



MATERIALISM, DATING AND *Marriage* **A YUCONNECTS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

Money and how to relate to material goods can have a profound impact on a relationship between husband and wife. This roundtable discussion focuses on questions relevant to the intersection between materialism and dating, marriage and relationships.



Rabbi Josh Blass
(RJB)
Mashgiach Ruchani, RIETS



**Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky, LMSW
and Mrs. Mindy Eisenman,
MSW (YUC)**



**Mrs. Penina Flug,
LCSW (MPF)**
*Couples Therapist &
Premarital Workshop
Facilitator*



Introduction by Rabbi Jeremy Wieder

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS



An episode in the Biblical account of the struggle between Shaul and David offers an important lesson for one of the most important requirements for a harmonious marriage. When Shaul haMelekh, consumed with jealousy, is trying to rid himself of David, he decided to offer his daughter Meirav to David in marriage in exchange for David's fighting his battles against the Philistines in the hope that David would fall in battle against them (Sam I 18:17). That match, however, did not come to fruition and Meirav was given in marriage to someone else.

As the story continues, David then caught the eye of Shaul's younger daughter, Michal. We are told that Shaul was pleased, thinking to himself that "she will be for him a snare; and the hand of the Philistines will harm him" (*ibid.* v. 21). Many commentators understand these to be linked, that the marriage would lead to David's fall at Philistine hands, as the condition for the marriage was David's continuing to fight Shaul's battles against them. Taken literally, however, it seems that there were two independent benefits that appealed to Shaul about the match: 1) David's marriage to Michal would somehow be a snare for him and 2) David might fall in battle at the hands of the Philistines. Malbim picks up on this two-fold consideration and suggests that Shaul hoped that the marriage to Michal itself would harm David because of a halakhic controversy over whether he had already betrothed her sister, Meirav, potentially rendering his relationship with Michal as *gilui arayot*.

Reading on the level of *peshat*, however,

provides an alternative understanding of the way in which Shaul imagined that marriage to Michal itself would harm David. Shaul, who had spent the formative years of his life as a commoner, viscerally understood the difference between the lifestyle of a commoner and that of royalty — he after all, had experienced both, and his expectations and norms were shaped by his youth. At his core, he remained a *nechba el hakeilim*. His youngest child, Michal, however, had grown up as a princess. With keen insight Shaul understood that David shared his own life experience — like Shaul he had grown up as a commoner, and he too saw himself as unworthy of marrying royalty. Shaul recognized that this difference between Michal and David, specifically the expectation of pomp and privilege, including material abundance, had the potential to create irreconcilable fissures in David's home life which could undermine his capacity for success.

While Shaul's plans to prevent David's ascension to the throne failed, his insight was prophetic. When David brought the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem, he joined the celebration dancing enthusiastically and exuberantly (Sam II 6:16). Looking out her palace window and seeing her husband dancing with the throng, Michal felt only contempt, confronting him afterward for his mingling with the people (*ibid.* v. 20-22). As marriage researchers John and Julie Gottmann have shown, there are few things more toxic to a marriage than one spouse's contempt for the other. Michal's contempt and David's predictably harsh response to that contempt seems to have fractured their marriage forever (*ibid.* v. 23).

Shaul haMelekh's insight was both profound and, in retrospect, obvious. When we raise our children, the circumstances in which they grow up shape their expectations for a lifetime. Children raised in a context of material excess, in a home and community where one's "stuff," broadly construed, determines one's status, often enter adulthood with assumptions of norms that cannot be met, either initially, or sometimes ever. This can be a formula for a life of unhappiness.

It is a truism that money is one of most common causes of marital conflict. When a young man and a young woman enter a relationship where their attitudes towards money and their material expectations are not in sync, the dissonance has the potential to be a major impediment to *shalom bayit*. This consideration should be one of the significant questions addressed by young people dating (and, when relevant, by their *shadchanim*). Young men and women should remember three things: 1) It is important to carefully consider your compatibility in this area with those who you are dating — this is not a trivial matter to be brushed aside with the assumption of "love conquers all," but a reflection of a core value. 2) High expectations may be an impediment to finding a spouse (by limiting one's potential dating pool) and to enjoying *shalom bayit*. 3) Finally, while we in no way valorize poverty, a life in which shared spiritual goals take precedence over those of status or material success is a more well-trodden path to a life full of meaning, and one of *shalom bayit*.

