

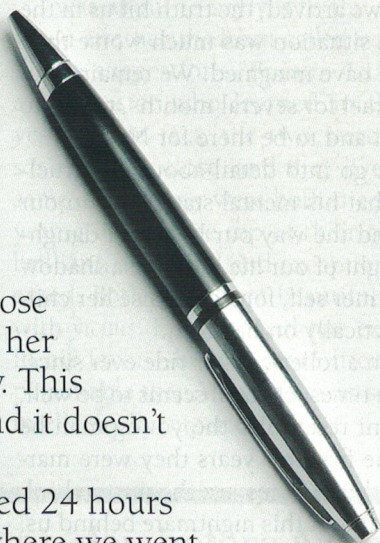


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ASK

RABBI

Dear Rabbi Shais Taub



I am one of those brokenhearted mothers whose child has decided to cut off her relationship with the family. This happened five years ago, and it doesn't get easier.

In the beginning I mourned 24 hours a day. I tried to figure out where we went wrong. These days I try not to allow myself to be consumed by it, but it's nearly impossible. Honestly, even when I heard my daughter's complaints I couldn't believe what I was hearing. The things she said either never happened or were totally exaggerated. But regardless, I decided to do whatever she wanted because the pain was too much for me, my husband and my other children.

I apologized, I asked her what I could do to change things. I groveled, but nothing make a difference. Recently, my daughter has been making overtures towards us, but she has set terms. She and I can have some relationship, but my husband can't be included. My husband says that it's unacceptable. She can't divide us. If she won't speak to her father, she can't speak to her mother. He says she isn't the only one who can set terms.

## My Estranged Child Wants to Reconcile

I'm listening to my husband because that's what I have to do. But at the same time I'm wondering if that's the correct course of action. Perhaps if I repaired my relationship with her then eventually she will repair her relationship with him as well, and then he will gain so much. He is literally sick about this too. In all the years I've known my husband, through losing his mother and his father and other hardships he has never wept as much as the day our daughter sent us a "good-bye" letter. He says *Tehillim* every day with heartrending sobs, begging Hashem to help us.

I don't want to deflect away from us, but I would like to add that I truly believe that this has happened either because of her therapist or because her husband is abusive. No person can be happy to be cut off from their parents and siblings while missing all the family gatherings and *simchos*. We are such a close knit family, and she is missing out on all of it.

I'm sorry to be rambling, so I will return to my question: Should I try to build a relationship with my daughter without my husband's consent in the hope that ultimately he will benefit from it?

Thank you so much. I am looking forward to your wise answer, as I am an ardent follower of your column and have learned a lot from it over the years.

*A Brokenhearted Mother*



**It's important to consider the fact that in previous generations moving to a new city or a new country often meant all but losing contact with family. We have to wonder how much of that may have been intentional.**



Having said that, I will now try to address the main purpose of your letter, which was to ask about the decision you are currently grappling with in regards to accepting your daughter's overtures to rebuild your relationship.

My simple answer is that without a doubt you should reconnect with your daughter without delay and in whichever way she is most comfortable. Since I am not sure you are ready to do that, I will elaborate on my position, and I hope it will help you find clarity on this matter.

I think it will be most helpful if I work within the framework of the logic that you have presented in your letter. The argument that you give in favor of reconnecting with your daughter is that if you repair your relationship with her perhaps it will eventually bring her to repairing her relationship with your husband as well. I cannot tell if this is a line of reasoning that

you came up with in order to feel better about reconnecting with your daughter without your husband or if it is an argument that you came up with in order to convince your husband to allow you to do so, but I will respond to each possibility.

If this is an argument you have come up with to assuage your own guilt, let me tell you that you don't even need to make this argument, because you have nothing to feel guilty about. Why should a mother feel guilty about taking care of her child? Being connected to family is a basic human need. Indeed, you say as much in your letter. So why should you not do whatever you can to provide that for your daughter in whatever way you can?

