



Abandoned

After all I've done for my child, he pretends I don't exist

Parents invest heavily in their children. They give up their sleep, their time, their money, sometimes their careers. They struggle, they worry, they pray.

Regardless of whether they do an excellent job or a poor job at raising their children, they tend to give everything they have to this great endeavor. Parenting is a service of the heart and soul.

UNMET EXPECTATIONS

Unfortunately, children are sometimes disappointed in their parents. They'll say something like: "My mother's very selfish. She's out with her friends, traveling with my father, taking a million classes. She's hardly ever available to watch the kids."

Grown children sometimes feel that their parents didn't do a good-enough job

of raising them and/or are failing to be good-enough parents now that everyone is fully grown. In their opinion, their parents needed to have better marriages, be more emotionally healthy, be less controlling and more understanding, give more of everything, be wealthier or more accomplished, be more socially accepted, and otherwise be more successful human beings.

"I had three small children, was finishing my master's degree and was working full-time. My mother had the nerve to criticize me for not making homemade challah! Her lack of understanding was over the top and after that remark I just couldn't bring myself to talk to her again. I haven't had more than a two-minute conversation with her ever since she said that."

Adult children can be cut to the core by their parents' insensitivity. The child within the child is permanently six years old, yearning constantly for the complete cocoon of love that only Hashem can provide. The human limitations of parents create pockets of deficits and despair in the child, creating an enduring frustration, ranging from low-level resentment to high-intensity rage. These feelings are triggered and retriggered throughout the lifetime interactions the child has with his or her parents.

"I simply could not believe that my father would remarry after Mom died. But there he was, a year to the day, announcing his engagement to us children. When he bought a new house for himself and his new wife and put her name on the title, when he updated his insurance policies to include her as a beneficiary, and when he made plans to spend winters with her family in Argentina, I felt this was too much!

He was clearly abandoning his children and grandchildren, taking this virtual stranger into his life and leaving us in the dust. That's when I stopped talking to

him. I felt I didn't have a father anymore, so what was the point?"

A PARENT'S VIEW

"The father has a very different take. Yes, I understand their loyalty to their mother but I'd think they love me enough to want me to be happy in my remaining years. I'm still young; I hope to have decades with my new wife. Yet my children are waiting for their inheritance and are expecting me to pack up my life now. One daughter doesn't want anything to do with me and the other two girls and my sons are barely civil. They've cut me off because they disapprove of my decisions. Have they forgotten everything I've done for them their whole lives?"

Parents who've abused their children can't blame them for minimizing or cutting off all contact later in life. The trauma of abuse often distorts relationships beyond repair. But parents who have not been abusive and who gave what they could to their children are understandably deeply surprised — in fact, *shocked* — when their kids withdraw from them in adulthood. They cannot fathom what they've done to deserve to be separated from their children and grandchildren. Most experience it as heartbreaking, and during the senior years, it can actually be life-threatening.

Although one doesn't have to maintain a very close relationship with a parent whom one does not respect or like, one does need to maintain some sort of relationship. Our parents were chosen by Hashem to bring us into this world. When we've grown up, our relationship with our parents is based on unconditional love: "just because." Hashem will reward us for nurturing this relationship *middah k'neged middah*, with unconditional love that flows into our lives and our souls, filling all the gaps at last.

Finally we can experience the truth that parents don't have to be perfect to be loved and accepted and, neither do we. ☺