When dating, how important is it for a couple to have the same perspective and approach to earning and spending money?

RJB: The starting point for any young person entering the world of dating is to assess who they are and what their life vision is. Obviously, these are questions that are complicated for any person and the answers can often change and shift as the person or couple ages and grows. The most important factor is that the couple have a shared life vision. If the man wants to have a house overflowing with guests and the woman is interested in something more sedate, if the woman is passionate about aliyah and the man is attached to his family in Woodmere, if the man wants to go into *klei kodesh* (Jewish communal life) and the woman is interested in something very different, then no matter how much the couple love each other, the relationship may run into significant obstacles, if not in the present moment then certainly over time. Part of navigating this fundamental question of life-vision is taking into account the lifestyle of both daters. If a certain young man wants to go into *klei kodesh* and the young woman he is dating is supportive of this vision but also is aware that she grew up with a relatively high standard of living, then these factors need to be fleshed out and discussed, preferably with the help of a third party who can help the couple navigate the fundamental complexities of the situation. Expectations of standard of living, degree of financial support from families, overall perspectives about the world of the *gashmi* (material) are all significant, and while they are not elements that must necessarily disrupt a shidduch, they shouldn't be overlooked. That is especially true when each of their chosen professions might be more limited regarding expected incomes.

Navigating real-life decisions, expectations, obligations and shared responsibilities are as much a part of

a healthy relationship as any of the more elegiac emotions and values. In a healthy relationship, different potential expectations and tastes of each party can be worked through, but these matters are by no means simple, and require open and frank conversations. Part of that process is each party looking at themselves in the mirror and asking themselves what they feel they need — in all areas, including in the materialistic and financial realm.

YUC: For this question, we will focus primarily on the dating stages. It is quite common that when a young man and woman begin dating, they may have vastly different approaches to spending money on dates and materialism. Often, the difference is not one of values, but just of needing a little education. We sometimes find that young men appreciate being mentored on how to make a young woman feel special. We could share "dating mishaps" involving a young man who accidentally slighted a young woman simply because he had little experience in knowing how to prepare adequately for the date. He may not initially understand why she feels that way, and sometimes, he may even think that his date is being too needy or materialistic. This young woman simply wants to be treated nicely after spending time, money and energy preparing herself for the date. Hence, with gentle guidance and proper communication, hopefully he will find that it is not a function of materialism and that there are times when spending a little bit of money is important in making the other person feel special.

Of course, there are instances when the gap of standards or expectations between two individuals is quite wide, and it is not simply a matter of education. And, like many other aspects of dating, the dating couple should explore how far apart they really are and determine if they can find common ground in lifestyle expectations, or if their differences may interfere with them living happily ever after.

When young couples are dating seriously,

the YUConnects "CandiDate" podcast episode "Money Matter\$," by Tamar Snyder Chaitovsky of Project Ezra, is an excellent resource discussing how to appreciate and navigate money spending differences. Achieving financial independence can sometimes create contrasting approaches to living and spending harmoniously. An awareness of any "major" (we all have "minor") differences and open and respectful communication between a dating or young married couple can help bridge gaps and create compromises along the way. Additionally, "The Aisle" a workshop offered by Project Ezra, is fantastic for engaged and newly married couples to assist with budgeting and prioritization.

MPF: As a couples therapist and premarital workshop facilitator, my role is often to help couples navigate these types of conflicts. Many times, how to spend money is one of the stressors in the relationship. This issue may not come out right away when a couple is dating, engaged or even newly married, if the financial constraints are minimal.

I am a strong advocate for premarital education where couples can learn how to navigate conflict and communicate properly. If the couple has a strong foundation and good communication skills, they should be able to navigate minor differences in their approach to finances.

