BETWEEN FRIENDS *with* ESTHER

EtiQuette



Dear Esther,

I often invite guests to my home for Shabbos and Yom Tov meals. I'll call up a friend and ask if she and her family would like to join us for Friday night dinner. Often, this is the response I get: "Oh, we're already going out Friday night, but we'd love to come for Shabbos lunch." I feel like saying, "Really? That's so funny, I was just going to say that we'd love to come to you for Shabbos lunch".

Why do people assume that an invitation to a specific meal can be extended to any time that is more convenient for them?

Signed,
A Balabusta sans the Balagan

Dear Balabusta,

If you invite guests to most of your meals and have an open home, some (not very *mentchlich*) people will start taking your hosting for granted. They start believing that you just love cooking and staying up all night and scraping soup pots and setting tables and washing dishes and chopping salads and schlepping Costco boxes and baking cakes and frosting them too and serving and clearing and sweeping. And because you make it look so easy, they believe that it actually is easy (for you). So if they can't come Friday night, why not Shabbos day? You love having guests, right? And it's true, you do love having guests. But you also love being appreciated by your guests. And you want your guests to understand that dishes don't just magically appear and your house doesn't have fairies that clean it and that serving a large crowd is work! And if you invited guests for Friday night, that means you are putting in all that effort for a Friday night meal and that is the meal you would like to host.

So, guests: Unless your host says, "Which meal would you like to join us for this Yom Tov?", you do not get to choose which meal to attend. You can decline the invitation or accept it, but you cannot create a new invitation to someone else's home.

The same goes for your visiting family members and friends: If you get an invitation to someone's home for a meal and you have family in town, it is impolite to ask if they can be invited too. The best response is, "Thank you so much for your invitation, but we'll have to take a rain check as we have family visiting." When the host wants your family too, she will counter with, "Oh, but we'd love to have your family as well." In that case, bring over a lovely gift and be very grateful!

And a word to you, Balabusta. Instead of getting bent out of shape, or feeling obligated to comply, just calmly reply, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear you can't make it Friday night. Shabbos day won't work for us this week."

Signed,
Esther

there's a slight chance that this could go badly, but he's my brother so we're going to take that chance.

Dear Esther,

I live in a smaller community and recently a new family moved in. Let's call them the Steins. I invite them over for Shabbos meals and include them in any parties I host (upsherins, birthday parties, etc). I've introduced them to other couples their age in the community too. My problem is that Mrs. Stein wants more from me than I can give her. She calls or texts me almost every day to go here or there with her or to meet for coffee. I finally met her once, but most of the time I have other things I need or want to do. Sometimes she just texts, "What are you doing today?" If I text back "Cleaning my house!", she'll ask if I want company. I don't respond. I'm feeling suffocated by her and I know she is hurt by my constant avoidance. How can I explain to her that while I value our friendship, I also strongly need my space?

Signed,
Civil Cyril

Dear Cyril,

You have an admirer! A not so secret one. You mentioned that Mrs. Stein is new to the neighborhood and that your community is small, and so I would gather that she is probably lonely. Lonely people can sometimes become needy and it sounds like Mrs. Stein "needs" something from you. Just like we cannot turn away a poor person who asks us for money, we should not turn away an emotionally poor person who asks us for friendship. But, we do not give *all* our money to the poor person and we should not give all our time and energy to an emotionally needy one. We need to set boundaries.

I'm guessing that Mrs. Stein is doing all the initiating in your relationship (aside from the Shabbos meals and other more formal forms of socializing), and that is causing her to feel lonelier and more desperate. She senses that you aren't interested in the relationship (at least to the extent that she is), yet she won't give up because she likes you, needs you, and wants to be your friend. She needs to feel that you are interested in her personally (not just as a Shabbos guest) and that you would make time for just her. It doesn't have to be often, but if she felt like you wanted to spend time with her periodically, it would probably satisfy her.

Here's my advice: Call Mrs. Stein and suggest a very specific coffee date. Te her that you value her frien ship very much and that while your schedule is busy, you do want to spend time together. Perhaps you could meet every Rosh Chodesh for a half hour coffee break, or once every two weeks. You set the standing date that works with your schedule. I think if Mrs. Stein knew that you would be seeing each other and spending time regularly, she would feel secure in the friendship and have what to look forward to. I bet the incessant phone calls and texts would wane and maybe, just maybe, you can fill her need without throwing a wrench in your own schedule and sacrificing your private time.

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,

We are going to be selling our current house and buying a new home and need to find a realtor. My husband wants to give the business to a new realtor in our community but I am hesitant to do so. I am concerned that a new realtor won't do as good a job as an experienced realtor and it will be difficult to "fire" him from the job if we are not happy at some point. Also, I'm not so comfortable with a community member/friend knowing our financial matters. Do I have valid concerns? Or is my husband right and we should give business to our own?

Signed,
Leah



Dear Leah,

You have valid concerns and still your husband is right! There is a risk when doing business with friends (and certainly friends who are new in a business) that they might not do as good a job as someone else and they necessarily will get up close and personal with your private business. But, if it was your brother who was the realtor, would you be arguing with your husband still? Or would you say, yeah, there's a slight chance that this could go badly, but he's my brother so we're going to take that chance. You're willing to go out on a limb for your brother (even though he may be a new realtor, and may take your business for granted, and may know more about your finances than you would like), because he's your brother and you want him to succeed and you know that if you don't help him get his business off the ground, no one will.

Strong communities are built on brotherly support. Whether in the forms of Shifra and Puah, Tomchei Shabbos or friends helping friends' businesses take off. The highest form of *tzedakah* is giving another person a job; giving a fellow Jew business (especially when he is starting up) is the same thing. And Hashem promises that you will be repaid ten times over, so you have nothing to fear.

Signed,
Esther