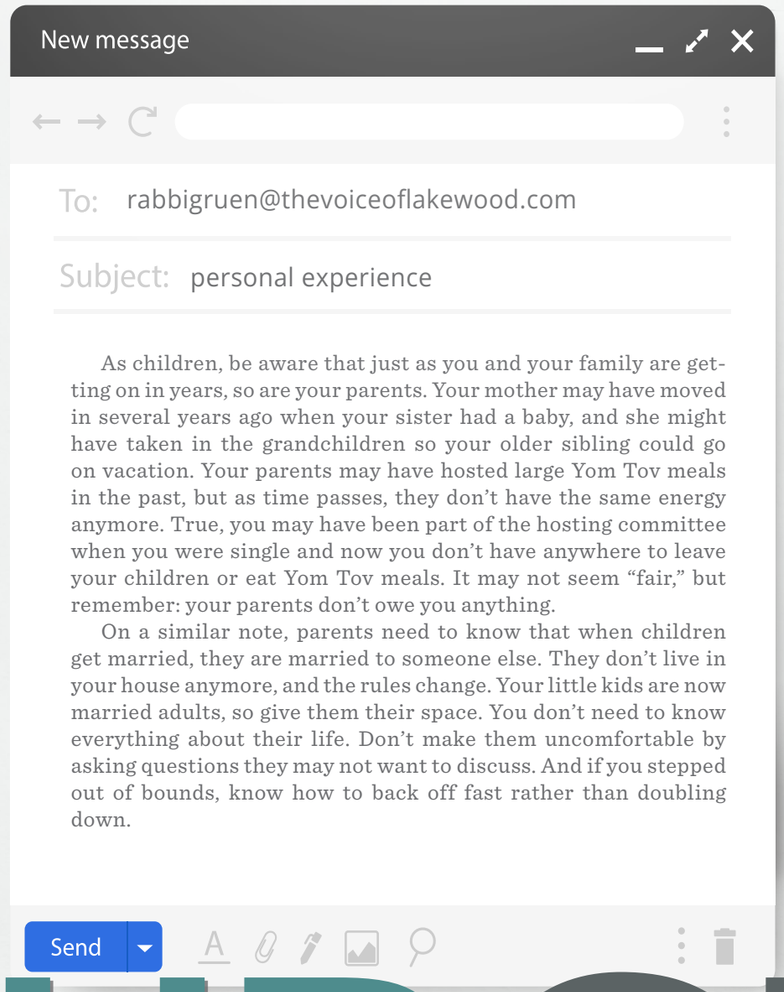
OUT OF SIGHT, FRONT OF MIND

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.



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.