If their values are very different in this area, the conflict can still be managed with proper communication — I have seen couples get through much more difficult conflicts — but it does have the potential to be quite challenging and put a great strain on the relationship. Daters should educate themselves about the financial realities of raising a Jewish family and when daters have discussions about values with their prospective partners, this topic should be discussed.

If a dater is going to be in school for a number of years, how important is it to know a family's financial background and willingness to help before allowing a relationship to advance?

YUC: The financial realities of the modern world, even beyond our community, are such that many young couples are not prepared to be financially independent right away. Therefore, some parents or daters may wonder whether the other side is in the position to partner and assist a young couple in getting started. In order to allow young daters to feel secure in dating and early marriage, it is advisable for parents to initiate conversations about finances in an honest and open fashion, and discuss to what degree they are able and willing to help. As a relationship progresses, a couple can broach the topic with each set of parents (best to do it separately), so the couple can plan accordingly for the beginning stages, with an eye toward future financial independence.

It should be noted that economic background or financial comfort do not always correlate directly with endless generosity. Often it is the values or commitment that a set of parents display that will affect the finances of the couple more than a bank account. Furthermore, parents may have varying standards and values of how they support and educate their children toward financial responsibility and independence. We all have heard comments ranging from “we are happy to continue paying our son’s or daughter’s car insurance” or “we will pay for childcare for our grandchildren, but we won’t pay for....” or “we Zelle our children a set amount of money each month and allow them to prioritize and pay for their expenses directly.”

If the couple needs financial assistance at the beginning of marriage, it is of course helpful when both sets of parents can

contribute, but not always possible. Some may not be in the position to provide financial support to their married children, but will assist and support in other ways. Is this a reason to dismiss a shidduch? How about if you determine that the young woman or man is a great soulmate for your son or daughter? He or she is a hard worker and not looking for a high maintenance lifestyle. How about if you learn that the *middot* in their house are pristine, the family is known for their *simchat hachaim*, and they are juggling multiple financial responsibilities and really don’t have the extra money to contribute? Will money really bring happiness? These are all hard questions parents and daters need to ask themselves and others, with the acknowledgement that it is only one factor of the total picture when considering a potential match idea.

MPF: The practical considerations are important, and we must recognize that certain career paths may require parental support in the first years of marriage. That said, the practical issues are usually solvable as the relationship progresses, without one side having to dig into the other side’s financials before they first meet.

I am not here to say how much research needs to be done into the other side, if at all. However, I do know the type of questions people ask the references (I myself appear as a reference on a number of shidduch resumes), and I have observed that there is too much emphasis on researching a potential shidduch’s family finances and other material matters and not enough emphasis on more important aspects of the family background — what values and character traits is the dater exposed to at home? Are the parents good relationship role models? If not, does the dater have other relationship role models that he/she spends time with? Beyond relationships, are the parents, older siblings (or other relatives) good role models for other character traits?

If one feels that financial background questions are important, at least it should focus on the family and the dater’s approach to finances. Are the parents generous people? Do the parents model a healthy relationship in how they deal with financial issues? Did the dater learn to spend money responsibly? These types of questions, whether they are asked in advance or explored by the couple in their conversations, can provide real insights about the dater and his/her family.

RJB: This is a complicated question. Is it helpful to marry into a family that has the means to be financially supportive in helping to buy a house or in allowing the couple some support in getting off their feet? Absolutely. Depending on the financial background and stability of the other person, this might be something desirable. With that said, there are many far more important aspects in reflecting on the family of a potential spouse. Is it a home of kindness, of Torah, of *middos tovos*, and respect demonstrated to all members of the family? This is the real *osher* (wealth) that a young man or woman brings with them into the next chapter of their lives. Economics are a factor but should be placed within the proper hierarchy of overall life values.

Should a person consider changing career paths based on the expectations of a potential spouse? For example, a young man is planning on going into avodas hakodesh and is dating someone who doesn't think she is ready for that lifestyle. Another example, a young man is planning on going into a career that in our community, typically requires additional income. The woman he is in a relationship with wants to be at home to raise the children. How do we navigate these situations?

