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.

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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.



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.