If you will argue that she is the one choosing not to have that connection, I will counter that the opposite is true, at least in this immediate context. Right now, it is she who is asking for a relationship and being declined.

If you want to bring in the larger context that it is she who cut off from the family in the first place, I would have you ask yourself how that is pertinent. Is your intention now to punish her for that, and, if yes, aside from the cruelty involved, is there any sense in that? The punishment for disconnecting oneself should be to be pushed away even more? If a child doesn't eat, should we punish them by refusing to feed them when they ask for food?

What this all comes down to, in my opinion, is whether we view our connection with our children as something that we are doing for our children or as something that we are doing for ourselves. If

**Dear Brokenhearted**

**Mother:** Before addressing your actual question, I want to make two brief prefaces.

First, you describe the experience of estrangement from your child as "mourning," and I think that is an apt description. As such, I want to extend my sympathies to you and pray that Hashem give you continued strength, comfort and healing.

Second, I want to comment on your choice of words in introducing yourself as "one of those brokenhearted mothers..." I think the implication of your words is correct, namely that today there seem to be many such cases of parent-child estrangement.

Furthermore, while some view this as a new phenomenon, a product of the modern age, I think it's important to consider the fact that in previous generations moving to a new city or a new country often meant all but losing contact with family. Obviously, it would be impossible to know how many of these cases involved people who were purposely severing ties, but one must assume that such things happened. In those days, with the lack of transportation and communication being what they were, it was understood that relocating could mean never seeing one's family again. We have to wonder how much of that may have been intentional. My point is that your situation is not unique, not today and probably not ever. I share this with you only in the spirit of "*tzaras rabbim chatzi nechamah*—a problem shared by many is half a comfort."

the parent-child relationship is something that we pursue because we want it (of course we also want it, but I am talking about our primary motivation), then I can see how a parent would feel that they have a right to pick and choose the conditions under which that bond can take place. However, if the parent-child bond is something that we give to our children, something we do for them, not for ourselves (even though we obviously want it for ourselves as well), then our approach becomes completely different.

If I am trying to give my child something they need, I will take any opportunity to do so, even if it is in a way that causes me pain or discomfort. After all, I am a parent. That is what parents do.

The above is what I would respond to you if the argument you have fashioned (that connecting to your daughter may lead her to eventually connect to your husband) was something you came up with primarily to “excuse” yourself. (Although, as I said before, you need no excuses for providing something for your child that no one else in the world can provide for them—a bond with a parent.)

If, however, this argument was meant primarily for your husband in order to convince him to accept the idea of not negotiating “terms” with your daughter as she attempts to reconnect with you, I will ask you the following: I hesitate to ask this, and I pray that it not bring discord between you and your husband, *chas v’shalom*, but ask yourself, or better yet, ask him, if providing your child with a bond to her parents is something that you are selflessly doing for her, not for yourselves, just as you have selflessly done and do so much for her and all of your children, then why must any terms be negotiated? How is that appropriate?

Are you giving a gift? Or making a deal? Is parental contact a bargaining chip?

Furthermore, to once more use the comparison to eating (and I think it is

**If the parent-child bond is something that we give to our children, something we do for them, not for ourselves, then our approach becomes completely different.**

indeed helpful to compare emotional needs to physical ones), if a child who doesn’t eat is suddenly willing to eat half a meal, should you refuse to serve them until they agree to eat a full meal?

To put it simply, whose needs should we be focused on here—ours or our child’s? That’s also why calling your daughter’s request “unacceptable” sounds so out of place to me. The word “unacceptable” makes it sound as if you think the relationship is for you, and therefore you can choose whether or not you’d like to “accept” it. But if the relationship is something that your daughter needs from you, then it is she who decides what she can accept. It’s not about power or control or gaining leverage; it’s about parents providing for their children.

I understand that you suspect your daughter’s therapist or spouse may be to blame in this situation. I have no way of knowing if this is true, but if it is, then isn’t that an even more compelling argument for how important it is to extend the lifeline that your daughter is now asking for?

