

Torah Insights: The Role of Parents and In-Laws in the Lives of Their Adult Children

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What is a role of a parent in the dating process?

Take wives and give birth to sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and husbands for your daughters. They will give birth to sons and daughters, multiply there (in exile).

Yirmiyahu 29:6

קחו נשים והולידו בנים ובנות וקחו לבניכם נשים ואת בנותיכם תנו לאנשים ותלדנה בנים ובנות ורבו שם ואל-תמעטו.
ירמיהו כט:ו

Hashem's charge to those in exile in Bavel delivered through Yirmiyahu HaNavi to marry off their children is a timeless mandate to ensure the proper continuity of our People (*Kidushin* 29a, 30b). Nonetheless, the parental role in marrying off children varies from generation to generation and from community to community.

For example, in Talmudic times, it was common to marry off children in their early teens. Nowadays, marrying off children at this early age is no longer practiced anywhere. Similarly, a father has an obligation to enable his daughter to be a suitable marriage candidate by providing her with nice clothing (*Kidushin* 30b) and a dowry (*Kesubos* 52b). This obligation is understood differently in each segment of Torah society.

More fundamentally, parental involvement in marrying off children is approached in dramatically different ways. It often varies from community to community and from family to family. In some families, the parents play an active role as initiators, and in other families, the child leads the process and the parents are available for support. It may be helpful for the parents and child to have an open dialogue about their respective roles in the process. Parents should be appreciative of the many efforts done on behalf of their children, whether through a traditional matchmaker, a friend, or through a social venue. Parents and children should work together to identify the role of the parents and the child in the dating process.

From the perspective of *kibud av va'em*, what should a child do when his/her parents object to his/her choice of a spouse?

It is widely known that the Rama (*Y.D.* 240:25) rules that a son is not required to obey the

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objections of a parent to his choice of a wife. However, a more careful reading of the Rama's source (Maharik 166) and the *Chazon Ish* (Y.D. 149:8) yields a different conclusion. The child may ignore an unreasonable request of a parent, including a request not to marry someone suitable. However, if we can objectively determine that his/her choice is inappropriate and the parents' request is reasonable, the child must obey the request of the parent.

There is an inherent difficulty in implementing this rule on a practical level because when such situations occur, the parents will often assume that their request is reasonable and the child will argue that it is unreasonable. In order to resolve these issues, a halachic question must be asked by the child to a competent rabbi who knows and understands the prospective couple. The rabbi will take the following into consideration:

- The prospective couple may in fact be appropriate for one another, in which case the child need not obey his parents. However, the rabbi should make sure that the child is aware of the consequences of disobeying the request of the parents, which may cause friction and lead to stress, both personally and on a marriage.
- When considering whether a spouse is an appropriate match, the rabbi should consider both members of the match. Parents may object to a prospective spouse because of certain flaws that they see in the prospective spouse, and may not realize that their own child has similar or complementary flaws. While the parents may see their objection as perfectly reasonable, it is only because they may not have an objective perspective on the situation. In this case, the objection is unreasonable and need not be obeyed. [For a more detailed halachic discussion, see *Bais Yitzchak* Vol. 38 p. 190-192.]

What are some helpful guidelines for parents, in-laws and married children?

Once a couple is married, potential intervention is even more problematic. While the technical exemption from obeying a parent applies to a married woman (*Kidushin* 30b, See *Gur Aryeh*, Vayikra 19:3), the underlying logic may be that her marital responsibilities may make the parental request unreasonable. The identical exemption can apply if a parental request to a married man threatens his *shalom bayis*, marital harmony (Ibid, p. 191).

Wise parents make no demands of their married children, irrespective of the financial support they provide. Common flash points, such as where a young couple spends Yom Tov or what they name their children, are opportunities for parents to demonstrate the wisdom of silence. Even unsolicited advice often yields regrettable consequences.

Of course, good married children learn from parental role models and establish healthy relationships with parents-in-law.

In conclusion, parents should count their blessings when dealing with the challenges of both marriageable and married children. Good parenting, at every stage of a child's life, is critical to carrying out the biblical mandate of our People's continuity, and to yield lasting *nachas* and familial harmony.