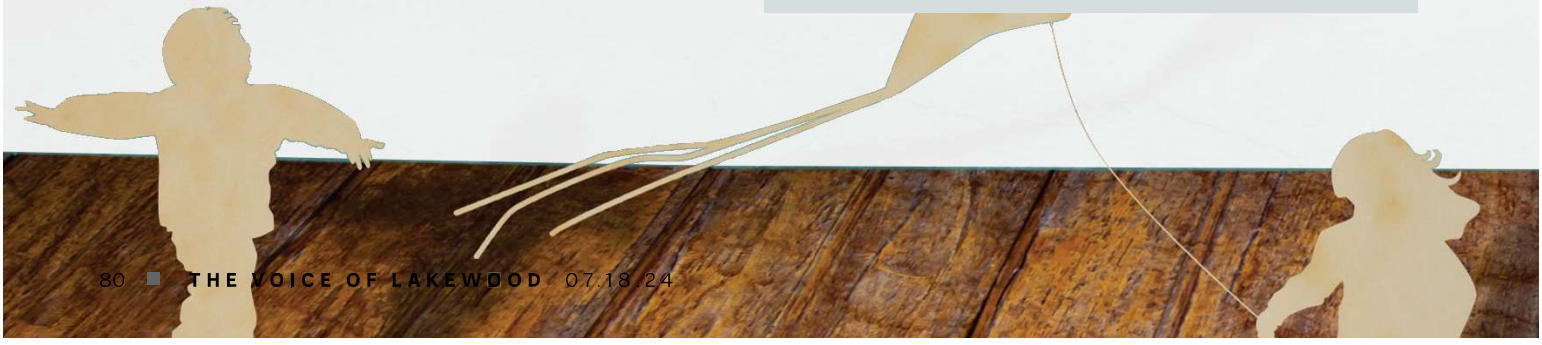
In general, one needs to make sure that advancing in age doesn't make them feel more entitled. They say there are two types of people who walk into a room: one says, "Here I am!" and the other says, "There you are!" I don't think it's so black and white, and it's fine to see both oneself and others, but only with some introspection and self-awareness can one realize how it looks from the other side, whether with their own children or anyone else.

By implementing the changes I've outlined above, I hope your visits and your relationship with your father will improve, ultimately bringing peace and joy to both of you.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience

You mentioned that people see things differently at different stages of life. Growing up, children may see things a certain way, but when they become a parent, they see things in a completely different light.

I thought it would be so simple to "do it right" (unlike my parents) when my turn came to marry off my children. Now that I reached this stage and see how challenging it is, I want to stress how important it is to keep the following points in mind:

1. Please, parents, try to maintain a good relationship with your *mechutanim*, even if it means giving in a lot. You're not doing this for them, you're doing it for your child and their spouse.

2. Even if you do have some disagreements, please leave your kids out of it. It gets extremely heavy and uncomfortable for your kids to be stuck between the two sets of parents who can't get along. (I'm not even talking about how it can affect their *shalom bayis*.)

3. Please never ask your child to keep something a secret from their spouse and/or in-laws (just because you hid some information before the shidduch and fear the ramifications).

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

PEACE AT ALL COSTS

You have my wholehearted agreement when it comes to the first two points. Establishing and maintaining a good relationship with your *mechutanim* is so important. Parents of married children should never involve the children in any conflict between the two sets of parents, and if possible, the children shouldn't even know about it. Aside from avoiding conflict, it's so important to invest energy to build and maintain a respectful relationship with *mechutanim*, even if it's difficult. Remember: there are children and grandchildren who can be impacted in a big way if a fight erupts.

There's the typical stuff, like making sure to attend each other's *simchos*, and then there are the more challenging or stressful situations that require a lot more inner strength to deal with effectively. In many cases when one feels that the "other side" is being less consider-



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ate, it's well worth bending over backward to avoid conflict. Often, the subject of disagreement relates to the children and grandchildren, and inevitably, only one side can win. It's up to you to decide if you want to be the winner or you'd rather score a real win by giving in. Aside from doing it for peace, which is huge, it's worth doing so for the sake of the children.

As you pointed out, just venting or discussing the issues with the children can be very damaging. Aside from the clear violation of *lashon hara*, which should be more than enough to make us control ourselves, I've seen people make the mistake of assuming that when pointing out to their child where the *mechutanim* are wrong, their child or even child-in-law will surely side with them or at least won't be offended. Interestingly though, that's often not the case.

Often, hearing bad things about one's parents or in-laws will put a child on the defensive. In a conflict, one side isn't usually 100 percent right. By stating your side, you're pressing their buttons and egging them on to stick up for the bit where the other side may be right.

All this is in addition to the internal conflict between the couple that's stuck in the middle, which is often caused by such comments and conversations. Even when your child agrees with your perspective, their spouse might not see it that way.

Expressing your feelings may lead to a conflict on many levels, which gets very hard to untangle once it progresses. By holding your tongue, you can maintain peace in the family and avoid so much negativity.

Disagree

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

Telling a child to keep a secret may be the wrong thing to do. However, the idea of total transparency is often equally dangerous.

The mishnah in *Avos* tells us regarding sharing information with one's wife, "Don't speak excessively with a woman." The Bartenura explains that this means that certain things are better left under wraps. Whether the information is negative or just challenging to absorb, resisting sharing the information can be the best route to follow. As stressful as it is to not share certain information, having an open-mouth policy can be equally or even more dangerous at times.

For a parent to tell a child that they can't share something with a spouse is generally wrong. If they feel that the information is better left unsaid, they can suggest that the child be cautious with the information and only share after verifying that it's okay and perhaps discussing it with the right person. Keeping a secret from a spouse is a risky thing to do, and dictating such a thing is generally stepping into private territory.

When it comes to a child vis-à-vis their in-laws, sometimes the relationship isn't as strong as you'd want it to be, and then silence may be warranted. Your child is young and might not always know or under-

stand the difference between which relationships are close enough to trust with everything and which need a bit more caution. Therefore, lumping a spouse and in-laws together in the same set of instructions (regarding secret keeping) isn't a great idea. Before your child gets married, it may be easier to suggest what you feel should or shouldn't be shared, but once they're married, it's probably best not to get involved.

What you can do, however, is not share something you don't want passed on further. If you can't hide it, how can you expect others to do so? Of course, some things you can't hide, like a medical condition, but you'd be surprised to notice how many things weren't important to share in the first place, especially at the risk of having it passed on.

When you open your mouth to speak, you are, by definition, handing over that information into the hands of the listener. As much as you may want or need to share that information, if you think something won't be beneficial for your child to tell their spouse or in-laws, it's often best not to tell the child either.

I would add...

KEEP THE PAWNS OFF THE BOARD

Another point I'd like to stress to parents who are in a conflict with their *mechutanim*: never use children as pawns or monkeys-in-the-middle. If you haven't managed to avoid conflict, at the very least keep it between you and the *mechutanim*. Don't ever use the children as "human shields." And certainly don't mess with something that your children seem fine with in the name of helping them stick up for themselves. Statements like "Look, they didn't give you what they promised, so how can you go to them for Yom Tov?" or "It really doesn't make sense to do *XYZ*. Tell your in-laws that it won't work for you" are extremely damaging.

By the same token, when children don't get along with one set of parents, the other set of well-meaning parents shouldn't make themselves into pawns as they try to help them make peace. Getting involved in order to help children smooth out the relationship is admirable. However, extreme care must be taken so that whatever is said or done is to the benefit of everyone involved and never causes hard feelings to either side or oneself. Even the best intentions may bring people to do the wrong things, causing more harm than good.

Resolving this conflict is a delicate tightrope walk, and it may be wisest to stay off the battlefield altogether. Gently referring the young couple to a third party may be the wisest way to go. Once the parents give that gentle suggestion, it's often best to move on and not follow up. It's not in the parents' control, nor is it their responsibility to make sure that it works out the way they feel is best.

This reminds me....

WORDS OF THE WISE

Reading this letter reminded me of a meeting I had with a *chassidishe* Rebbe about a couple who was struggling with their *shalom bayis*. He told me how saddened he was by the fact that, according to his perspective, the couple's difficulties weren't that great and would have easily been resolved if not for their parents' involvement. Although these *mechutanim* may have gotten along well before, as soon as certain issues came up between the couple, they took sides. This, of course, added fuel to the fire, with the husband and wife now sticking up for their respective parents. An issue that could have been dealt with privately between the couple became a conflagration of conflicts, with each conflict feeding off the other.

Then he shared something personal with me. This prominent Rebbe, a scion of royal lineage, didn't give the *kibbudim* under the *chuppah* to members of his distinguished family when marrying off his children. Once he had *mechutanim*, he honored them instead of his brothers or other relatives who were Rebbes and *rabbanim* in their own right. He told me he knows that people wonder about this, but he feels it's important to do so. "I want my children to see how I revere their parents-in-law. That way, they will honor them as well."

I was amazed by his understanding of what's truly important as well as the effects of how his actions and behaviors ripple on to his children. Telling your children to be respectful to their in-laws is far less convincing than showing them how you respect them yourself. People emulate actions more than they heed education.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

This week, we deviate slightly from our typical format by bringing two contrasting letters that highlight the same topic.

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience #1

Thank you for your enlightening column. Last week, you touched on the topic of sharing information. That made me think. When my children get married, how will I feel if they share with us the same amount of information I share with my parents (I don't share much)?

I realized that there's so much information that we could share, like good test marks from my kids. I can have my children write them letters and send voicemails of cute recordings. I haven't made the effort of sharing these until now because I wasn't thinking how big these small things can be for them.

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience #2

One of the biggest things for me is when my parents and in-laws mix into my parenting. I know that they have experience (though my husband and I are both in therapy for all the pains of the experiences we've been through), but, quite frankly, I feel like telling them, "I don't want your judgment or great ideas — especially when you don't know my children and their needs the way I do."

In general, if you trust that your child is old enough to get married, that means you trust that they're old enough to have and raise children. If we ask you for advice, you're welcome to give it, but if we don't, please respect our abilities, respect our maturity, and aside from *davening* for us and our children (always appreciated and helpful), please refrain from saying anything.

While cutting the apron strings is the healthy, natural way of the world, a child remains a child to his parents even after leaving their home. So when and where is sharing our lives with our parents or allowing them to share in it recommended, and how is this best done?



