BETWEEN FRIENDS with ESTHER EtiQuette

Dear Esther,

My mother-in-law is a wonderful Bubby who is constantly thinking of her grandchildren and often brings over nosh. For my children, there is no better gift on earth. However, my children and I are not in agreement. The gift of nosh translates into cavities and root canals, which I try hard to avoid. How do I steer my mother-in-law away from the candy aisle and in the direction of books, flashlights, plants, crayons, pads of paper...



Shayna Shnur

Dear Shayna,

Your situation can be resolved easily and without hurt feelings, as long as you express sincere gratitude to your mother-in-law before asking her to change her gift of choice. You could say: "Shviger, I so appreciate how you constantly think of my kids and surprise them with treats. They absolutely love when you come over and get so excited with their gifts. Would it be okay for me to ask you to hold the sweets? I'm concerned about their teeth and the sugar highs! I know they love nosh, but truly anything is appreciated when it is given by you." You can give your mother-in-law some of your gift ideas, but make sure first that they are in the same price range as nosh and can easily be bought. You don't want to make her life more difficult.



Esther

Dear Esther,

My son has a good friend who he frequently plays with. As a result, my husband and I have become friends with the parents. We share Shabbos meals, BBQ's and the like and are often in and out of each others' homes. Recently, we have becomes aware that the family uses hechsherim that we do not and generally do not have the yiras Shomayim that we thought they did. My husband and I are selective about what we eat there now, but we are uncomfortable eating there at all. Is there a way I can respectfully explain this to my friend? I do not want to go the passive-aggressive route by declining each invitation with bogus excuses until they get the hint.

Friendly Frayda

Dear Frayda,

Thinking this over, the passive-aggressive approach may not be a bad idea. It will certainly help you avoid an uncomfortable, potentially embarrassing confrontation. However, if you prefer the straightforward route, be prepared for the probable end of your friendship, as friendships are usually built around similarities in interests and lifestyle. Still, you want to be as respectful and sensitive as possible. I would say: "You are dear friends of ours and we value our relationship. We have made a decision in our personal lives to only use _____hechsherim and to only eat out at places that do the same. "

Do not use words like "yiras Shomayim" and "standards" as they scream JUDGMENT. Be prepared for comments like, "I can't believe you don't trust us!" and, "How could you judge us like this? Are you looking through our cabinets?"

Best case scenario, they may offer to use only hechsherim you approve of when you come over, which could be the best possible resolution to the situation.

Esther

Dear Esther,

I live with my husband and six kids ka"h in a small three-bedroom home. Comes Tishrei, and I live with my husband and four kids in one bedroom, with one kid on the couch and one staying across town at my sister's house. Why? Because I open my home to guests who travel to Crown Heights for Tishrei. I could push through Rosh Hashanah till the day after Simchas Torah with tripled food bills, continuous mess, non-stop cooking and a tied-up (when not lost) home phone if I knew it would end on Isru Chag. But just when I think I can breathe a sigh of relief, sleep in a bedroom without kids and begin the task of putting my trashed house back together, my guests inform me of the good news: they are staying an extra two weeks "to do some shopping," or because a relative "might be getting engaged soon."

I am on the verge of not accepting Tishrei guests this year.

Hachnasas Orly



Dear Orly,

You are to be commended for taking in guests for weeks at a time, and inconveniencing yourself and your family in the process. However, you are certainly entitled to set some boundaries, especially for those who will not do so for themselves. Tell your guests *in advance* that while you are very happy to have them over Tishrei, you will not be able to host them once Tishrei ends.

Note to all guests: Please understand that when you ask a family for permission to stay with them (as opposed to being an invited guest) you are imposing yourself on your hosts. Therefore, you need to ask yourself: How can I make this imposition as pleasant as possible for the host?

There are hosts who understand that Tishrei in Crown Heights is important. There are no hosts who understand that two weeks of shopping in NY is important, and certainly not at their expense. If you need a shopping trip, book a hotel and shop away. In general, any pleasure trips should always be at the traveler's expense. I have never understood people who go on vacation to a city and then search for hospitality there. If you can't afford to provide for your family's needs on vacation, don't go. (Or go somewhere less expensive, or for a shorter time.)

If your circumstances warrant asking a host for hospitality, stay for as short a time as possible. Even if your hosts live in a large home, and especially if they don't, you are invading their privacy and space, and taking advantage of them financially and otherwise. No matter how charming of a guest you are, after three days, they are waiting for you to leave. Remember, you are not there to visit them; you are "using" them.

Kudos to all the hosts who make it look like it is their absolute pleasure to host strangers time and time again and for lengthy periods. You are inspirational. Guests – be aware that for most it is not easy. She only makes it look easy to make you feel more comfortable about being on the receiving end.

Wishing everyone a shanah tova u'mesukah.

Esther Etiquette



There's nothing that screams "fresh start" like the start of a new school year. New shoes, new backpacks, new uniforms, new supplies and of course new teachers bring anticipation for a bright start to success.

Parents:

- ✔ Make sure your child starts off on the right foot by having *all* his or her school supplies, admission cards and forms ready for the first day of school. It is uncomfortable for the administration and even more uncomfortable for your child to have to be singled out of the group as a result of a parent's disorganization.
- ✔ When you are with your child and you meet the child's teacher on the street, in shul or any place, make it your business to walk over to the teacher and initiate a greeting. This is great chinuch for your child and gives your child the sense that you respect his or her teacher.
- ✔ Don't turn every social event into a parent-teacher conference. As a teacher, I can tell you that having a parent pull me aside at a wedding or bar mitzvah and start hounding me about why question 4 on the Navi test was all in Hebrew... or why _____ got sent out of class when really it was the student three desks over... or even the simple question of how much time I expect the students

to be working on homework each night, is not communicating with your child's teacher within respectful boundaries. Would you ask your doctor for your mammogram results at your mutual friend's wedding?

- ✔ The school administration is not your personal secretary. Parents, we need to get our acts together. We can't expect the school to start arranging our children's rides home with the friend we couldn't reach, or check our child's backpack to see if she has her ballet gear for her after-school activity. The school understands that there are emergencies. Some examples of an emergency are a delayed flight from out of town or having a baby. Stuck in traffic is not.
- ✔ In the event that the school has to call you on the day of a field trip because they never received your permission slip, please do not say, "I never heard about the trip, I never got the form, I never saw the email. There is just not enough communication in this institution." Just apologize and fax over the permission slip.
- ✔ Start a positive line of communication with your child's teacher by writing a short complimentary note on your child's homework. When you shep nachas from your child's learning – tell the teacher! It will make his or her day.
- ✔ Proper etiquette is inviting the entire class to a birthday party.
- ✔ Reach out to new parents and children in your school. Invite a new child over to play or the family to a Shabbos meal. If we want our schools to be the happy, friendly and caring place we say it is, we need to make it that way.
- ✔ Conversations with teachers and the administration should be with an attitude of, "Let's work together to bring about good results." Nothing is gained by accusing, ranting or raving. Everything is gained by asking, listening and collaborating.
- ✔ When giving gifts to teachers (Chanukah gelt, Mishloach Manos, end of year gifts, etc.), give to *all* your children's teachers, not just the ones you like best.
- ✔ And the Bonus Tip: You don't have to post every school issue on public websites.

Wishing you all a year of nachas and hatzlachah!

Batya Lerner, D.D.S.
Aron Gamss, D.D.S.

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