MPF: You marry a person not a career. A person’s career choice doesn’t define who

he or she is as a person. If everything else is aligned, they can make it work, if each of them is flexible. If a young man who is dating wants to pursue a career that is not expected to completely cover normal family expenses, he needs to be open about that when dating and his potential wife needs to be willing to make that work, whether it means not having the husband home a lot because he is working a second job or whether it means the wife working (or both). We never know what life will bring and both partners need to be flexible and open to changes that may be required. She should be willing to live a more modest lifestyle and he should be flexible about his career plans. It doesn't mean that he has to give up his dreams, but the couple needs to have open communication about it to make it work.

I am a practitioner of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) where the goal is to create a secure attachment between the man and woman. When there is a secure attachment, they each feel comfortable expressing their needs to their partner and their partner is open and flexible to making changes that meet those needs. Flexibility is a key ingredient in a healthy relationship, especially when combined with good communication.

We all know people who originally pursued a career in *avodas hakodesh* and then switched careers and we also know people who did the reverse. We also know women who were set on staying at home and then decided to pursue a career and vice versa. I often remind daters that someone's career choice doesn't define their level of commitment to Torah. Shared values are more important and if they are aligned, they can figure out how to navigate this challenge together.

RJB: You have stumbled on one of the big questions that as Mashgiach, I, and many others before and after me, have contended with dozens of times and in a whole host of shapes and forms. Obviously, the question is beyond complicated and is so dependent on

both people involved, the nature of the concerns, and at which juncture in the relationship the hesitations are expressed.

In a general sense, I would say the following: There are people whose job or career path is not just a job but a real calling and reflects the inner core of who the person is. The husband, especially if he is in *avodas hakodesh*, will need a real partner and not just a woman who begrudgingly drags herself into the fray. Marrying an individual who is not a supportive and engaged partner in one's life, work and passions can lead to deep-seated internal or relational dissonance. I would be hesitant to advocate for a relationship in which one person is passionate about a certain life calling or life vision and the potential spouse doesn't in some way share those passions. I would note that a certain amount of this can be ascertained before the couple goes out, in order to avoid attachments being formed only to realize later that their life visions don't match.

That being said, there are so many details and specifics related to this question that each situation would need to be looked at independently. It's nevertheless worthwhile to look at the examples in the question.

Regarding whether there is an expectation that a wife works, obviously, expectations of each spouse to some degree are dependent on the community from which they come. Expectations that a husband learn a year or two after marriage, that he have a two-hour night seder, that he share in carpool responsibilities when they have children etc. are all somewhat dependent on each community, and those broader cultural expectations definitely play a role in this discussion about women working as well. What is critical is that the couple form a partnership in which they can clearly communicate their own needs, desires and aspirations. If a man enters into a marriage in which the woman states very clearly that her intention and desire is to be a stay-at-home mother, then that should guide

decisions that they make moving forward. That might change either by necessity or by choice over a period of time, but either way, the partnership has been established with clear communication and expression of needs by the partner.

YUC: People typically choose their career paths based on their own personal passions, capabilities, and upbringing. Career choices are also driven by values. While many find the financial responsibilities of the Orthodox lifestyle daunting, most agree that one should not forgo his or her passion or choose a career that he or she will not enjoy, purely for the earning potential and lifestyle expectations. Yet at the same time, with ample research and inquiries, people need to be realistic about expectations and know that some choices will often entail tradeoffs (e.g., salary, day or night shifts, travel, lifestyle, summer responsibilities, etc.). Someone who wants to give to the community may choose a career in *avodat hakodesh* or communal service, recognizing that he or she may need to have supplemental jobs depending on family size and his or her spouse's profession. Concomitantly, sometimes a place of residence affects earning potential of certain professions, higher or lower than if a couple chooses to live in a different state or country.

Further, every person has a different belief system on balancing the value of work and family. This is a great discussion for couples to have as they are dating to figure out the balance that works best for them. One should not be judged for differing values, but should be aware of the implications. Some young men and women may not want to date someone who has chosen a certain career because they don't see it working with their own career or lifestyle wishes. As such, if one is insistent on a certain path, it may limit potential shidduchim, but that tradeoff is something an individual will contemplate by circumstance.