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER



Sometimes, people only realize what they should've done when they're already on the other side of the table, when they're the parents waiting to hear from their children

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

APPRECIATE THE SHARING

Sharing parts of your life with your parents makes them feel cherished and admired; it's a great way to perform the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'eim*. Kudos to the first writer for coming to this conclusion (and thanks for letting me know that it may have been generated by this column). You realized how little you're sharing with your parents by thinking about how it would feel to be on the receiving end. Sometimes, people only realize what they should've done when they're already on the other side of the table, when they're the parents waiting to hear from their children. And some never realize it, sadly.

Besides agreeing that there's so much to share and that it's a nice thing to do, which I wholeheartedly do, I'd like to take this opportunity to appeal to parents to make it pleasant for children to share with them. Taking into account what the second letter is expressing, it's so important to make a conscious effort to make it pleasant for your child to share with you. Parents sometimes make it harder for a child who's sharing by adding their comments, "You sent me a picture of the kids; where'd you buy those fancy clothes? The sales haven't started yet!" Or "You went on an outing today with Moishy? Wasn't he supposed to be in school?" How about a great test mark, "Is she doing better in this subject than in others, and you're not telling me about it?"

When sharing becomes unpleasant, people start to think twice about doing it again.

It seems that the first writer is expecting it to be a very different experience. But it's more than just not being unpleasant. It's great when parents know how to appreciate and enjoy when children let them into their life and give them well-earned *nachas*.

Even when you don't express this openly, sometimes it's obvious how much you love it and how meaningful it is. But in general, don't rely on it being obvious. While some parents feel entitled to the information and don't even feel the need to express appreciation, others assume that children will know on their own that it's appreciated. In all areas of communication, particularly when it comes to appreciation, if you feel something, say something! Showing appreciation for cute *nachas* tidbits and relevant family news will go a long way in bringing about more of the same.

Disagree

IT'S NOT ALL OR NONE

While I agree that when parents make it unpleasant for their children to share they get turned off and want to run to the other extreme, I don't agree with the black-and-white undertone. Failing to see the subtle shades of gray in relationships and other areas in life leaves people crippled as they miss capitalizing on worthwhile opportunities. If they see the issue of sharing with parents as an all-or-none topic, either I'll share everything or I won't share anything, they're usually going to be wrong a large percent of the time.

These two letters contrast each other and highlight the message that even if you don't share everything, like personal, sensitive information, you can still share so much non-inflammable content.

In general, crossing off your parents as "not knowing your children or their needs" might be a rather immature way of thinking. Perhaps, as you wrote, they don't know your children the way you do, but that doesn't mean they have no valid opinion worth listening to. Your parents are older than you and actually do have more life experience. Granted, they may be throwing it in your face in a tactless way, and they might have experience...failing. However, it's often small minded to discount whatever they say just because you know your kids better.

Even with meddling parents and in-laws, if you care enough to develop a relationship with them, you'll almost always be able to find topics to discuss or news to share that won't set off that negative interaction. Safe ground would include benign issues you don't care to hear feedback on (*What should I do first, cook or clean?*) or topics you don't mind discussing because they won't know what you did with the feedback (*Thank you for telling me about that natural remedy! It was a great idea!* even though you decided to do antibiotics).

When you'll be a parent, I assume you'll be much more careful about the way you interact and react with your marrieds, but in the meantime, it's a pity and a loss to both sides when you choose to close the door on parents because of incidents and challenges that arise.

As I've mentioned previously, people tend to run after those who are running away from them. Maybe your parents are trying to give you input and share their experience because you aren't interested in their opinion? If you would ask them for advice every now and then, maybe they wouldn't feel so desperate to try to educate you and your children.

This reminds me of...

LISTEN AND LEARN

Now that you brought it up, let's address this head on: Who's more equipped to tackle *chinuch* issues that crop up? Is it me, who knows my children best, or my parents, who are older and wiser but don't know my child as intimately as I do?

Well, there are different variables to take into consideration. As the one raising your children, you do know your children better than anyone else. But that very fact, your emotional subjectivity, may cloud your vision and hinder you from making the right decisions. Your parents, on the other hand, may not know your child as well as you do, but they may have two advantages: more life experience, and a less biased, more objective perspective. Each side has a distinct advantage, and it would be wise to cash in on both of them.

To make decisions yourself without acknowledging that you're too emotionally subjective is a mistake. Even the wisest of people seek outside counsel

I think it's important for people to realize how subjective they are. Even if you decided that you know better than your parents, and you might, it doesn't mean that you know what to do on your own. It might still be very important to find someone who can help you and give an objective opinion, whether it's someone you trust, someone you're close with, someone with *da'as Torah*, or someone who's more responsible and professional. Making decisions yourself without acknowledging that you're too emotionally subjective is a mistake. Even the wisest of people seek outside counsel.

Yes, you may be right that it's too hard to take your parents' advice, especially when it challenges your own.



I also understand why the facts might not be as clear to them in one aspect; after all, you see your children a lot more than they do! Still, if you want to be the best parent you can be, it's worth your while to consult with someone who doesn't have the disadvantage your parents have, but has an advantage over you, as they're more experienced and objective.

I would add...

LOOK OUTWARD AND LOOK INWARD

This whole debate of when to share and how much to share reminds me of a conversation I had with a father who recently celebrated the birth of his twelfth child. He was talking to his father about the name he wanted to give, and his father responded by adding his own two cents (plus) on the topic. When he told his father something like, "You know, it's my twelfth child, please, I should be allowed to decide on my own what name I want to give." His father said, "What do you mean? You still have a father, and you should take my advice seriously. You may be a little older, but that doesn't mean that you understand everything on your own."

The interesting thing was that this grandfather didn't realize that by the time he had his third child, he didn't have a father anymore. He's been making his own decisions from when he was 28, and here he is educating his 49-year-old son and telling him he's not too old to learn. At what point does he become old enough to give a name?

My point with recounting this is that there are always two ways to look at things, and each has its own merits. Parents have reason to think they're smarter than their children, and the older they get, the smarter they get and the more experience they have. They may even expect their children to care about their opinion and to take them seriously. On the other hand, it's important for parents to realize that their children are grown and it's time to give them space.

It's always good to think about what it looks like from the other side. Parents should be aware of how negative and intimidating they may come across, while children should realize that parents may not mean anything negative and they don't have to be so intimidated by every remark.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

Thank you so much for undertaking this project; it's so appreciated. Allow me to share my thoughts and experiences with children-in-law in the hope that I can offer something helpful to others as well.

As a long-time follower of yours, my first advice is to read your book and determine your son- or daughter-in-law's personality. That will help you gauge what to say and what to expect and help you avoid negative reactions. It sure helped me a lot.

Aside from that, my message is: your son-in-law or daughter-in-law wants acceptance and is naturally on guard to feel any hint of criticism. Sometimes, when the older and wiser father-in-law wants to convey that he feels a mistake has been made, he resorts to hinting. That's a cardinal error. Your subject will always catch your hint (often even when you don't mean to hint!) and will feel uncomfortable or worse. It won't encourage them to change. It will make them complain to their spouse and strain their relationship. On the other hand, if you refrain from hints, there's no danger of them interpreting something you said as a hint.

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

EMBRACE YOUR NEW CHILD

Everyone wants to feel accepted and respected for who they are. And this need is amplified when an in-law child takes their first tentative strides to join a new family. Even a subtle undercurrent of rejection can hurt a vulnerable, intimidated child-in-law.

Sometimes, parents think that by virtue of marrying off a child, they've acquired another child (the in-law) to educate. Yes, a parent may do a thorough detective job when looking for the perfect *shidduch* for their child, but when the right one comes around, they should embrace the new child fully and show them that they trust them and accept them. A small negative com-



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

ment or unsolicited advice can contradict their most basic need of total acceptance.

Some may argue, *What do you mean? My son-in-law is still young and needs to be guided!* They may be young, and they may need to be guided, but if they don't want to be guided, you're not only wasting time and energy by imposing on them, you're probably also putting a strain on the relationship.

If your in-law children want to hear from you and learn from your advice, they'll let you know. When they do reach out, be polite and gentle in your communication. It's crucial, even then, to be cautious with how you say something.

When you know someone is comfortable and willing to hear from you, it's best to do it in a natural, gentle yet open way. Being roundabout, especially when the advice wasn't asked for, is not a good idea and should be avoided, as I will explain soon.

If they don't want to be guided, you're not only wasting time and energy by imposing on them, you're probably also putting a strain on the relationship

Disagree

HANDLE WITH CARE

I feel gratified that the writer suggests that people read my book. While I agree that it can be helpful, and *baruch Hashem* it has helped many, I don't think it's necessary if you're ready to err on the side of caution. For those who aren't great at being cautious on their own, it might be helpful to read the book before trying their luck and damaging the relationship.

I'll add a word of caution, though: If you do read my book, or any book about understanding people and personalities, keep the information to yourself so you can better deal with those around you. Going around and telling people that you understand them very well and that you know how they think and feel is often unappreciated. Many people dislike being labeled an extrovert/introvert or one with high self-esteem/low self-esteem and so on. Be careful with what you do with your newfound knowledge.

One of the things that someone reading my book will learn is that you should never fight sensitivity. That's part of what this question was about. When someone throws a hint and the other person gets offended, very often the hinter will think that they've gone overboard. "Come on, why did you take it personally?" They try to fight with the person's sensitive personality and sometimes even say it clearly: "Get over it and grow up already." That is never smart.

Some people try to undo sensitivity in younger children, assuming it's possible because the child is still so young. Others challenge sensitivity in older people, thinking that the person is

mature enough to understand that there's nothing to be offended about and see the situation more logically. These are big mistakes. Natural hypersensitivity doesn't evaporate just like that.

It's wonderful when people are willing to work on themselves and try to overcome their negative feelings, but you can't change others. Any criticism you give or imply may be taken the wrong way and hurt them instead of getting them to improve, and it will affect your relationship with them as well.

This reminds me of...

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

I mentioned that it's not your place to educate married children. However, there is a form of education that you should always use, and this doesn't only involves your children; it affects everyone around you. And that is your personal example.

Even with younger kids, this is the best and most effective form of education. However, being that you're not always in the same situation as they are, you can't always set the example for what they should be doing, for example at school or at bedtime. Therefore, there's a lot of teaching and even dictating or clarifying what they should be doing. However, the older the child gets, the less that works. And it definitely doesn't belong in your relationship with your children-in-law (who, by the way, have parents of their own).

If you're concerned that they still have to learn, you can teach them by serving as a positive role model. It's very important to take that seriously, because this form of osmosis is natural; it's not optional. Just watching you influences them, hopefully for the better.

