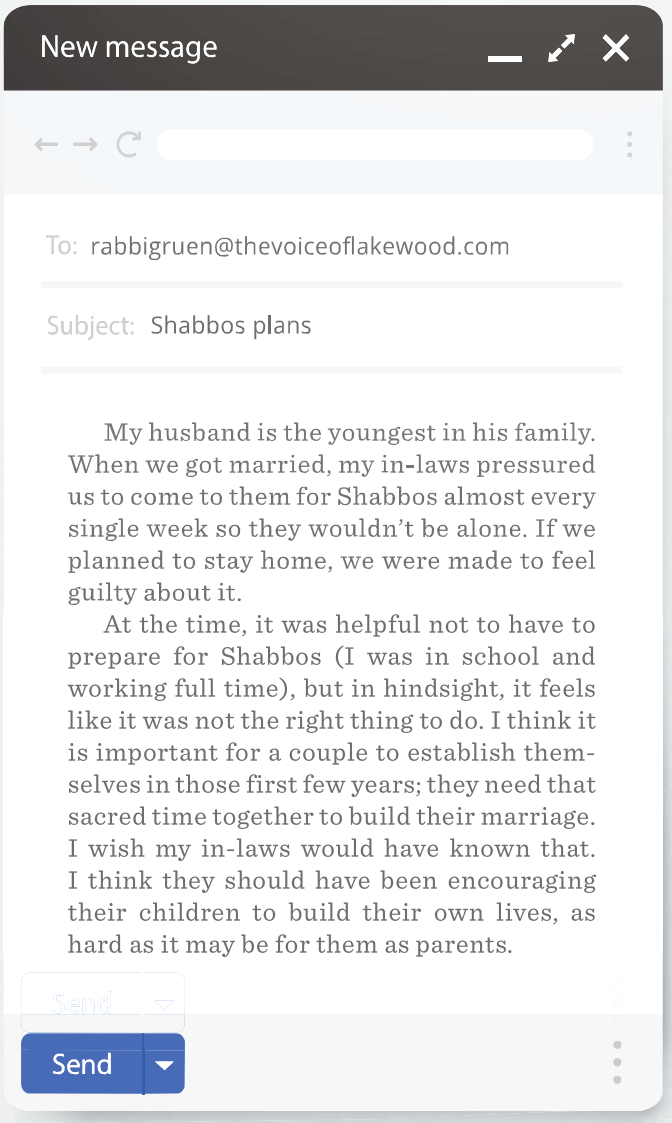
# OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

## THE ADULT CHILD–PARENT/IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP




## 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.



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.