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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.

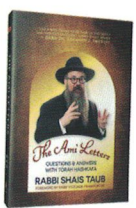
Finally, I think it is essential for readers to bear in mind that my response was to the letter writer only. This means two things. Firstly, it means that it was not to anyone else, even if they may feel that their situation is similar. Secondly, it means that my answer was to the mother, not to the 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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