When your married children come into your home, they watch you closely. They're learning how to talk to their spouse. They're learning how to lead a Shabbos meal. They're learning how to greet people and how to be *ehrlich* at home, etc. Think about it. Are you giving off the right impression?

This subtle *chinuch* has a lasting impact. You may have the option to preach, but you'll have a more effective impact and influence by showing the right example than by commenting or being critical.

Another form of *chinuch* that's always called for and is also effective is genuine compliments. Instead of hinting where people are mistaken, compliment where they're successful. This is a method that works well with children too, but with adults, it's one of the only things you could and should do.

Some people misuse the idea of compliments and talk about the positive just to imply what they want, such as, "Last week, you managed to deal with your daughter's tantrum so well." Are you hinting that you're unhappy with how it was done this week?

A genuine compliment, not a hint, simply promotes the good and helps someone feel acknowledged, respected, and appreciated for what they do well. When there are no secret intentions or underlying negativity, a compliment encourages, educates, and spreads goodwill. Generally, when you're sincere and genuine, people won't misinterpret your intentions or think you're hinting at things you're not.

You may have the option to preach, but you'll have a more effective impact and influence by showing the right example than by commenting or being critical

I would add...

TRUTH BE TOLD

This topic reminds me of the story of an old Polish Yid standing nervously in line at Ellis Island, hoping to be allowed entry into the *goldene medinah*.

The immigration official asks R' Yankel, "How old are you?" but he doesn't respond. He asks again, "How old are you? What's your age?" And he just stands there, looking like he's lost in thought or pondering the question.

The guy behind him whispers to him in Yiddish, "Yankel, they're asking '*Vi alt bist di*?" thinking he doesn't understand English.

To which Yankel replies, "I know. I'm trying to figure out if I should tell them that I'm older than I am or younger than I am."

"Why don't you just tell them how old you are?"



Yankel grins and says sheepishly, "Oh, I didn't think of that."

So often, people tend to look for the roundabout way of communicating and don't realize the benefit of being straightforward.

In general, the idea of hinting at things instead of being straightforward isn't a great one, not when dealing with your children, your spouse, or anyone else for that matter. While hinting has its benefits, as the message gets across without negative connotations and hurt feelings, it can be akin to trying to kill a mosquito by using the long straw and aiming WD40 into its microscopic mouth. If it works, you're a winner and don't have to deal with getting the dead mosquito remnants off the wall, but what are the chances that you'll manage to accomplish your goal?

Similarly, if you give too small of a hint, you'll become frustrated by the lack of response (and tempted to get more assertive and explicit). Giving a less subtle hint may hurt the other person, who may interpret it in a way that's even sharper than your intended message. What are the chances that you'll get it just right?

When criticism is clearly warranted and in place, whether it's because someone wants to hear from you or because it's obvious that something should be said and you're in the position to say it, then by all means, go ahead and say it. Of course, you should make sure to say it in the nicest way possible so as not to hurt anyone's feelings. But why hint? And if you're not certain that it'll be taken well, most often, the best thing to do is to keep quiet.

This advice isn't just for criticism. If you think someone is open to hearing your opinion about something sensitive or personal, say it clearly and gently. And if you're not sure, it's best to skip it until you feel more comfortable.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

New message

To: rabbigruen@thevoiceoflakewood.com

Subject: personal experience

While you're on the topic of accepting children and in-law children, how about you address the topic of children and grandchildren visiting?

Most of us love it when the kids come over, and it's important to make them feel comfortable. Here are some pointers that I feel people should keep in mind:

- Never pressure your children to join you for Shabbos, Yom Tov, etc. The less pressure they feel, the more they'll want to come.
- When the grandchildren act like kids and behave badly, the in-law child will feel that there are many eyes on him or her and feel guilty. Try to make light of it and say, "Kids will be kids; I acted the same way," or something like that.

Send

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

THE COMFORT ZONE

If you want to build a warm, loving relationship with anyone, making the other party feel comfortable in your presence is the first step. This is true regarding any relationship, especially the more sensitive ones, such as between parent-in-law and child-in-law.

Some are naturally adept at playing the part of the gracious host(ess) and have a way of making everyone feel at ease. If you aren't blessed with this knack, don't sit around and beat yourself up about it, nor deny it and blame others. It's possible that you mean well but somehow, your overtures may come across as pressurizing or intimidating. It's a good idea to put thought into what others are seeing and feeling, regardless of your harmless intentions.

What makes it trickier is that what one child takes the wrong way, another appreciates. A benign question like "What are those pimples on Chaim's face?" may be interpreted as an accusation or cross-examination of your child's parenting abilities, but others may appreciate that you noticed and are showing concern. Similarly, a comment that makes light of their child's misbehavior, as the writer is suggesting, can be appreciated by one and seen as intimidating by another, who sees this as a clear sign of you noticing everything.

When it comes to relationships, it's not enough to mean well or even to do what the book says. If you want to achieve the optimal connection, make sure to tweak your messages to ensure user-friendliness on



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

FACILITATED BY CHAVA BEER

your end and on the receiving end. Don't make the mistake of wondering why someone misinterpreted your comments or blaming them for being too sensitive.

When it comes to relationships, it's not enough to mean well or even to do what the book says

Making others feel comfortable in no way implies that parents need to fall prey to the whims of their children and grandchildren. You don't have to tolerate whatever goes on when your children and grandchildren spend time in your home. If they're breaking things and you feel that the parents should be supervising them better, you can and should find a respectful and gentle way to bring up the issue. Doing so is a favor to both you and your child/in-law. It would be a shame to allow the resentment to build up, resulting in fewer invitations and less time spent together.

There's still a time and place to nicely yet assertively say what needs to be said. Make sure to be and sound reasonable, but don't hesitate to gently say, "Rivka, please make sure your children don't touch the glasses," or better yet, "Rivka, can you put the glasses on a higher shelf while you're here? I'll feel better knowing that they won't get broken."

It's all about balance. Knowing what to overlook and being a bit more tolerant can do a lot to make your children feel relaxed and comfortable when they come over. Additionally, make sure that you stay in a comfortable zone as well so that you can appreciate their presence and they can feel appreciated.

Disagree

EXCEPTIONS TO THE NO-PRESSURE RULE

The writer suggests that if you don't pressure your children to join for Shabbos, they'll want to come more often. While it's true that less pressure attracts people and makes them feel comfortable, it's not always so straightforward.

Some people need many invitations to make them feel like they're wanted and needed, and not hearing it enough makes them question your interest in having them. Others are even more complicated and will only be tempted to come if they know that they'll get VIP treatment along with that perfect balance of attention and privacy to make them comfortable. It isn't always simple.

The fact that some people are just a bit complicated often makes parents become self-critical and blame themselves for not getting it right. As much as they try to make their children feel comfortable, it doesn't work, and they keep on trying. Sometimes it's the child, sometimes it's the child-in-law, and sometimes it's the dynamics of the child's marriage. I've seen this many times.

Parents won't necessarily always get it right, and sometimes they may never get it right. One-on-one guidance from an outside party may help these parents figure out if and how they can best relate to a challenging or self-entitled child. So while the no-pressure rule works for many, some people need a different approach. The main thing is to try your best to do what works for you and your child and to remember that sometimes trying is all you can do.

I would add...

ACCEPTANCE: IT'S A MESSAGE FOR YOU

Each topic needs to be addressed from multiple angles. When people point fingers at the parents, it's good to notice the children's part, and vice versa.

DE

I was recently talking to a *bachur* who's part of a group of older boys in their post-yeshivah years who get together once a week to relax. They often invite different speakers to address them with words of inspiration. Once, they asked a man who's involved in helping parents of kids at risk to address their group. Knowing that the overarching message he is so passionate about is how parents should accept children despite their challenges and their choice of lifestyle, they assumed he'd discuss something along those lines.

To their shock, the man sat down and told the group, "I'm not sure what you were expecting to hear from me. When I talk to parents, I encourage them to accept children no matter what they do and wherever life's path has taken them. To you, however, I'm saying that you have to accept your parents. Your parents aren't robots, and they aren't perfect. They make mistakes and may be unrealistic in their expectations. But just like parents have to know to accept children, children have to know to accept parents."

The boys were taken aback by this new twist on acceptance, yet they were impacted by its brilliance.

When people start demanding acceptance of each other, no one gains. Acceptance is to be granted, not demanded. Parents should be welcoming, gracious, and pleasant to be around, and children should be understanding as well. Obsessing over how unaccepting your parents are and constantly noticing how they notice too much isn't helpful. When at your parents' home, it's important to remember that you aren't in your own territory and your hosts have opinions, likes, and dislikes too.

When people start demanding acceptance of each other, no one gains. Acceptance is to be granted, not demanded

Whichever end of this relationship you find yourself on, it's good to remember how much room there is for acceptance and consideration. It would be a shame for a lack of the correct perspective to cause you to spend less time with family.

This reminds me of...

SETTING THE RIGHT TONE

Back in my yeshivah days, I was invited to someone's house for the Friday-night meal. My host told me that his son-in-law, who would also be joining for the *seudah*, would walk me to his home. On the way, we bumped into an older single who was clearly troubled. The interesting fellow asked my host's son-in-law a question and got an answer that he felt was disrespectful.

Mortally insulted, the fellow began harassing this *yungerman*, and he apologized for the disrespect. But it didn't end there. The young man began heaping "blessings" on the *yungerman*. As we continued on our way, he followed us, continuing his litany of insults and comments: "You embarrassed me; Hashem will repay you for what you did," and so on.

It was getting uncomfortable, but the *yungerman* looked unfazed. To be honest, the fellow's accusations did have some truth to them, though any levelheaded person would voice them in a lower tone and let it go.

