BETWEEN FRIENDS *with* ESTHER

EtiQuette

Dear Esther,

I was invited to the engagement party for the daughter of my first cousin Shmuel. My teenage daughter Chaya who feels close to her older cousin wanted to come and so I called Shmuel and asked if "junior cousins" were invited. He apologized and explained that the event was being held in an expensive restaurant (they are on Shlichus and don't have many options for where to hold events) and both money and space were limited, so only adults were invited. I left Chaya home and went to the party alone and lo and behold there's a first cousin of Shmuel's wife with two teenage girls by her side.

Well, there were those teens eating sushi, laughing and enjoying the party. How am I supposed to feel about the fact that my cousin's wife invited the girls from her side of the family, while excluding a girl the same age from her husband's side? Can I bring this up to my cousin without sounding petty?

Signed,
Broiges Brochie



Dear Brochie,

To answer your question: No, there is not really a way you can bring this up to your cousin's wife without sounding a. petty and b. accusatory. But before you replay the scene in your head, causing your blood to warm and reach your head, and causing you to exclaim to your husband for the umpteenth time "Can you BELIEVE....", consider an alternate scenario:

You said you called your cousin (and good for you!) and asked if it was okay to bring your daughter, to which your cousin replied no. Who says the cousins from the other side even asked? They probably received the invite in the mail, saw the words Engagement Party and assumed it was a party for the whole family. I see this all the time. Parents seat children down next to them, at a place that is reserved for an invited guest, at a party those children were not invited to.

It could well be that Shmuel's wife watched in mortification as her cousin waltzed in with teens in tow, cast a mournful look at you, as she thought, "Oh, no, now Brochie thinks I only invited my cousins!" and wondered if she should throw her family under the bus and explain to you that those girls were uninvited guests, or hope (rather optimistically) that you wouldn't notice or care. (In this situation EE would quietly go over to her husband's cousin and say, "I don't think my cousins realized that this is an adult party.")

If my imagined sequence of events is certainly not what happened and your cousin has the habit of treating her side of the family differently than her husband's, then there is not much you can do other than to feel bad for her husband and be grateful that she is only your cousin and not your daughter-in-law!

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,

As texting becomes the easiest and most popular mode of communication, I find myself often wondering, should I make the phone call or just text? What situations require a phone call and when does a text suffice?

Signed,
Techie Tikki

Dear Tikki,

Much as I loathe to admit it, we've entered a new and unchartered territory of communication and the rules are being made along the way. Five years ago, I would not dare text my father! Anything! Today I text my parents quite frequently (generally for logistical information; I arrived safely, the phone number is...) and they text me (what size shoe is Levi?). People are definitely using texting more and more; even my grandparents have iPhones and are on the family Whatsapp.

Texting is a great tool to save time when communicating mundane information (add salt to the list, stuck in traffic), following up with plans (parking on 5th, be there in 15 minutes), or sharing a picture with sisters (yay or nay to the oversized jacket?). However, texting should not replace relationship-building communication. Let me strengthen that. Texting cannot replace relationship-building communication; if you try, the relationship not only does not get built, it could be damaged or wither away altogether.

I still would not text my father or grandmother Good Shabbos, nor would I text a friend or relative who I had not spoken to in a while. There is something cheap about relationships that survive via text. Texting is too effortless and impersonal for it to be valued or considered meaningful. Therefore I would also discourage using texting

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to request a favor, say thank you or unload feelings. These situations require one to take the extra time and make the call. I remember feeling used by a friend who constantly sent texts like "can I drop off Sara at your house for two hours?" (That was really the only text request, sent at least once a week.) She would then have her husband pick Sara up and later that evening would text again "thank you!" I did not feel appreciated or valued since she never took the few minutes to call me and ask for the favor or thank me for the favor. (What, you're saying she could even ask me how I am doing? Now that I know is pushing it.)

Texting certainly has its place in our fast-paced, technology-enhanced lives. But, like everything, the key is to use the tool appropriately.

Signed,
Esther