As for the argument that giving your daughter the connection she craves would constitute an act of “dividing”

you and your husband, it is your choice whether or not this divides you. If your husband consents—and I would argue that he should do more than consent and should be grateful for this opening—and chooses to view your reconnecting with your daughter while he holds back as something that both of you are selflessly doing for your daughter together, then it will only unite you.

Finally, you say that your husband “says *Tehillim* every day with heartrending sobs, begging Hashem to help us.” Is it possible that your daughter’s recent overtures are the beginning of Hashem’s response to these prayers? If so, forgive me for saying this, but even if you think you are in a place to negotiate terms with your daughter, do you think you are in a place to negotiate terms with Hashem as well?

I know that you and your husband are hurting. I know that you have been consumed with grief. But as parents we set aside our own feelings and do whatever we can for our children, while asking for nothing in return. I hope that this makes sense to you and that it will also make sense to your husband.

I pray that you both have strength to do the selfless thing and that Hashem bring healing to all of your broken hearts—not just yours, Brokenhearted Mother, but to your husband and, perhaps most of all, since I think her plight may not be known or understood, to your daughter as well.

*With Blessing,*

RST



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ASH

RABBI

## In Response to Last Week...

Dear Editor:

In your June 17 issue, Rabbi Shais Taub responded to a mother whose estranged daughter wants to reconcile with her but not with her husband. Her husband, however, doesn't think they should be "divided." Rabbi Taub advises her to accept the offer as a selfless mother whose hungry daughter needs to be fed. I vehemently disagree. The first consideration for this woman should be to avoid causing her husband pain. Her first loyalty must be to her spouse and her marriage. Even if her husband accedes to this pernicious arrangement, he will undoubtedly suffer terribly. The daughter, who is in violation of *issurim d'Oraisa*, is only adding insult to injury. She does not deserve to have her hunger satisfied by her mother at the cost of her father's pain.

I suspect that the mother is motivated more by the prospect of reconciliation with her alienated grandchildren than with her daughter. It is heartbreaking. At best, she will be setting a terrible and destructive example for the grandchildren. As difficult as it may be, she should find solace in the knowledge that she is doing the right thing by not going along with it. As a true *ishes chayil*, she should give her husband love and protect him from any more pain.

My advice to this unfortunate woman is to agree to see her daughter alone, with her husband's knowledge and consent, and to persuade her that they should go together to a Rebbe or a *rav* to discuss the situation. If the daughter refuses to go, or if she remains intransigent after they go, the mother should have nothing more to do with her unless there is a full reconciliation. May her and her husband's suffering be a *kapparah*.

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Reinman

# SHAI'S TAUB

## A Second Look



Dear Editor:

While I usually enjoy reading Rabbi Taub's column and appreciate his insights, this week's response to the mother whose daughter would like to reconcile—but only with her, not her father—left me puzzled and upset. If we take the mother's claims at face value—that the daughter cut off her relationship with them for five years due to her therapist's advice or because of an abusive husband, and not because there was anything approaching an abusive situation in the house in which she grew up, I think Rabbi Taub is doing a great disservice to the parents by advising that the mother reconcile with her daughter against the wishes of her husband.

This is further manipulative behavior on the part of the daughter and will indeed drive a wedge between the parents. Is it not enough to know that the father cries over his *Tehillim* daily due to this rupture in the family? Do we also have to sacrifice him, his self-respect and his role as head of the family in order to satisfy a daughter who is acting immature, privileged and conniving?

Of course, if the father did treat his daughter in any kind of abusive way when she was growing up, I would not have this opinion.

Sincerely,

Sari Gross, Jerusalem

Dear Editor:

I have been following the parent alienation crisis and its causes for quite some time. I was appalled that *Ami* published Rabbi Shais Taub's answer this past week. I would not be surprised if you were to get a lot of feedback from both camps. However, I feel that Rabbi Taub's answer will cause a setback in trying to improve this crisis. As far as awareness goes, Rabbi Taub's very public answer is part of the problem and adds to the public crisis. Rabbi Taub is a *rav*. Does he have any professional training or experience in parent alienation, or is he giving his answer to this very sensitive topic based on his experience as a rabbi?