As we approached the father-in-law's home, I thought, *Uh-oh. This is going to get ugly. Imagine, the son-in-law walking into his father-in-law's house with this guy bashing him out loud.*

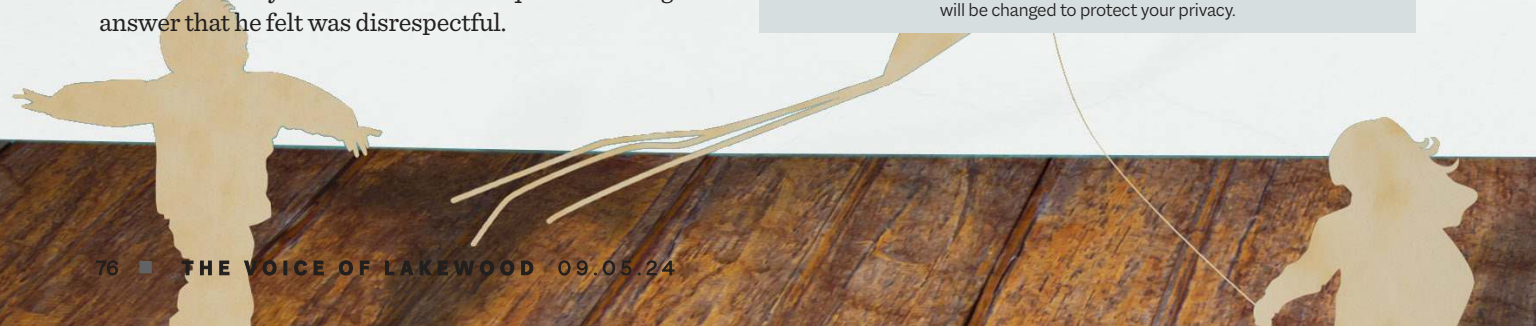
I felt very uncomfortable, but the *yungerman* didn't seem nervous. We walked up to the door of our host, and sure enough, the fellow walked in right behind us. Right away, he told the father-in-law about how his son-in-law had embarrassed him. After hearing him out, the father-in-law invited him in for the meal. The fellow stayed for the *seudah* and continued ranting and raving about the "crime" the son-in-law had committed.

I remember being flabbergasted, not so much by the father-in-law's cool way of dealing with the guy but by the comfort level this son-in-law had in his in-laws' home. If the son-in-law could so confidently stride into the house with this guy bashing him from behind, he clearly knew that his father-in-law would take it well.

Those who create an atmosphere of security and comfort in their home will have it serve as a buffer even in difficult situations. When the energy in the home is positive, people feel free to be themselves and aren't afraid of making a mistake.

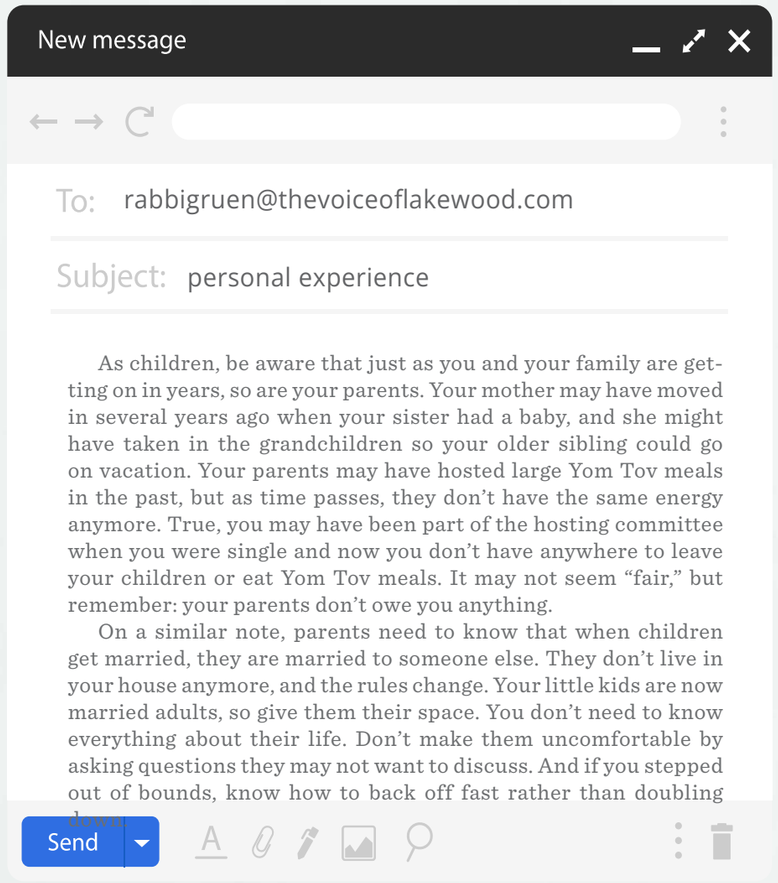
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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP



UPGRADE

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

CONSIDERATION—ON PRINCIPLE

Consideration is the foundation for all good relationships, and the parent-child relationship is no exception. This means being generally considerate as well as having your eyes open enough to notice when situations change and require more or new consideration. Whether it's your parents who are aging or your children who are no longer your little kids, please be considerate of those facts.

Consideration isn't just about the general age and stage, it's about being considerate of people's individual limitations too. Even if you're the oldest in the family and got married when your mother was 43, who says she's capable of serving you a five-course supper every time you come? People have different capabilities and temperaments that fluctuate over time. Your mother may be dealing with some stress in her life and may not be capable of catering to you right now. Even if it was okay that you came last week, it's not a given that you can come again this week.

Being considerate of these factors when they affect us so closely is far from easy. It isn't like empathizing with a neighbor or friend, where all it takes is a listening ear and a "tsk, tsk." Being sensitive to the changes in your parents' or children's lives demands giving up and giving in, which is often painful, difficult, and challenging.

People sometimes mention certain principles regarding the parent-married child relationship with indignation that makes these *shittos* sound convincingly true. They don't realize that some of these principles are merely an outgrowth of their emotions and desires, and being considerate of others can help overcome this narrative.

For example, Chaim might be disappointed that his parents won't be hosting him for Sukkos (because they chose to go to a hotel) and emphatically state, "Parents should host their children for Yom Tov instead of running away to hotels!" Does he truly believe that, or is it his disappointment that makes him feel so?

Similarly, Mrs. Weiss finds out (only two weeks before the summer!) that her daughter plans to go to a bungalow colony, and she hisses, "Children should let their parents know when things are happening in their lives." Again, could it be her turbulent emotions that stand behind this principle? Would a bit of consideration for the stresses her daughter is dealing with shed light on what's really going on?

It isn't easy to be considerate of another's situation and perspective, yet it's surely a key ingredient to a positive and satisfying relationship.

If the only impact of reading this article is that you feel entitled to more consideration, you've defeated its purpose

Yes, but...

SHOW IT; DON'T ASK FOR IT

When discussing consideration, or any admirable trait for that matter, it's important to stress that these virtues are for you to give to others, not for you to demand for yourself.

It's easy for children and parents to notice where the other is lacking in consideration. If the only impact of reading this article is that you feel entitled to more consideration, you've defeated its purpose. So while we should all be considerate of each other, awareness of this topic should never increase resentment or justify bad feelings.

Along the same line, the writer mentions that if parents stepped out of bounds, they should know how to back off fast instead of doubling down. Sometimes, when children feel that their parents stepped out of bounds, they feel justified to wait with folded arms and pursed lips for the parents to back off, because that's what parents are supposed to do, right?

What they fail to realize is that the parents' actions are the parents' responsibility, and getting them to change is an exercise in futility at best and a recipe for heartache at worst. Be considerate of the fact that they, like you, are human and make mistakes. There's no need to resort to anger or hostility and certainly never to sever a relationship because of a misdeed of a parent. Most often, there's a gentle way to discuss the issue when necessary. Find gentle and forgiving words to express your feelings about what you perceive as an invasion of privacy so that it can be avoided in the future.

Another "yes, but" when it comes to consideration is to realize that extending yourself beyond your comfort zone doesn't mean that you can expect others to reciprocate. The fact that elderly parents are willing to overexert themselves and host a family for the Seder without asking for help doesn't obligate children with large families and perhaps marrieds of their own to take them up on it. Nor does your willingness to plan your out-of-town *simchah* per your parents' schedule obligate them to make the long trip.

Everyone's situations are changing at once, and consideration means noticing and taking into account the evolving phases of life.

Leaving is the only thing you should do before being told. If someone has to ask (or hint) you to leave, it's a bit too late

I would add...

ON BEING A GRACIOUS GUEST

The topic of consideration plays a large role when it comes to being hosted. It's not black and white, and it's impossible to spell out hard and fast rules, but one needs to turn up their antennae about when to come and when to go.

I've heard people complain that their parents or married children come over for supper and then linger for another two hours while the gracious hosts are trying to clean the house, put kids to bed, or just enjoy some private time. The same is with overstaying after a wonderful Shabbos, sticking around for *melaveh malkah* and hinting that it's easier to travel back on Sunday morning instead. Stay only as long as the host is comfortable having you.

Especially when parents visit their children, who most certainly love when they visit (and appreciate the chocolate that comes along with it), it's important to know when to leave because as children, they must be as respectful as possible and not even hint that they would like their parents to leave.

Chazal teach us, "Everything that a host tells you, you should do, aside from leaving." I once heard this explained as follows: Leaving is the only thing you should do before being told. If someone has to ask (or hint) you to leave, it's a bit too late.

Also, be considerate of the fact that although your son may enjoy a long visit, his wife might be getting a bit antsy. And when you visit your parents, your mother may have all the time and patience for you, but your father may be getting stressed-out sooner.

This reminds me of...

GENIUS IN KINDNESS

I'm reminded of an example of consideration and thoughtfulness that really impressed me. A man whose parents were getting older noticed that it was becoming a burden on them to host his family. But he knew that if he would come over less, they might feel bad about it. What could he do if his parents preferred to be the givers, but he really didn't want to overexert them?

He came up with an idea. From time to time, he would invite himself over to his parents' for Shabbos. Pretending that his wife happened to have already cooked for Shabbos before deciding that they preferred to go away, the family would come and bring food with them. It was a win-win scenario, with his parents feeling good about hosting while he made sure that they weren't overworking themselves.

What a brilliant way of showing consideration to others! It's wonderful when you can be considerate of somebody's limitations without making them even feel that it's demanding major consideration on your part.

It can take consideration to show consideration in the best way possible.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION:

When my kids were growing up, they didn't enjoy visiting my in-laws. The meals were formal, and my in-laws expected a lot from them. Now that I'm a grandmother myself, I really want my children and grandchildren to enjoy coming to us. I work very hard to create a warm and relaxed environment.

There are two things I'm wondering. First, even though I try so hard to make them comfortable, some of the children don't seem to enjoy coming. Some of them hardly ever come, saying they prefer to stay home, while others do come but seem unhappy when they're here. I can't figure out why. Will they just be unhappy no matter what, or is there something I'm doing wrong?

Second, with some kids I seem to have succeeded too well in making them comfortable. They come very often, drop in unannounced, and stay for a very long time. I'm happy they're so comfortable, but it seems to be a bit much. This daughter and daughter-in-law are the sensitive type, and I'm hesitant to say anything for fear of hurting their feelings. How I can deal with this?