As in many areas of life, there is certainly

no one-size-fits-all approach here. As such, flexibility is often key. The most important piece of advice is that a couple should be prepared for the economic opportunities before them and explore the respective implications for family life. And we all know that circumstances and fortunes often change. Having personalities and values that can co-exist with these changes will create a strong marital bond regardless of the financial challenges that may arise.

How important is it for young couples to spend money on experiences during their first few years of marriage? Should parents help fund vacations for their married children (and grandchildren)?

RJB: I believe that there are two elements at work in this question. The first is the need for the couple to really bond during the beginning year of marriage (see *Sefer HaChinuch* mitzvah no. 582). That bond becomes the bedrock for the rest of the couple's life together. The question then becomes: what is the best mechanism for the couple to create this special bond? Is that through travel? Is it through being at home? Is it being home with guests? Without guests? Is it through going out to eat? Is it by having a stay-at-home date night once a week? Those are questions that the couple needs to figure out.

The second element of this question, and something that I believe is absolutely crucial, is the establishment of joint goals and spiritual aspirations for the couple during the early part of their marriage. Life is complicated and an early establishment of values and the centrality of learning, chessed and religious growth is critical. For some, this might be best accomplished by spending some time in Eretz Yisroel, which allows the couple the opportunity to bond in an environment of learning and *kedushas ha'aretz*.

In an ideal world, the values of the parents and the values of their children align and

parents can help before their children are completely on their own feet. Also, ideally, parents are in a position that they can be financially helpful during these years. What is important to emphasize is the enormous *hakaras hatov* that kids should have for their parents, especially when support is being extended beyond the period when a child is *someich al shulchan aviv* (being supported by parents) and, consequently, that support from family should never come with an attitude by the children of *magi'ah li* (it is coming to me).

YUC: It is wonderful for a young couple to spend time together to share experiences and create memories. This can be a hike, picnic or trip and does not have to be a luxurious vacation. Part of the early marriage stage is learning to live within our respective means and taking pride in budgeting and planning accordingly. Parents can gift their children money for a vacation, but it should not be expected by the young couple. The important lesson is to establish quality time together in the early years of marriage and to make these times sacred until 120 in the various ways that work best for the couple.

MPF: Family vacations are wonderful if the parents/grandparents want to treat their children. However, I don't think it's important for marriage building. It is important for the couple to have time together alone (date nights or nights when the kids are with their grandparents), but that doesn't require spending a lot of money.

Parents can also "invest" in marriage building more directly. They can offer to pay for a couple to take premarital education or marriage enhancement courses. They can also offer to help ease some of the common stressors in relationships. This can include providing funds for domestic help, extra-curricular activities for children, or assistance with a down payment for a house.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Ishus*

15:19) says **שיהא אדם מכבד את אשתו יותר מגופו ואוהבה כגופו, ואם יש לו ממון מרבה בטובתה, כפי הממון a husband should honor his wife more than he honors himself, love her like he loves himself, and if he has financial means, he should spend it on her accordingly. Practically speaking, how do we guide a couple in which the wife expects that her husband spend money on her and he feels that she is being too materialistic?**

YUC: It is essential for couples to have candid conversations before marriage as to what they like to spend money on, and if they will have the finances to afford these expenses. Some people grow up with lavish vacations and others are more accustomed to more modest and simple standards. Some dream of entertaining many guests regularly and some hope to work less hours to allow for dedicated chessed hours each week. In any event, as we mentioned earlier, financial and lifestyle wish lists need to be openly communicated and not left as silent assumptions that each person takes for granted.

Despite the different standards some men and women may have, when it comes to following Rambam's advice on a husband making the wife feel special, the thought really does count. Oftentimes, demonstrating love and care through the intention of gift-giving matters more than the actual gift. Similarly, accepting gifts in a gracious and appreciative manner is a proper *middah* for all. For those who are in a serious relationship, we recommend reading Gary Chapman's, *The Five Love Languages*, and how he relays individual styles and preferences in giving and accepting gifts. Spouses should feel comfortable sharing the types of "gifts" (not only purchased items) they appreciate most. As with so many areas of marriage, the key here is planning and open communication.