His answer seems to have come off the cuff, which is a big problem for such a big problem. I think it would be prudent for Rabbi Taub to retract his answer to "A Brokenhearted Mother" or at least present his sources. It seems from his answer that he does not have personal experience in this area. Does Rabbi Taub know any unjustly alienated parents who are in pain and agony 24/7? I feel that his answer added fuel to the fire of adult children who are doing this to their parents without enough due cause to do so.

Sincerely,

E.S.

## A Second Look

### Dear Editor:

As usual, I enjoyed Rabbi Shais Taub's article of 25 Sivan. Having dealt with *shalom bayis* challenges for over 40 years, *bli ayin hara*, my humble opinion would be to add two points:

1. Since the wife's priority is to address the husband's physical and emotional needs, it might be a good idea for her to have her husband read your thoughtful message to impress upon him that we feel his pain and are not neglecting it.

2. The mother might explain to her daughter that she is reaching out to her even though her father is in pain from not having any connection to his daughter whom he loves and is constantly *davening* for.

Wishing Rabbi Taub many years of *harbatzas haTorah* and *chesed*,

Avrohom Reich  
Kehilas Hatzalas Yisrael  
Co-founder of Shalom V'shalva

### Dear Readers:

Since last week's column ("My Estranged Child Wants to Reconcile," *Ami* #473) elicited some fairly strong responses, including the ones printed here, it seems proper to revisit this topic.

First of all, I am grateful to those who wrote in to share their perspective so that readers may have a more complete picture of the issue at hand. I have also forwarded an advance copy of this week's column to last week's letter writer.

Secondly, I want to clarify that it was never my intention that my response last week should be viewed as taking a stance on the highly complex and emotionally charged issue of parental estrangement. Judging from some of the reader reactions, however, that is precisely how it was viewed, and therefore an explanation is clearly in order.

As I mentioned in my response last week, such stories are unfortunately not all that rare, and I receive letters on the topic quite often—I would estimate at least once a month. Yet I generally do not answer those letters publicly for the simple reason that I do not want to take sides on this highly contentious issue. It's not that I have a problem letting my opinion be known; rather, it's impossible to even have an opinion without knowing each and every situation firsthand.

There are some cases of parental alienation where the parents are absolutely at fault, yet there are those cases where the child is absolutely at fault, as well as cases where *all* are at fault, and even cases where *none of them* are at fault (such as when the entire issue was fomented by a third party). Since it would be impossible to determine from one letter written by only one side which kind of case was being presented, it is impossible to respond properly.

So why did I make an exception last week? Only because I felt then (as I do

now) that in this specific case there was a way of offering a way forward without having to assume which party, if any, was in the wrong. I felt there was a clear path for this family to find some healing, as well as a strong likelihood for everyone to eventually achieve what they want. Yes, it would involve a great deal of selflessness on the part of the father to go along with the plan, but it would bring him, I feel, a step closer to his tearful prayers being answered, whereas the all-or-nothing approach that his wife said he was suggesting would only lead to a stalemate.

In other words, even if the daughter were in the wrong in this case and the parents were the aggrieved party, it would seem wise for them not to stand on principle. After all, I have to assume that what the parents really want is reconciliation. As such, I suggested a way through which I believed they could begin achieving that.

A further point that I would like to make about the situation described in last week's letter is that it was not a case of a child cutting off from her parents (she had already cut off from them) but to the contrary, a child asking for a connection and attempting at reconciliation.

Although the parents would ideally like to see that reconciliation happen with both parents at the same time, the reality is that many times rebuilding broken bonds happens gradually and in small steps, through winning trust and establishing new patterns over time. I am sure that many parents who are estranged from their children would welcome such an opportunity with the hopes that it could lead to more.