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

1. *Learning from experience*

Like so many other things in life, we're expected to look back, learn from experience, and avoid repeating past mistakes. At the same time, we may never get it 100 percent right. It's amazing how despite everything you've gone through and everything you've learned, new issues, new mistakes, and new challenges will inevitably come up. You may think you've seen everything growing up and when raising your own children, and then your grandchildren come along with a whole new set of personalities and needs. It's not a simple.

Baking a cake is simple because there are so few steps, and building a spaceship is complicated because there are so many, yet both have a predictable outcome. Raising children, on the other hand, can't be pinned down to steps, and the outcome is almost never predictable. There are so many unknown factors and so many more variables that affect the success you're striving for.

Parents want to do the best they can when raising their children, and they often look at their own experiences to guide them. But saying that life experience is the best teacher can cause its own issues. This occurs when people tend to go to the opposite extreme based on a negative experience.

Parents often look at mistakes that other people made and then try to do the exact opposite, hoping that will bring them success. We assume that if our parents got it wrong, then we need to behave very differently. And yet, these people often find that this new approach brings different challenges.

A simple example: Growing up, Yaakov's parents were very on top of his schoolwork, and he hated it. They were always checking to see which tests he had coming up, talking to his teachers, and making sure he did his homework. When raising his own children, Yaakov took a very hands-off approach with regard to schoolwork, making sure that home was a safe place that always felt good to be in and leaving academics for the better part of the day, when a child is in school. But he soon discovered that his children were struggling in school and needed assistance.

Parents often look at mistakes that other people made and then try to do the exact opposite, hoping that will bring them success

You often see that the child who resented a long *davening* now attends a short *minyan*, and the child who grew up in a no-rules, open-technology household raises his children in a stricter household. And then, interestingly, the next generation swings in the other direction, being more like their grandparents.

We can't always outsmart or overcome challenges that others have struggled with. Of course, we must try and put effort into our parenting and do the best we can, but the correct method isn't necessarily to be so drastically different. And even if it is a good method, it may not work for your children.

I once heard from a wise man that when you're young, you think you know better than your parents; when you grow older you realize that they aren't less smart than you; and when you grow even older, you realize that they are smarter than you.

I commend your quest for a better way of hosting kids and grandkids than that which you've seen at home, and I feel bad that you're not getting it exactly right yet, but that's often how it is. There may never be a perfect way to do things.

2. *The perfect fit*

A warm and relaxed environment is appealing to most people. Creating such a family atmosphere is usually what draws people to one's home. Generally speaking, you're on the road to the best outcome. However, not everything works for everyone, and what one person loves, another person may get nervous from.

Your warm and relaxed atmosphere may, for example, cause your child to feel that her kids get too wild at Bubby's house because anything goes. They might not appreciate that timing in this relaxed environment is a bit unpredictable and no one knows when to expect the *seudah* to begin. Maybe they feel uncomfortable that they're being treated like family and not as guests. Never forget that different strokes work for different folks.

People are people, and you won't be able to make everyone happy all the time.

You can still try to get it right with everyone, and sometimes by putting in some thought and creativity, you can come up with ideas that work for each family. Maybe invite them with the kind of company they like best, or try other ideas to make coming more attractive to them. But if this is too draining or impossible, don't give up. If they don't enjoy coming for Shabbos, find other ways to connect with them. You might feel that your way is best, but don't push them to come by telling them that.

Most importantly, if, for whatever reason, you can't get everyone to want to come over, don't take it personally. Remember that there are people who appreciate staying home, and it doesn't reflect on you at all. There may also be personal challenges that prevent them from coming. There's no magic formula that will work for everyone, and you may not be capable of getting it right to the degree of making everyone happy at the same time in your house. And that's okay.

3. *When to say and when not to say*

About those children of yours who make themselves too comfortable and you seem to be afraid to address it, I'd like to mention two points.

1. Almost anything can be said if it's said at the proper time and in the right way. Definitely don't say anything when they're currently over for a visit and the kids are acting up. Instead, pick a moment when the issue isn't relevant and is therefore less emotionally challenging, when both of you are calm and not stressed.

UPGRADE

RABBI SHIMON GRUEN

There are many tips when it comes to communicating a challenging message so it goes over well, and I'll mention a few briefly. Make it clear that it's not personal and doesn't reflect on your child. Validate their feelings and say what you think they might be thinking or wanting to say, such as "I know you might feel this isn't fair, and I see that you try really hard..." This helps them feel less defensive or tempted to explain their view to you. Clarify that it's a personal preference and not something they could have known on their own or something they're wrong about.

It would be a shame not to say something that should be said. Many people get so caught up in their fear of saying something that they build up resentment and cause avoidable, unnecessary damage to their relationships.

2. While that's true for most cases, there are times when saying something will cause harm either because the topic is too delicate or because of the sensitivity of the recipient. That's when you need to decide if it's worth it for you to say something unpleasant and deal with the fallout or if you would rather just keep quiet.

If you're clearly being taken advantage of, or if you can't handle the building resentment—which is bound to cause an explosion—it may make sense to talk it out in the best way possible even if unpleasant feelings may ensue. However, sometimes, you may choose to stay silent and accept the situation because maintaining the relationship with the other person is more important to you. So while most children will be okay when you say something, for those who won't, you might choose to just accept the situation.

Acceptance isn't easy, but when done right, it will resolve a lot of bad feelings and spare you the pain of high expectations and constant disappointments. Acceptance doesn't mean a decision to be continually aggravated. Rather, it's the acknowledgment that the situation isn't what you want, but because you know that you can't change it, you choose to work with it and make the best of it. You choose to not say anything.

Life is about choices, and it's up to you to decide how you want to deal with this uncomfortable situation. Think about it, perhaps have someone help you decide which path to take, and proceed with confidence and a good feeling.

Visiting your parents, spending time with them, and bringing your children to them isn't all about you and your children

4. *On the other end...*

I'd like to take the liberty of addressing any children out there who are reading this.

Visiting your parents, spending time with them, and bringing your children to them isn't all about you and your children. It shouldn't be done solely based on your comfort and interests or on whether your parents succeed in making you feel perfectly comfortable. They aren't angels, and they may not be getting it right all the time (or ever, for that matter). Connecting with them and bringing them pleasure is your obligation and privilege.

A veteran *maggid shiur* told me that a student of his from many years before approached him and asked him what his secret was. How did he manage to raise such a big family of wonderful, successful children? He was a bit taken aback by the question and said that honestly, he never gave it much thought and attributed his *nachas* to Hashem. But after his student kept pushing him, he said that he would ask his children what they thought it was.

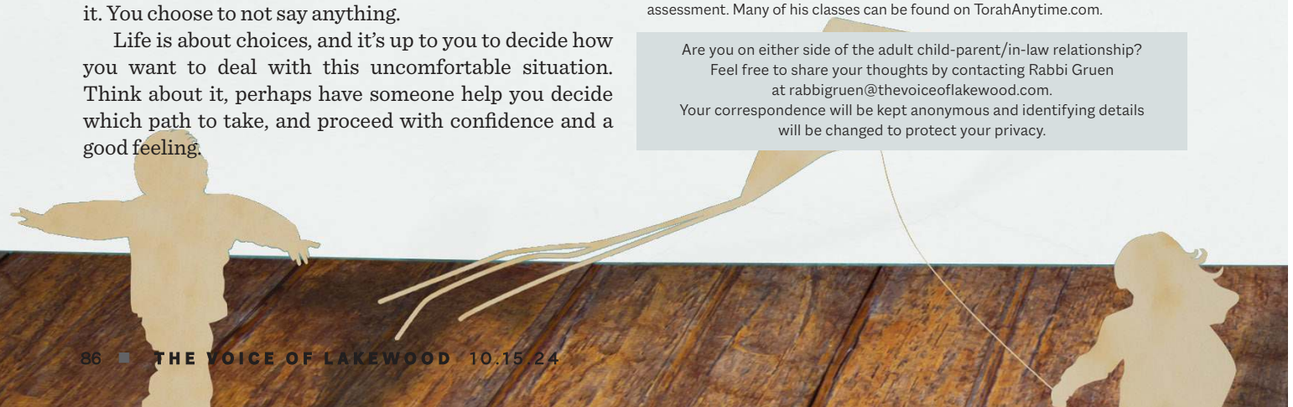
When he asked his daughter, a *rebbetzin* herself, if she had any idea, she responded right away that she did. Seeing the way her father hosted, respected, and treated his in-laws with such devotion and respect left a lasting impression on the children, and that, in her opinion, was the secret ingredient.

Today's children often complain about their parents and discuss what their parents could have done better. Yes, parents should do all they can to make their children feel good and keep the connection. But at the same time, it's important to remember that children are children and parents are parents. And especially when the question isn't about hosting parents respectfully but parents trying their best to host and attract their children, the respect toward parents shouldn't depend on their success at saying and doing the right things.



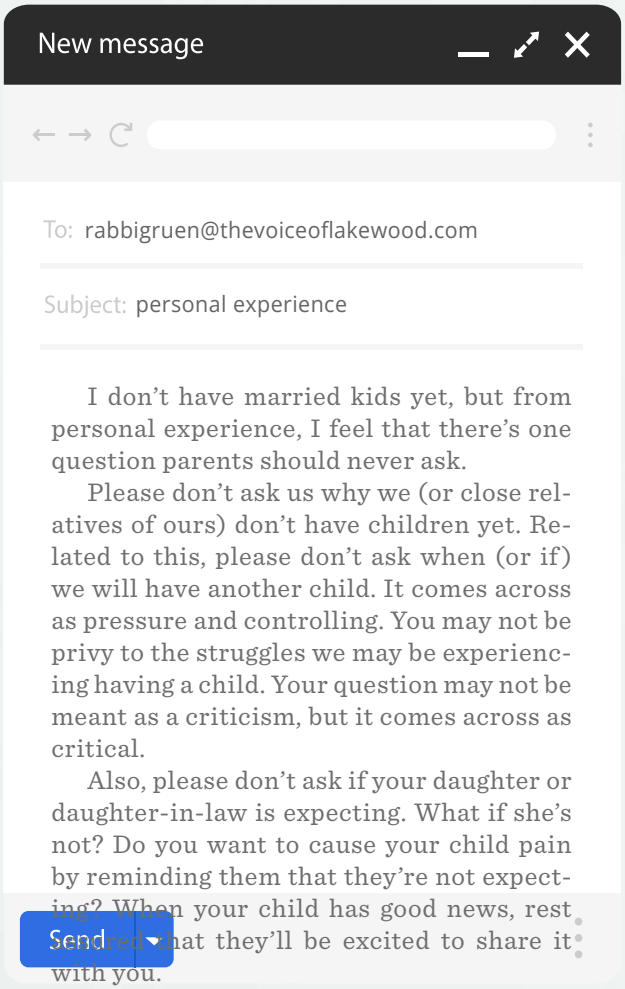
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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP



RABBI GRUEN'S TAKE

Agree

Oh yes, parents must realize that despite their desire to hear good news, this is a place where they need to respect their children's privacy. It's a particularly sensitive topic. For one, it's very personal, as people don't talk about this with just anyone. In addition, it's an area that people feel very helpless in. Remarking on it just deepens that feeling. This is true both when asking children about their status as well as asking them about the status of their own children, for those who are up to that stage.

