



We tend to use a magnifying glass when examining the faults of other people, and a blindfold when examining our own.



*Tzippy
Remembers
When...*

Ahavas Yisroel On the Home Front

TZIPPY CLAPMAN

IT IS SOMETIMES EASIER to love strangers from afar than our own family and neighbors, isn't it? We send mazel tov or condolence texts or emails or voice notes and we're done and all is peaceful and happy.

I have a friend who lives here in Crown Heights who has many sons-in-law. And she always loudly proclaims that the one who lives in Eretz Yisroel is her favorite, followed by the one who lives in California. But of course. The locals who always invite her over and drive her places also sometimes forget to invite or come late to pick her up, so they're not the favorites. The ones who *never* have her over and *never* give her rides also *never* mess up, so they're the faves.

I try to keep this in mind so I can appreciate all my children and children-in-law, the ones who are close and the ones who are far, and not punish those who are close!

Maybe that's why the Torah says *Ve'ahavta lerai'acha...* love your friend. Since that's a much bigger job than loving a stranger, we need to be commanded.

Each one of our children and children-in-law is only human, maybe not perfect in every way, just like I am far from perfect as well.

IN-LAWS ARE NOT OUTLAWS

I make it a priority in my life to love and accept my children-in-law as a present that Hashem gave me without nine months of pregnancy, without labor or delivery! I didn't have to pay for braces or overnight camp or tuition, I got them all grown up and raised and *mentschlich* and ready to go!

I owe my *mechutanim* a big thank-you for doing all that work and then handing me the finished product as a gift, as a child-in-law.

To me there is no difference between my sons and my sons-in-law, and there's no difference between my daughters and my daughters-in-law. Each one of our children and children-in-law is only human, maybe not perfect in every way, just like I am far from perfect as well.

When we see imperfections in any of our children, if they are our biological ones it is easy to dismiss it because deep down, we know that we raised them and probably they got their bad habits from our own imperfections! And so, many parents cope with these actions by ignoring them or forgiving them or rationalizing them. But when we see these imperfections in our children-in-law, it is easy—maybe even natural!—to be critical and unforgiving.

This is the best time to exercise our *ahavas Yisroel*. We are there to love and support them, to live and let live, and to be there as their cheerleaders, the loving and caring grandparents of their children.

Showing disapproval of a child-in-law has repercussions in many areas, all of them negative. First, your child sees it and feels it even if you don't say a word. Your attitude comes through, especially to your own children. Do you really want to be responsible for making your child see their own spouse in a bad light, *chas v'shalom*?

Second, you could easily wreck your relationship with your child-in-law and it won't be so easy to repair. Sometimes these disapprovals damage relationships forever, *chas v'shalom*. Is it really worth it, even if they did do or say something dumb?

NO PLAYING FAVORITES

Be careful with your gifts to children and grandchildren. You don't want to play favorites and you don't want to hurt feelings. I know one woman who takes her grandchildren out for ice cream for their birthdays. The ones from out of town get to go out next time they visit Crown Heights. She keeps track! I know another woman who sends a certain amount of money to each child on Erev Rosh Hashanah, an amount that totals \$20 for each child. Then at each child's birthday, the parents give the child \$20 or a gift worth that much, from the grandparents. The children are taught to write thank-you notes and call to give and receive birthday *brachos*. Whatever you do or don't do, just make it the same for everyone.

Chassan gifts: the same for all sons-in-law. *Kallah* gifts: the same for all daughters-in-law. (While we're on that topic, may I suggest you let your future daughter-in-law shop for the jewelry with her mother, not with you? You give the jeweler your price limit ahead of time, and then give her the freedom to shop at her leisure, and to choose without your input.)

We have all seen *kallahs* who have jewelry given to them by their *shvigger* and they don't like it but they feel they have to wear it. What a waste of time and money. And



something that should have brought joy and closeness instead brings resentment and discomfort.

Whatever you buy for your first couple, bear in mind that you will need to buy the same for the second and the fifth and the tenth. Keep this in mind when shopping for the first! *Chas v'shalom* you don't want children to feel they are second-rate or not the favorite because you didn't buy them a dinette set or a bookcase or whatever you bought their older sibling.

I can't believe I have to say my next point, but from what I hear from my friends, and my children's friends, I think I do.

When it comes to birthdays and anniversaries and gifts, treat your biological children and your children-in-law THE SAME! The same goes for in-towners and out-of-towners.

If you take your out-of-town grandchildren on outings, why should the locals miss out just because they're local? My husband and I try to take all our grandchildren to an arcade or park whenever we visit our out-of-state children. We of course have to make sure to do the same with our local grandchildren.

It's important to point out that it's not necessary to spend money on birthdays altogether. Going over to the house with something you baked and telling them a good story or singing them a good song or dancing a good dance with them will be cherished forever in their memories.

My husband calls all his children and grandchildren every Erev Shabbos to wish them a good Shabbos and that includes the new granddaughters-in-law and grandsons-in-law. He does it methodically and makes sure he doesn't forget anyone.

All this goes for our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren—may we all live and be well to enjoy them together with our husbands in good health, mentally and physically. It may get to a point where we may not be able to keep up with all these birthdays. We can either hire an accounting firm to keep up with all these timely obligations or we can put one talented grandchild in charge, or perhaps take a break from all the gift-giving and let the next generation take over. And hopefully our children and children-in-law will learn from our efforts and will take over in a fair and loving way!

DIVORCE

I hate to bring up a painful topic in this happy and light-hearted article, but life is not perfect and there will always be problems, disagreements, that will go on in most normal marriages, but family involvement is inevitably damaging and we have seen marriages end because of that involvement. This is for *Rabbanim* and *frum* Torah-observant life or marriage coaches who can be of help without family biases.

If you get involved in a couple's issues, and then *baruch Hashem* your children reconcile happily, you will always be remembered for your hurtful, possibly blaming, words. They will forgive each other quickly and wipe it away and move on, but you'll stay the bad guy. This is also a good reason not to share your marital disagreements with your mother. You'll make up and it's over, but she cannot forget it, and maybe she will even share it because it hurts her so much.

Even in the case of *chas v'shalom* a divorce or separation, a parent must remain civil to the exiting child-in-law. They are the parents of your grandchildren; for that alone they should receive your *ahavas Yisroel*. Your grandchildren are easily able to identify your true feelings about their parents, and this will definitely hamper their true feelings for you. I know divorced families where the former parents-in-law still visit with and celebrate with and keep in touch with their child's past spouse with great love; what a gift this is to the children who have suffered enough having their parents get divorced.

GIVING A GET

It hurts my heart to see all the *agunos* in our community and as a parent you should never allow your son or daughter to hold back a divorce if it is truly desired and needed (after ample study and effort) by one spouse! At that stage, we should never let our son or daughter hold back from granting a *get*. This is usually used to punish the husband or wife, but if one spouse wants a *get* it is only right to grant it to them. I have seen countless women living alone for years, some for life, without a *get* and it is the most heartless torture that I have seen. I blame parents of these *get*-refusers, who support their children in such behaviors, and I hope and *daven* that these parents will wake up and see the light. A couple got married with free will, and when one wants a divorce it should be honored with free will, tragic as it is.

May Hashem give us happiness and peace, and may we have the strength and wisdom to only add to that and never *chas v'shalom* detract from it with our words or our actions! ❧

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