Of course, there may still be those who are of the opinion that a hardline approach is the right one. I happen to disagree, but people are certainly entitled to their opinion, especially if they are going through this painful situation themselves. If people

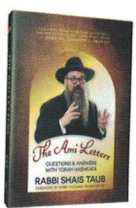
were successful with such an approach, I think it would be of great benefit for them to share their stories, and I invite them to write to this column to do so.

Finally, I think it is essential for readers to bear in mind that my response was to the letter writer only. This means two things. Firstly, it means that it was not to anyone else, even if they may feel that their situation is similar. Secondly, it means that my answer was to the mother, not to the daughter. If the daughter had written to me, my answer could have been very different. I think people will see that on those occasions over the past eight years when I have responded to children who have cut off from their parents, I have consistently recommended that they consider the possibility of reconciliation. Indeed, I have received harsh critique for that, as well, and I have been accused of not being sensitive to the plight of such children.

The bottom line is that I can only respond to the person who is asking for a response. It does no good to tell someone what other people should do. When parents write to me, I can only tell them what parents should do. When children write to me, I can only tell them what children should do.

May we soon see the fulfillment of the prophecy (*Malachi 3:23-24*), "I will send the prophet Eliyahu... to reconcile parents with children and children with their parents..."

With Blessing,  
RST



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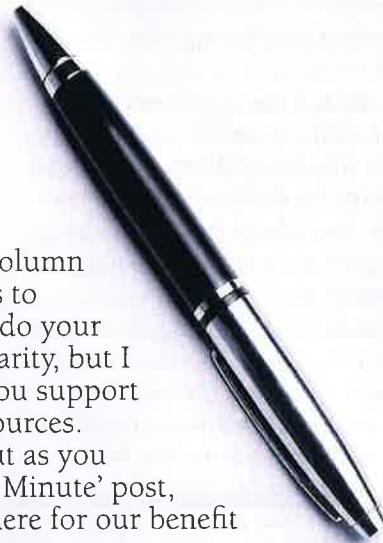
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# Ask Rabbi Sha

Dear  
Rabbi  
Shais Taub



I am an avid reader of your column and always enjoy your answers to the questions posed. Not only do your answers provide insight and clarity, but I am always impressed at how you support them thoroughly with Torah sources.

This is not only necessary, but as you say in your recent 'Meaningful Minute' post, the Torah and its *mitzvos* are there for our benefit and show us the best way to live.

Therefore, I was extremely surprised to read your answer to the broken-hearted mother whose daughter had cut off from her for five years but now has been making overtures towards her. (Considering this daughter went so far as to write a "goodbye" letter to her parents, one can't help questioning her motivation for these overtures.)

In your answer, you approached this issue from a purely personal-psychological level and did not include a halachic or hashkafic perspective, which is in stark contrast to your usual style, which has always been to back up your answer with Torah sources.

Allow me to ask you how the mitzvah of *kibud horim* can be reconciled with the daughter's behavior of cutting off from her parents and her subsequent setting the terms of reconciliation to only speak to her mother. I have heard that some mental health practitioners base the permission for withdrawal of the filial duty of *kibud horim* on the opinion of Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zt"l*, who exempts the fulfillment of a mitzvah when this mitzvah endangers mental health (see *Igros Moshe Orach Chayim* 172).

## A Third Look at Parental Alienation

However, this *heter* allows for withdrawal from *kibud horim* in a passive way only (similar to *Yoreh Dei'ah* 240:17), not in the active way described by the mother. To write a "good-bye" letter and then dictate the terms of a relationship is actively violating the obligations of *kibud* and especially of *mora*. If her mother consents to this behavior, she might have a problem with *lifnei iver!*

Furthermore, the *halachah* states (*Yoreh Dei'ah* 240:17) that a wife's first obligation is to her husband, and in some cases this might even mean putting her husband before her parents. That being the case, surely this applies even more so when this involves an adult child to whom *al pi Torah* a parent has no obligation.

Also, from a practical perspective it seems strange that a woman should take steps that might jeopardize her marriage for the sake of an adult child. It's bad enough that the mother is broken-hearted from her errant daughter's behavior; why should she also lose her husband's support?