Besides the pressure or controlling feelings you mentioned, many comments on this topic are downright inappropriate. People shouldn't need to be told to respect someone's privacy when it comes to saying things that are obviously not an open topic to discuss. I understand that parents may be concerned; it doesn't change much, though.

Bringing up this topic might also cause the married child to think, *This is all you see about me? This is all you care about?* No one wants to cause such feelings.

While people often ask uncomfortable questions such as how much someone spent on something, why they didn't come to a wedding, or where their spouse is, the pain of such questions fades with time. However, the pain of questions about



RABBI SHIMON GRUEN
FACILITATED BY M. BREJT

fertility and childbearing usually lingers long after the conversation is over. It may never go away.

Respecting people's privacy is always important, but in this case, I would add an extra measure of caution.

People shouldn't need to be told to respect someone's privacy when it comes to saying things that are obviously not an open topic to discuss

Yes, but...

It's nice to hear you say that as soon as a child has good news, they'll immediately run to the phone and excitedly inform their parents. Unfortunately, this isn't necessarily true. First, everyone has different ideas about when is the right time to share good news. Often this is based on Torah guidance and specific opinions on the topic. The child's opinion may not be the same as their parents'.

Second, those who waited longer for good news are often so consumed with their own agony that they don't realize how others may be feeling about the same issue. And when there's good news, they're so overwhelmed by their own emotions of relief and excitement that they may not realize how desperately their parents are waiting for good news.

Interestingly, the exact opposite may be true as well. Some young couples might not have been nearly as stressed as their parents and are oblivious to the fact that their parents are sitting on the edges of their seats, biting their nails each time they call, hoping for some good news. Children don't mean any harm, but it's important to clarify that by not sharing good news right away, they may be causing unnecessary angst to their parents. They care, they *daven*, and they want to hear. In general, it's important to make the effort to share all good news and nice feedback whenever you can.

There's another point that's relevant before there's good news that will "surely be immediately shared," as you mentioned. Even considerate parents who aren't inquiring in any way would surely appreciate knowing that their children are being taken care of. Whether children are waiting for children or are dealing with any other issue, parents naturally worry. Without sharing details, just letting the parents know that their children are getting the necessary help and have an address to turn to would be comforting to the parents.

Whether to share sensitive information is a decision each couple needs to make on its own. Husbands and wives often have different opinions on how much they should share about a challenge they're dealing with. When deciding when and how much to share, it's important to take into account how much comfort parents derive from knowing that their children are taken care of, not because they're nosy or because they don't trust their children, but because they love and care for their children, even if they may not express it that way.



I would add...

There's an important caveat I'd like to add here. Yes, parents should be sensitive. No, they shouldn't ask overly personal questions. Yes, by getting involved they can cause a lot of pain. No, not everything needs to be shared. It's all true. But none of this ever justifies reacting inappropriately to a hurtful or insensitive comment.

Recently, I heard about a couple who haven't been to visit the husband's parents in close to five years. Why? Because on their last visit, the mother made a hurtful comment. I'm sure it was hurtful, regardless of whether it was intentional, but the mother-in-law apologized many times since then. Alienating parents, even just temporarily, because they meddled isn't the right way to respond. You can't use parents stepping out of their roles as a reason to be disrespectful or cut them off. It's hard to be the one who's big and mature and puts aside the pain, but that's your role.

It's hard to be the one who's big and mature and puts aside the pain, but that's your role

This doesn't mean you need to allow meddling. When your mother calls and asks if your eight-year-old son is going to therapy for his social skills, you don't need to hang up the phone or point out how wrong or out of place you feel she is. Instead, you can say in a polite and respectful tone of voice, "Mommy, I really appreciate your concern. I know how much you care for us. I'm not comfortable discussing the details, but it's being taken care of. Thank you for caring."

It's often easier to make someone feel stupid for addressing something you don't like, but it's definitely more respectful and helpful to take it on yourself and say, "I really don't want to discuss this."

In any case, to share nothing because of the one topic you'd rather keep private is usually a mistake and generally unnecessary. Parents want to feel involved in their children's lives, and it's important to make the distinction between sharing some information and sharing everything. Allow your parents to be a part of your life while knowing what to keep private and what not.

This reminds me of...

It's never pleasant to pay a *shivah* call, but I'm reminded of a visit I paid to a *shivah* house that was sadder than the typical. The parents were sitting *shivah* for a child who had been found dead in another country, and it was a very uncomfortable, awkward situation with unanswered questions in the air. While most visitors were sensitive, it was clear that some just didn't know what to say.

The father was repeating some of the insensitive remarks or questions people had mentioned. He related that someone asked, "How did your son get kosher food in that country?" He had been so taken aback by the inappropriateness of the question that he'd blurted out, "You're the winner! You asked the stupidest question I heard all week!"

Most people know to avoid inappropriate or private questions. However, parents, sometimes due to their age and stage, other times due to their emotional involvement, and yet other times due to their feelings of entitlement regarding their children, sometimes miss the boat with this one.

This isn't only about having children. Every child has different issues they don't feel comfortable discussing with their parents. For some, it's *shalom bayis*; for others it's their children's success in school, and for yet others it's mental health issues. Parents, please don't take it personally. They love you and they know you love them, yet they have their comfort level, which should be regarded with the sensitivity it deserves.

By being more sensitive to each other, the bonds will be tighter, and hopefully children will feel more comfortable sharing the most they can.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

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QUESTION:

My parents have a real open house—people are always coming and going and kids drop by at all hours. Growing up, my grandparents lived nearby and were frequent visitors to my and my cousin's homes. We were one big happy family.

When I was still a *bachur*, one of my older brothers got married, and we quickly realized that his wife was very stiff. She couldn't handle all the comings and goings and wanted people to call her before visiting her house. I felt bad for my brother and also for my parents, who ended up with a strained relationship with her.

Then I got married, and my wife is a wonderful hostess, but she gets flustered by uninvited visits. I tried reassuring her that my parents aren't judgmental and they don't care how clean the house is, but she still gets really stressed. During the week it's not so bad and she usually handles it, but on Shabbos, my parents sometimes walk over while she's sleeping, and we sit together and have a good time. When she finds out, she gets upset. "How could you do that? How can you host when I'm not there?" she says.

I explain that I want a casual, warm relationship with my parents and that she shouldn't feel she has to host, but she asks me to wake her when they come.

Now, every Shabbos, she's tense, worried my parents will come, and if they do, she's even more tense. I keep telling her they don't care but it's important to my parents (and to me) that our relationship is open and connected. How do I handle this? Do I speak to my parents or my wife?

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

1. *Two-way consideration*

Truthfully, I think this is more of a *shalom bayis* question than a parent-child one, but let's start with the parent-child aspect, which is our main objective in this column.

The common theme in many Upgrade articles is the idea of consideration: parents being considerate of children and children being considerate of parents. It's clear that this situation requires consideration on both ends.

We'll start with what I think is the more obvious side: parents should always be considerate of married children before visiting unexpectedly.

If you're a parent who's okay with having an open home, that's wonderful. But even if your family is used to this closeness, don't impose this visiting style on your children-in-law. It's important to realize that they come from different backgrounds and cultures, each with their own attitude and personality.

I don't mean to imply that these parents are inconsiderate. There are people who don't ask before visiting not because they're inconsiderate, but because they're more spontaneous people, as is the case here. But the parents do need to know: it's fine for you to be that way, yet you can't expect others to operate the same way.



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And don't assume that your daughter-in-law is okay with it because she and your son haven't said otherwise. Err on the side of caution. It almost never hurts to give notice before popping in.

It's on each of us to work on our own end and not on what the other person should be doing

Interestingly, erring on the side of caution also takes consideration. It doesn't mean that you say you'll come just because you might show up. Expecting someone who doesn't show up can be very upsetting to some people, and it sounds like this daughter-in-law would be bothered by this as well. She may have prepared a cake for the visit or given up a nap; she may be waiting for you.

We must be considerate about how others are feeling, what they expect, and what they appreciate.

At the same time, the daughter-in-law should be considerate of the parents' style and attitude and try to work with them as well as she can, even if unexpected visits to a less-than-perfect house irritate her. It so happens that usually, the pop-in kind of parents are the ones who care less about how the house looks and are in general lower-pressure people. But even if it weren't so, consideration is important.

To the daughter-in-law: we all have our own sizes of personal rubber bands which can stretch only a certain amount, but if at all possible, both for your in-laws' and for your husband's sake, try to stretch your rubber band just a little bit more to be understanding and accommodating of what's important to them and what they appreciate.

Consideration goes both ways. We should all be considerate of the people who care about us most. It's on each of us to work on our own end and not on what the other person should be doing.

2. Don't make it personal

Let's transition from the parent-child relationship to the husband-wife one, as this question connects the two. It's not uncommon for the relationship between parents and married children to affect *shalom bayis*.

While we discussed in the past how important it is for parents to never cause a strain on their children's marriage, it's on the couple as well to make sure the relationship with their parents isn't getting in their own way.

Every couple needs to learn that there are two ways to approach any stress, issue, or challenge: it can either be dealt with as an independent issue, or it can turn into a marriage issue. Problems can so easily roll over into the marriage and become what I call a "me-you" issue. *I want this, but you said that... Yeah, because you don't care, and last time I wanted, and then you did, and why when it's me not, and you always... Because you're not home enough... You never listen... You care more about your parents than about me...* (Sound familiar?)

A better way is to depersonalize the challenge and make sure that whenever you're talking about it, it's only about the issue as it is. Instead of creating stories about the problem, tackle the problem itself.

A conversation about the parents and when they come, how they come, the stress they cause, or whether they did or didn't notice the mess can quickly escalate. That's why it's so important for the couple in this scenario to make sure that his parents' visits never become a "me-you" issue. And the same is true for many of life's challenges: It's best to isolate and depersonalize the issue. Break it down and tackle it as a team.

