

# THE STORY OF THE SLAMMING DOOR

When the Break Comes from Within the Home

A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a black suit jacket over a white shirt and a black fedora hat, stands in front of a white door. The door has a brass handle and is slightly ajar. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“It started with  
a slammed door.”

RABBI S. BINYOMIN GINSBERG

## **The Story of the Slamming Door**

### **When the Break Comes from Within the Home**

It started with a slammed door.

Not just the wooden one to his room — that too had become common — but the invisible one, the emotional barrier that felt louder with each passing week. He was sixteen. Bright. Sharp. Intense. Once, he had been soft-hearted. Sensitive. The kind of child who whispered *Shema* with his mother at bedtime, who leaned in to his father during *zmiros*, who asked innocent questions about Mashiach and *yiras Shamayim*.

But lately, something shifted.

His parents couldn't say anything right. A reminder to help in the kitchen was "controlling." A bedtime curfew was "manipulative." His father's advice? "Toxic." His mother's tears? "Guilt-tripping."

He had begun to read things online. Long articles. Forum posts. Voices that told him he was being "gaslit." That "emotional safety" was his right. That "cutting out toxic people" was strength. He found a new mentor — not a *Rebbe*, not a *mashpia*, but someone who saw his parents as the enemy.

And one day, after a loud confrontation over a trivial phone restriction, he left. Not just from the room. From the home.

He moved in with a distant relative. He blocked his parents' numbers. When they tried to send a message through a third party, he responded coldly: *"Please stop reaching out. I need space. I'm healing from trauma."*

*Trauma?* His parents were stunned. There had never been abuse. No screaming. No violence. Just structure, guidance, and love — perhaps imperfect, but never cruel.

For months, they lived in confusion and grief. They didn't know what to say to neighbors. They didn't know if they should send gifts for his birthday. His mother kept his *kapel* and tefillin bag in the same spot on the shelf. His father davened for him by name every *Shacharis*.

And they waited.

The silence was excruciating. Not knowing was worse than any fight.

It took nearly two years before a message came — short and awkward. *"Can we meet for coffee?"*

That meeting didn't fix everything. But it was a beginning.

And they learned: even when a child slams the door, it doesn't mean the window of connection is forever closed.

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We must be honest. In many of these painful stories, it is not the parents who left the child. Increasingly, we are witnessing a *reverse estrangement* — where it is the married or teenage child who initiates the break, often abruptly, and often backed by outside influence.

And while some of these stories involve complex emotional dynamics, we must confront a new and terrifying pattern: the threat of divorce used as a weapon to cut parents out of a life.

This isn't *sibling rivalry*. This is not a misunderstanding about money or simchah seating. This is a systemic, often irreversible *cutting off* of the very people who gave life.

It is a new phenomenon. And we must speak about it.

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### **Torah and Chazal on Kibbud Av V'Eim**

The Torah says it plainly: "כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ" (שמות כ: יב) "*Honor your father and mother.*"

One of the Aseres HaDibros. Not a suggestion. A Divine command.

The reward? Long life — not just in years, but in legacy. A deep connection to *mesorah*.

The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin 31b* tells of Dama ben Nesinah, who forfeited a vast fortune just to avoid waking his father — and received reward beyond comprehension.

*Shulchan Aruch* (Y.D. 240:1) is clear: "*A person is obligated to honor and fear his father and mother at all times, in all places.*" No exceptions for marriage. No exceptions for therapy.

And yet, we see Torah-observant adults abandoning this mitzvah entirely. A mitzvah equal to honoring Hashem Himself. A mitzvah that never expires.

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### **The Culture of Disposability Has Entered Our Homes**

We live in a *throw-away society*. When a phone slows down, we replace it. When a friendship feels complicated, we unfollow. When a store policy triggers discomfort, we cancel.

And now, *when a parent says something difficult — we cut them off.*

We treat relationships like broken appliances. Fixing is hard. Replacing is easy. But in Yiddishkeit, *relationships are sacred*. Family isn't disposable. Parents aren't interchangeable.

Secular psychologist Dr. Joshua Coleman observes: "Estrangement has become the modern solution to pain. But the cost is lifelong guilt and brokenness."

