



## FOCUS ONLY ON THE GOOD

CHANA KORNFELD

*Dear Esther,*

My son and daughter-in-law recently made a bar mitzvah for their son, and we flew across the world to celebrate and participate in the *simchah*.

My husband and I arrived late in the evening a few days before the bar mitzvah and my son ordered an Uber to pick us up from the airport. We finally made it to his house after hours of travel at about 12:30 a.m. and our son greeted us and showed us to our room. Our daughter-in-law was sleeping as usual (any arrival past 10 p.m. interferes with her beauty sleep). The next morning when we woke up at about 8 a.m., no one was home. My daughter-in-law was taking the children to school and my son had gone to work. My daughter-in-law finally came home around two in the afternoon, said hello to us for the first time, and said, "I hope you found everything you need! There's tons of food in the fridge and pantry and you know where everything is!"

I nodded and refrained from telling her that while we did end up puttering around her kitchen to find a bit of food, we were not comfortable doing so without a welcome or permission. I know my daughter-in-law and son did not mean to be rude, they figured we would make ourselves comfortable in their home, but Esther, it was not comfortable to feel ignored and not welcomed when we have traveled thousands of miles to visit our children and grandchildren. Do you think I am overreacting?

Signed,

***A Shvig Trying to Be Big But Feeling the Dig***

*Dear Shvig,*

I don't think you are overreacting, but I bet your son and daughter-in-law don't have a clue that their hospitality made you feel less than welcome and taken care of. They may think they

have a casual vibe in their home that has done away with stuffy formalities, not realizing that some formalities create warmth and offer attentiveness and honor. Parents should be honored and *Shulchan Aruch* is full of "formalities" that

ensure a parent receives honor from a child. [See sidebar. -Ed.]

Allow me to remind grown children of the proper etiquette for visiting parents and parents-in-law.

When parents visit, we should make every effort to pick them up ourselves from the airport, which shows that they are important and honored guests whom we are eager to see. We should go into the airport to greet them and help them with their luggage (as I am writing this I realize I do not always do this, and I should!).

Make a fuss! If we have children, we should encourage them to decorate signs or create something special for their grandparents' arrival.

We should make their room up as nicely as we can with as many amenities as possible (Shabbos lamp, alarm clock, *negel vasser*, *sheitel* head, water



## HOW ARE PARENTS TO BE HONORED?

You should provide them with food and drink, with clothing and shelter, escort them to their home and escort them from their home. You must provide these services cheerfully, for even if you provide them daily, with choice poultry, but you do so with ill grace, you will incur Divine punishment. - *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 143:3

bottles, etc.) and have it prepared and ready when they arrive.

Our spouses and children should make every effort to greet our parents in person when they arrive and if they cannot, they should call or leave a note and apologize for their absence.

No matter what time our parents arrive, we should have a hot meal ready to be served. If there are specific foods our parents like, we should have those foods in the house for them. I know all my grandparents' favorite foods, because my mother always went on a special shopping trip in preparation for their arrival, stocking up on prunes, chocolate licorice, and black tea.

When parents are visiting, make time for them. Even those parents who give you the I-know-you're-busy-don't-worry-about-us-we'll-just-stay-home-and-read will very much appreciate it when you pop into the house to eat lunch with them and take them out.

Most importantly, know that a visit from our parents fills our homes with warmth and holiness, because our parents are partners with Hashem in the creation of

us. May we merit to honor them properly and reap the rewards for generations to come.

And now, I have a little more advice just for you, Shvig, and it can be summed up in four words: **Focus on the good.**

Speaking (and even thinking) sarcastically or critically about our children and children-in-law is destructive on many levels and curiously encourages more of the exact behaviors we find offensive. The daughter-in-law who was sleeping "as usual" because she "needed her beauty sleep" is not going to spend less time locked in her bedroom because of your passive-aggressive remarks: "Wow, you really do practice self-care so well! I never seemed to be able to sleep for ten hours when I was raising children."

Our children, children-in-law, and grandchildren are not perfect. Some were raised better than others, some are more emotionally attuned than others, and some are more respectful than others. Whatever they are and whatever they "should be" is out of our hands now. The time for us to raise them is over. The time to enjoy them is now. Notice

the many good things they do, comment on them with warmth and gratitude, and overlook the areas where it seems to you that they fall short. Show them that you like being around them and think they are superstars, and they will revel in your good opinion of them and want to please you more. Although the stage of discipline is well over, you are always a parent and children always want to please their parents. The more a child feels successful at pleasing you, the more likely it is that he or she will want to please you more. Find the good, focus (only) on the good, and watch how much more good will come your way!

Signed,  
**Esther**



**CHANA KORNFELD,**  
*the creator and writer of  
Esther Etiquette (arguably  
our most popular column  
since its inception in*

*2011), lives in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, but was raised in Atlanta, Georgia, below the Mason-Dixon line, where good manners are taken as seriously as fried food. Chana was raised by parents and grandparents who taught her that derech erez kadmah laTorah: First, be a mensch.*