MPF: If the couple is dealing with this

issue, it probably came up on the first special occasion of their marriage and you can expect it to come up again and again. It is what marriage expert Dr. John Gottman calls a “perpetual issue.” Perpetual issues, including this one, are best addressed with open communication. Each must understand the other’s needs and values. Hopefully, they will find a way for the husband to make his wife feel special without having to spend more than they can afford.

RJB: I think it’s fair to say that building a great marriage can be a long process. One of the many parts of that process is each member of the relationship learning about the other and developing a knowledge of, and a healthy respect for, what the other party likes and what the other finds meaningful in a gift. This is explicit in the Gemara and the Rambam in regard to the mitzvah of simchas Yom Tov (see *Pesachim* 109a and Rambam, *Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:18). There are two elements at play: (a) the difference between men and women generally and (b) learning about each person’s individual strengths, likes and particularities. This process of learning about the other person, and even more important, of accepting the other person, can be a bumpy ride for many young couples. [I personally finally got the hang of it after about 20 years of marriage!!]

The key is partnership and communication. If the wife feels that the husband is not sensitive enough to the types of gifts that she would appreciate (whether that be jewelry, cards, books, words of affirmation or otherwise), then those feelings should be warmly but clearly communicated. If the husband feels that the expectations of the wife might not be aligned with the financial realities of the family, that too should be an open and respectful conversation. This might be an area in which a trusted family rav could be helpful, if the issue is too sensitive to raise just between the husband and wife. To me, the issue itself is by no means a concern. What would

be a concern is if the couple felt that they couldn’t speak openly with each other, and that the partnership didn’t support this type of communication.

What advice can be given to an engaged couple where one set of parents wants to spend a lot of money on the wedding and the other side would prefer putting that money towards the young couple's future?

MPF: This is a very delicate situation, and it would not be wise for the parents to draw the young couple into it. The parents should manage this on their own and work hard to find a peaceful solution.

Sometimes people get so caught up in the wedding that they forget about the marriage. The wedding is a six-hour event and the marriage will, G-d willing, last many years. Whether it is the conflict posed in this question or any conflict relating to the wedding preparations, parents need to consider the issue at hand and whether it is worthwhile to introduce conflict into the relationship. Even if the parents are handling it on their own, if there is contention between the two sets of parents, it can be a source of conflict for the young couple.

RJB: The advice here is the same advice that one would give a couple when dealing with most of the differences that come up between *mechutanim*: whenever possible, stay far away! The children getting involved in this issue between the parents can only take a contentious situation and ignite it even further. Before you know it, the couple has taken sides with each of their respective parents, animosity is created between the children and their future in-laws, and the whole thing becomes a mess. The chassan and kallah should express to the parents what they feel is important about the wedding (perhaps the music, what type of seating arrangement there ought to be between males and females, who they would like to give kibbudim to etc.), and then back

away as much as possible. Hopefully, all the parents involved have the capacity to keep their children in a space in which they can focus on their own preparations instead of bringing the children right into the middle of wedding plans.

YUC: The engagement party, wedding and all the accouterments are fun, festive and frequently take enormous energy and time to plan. They can be temporarily all-consuming, yet we all know that those few days are not the main event. Rather, the ultimate joy is watching the couple begin their life together, building a *bayit neeman b'Yisrael*.

Furthermore, while planning a wedding can be challenging and stressful, it is important that the process, and any consequences, do not distract from the focus on the healthy relationship of the budding couple. The two families who are uniting for the first time in planning the simcha may have differing perspectives and wish lists for the upcoming celebrations. We encourage *machatanim* to discuss with each other the details of their desired arrangements and their capabilities for contributing toward them. They may have differing financial, family and social circumstances that all factor into the plans. It is important to be understanding and not to pressure the other family to spend money they do not have.