It may not be easy to be so objective and technical when dealing with a challenging situation, but when you think about it objectively, is it all that complicated? Your wife gets stressed out about her



in-laws' visits, and you like when your parents come over. Okay, so far so good. This can be resolved by talking to your parents, by coming up with a schedule, by negotiating the details of hosting, or with another idea.

When you see it as an objective issue to solve together, there are so many possible solutions.

3. Solutions

One word that I get caught on is when people use the term "explain," when looking to resolve a conflict. Let me explain (pun intended) why I get stuck on this.

I hear it all the time. "How do I explain this to my teenager?" "Help me explain that to my wife." "I'm looking for the right way to explain to my employer that..."

"Did you try to explain this to them yet?"

"Oh, sure, a hundred times" is the most common answer.

So you're looking for the right explanation that's going to click, as if that's really what was missing. If you tried explaining something many times, I would assume that you said something sensible at least once.

Explaining to somebody why what they're feeling is wrong or why they should care less or respond differently is almost never helpful

Interpersonal challenges generally have nothing to do with logic and therefore won't be resolved with explanations. When people are aggravated, disturbed, hurt, or frustrated, it's emotional, not logical. Explaining to somebody why what they're feeling is wrong or why they should care less or respond differently is almost never helpful. Your explanation could be 100 percent correct, but you're using the wrong tool to resolve the issue.

Using logic and explanation to resolve an emotion is not only useless, it often aggravates things because now the other person feels more misunderstood and invalidated. And if your explanation is really good, they're probably feeling stupid too (something they won't admit but can sometimes project on you as *I know you think I'm stupid, unreasonable, stubborn, etc.*). The more explanations you come up with, the more defensive the person usually gets. Understand that the resistance is emotional.

You write that you tried explaining to your wife that your parents don't care how the house looks. It's reasonable to try explaining something once, just in case they're really missing something, or even twice. But if it's not going anywhere, drop it.

By the same token, I doubt you'll accomplish much by explaining to your parents why your wife feels the way she does either. People feel differently. They don't always understand each other's sensitivities. It's okay.

You can validate the feelings on both sides, and people will be more open to hearing your ideas and suggestions.

As an aside, talking about emotions versus logical reasoning, warm words might help ease the tension. For example, you can always tell your wife, "My parents said such nice things about you. They love coming here. They feel so welcome, and they so enjoy seeing the kids."

You asked who you should address, your parents or your wife. Once you drop the explanation piece, it may become easier to understand who you should speak to. You might want to share with your wife how you feel and how you'll appreciate if the two of you can come up with a feasible solution that works for both of you. Or you can choose to tell your parents that it would be appreciated if they gave advance notice before dropping in.

When you're trying to explain things, you look for the person who's being less reasonable to explain it to. When you're looking for solutions, you look for the person who's easier to work with and more receptive.

4. Yours, mine, ours

With this last point, I'm going to enter sensitive territory. At the risk of being called old-fashioned or formulaic, I'll share a structure that helps people navigate relationship issues. I elaborate on this approach in my book, *Get Along with Everyone*.

All issues in a relationship can be categorized as *mine*, *yours*, or *ours*. There are things that pertain to me, to you, and to both of us.

It's important for people to be very conscious of what belongs to the other person, where they're entitled to make their own choices, and where the couple should make a joint decision.

You write, "It's important to my parents (and to me) that our relationship is open and connected." The words in parenthesis are the clincher.

For the most part, your wife's preferences come before your parents'. But the fact that it's important to you



personally is very relevant. There's no reason you need to put that on the side. Hosting is something you want to do. It makes you feel good; it's what you feel is right. You're entitled to that feeling.

When it's about looking to please someone else, it looks like a competition. When it's for you, it's more understandable. You're entitled to want to be with your parents regardless of whether your wife wants to be woken up to prepare something. She has her preference, but as much as you want to please her, you're entitled to please yourself too. You can try your best to avoid her stress, but her feeling a certain way doesn't necessarily obligate you to do things accordingly.

If she isn't telling you that you can't connect with your parents and all she's asking is that you wake her up, that's fine. You may not like that she's tense, but her tension about this is her issue, not yours.

As long as nobody is controlling anyone else and telling the other person how they have to do something, it's all good. Sometimes, the more you try to solve a problem, the more credibility you're giving to the issue and the more it seems like you're obligated to resolve it.

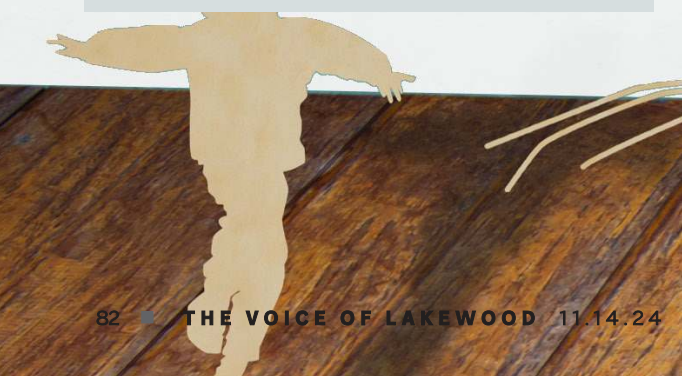
Of course, there's the "ours" part, which is that you're hosting someone in a home that belongs to both of you. I don't think hosting your parents should be done completely on your own, especially in ways that impose on her. She should definitely be taken seriously, and a joint decision should be made. It's just that your preferences and wishes don't need to be shoved aside due to someone else wanting something else.

I hope these Shabbos-afternoon visits become more pleasurable for everyone soon.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION:

Recently, my in-laws started giving unsolicited advice about how we're raising our children. They've criticized everything from our educational choices to how we discipline the kids. While I understand they may be offering guidance based on their own experiences, it's starting to make my wife and me feel like we're being judged. My wife doesn't want to upset her parents, but she's also feeling undermined. How can we respectfully handle these critiques and set boundaries without causing tension, especially when we don't feel that they fully understand our choices as a couple?

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

I want to mainly address the couple writing this letter, but I'll preface my response by pointing out to parents what it looks like on the other end and how wrong it is for parents to give this kind of feeling to their children. As we discussed in other articles, there are smarter ways to deal with your children making poor choices.

Somebody recently shared with me that when he started marrying off his children, his *rav*, who's a well-known *gadol b'Yisrael* today, told him, "When it comes to married kids, just keep your mouth shut." He followed that advice, and *baruch Hashem*, he has a wonderful connection with his *eineklach* despite having had to bite his tongue many times over the years.

Now back to the questioner.

1. You're being judged. Now what?

You write that you're feeling judged and that your wife doesn't want to upset her parents. I'd venture to say that you're being judged; it's not just a feeling that you have. Generally, if someone is very critical of your choices and voicing it, then, yes, you're being judged. And it's normal for your wife to not want to upset her parents.

Nobody likes feeling judged. Hashem created us with a desire to find favor in others' eyes. This is for our benefit, although we often misuse this desire. A lot of the good that we do is because of the instinctive desire to find favor in people's eyes.

Chazal tell us that when somebody is doing something bad, they say, *"Halevai shelo yirani adam"*—nobody should see me doing the wrong thing. Hashem created social pressure, which helps us make the right choices. We ask every day, *"V'nimtza chein...b'einei Elokim v'adam."* Wanting to find favor is a good thing.

On the other hand, when we're only concerned with our image, it can cause us to do the wrong things. We're supposed to want to find favor in the right people's eyes and for the right reasons, not to look to find favor in the wrong people's eyes.

It's normal for married children to want to impress their parents. Parents are people we look up to; we appreciate it when they like what we're doing and when they think highly of us. Here too, finding favor in their eyes when it's by doing what's right is a great desire, one we should fulfill.

So whenever you feel judged and don't want to upset someone, think: *Is this person somebody I should be looking to impress? Is the pressure that I'm feeling*



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pushing me to do what's right? Do they want me to do things that are good for me and my family or the opposite? Is this someone Hashem wants me to impress in this way? Or is it just my own ego, my need for nods of approval, that's driving my choices and feelings?

Nobody likes feeling judged. Hashem created us with a desire to find favor in others' eyes

Children who are looking for their parents' approval should contemplate with an honest, objective mindset: *Should I put aside my need for space and independence to meet these standards, or should I follow what feels right for me and my family even if it means going against those expectations?*

2. What changed?

The way to decide if this is something you should take seriously or not is to introspect and try to figure out where the criticism is coming from. Often, when people see a problem in a relationship, they get stuck on what's bothering them—in your case, the unsolicited advice—and they don't think about what brought it about.

You started off your letter with the word "recently." Now, it seems like you already have a few children, and perhaps it's only recently that your in-laws have been saying comments about how you're raising your children.

Nothing happens in a vacuum. If something changed, it's good to think about what may have caused the change. Maybe it's not just because they're judging you. It could be that your parents are criticizing your choices because things have changed lately.

Could it be that you started making certain choices, and that's when and why they started getting more critical? Maybe you were following a certain path that changed, and that's causing them to feel a little uneasy. Maybe there were certain mistakes you made that became more obvious to them.

It's very possible that none of the above are true; I'm just suggesting some ideas.

I've seen situations where couples have a certain idealism when they get married, and the marriage starts with a certain *mehalech*. They behave with humility and respect for their parents and what they were taught. As they get older, they get smarter, more arrogant, more self-sufficient, or more comfortable doing things they wouldn't have done previously. This happens subtly, and instead of noticing their own changes, all they notice is the fact that their parents are "mixing in."

It's not that it's right of parents to mix in, but sometimes it's a wake-up call that you're doing things differently and there's somebody watching. Like I mentioned earlier, Hashem gives us the need to impress others to keep us on track when we may be losing our way. Essentially, it's your parents who care about you and your family most.

Here's another idea to think about when you notice a change. Perhaps the cause is a shift in your relationship with them. Could it be that in the past you were more open with them, and they felt more in the loop? Maybe it's a certain attitude or line of communication that changed that's making them feel the need to meddle in your life to be a part of it.

This doesn't mean that you're wrong and they're right and you caused the trend of criticism. But once you understand what set off the recent development, you'll know how to change it back, or at least which critiques to take seriously or how to make things better going forward.

You may conclude that it's totally uncalled for and that your parents' lack of fulfillment or occupation or simply their old age is what's bringing about these unreasonable comments, and there are ways to deal with that too. But if you don't investigate, you may be missing something deeper.

DE



3. Communicate effectively

One of the biggest keys to resolving almost anything is the power of communication that Hashem gave us.

