BETWEEN FRIENDS with ESTHER EtiQuette



Dear Esther,

I have a friend who constantly posts pictures of her exclusive parties (none of which I am invited to) on Facebook and Instagram. I know I shouldn't care, but I do. Actually, I more than care. Every time I open Instagram and see a picture of four smiling couples holding wine glasses around a pretty dinner table with a caption that says something like "best night ever," I get a stomach ache from feeling hurt and left out. I'm a woman in my thirties and when I see these pictures, I feel like I'm in high school again. Isn't it impolite to post pictures of private parties on something as public as Facebook?

Signed,
Petty Perri

Dear Perri,

It's a shame that someone's social insecurities are making you feel bad. Your friend is posting those pictures to assert her social standing and is seeking validation from social media. Her message is, "See? I have a life that's fun and full and I'm liked and wanted." Obviously, she isn't secure in her popularity because she's feeling the need to prove it to people like you. She knows that it might offend some friends when she posts those photos but her need to show off is overriding her sensitivity. It's okay to feel left out. Allow yourself to feel that feeling and resolve not to inflict it on anyone else.

I'm happy you brought this up as I have been thinking about social media and its effects on socialization. There are some practices that are becoming all too common on sites like Facebook and Instagram (those are the only ones I'm familiar with at this point), that really should not be common at all. In fact, I must admit I have fallen prey to some of them myself.

For example, recently I posted a picture of a cake I baked for Shabbos. It

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was an impressive cake with a pretty icing topped with shaved chocolate and nuts. A bunch of my friends "liked" my picture of my cake (can you believe we do this? Press a button to like pictures we looked at?) and a few even commented with compliments like "gorgeous!" and "looks amazing" and "Wow Esther!", and I felt pretty good about myself. About a week later as I was scrolling through my Instagram feed, pressing the like button on a picture of someone's beautifully set dining room table, I had an epiphany: This world of Instagram is a world of negative attention.

Let me explain. We all need attention. We all need validation. And generally, as adults, we find legitimate and positive ways to get it. So, for example, if I worked hard on baking a cake and decorating it to perfection, I would serve my cake to my family or some friends who would enjoy its deliciousness and between bites say, "Wow, Esther, this is delicious! You are a fantastic baker."

I earned attention through enhancing some people's lives. That is positive attention.

In the world of Instagram I get to have my cake (pictured and posted) and eat it (all by myself) too! By showing a picture of my cake to a mass group of "friends" who will get nothing out of it other than an obligation to push a like button, I am blatantly (and embarrassingly) seeking attention. I am no different than a three-year-old child holding up a scribbled paper shouting "LOOK WHAT I MADE!!" except I am not three. Now "LOOK WHAT I MADE" is not as bad as "LOOK WHAT I HAVE." But believe it or not, people post "LOOK WHAT I HAVE" on social media all the time. Like your friend posting pictures of her little parties. "LOOK WHAT I HAVE! AN ENVIABLE SOCIAL LIFE!" Like people who post pictures of themselves in a new sheitel or a new dress: "LOOK WHAT I HAVE!" "DON'T I LOOK PRETTY"? Like women who post pictures of themselves and their husbands. "LOOK AT US!" How starved for attention are we? Would any of these women walk into a shul of 100 people and scream, "LOOK AT ME! I LOOK AMAZING, RIGHT?" No they would not. You might ask your sister or your close friend, "Don't I look good today?" but never a whole crowd. So why is this behavior acceptable on Instagram?

Probably because enough people are doing it. And most people follow the herd and don't stop to think if it's appropriate or why they are doing it. If we went through the whole thought process and pondered the impetuses for our ridiculous posts, we'd probably blush and stop.

WhatsApp groups are different than media like Facebook and Instagram because it is generally a more private and controlled group that constitutes a WE rather than a big world of I's. So for example, when I post a family picture on my family WhatsApp I am sharing our family with our family.

So, dear Reader, next time you're about to post a selfie, or a picture of your new couch, think: Why do I want to post this? Do I need some compliments today? Maybe there is a less narcissistic way of getting them. Like inviting someone over who will actually sit on your new couch. She'll probably tell you how nice the fabric is and how great you look! Let's even do away with "I am blessed" posts. How wonderful that you are blessed! Please thank Hashem for your blessings. Open up a *Tehillim* and say *Hodu LaShem ki tov!*

Signed,
Esther

Dear Esther,

I'm getting used to the fact that there is no one in this entire city to pick up the slack for me though I always pick up the slack for others. My kids, who are all teenagers and older, expect fresh breakfast, lunch and dinner, a clean house and washed and folded laundry, yet contribute next to nothing to the household duties. At my job, I'm constantly covering for coworkers when they are sick or have an emergency, yet somehow when I have an emergency, no one offers to help. I always invite mothers and their children when their husbands leave town. Those same women never invite me when I am in that situation. I make *sheva brachos* for friends; they never make for me. I am becoming bitter and resentful. Any ideas?

Signed,
Used, Abused and Not in the Least Bit Amused

Dear Used,

You hit the nail on the head with your signature. You are being used and abused and the pattern is starting at home. By now you have realized that if you allow yourself to be taken advantage of, there will always be someone ready to use up every bit of you that you offer. Even your kids. When a person is always available to others, says yes to everything, and has no limits, people stop respecting them. When a person loses respect, others walk all over them to the point that people forget that they are a person too, with needs! It's time to start setting boundaries. You are not the "yes" girl any more. Not at home, not at work and not at play. With your children this means deciding what you are doing, what you are not doing and what you expect them to chip in with. Then telling your children what you have decided. For example: "Kids, I've decided that the way we are living is not respectful to each other and is damaging to our family. I am not going to be doing everything by myself anymore. We are a family and we need to work together. I enjoy making dinner for the family and will continue to do that but breakfasts and lunches are your responsibilities now. Additionally, I need each child to take one chore that they will do daily whether it is folding laundry, loading the dishwasher or taking out the garbage." Then, decide what happens when one person doesn't carry their load, because you will surely be tested. It cannot be tears or shouting. It must be something tangible and simple to implement.

Your coworkers have also gotten used to you never saying no and never asking for anything in return. They are a little too comfortable requesting favors from you. Next time a coworker asks you to stay an extra hour for him or her, don't rearrange your schedule to be able to say yes. If you can (easily), say yes. If you can't, say no. Your coworkers need to know that you have a life with obligations that can't be altered at their whim. When they see you respecting yourself (your time and commitments), they will start respecting you too and stop taking you for granted.

As for your friends: I am questioning whether they are truly your friends if they do not reciprocate your friendship. Are you offering to host and make *sheva brachos* for people who will gladly take you up on the offer but do not really consider you a friend? They may just think, "Wow, she's so nice, so all-capable, always helping and never asking for anything in return. What an amazing woman!" with no notions of a return favor. A friendship is a give-and-take relationship. You need to do a friend inventory and toss out the "friends" who are just takers. There is no *mitzvah* in aiding and abetting selfishness bordering on abuse.

Signed,
Esther

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