UPGRADE

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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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