Placing the new couple in the middle of negotiations may end up being detrimental to the health of their relationship. However, that does not mean that the parents need to keep the couple completely in the dark. Each set of parents can be honest with their respective child as to what they believe they can afford. Some people like a ten-piece band and others prefer to spend money on flowers. Others like to be more minimalistic with the wedding expenses and give some money to the couple as a gift toward their future. However, all agree that regardless of respective preferences on wedding spending, the *shalom bayit* of the couple and families is most important

and we would not want to sacrifice it for the details of a five or six hour event. Parents should be careful not to pin the chatan and kallah against each other or against their future in-laws. The couple can also be cautious as to not be drawn into the negotiations, and speak to their parents openly if they feel they need to take a step back. Being *mevater* (giving in) by displaying restraint, flexibility, and kindness are excellent *middot* to model at this time, and will teach the young couple valuable lessons that they can bring into their upcoming marriage.

What is a healthy way for parents to support their married children without the children feeling like there are strings attached? What types of conflict arise if the couple feels pressured to live in a certain community or spend many Shabbasos and Yamim Tovim with the parents who provide support?

RJB: Like most things that pertain to relationships, the keys are communication and boundaries. A boundary is the fundamental statement that the other person's space and autonomy is significant and will be respected and protected. A lack of boundaries or an encroachment on boundaries severely puts relationships to the test. This is true of all relationships but is often most manifest in relationships between parents and children. There are two components to this question: The first is that ideally, the parents have a natural sense of how to be giving, generous, and involved while still being able to stay in their proverbial lane (Rav Wolbe writes about this at length in his beautiful sefer, *Zeriah U'binyan B'chinuch*). Often that requires the capacity to refrain from commenting about what one's married kids are doing even if their decisions or actions do not coincide with the parent's behavior or sensitivities and might on occasion deviate from the parent's values.

The second part is that if those boundaries have not been respected, then the children need to feel comfortable to respectfully communicate with the parents about space and independence. If the parents are open to a healthy conversation, then those conversations, while not comfortable, can in fact be positive and growth producing for all involved. If the parents are not able to engage in a healthy and respectful dialogue, then these issues tend to be incredibly difficult and painful, and I would recommend that the couple have a Rav or a therapist who can help guide them through this complicated process of establishing boundaries specifically when boundaries are going to have to be imposed.

YUC: In speaking with community marital therapists, one of the common causes of marital discourse today in young marrieds is parental overinvolvement. Parents can affect marriages in many ways and one area may relate to attaching strings to financial support.

Parents who are able and willing to provide support to their children are advised to do so unconditionally with no strings attached. While this may be difficult at times, it is most beneficial for the health of the young couples' marriage and the young couples' relationship with both sets of parents. Again, we should keep in mind that parental support may come in many different forms, not only financial. A young couple receiving support from their parents regardless of form and amount, large or small, should continuously show appreciation and gratefulness for the support, love and care they receive.

Encouraging our married children to be kind and respectful to their in-laws and visit and call their homes as often as ours, regardless of financial means or support, is an ideal practice. In fact, one astute mother commented to a matchmaker recently with the proper perspective, "I am so happy when the young couple spends time with the other side. I feel

so blessed that someone loves my child as their own." This positive mindset is indeed serving as a *bracha* for this couple and for the development of positive relationships across family members.

MPF: This is a deep-rooted issue. I don't know if a brief answer can sufficiently provide guidance, but that being said, these issues generally arise because of a lack of open communication. Parents tend to make assumptions or have unrealistic expectations, both from the married children and the *machatanim*. Married children are then in an uncomfortable situation and don't know how to navigate it.

Parents should give what they are comfortable giving. It is not healthy to give and then harbor resentment. They *cannot* have expectations of their children that are tied to their gift.

I have seen the Shabbos and Yom Tov issue create terrible strife between the parents and the children and between the husband and wife. Young marrieds must put their spouse's needs before the parents. Parents should make it clear that the couple is welcome but there is no pressure. The parents should also respect the couple's need to focus on each other and on building the relationship by putting each other first and being sensitive to each other's needs.