Naturally, it is possible that this case might be different, as the daughter could be under the influence of an abusive husband and therefore possibly an *anusah*, but I am still surprised that the halachic angle was not explored. At a time when more and more children feel at liberty to cut their parents out of their lives, causing grief and turmoil to the parents and the wider





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family, your response might have provided justification to their behavior rather than stressing that their actions violate *mitzvos* that have always been considered as fundamentals of *Yiddishkeit*.

Sincerely,

Shmuel Karchi

**D**ear Ami: I am writing as a daughter who has been estranged from her mother for some time. I thought it would be helpful to offer my point of view in order for people to understand how such a tragic situation comes about. The nature of a mother is to love and care for a child unconditionally. I have never experienced this.

My mother is an extremely difficult and verbally abusive person. As children, we all lived in the shadow of her volatile and unstable personality. To outsiders, she appears mostly elegant, personable and charming; she reserves her mean behavior to those very close to her. As we started to leave the house and establish our own families, she felt her control over us weakening and did her best to put down our spouses and in-laws in front of us, thereby ensuring we remain loyal only to her. This started deepening the cracks in a weak relationship. She also created many rifts between us as siblings, and would rejoice when we didn't get along, because this meant we would be more loyal to her.

To describe life with a narcissistic mother to someone who has not experienced it is simply impossible. A mother who is narcissistic is the opposite of everything a mother should be, yet she expects her children to

be there constantly for her and to give in to her unreasonable demands. If she finds her children not fulfilling her unrelatable expectations, she laments about them being disloyal and terrible children.

Every *simchah* I made, starting from the *bris milah* of my oldest son, to the wedding of my youngest daughter, was overshadowed by trauma and tears, as she made ridiculous demands ensuring that she was always the center of attention. As my children grew older, and I started to distance myself from her unhealthy ways and to establish boundaries to protect my sanity, my marriage and the calmness of my home, she would become increasingly more volatile, going so far as to try to ruin my own children's *shidduchim*. I even heard her once say, when she was angry with one of my siblings, "I *daven* he should become sick with cancer."

I was once in the hospital recovering from a serious operation when she suddenly appeared in my room, pulled off my oxygen mask, and whispered loudly, "Maybe this will teach you to do *teshuvah*." If this seems extreme to you, let me explain

**There are situations where both the parents and the child are wrong, and even situations where neither are wrong.**

that this is the bitter reality of children living with a narcissistic parent.

The only healthy way to maintain the relationship is with minimal contact, to ensure that your life and your relationship with your own spouse, children and grandchildren can flourish, and that you are not a prisoner of her excessively self-serving behavior.

When I encourage my adult children to try to maintain somewhat of a relationship with her, they often break down in tears, recalling the multitude of times they saw her taunt me, make me cry, and embarrass me in front of others. This was besides the times she would taunt them or make inappropriate comments to them. It remains a source of tremendous pain that I and my children don't have a grandmother to share their *simchos* because of the potential to be caused immeasurable hurt and destruction of their relationships with their spouses and children.

We are respectful to her, call to wish a good Yom Tov, and cautiously invite her to *simchos* (and hope she won't come and ruin them). But there cannot and will not ever be a warm contact and loving relationship. She is simply not capable. And as much as the tears prick our eyelids when we see a mother and daughter share a genuine moment of love, when we see an *Elter Bubby* cradling her great-grandchild, we choke them back and know this is something we will never experience with her.

I *daven* that all your readers should only know of happy and healthy relationships that bring *nachas* to themselves and Hashem.

*A Suffering Child*

# Ask Rabbi Shais Taub

**D**ear Ami: I would like to respectfully disagree with one of the responses to Rabbi Shais Taub in the Second Look installment regarding the Broken-Hearted Mother whose estranged daughter wants to reconcile with her but not her husband.