Effective communication, especially in sensitive areas, starts with thinking: *What am I trying to communicate? Which point would I like to give over? What is (and what isn't) this person capable of hearing? How can I express myself in a way that will be taken well?*

Just by thinking about that, you'll often be able to figure out what to say.

In this situation, it may seem easiest to not communicate. Because you're feeling judged, you likely want to pull away and start communicating even less than before. That's usually a mistake that only makes things tougher.

Even those who decide to talk often make the mistake of debating and explaining their position. They try to prove why they're right, why they should be allowed to make their own decisions, and what the parents don't understand.

Not communicating and trying to win a debate are two things that probably won't solve your problem.

How about clarifying your position without justifying anything? For example, you might say, "Tatty, Mommy, I love hearing from you, and I know you mean our good. We made these choices after discussing the issue with our *da'as Torah*/mentor/*mechanech,* and that's why we're doing things this way. We feel that this is what we need to do for our child. We wish we could always do things in a way that you approve of, and we'd love it if you can respect our choices." Maybe hearing your confidence or the fact that you were guided by someone will help them understand it better.

Another thing you might want to communicate is how you feel. They might not realize that you're feeling put down and judged by what they're saying. Try telling them gently, "I'm sure you don't mean it, and I might be taking it the wrong way, but the comments you made are making us feel very judged."

Respectful and clear communication makes everyone feel somewhat better.

4. Keep calm and connected

Perhaps none of my first three points are relevant at all. Maybe nothing changed on your end, you're all good, and your parents are simply going through their own stresses and struggles, which are causing them to behave the way they do. And let's say you already tried communicating effectively with them to no avail; they get more irritated the more you try to communicate with them. Still...

When one set of parents is meddling, the first thing you want to do is make sure it doesn't get between the two of you. Your connection with your spouse is crucial.

It's too easy for outside factors like this to cause fighting between the husband and wife.

As I read your letter ("I understand..." "My wife doesn't want..." "She feels..."), my first thought was, *I hope this couple is together in this.*

I don't mean that you should join forces and fight your parents as a united front. It's an old mistake to think that unity is about sharing the enemy equally. It's about not letting anyone get between the two of you, ever.

When one set of parents is meddling, the first thing you want to do is make sure it doesn't get between the two of you

Being on your wife's page doesn't mean that you agree with everything she says or does or feels or thinks. If you have a different view—for example, you feel your in-laws are right in their criticism—you can get your own guidance on how to deal with that.

Sometimes, whether consciously or subconsciously, the very fact that it's her parents who are getting in the way is already something that gets between the couple, leading to unnecessary comments about them and about how much to care or please them.

And sometimes it's because they notice that they can wedge their way between a couple that parents try and get at least one of the two to agree with them and want to please them. When your in-laws realize that the two of you are on the same page, that you're respectful to each other, and that you're confident but respectful to them, they may just let you be.



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OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

QUESTION:

In the recent article about different grandparenting styles and the tension created by that dichotomy, there was a point that wasn't brought up. One set of grandparents is an endless stream of Chanukah and *afikoman* presents, games, trips, and nosh, while the other is the opposite, and this affects the grandchildren. But then there's the adult piece.

My parents are always offering support and help, a constant safety net we can always fall back on. My in-laws' approach is focused on independence. The whole concept of helping married children is foreign to them.

My in-laws and parents both live in Lakewood, and the difference is stark. For example, while my parents are thrilled to have us every Shabbos, it seems that our family is too much for my in-laws, and they rarely host us.

My husband feels embarrassed and resentful that his parents don't—or can't—keep up. In his more cynical moments, he sees my parents' generosity as bribery, a constant bid to win some imaginary popularity contest.

How can I navigate these obvious differences? How can I explain it to my kids and husband in a way that breeds understanding and acceptance instead of resentment and entitlement?

Your thoughts on not taking responsibility for others' feelings, perceptions, and resentments really resonated with me. As a classic people-pleaser, taking others' emotional temperature is a constant and instinctive act. I can't feel okay when others aren't. I would love to hear practical tips on detaching from others' emotional states and not taking responsibility for their feelings.

RABBI GRUEN RESPONDS:

It's all connected

As the letter writer mentions, we already discussed this topic in a previous article, and anything I'm going to explore here is in continuation and addition to the previous article.

The first thing I'll touch on is what you refer to as the "children piece" and the "adult piece." You seem to see it as two separate issues. It's important to realize that children's issues affect adults, and adult issues affect children. It's all really one big mix, more than we think.

Parents like it when their children get treats and prizes. Of course, they don't want them to be spoiled, and sometimes they don't like how it's done, but in general, parents enjoy when their children are getting attention and gifts, and they like seeing their children happy. They also like when their children feel good about going to their grandparents.

And it's not just about the children feeling good. As parents, you also have feelings about it. Maybe it makes things easier for you when they're taken care of, or in general, you're calmer when your children are happy. It's important to be honest with yourself about your



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own interests in your children's feelings, as their feelings affect you.

On the flip side, children notice when their parents feel good. They see when things are easier for the family, like when they have a place to go for Shabbos or extra money for a *simchah*.

In life, we have to see the bigger picture and understand how everything is connected. It's a mistake to think these types of things are separate.

Parents enjoy when their children are getting attention and gifts, and they like seeing their children happy

I'll point out where this is relevant. Sometimes parents don't realize that they need to thank their parents for their help. When grandparents take the kids out, they feel it's between the grandparents and the kids and that once the children expressed their appreciation, it's all good. But there's more to it. Calling to say, "Thank you so much, my kids had a great time," is one thing, but it's also important to acknowledge that your parents made it easier for you personally, and they're often waiting to hear that.

Similarly, the same goes for when grandparents give money to the parents for a *simchah* or invite the family for Shabbos. It's good for children to thank their grandparents, even if the benefit wasn't specifically or directly for them. For example, at a *simchah* for which the grandparents helped out financially, the bar mitzvah boy or *chosson* and *kallah* can thank the grandparents for their part in the celebration. This kind of appreciation helps everyone feel good and makes the family relationships stronger.

Seeing the "children part" and the "adult part" as one big, connected entity often gives clarity on how to address things.

Finally, never assume that your attitude toward your parents or in-laws doesn't roll over onto the children. They pick up on it by osmosis, and that's why it's so important to work things out and resolve any hard feelings. The atmosphere at home will almost always be affected by it. Don't think you'll put on a good show for the kids and they won't realize how you feel. They feel it, and subconsciously, they're affected by it. As mentioned earlier, they want their parents to be happy, and they're slowly influenced by how the "adult part" affects you.

The adult piece

Just like the two sets of grandparents are treating the children in different ways, they're treating you, the adults, in differing ways too.

You call your in-laws' approach "focused on independence." It's important to see things in a good light. It's easy to paint others as selfish or lazy, and it's great that you choose to view them as principled. I think you're right. Everyone has their own way of doing things, and most people mean well and believe in whatever approach they take, regardless of why.

Seeing people's approach in a good light is important both when they give as well as when they don't.

It's known that we're living in a generation of entitlement. Even today's parents are part of the *"es kumt mir"* mindset, and our children pick up on this outlook. Sadly, it's become normal to expect parents to give, help, and do more than they do, and whatever parents provide is seen as a given. When you drop the entitlement and see your parents as people you should honor, give to, and not expect to get from, you'll be less concerned by their hands-off approach.

Seeing parents' attitudes in a good light is important for the parents who give a lot too. It's important to know how to take properly.

You might think, *If they're giving me, why wouldn't I take it well?* But you'd be surprised.

I was talking to a *chosson* who had issues with his parents. In the conversation, I asked him, "Do you realize how much your parents did for you; how much they invested in your success?"

His answer astounded me. He said, "Of course they did. They didn't want a failure for a son." He didn't see it as reason to be thankful. "They did it for themselves, not for me."



It's sad how someone could take something so beautiful and so badly distort and misinterpret it.

We often overcomplicate things. When everything is attached to layers of implications and motives, it's no wonder that even receiving becomes complex. There are people who resist receiving anything, even from their closest family members, just because of this. They worry what it might say about them, what they might owe the giver, what it implies about the relationship, etc.

Don't overthink it or assume their gifts mean something else or there's an obligation or a hidden agenda. If you have a set of parents who gives, accept graciously and show your appreciation.

See those who give less and those who give more in a good light and avoid overcomplicating your relationships.

Don't explain

Your question was about how to explain things to your husband and kids. Don't.

Explanations are by definition logical, and the topic you're addressing is about emotions. When you try to explain emotional things, aside from the fact that you won't be successful, you'll often just emphasize the problem. The difference between your parents' and in-laws' styles might be noticed anyway, but with less emphasis on what's happening, it'll be less of an issue.

Instead of trying to make sense out of things, show a good attitude toward everyone and speak nicely about everyone. That attitude trickles down.

There are always enough good things that should be emphasized, and that's where the focus should be. Usually, the less attention you give to the differences between the grandparents' attitudes, the less your children will think about it.

Similarly, when a child does bring up the issue of how different their grandparents are from each other, not too differently from the way he might talk about how different this year's *rebbi* is from last year's, don't make the mistake of going into long explanations about the right way to see it and how he's wrong for even thinking like that. You're often unknowingly emphasizing the issue even more. Usually, over time, if you give less attention to the differences and exude a good attitude to those around you, subtly pointing out nice things about both sets of grandparents, the children will absorb that message.

Detaching vs. apathy

The final part of your question is how you can detach when others don't feel okay. I think the part of the difficulty associated with this issue is that it's not reasonable to ask someone not to care about something they naturally care about. It's like when someone who can't handle a mess at home is told to stop caring about cleanliness.

But detaching doesn't mean not caring. It means accepting.

Hashem was kind enough to give the world a lot of kind, considerate, empathetic individuals. These people are wonderful and naturally care about others and their feelings. That's how it should be. The opposite of codependency—unhealthy ownership of others' emotional states—is not apathy.

Not only are you not responsible for controlling everyone's happiness or obligated to come up with ways to please those you love and care about, you're not capable of it

The opposite of codependency, and a mindset to help you with it, is simply acknowledging your limitations. Not only are you not responsible for controlling everyone's happiness or obligated to come up with ways to please those you love and care about, you're not capable of it. People who think they are exhaust themselves by trying to accomplish what isn't in their ability.

When you acknowledge this reality, you accept it and detach, not because you don't care—you do—but because there's only so much you can do. Caring doesn't mean taking responsibility. It means taking advantage of the healthy opportunities we have to make others happy and feeling good about the nice things we can do for others.

Even after you acknowledge your limitations in this area, you'll still find many opportunities to make your spouse, children, and both sets of parents feel good.



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.