Therapist Sharon Martin adds: "Discomfort isn't abuse. Growth requires tolerating conflict, not avoiding it."

This mindset has infected even our *frum* homes. But Torah was never about emotional comfort zones — it was about *emunah*, growth, respect, and connection.

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### Warning Signs: What Parents Can Watch For

Often, there are early signals before the break happens. Watch closely:

- Sudden use of clinical words like “toxic,” “gaslighting,” or “trauma” to describe normal parenting.
- Secrecy around communication or plans.
- A new spouse who consistently interprets all parental actions negatively.
- Withdrawal after simchos or holidays.
- Repeated pressure to choose between spouse and parents.

*Seeing these signs early can sometimes prevent a break that later feels irreversible.*

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### Who Really Suffers More?

It’s not a contest. Pain can’t be measured on a scale. But *practically*, many experts — including from therapists — agree that **the long-term harm to the child is often worse**.

When children sever ties with parents, they lose something foundational. They learn that disconnection is the way to deal with pain. And when *they* become parents, they may find themselves estranged — with no model of repair.

A rabbi who wants to remain private, puts it bluntly: *“If a child sees that a disagreement with a parent equals total separation, they’ll think that’s how we handle conflict.”*

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### A True Story: From Silence to Simchah

There was a woman in Lakewood whose married daughter had cut her off. No communication. No visits. No answers. The silence went on for *two full years*.

The mother was devastated. At times, she blamed herself. Other times, she blamed her son-in-law. But instead of lashing out, she did one small thing: **every Rosh Chodesh**, she mailed her daughter a card. Always the same words:

*“You are loved. I believe in you. My door is always open.”*

Not a word of guilt. No pressure.

After twenty-four months — one Erev Pesach — the doorbell rang. Her daughter stood there crying, holding her baby. *“I couldn’t do it anymore,”* she whispered. *“I couldn’t pretend I didn’t need you.”*

They spent Yom Tov together. Today, their relationship is stronger than before.

**Never give up. Teshuvah is real. Rebuilding is possible.**

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## **What To Do — And What Not To Do**

### **DO:**

- Keep loving. Send cards, emails, or gifts without expectations.
- Join others for Shabbos and Yom Tov. Don’t isolate.
- Talk to a friend. Don’t carry shame. You are not alone.
- Speak about it calmly with a Rav or therapist. Don’t bury the pain.
- Let other children maintain relationships. Don’t drag siblings into the split.

### **DON’T:**

- Don’t retaliate or threaten.
  - Don’t guilt siblings into “taking sides.”
  - Don’t cut off financial support *just to get a reaction*. It backfires.
  - Don’t pretend it doesn’t hurt — but don’t collapse under the weight of it.
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## **Protecting the Siblings**

When one child breaks off, it creates tension for everyone. But we must:

- Encourage healthy sibling bonds even when one child is estranged.
- Avoid comments like “You’re my only good child left.”
- Model loyalty without bitterness.
- Keep family simchos inclusive — *don’t erase the absent child*, but also don’t make the others feel punished by their absence.

Your other children are watching. Teach them how to hold pain with dignity.

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## Parents — You Are Not Guilty

It bears repeating: **you are not to blame.** Most often, these breakups happen despite years of love, sacrifice, and care.

Don't let shame silence you. If you had a child diagnosed with an illness, would you be embarrassed to ask for support?

This is a different kind of illness — one of the soul, the heart, the home. And you deserve support, kindness, and hope.

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## What Can Be Done in the Community

- Train Rabbonim and therapists *together* to understand both halachah and emotion.
  - Teach kibbud av v'eim in schools *as a lifelong mitzvah*, not just a childhood obligation.
  - Offer moderated, private mediation *before* things break.
  - Raise awareness that not every disagreement is “trauma.”
  - Create support networks for estranged parents, not just for struggling children.
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## Final Thoughts

This pain is deep. It's silent. And it's spreading. But we are not helpless.

As a community, we can rebuild the broken bridges.

As parents, we can wait at the gate with unwavering love.

As children, we can return — because the doors were never locked.

And as Jews, we know: **No matter how loud the slam, the window of teshuvah is always open.**

**May Hashem fill the empty chairs. May we have the courage to wait. And may broken hearts lead to full tables again — in this world and the next.**