The letter writer's first point is that a wife's loyalty must be to her spouse and to her marriage. That's very true, but what exactly does that have to do with a mother responding to her estranged daughter's attempts at reconciliation? What's so disloyal about that? Rabbi Taub assures the mother that she does not need "to feel guilty about taking care of her child...[as] being connected to family is a basic human need. [For example,] if a child doesn't eat, should we punish her by refusing to feed her when she asks for food?"

The letter writer disagrees with this premise and argues that "She (the child) does not deserve to have her hunger satisfied by her mother at the cost of her father's pain. As difficult as it may be, she should find solace in the knowledge that she is doing the right thing by not going along with it. As a true *eishes chayil*, she should give her husband love and protect him from any more pain."

But why would a husband be "pained" by his wife giving food to their starving child? In my humble opinion, if a husband is genuinely pained by this, he has a serious problem. In such a case, if she is a true *eishes chayil*, she should try to get help for her husband. Furthermore, would this not be a compelling reason for a child to want to cut off contact with her parents?

He draws other conclusions about assertions that Rabbi Taub never made. Rabbi Taub was very clear that we don't know why the daughter is estranged. There are several possibilities here, and it is presumptuous and short-sighted to assume that the child is absolutely at fault without having concrete evidence to support this.

To quote Rabbi Taub: "There are some

**Tears prick our eyelids when we see a mother and daughter share a genuine moment of love, when we see an Elter Bubby cradling her great-grandchild.**

cases of parental alienation where the parents are absolutely at fault, yet there are those where the child is...[but it's] impossible to determine from one letter written by only one side which kind of case is being presented. In this specific case there was a way of offering a way forward without having to assume which party, if any, was in the wrong. After all, I have to assume that what the parents really want is reconciliation. As such, I suggested a way through which they could begin achieving that."

Finally, the letter writer's claim that the daughter is being *oveir on issurim d'Oraisa* is unsubstantiated. In fact, it is entirely plausible that under these circumstances, if the mother takes his advice and makes her reconciliation with her daughter contingent on the father's inclusion, she—the mother—is actually being *oveir on the issur of lifnei iver* by putting a stumbling block in front of her daughter's attempts to repair the relationship (and thereby thwarting the chance for her daughter to be *mekayeim* the mitzvah of *kibbud eim*)!

Thank you for allowing me to present my views on this very important and thought-provoking issue.

Nina Frost

## Dear Readers

**I**t is obvious, and I suppose not very surprising, that parental alienation is a topic about which many people feel strongly. Since we have continued to receive a deluge of responses (some of which are printed above), I want to share the following few thoughts.

First, I wish to reiterate what I wrote two weeks ago in the first follow-up to this topic, and that is: Each story of parental alienation is different—the nature of each case varying from one extreme to the other. My intention in answering the original letter was therefore not to take a stance on this highly complex and nuanced issue, but to attempt to offer a reasonable path forward for this particular letter writer and her family in their particular situation. Once again, I want to make clear that no inferences about other cases or the subject in general should be drawn from this very specific response.

Next, to those who seem to automatically take exception with the fact that I did not take the side of the parents, I want to ask one question. If you are the one going through the pain of being alienated from your child, perhaps you did nothing at all to cause such treatment, but that doesn't mean that there is never a case in which a child is justified in severely minimizing or breaking off contact from a parent. The letter above from *Suffering Child* is one such example. Does her case strike you as one in which the child is being stubborn, insolent or unreasonable?

My point is, as I said previously, there are situations where the parents are in the wrong, situations where the child is in the wrong, situations where both are in the wrong, and even situations where neither is in the wrong. It therefore makes no sense to try to take a side (any side) without knowing which kind of case one is actually dealing with. What does make

sense is to look for a possibility for healing. And if there is one, then assigning blame has to be made far, far less important than taking a step, even one tiny step, toward reconciliation.

As to the charge that my response two weeks ago was lacking Torah sources, that is a legitimate critique. To be frank, my thinking was that the basic Torah value of seeking peace is obvious and known to all, requiring no source. However, if I were to have given sources, I might have included:

“Be of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace...” (Avos 1:12).

“The entire Torah is for the sake of the ways of peace” (Gittin 59b).

“Great is peace, as the whole Torah was given in order to promote peace in the world, as it is stated (Mishlei 3:17), ‘Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace’” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Chanukah* 4:14.)

Furthermore, we are all aware of the well-known dictum of the Sages: “A person should always be flexible like a reed, and not hard like a cedar” (Taanis 20a)

Now, if one were to argue that the parent-child relationship is different, my response would be that although each situation must be considered on its own, there is no rule stopping parents from forgoing their honor in the course of seeking peace with a child, as *halachah* states: “*Av shemachal al kevodo, kevodo machul*—A father may absolve a child of his duty to honor him” (*Kiddushin* 32a, *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Dei'ah* 240:19. See also *Sefer Chasidim, siman* 565.)

Indeed, it is interesting to me that one of the letters above suggested that if the mother in the original case were to forgive her daughter, she would be the one transgressing *lifnei iver*. I don't know if that is true; however, I do think that the very opposite argument could be made. (I did not make this argument in my original response, and I am still not making it, because I don't know the situation. However, I think it is at least worthy to consider for the sake of perspective.) According to the sources just mentioned, a parent who is overly demanding of his or her children (thus causing the children to not be able to adhere to all that is demanded of them)

would be transgressing *lifnei iver*. Of course, what constitutes “overly demanding” is a discussion in its own right. The point remains, however, that such a concept exists *al pi Torah* and should at least be included in the present discussion.

At any rate, as I said earlier, I don't think it's helpful to figure out who is wrong or who did which sin. The main thing is peace and reconciliation above all.

If I can have the final word on this subject (for now), this is what I would like it to be: If you are a parent who is estranged from your child, or a child who is estranged from your parent, please take this moment to consider reconciliation and do your utmost, as difficult as it may be, for the sake of peace. Ask yourself if there is some small step toward peace that may be taken. For instance, in the case we have discussed, allowing the child to begin reconciling with one parent before the other; or in the case of *Suffering Child* above, where she has minimized contact, but still maintains it. And, of course, there are some very rare cases where until Moshiach comes no amount of reconciliation is possible at all. But even in such cases, the possibility for peace should be considered again and again.

In short, whether you are the child or the parent, I ask you to think about what you can do right now to pursue peace and take that step, even if it is very small. And in the words of the blessing with which Jewish parents bless their children: “May Hashem lift up His countenance to you and give you peace” (*Bamidbar* 6:25).

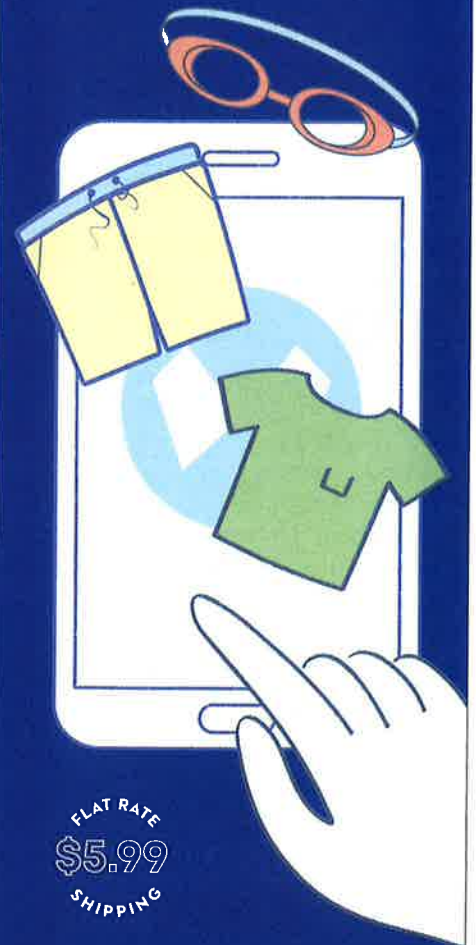
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