Rabbi M. Angel Replies to Questions from the Jewish Press

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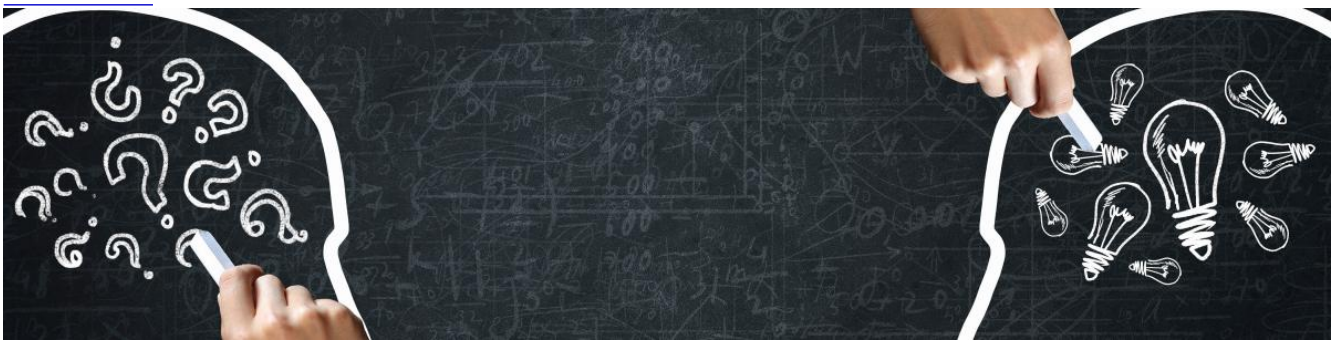

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Should a person who desperately wants to make *aliyah* do so even if his or her parents object?

The basic halakha is that a grown child may decide for him/herself about Aliyah and that parents do not have the right to impose their will in this matter. This is especially true if the grown child feels that he/she can learn and observe Torah better in Israel and if he/she wants to raise children there.

It is best, of course, if parents and children reach an amicable understanding. In our days, it is easier to maintain contact with family, even if they live far from each other. We have whatsapp and facetime and zoom etc. We also can travel to and from Israel much more quickly and easily than was possible for our ancestors even a few generations ago.

Making Aliyah is a big decision. If a grown child has decided on Aliyah after carefully considering the pluses and minuses, then the parents should accept this decision gracefully…and proudly.

If a Jew who knows better intermarries, how should one treat his or her spouse? Coldly? Warmly? Somewhere in between?

One “who knows better” also must realize that religiously observant Jews strongly disapprove of interfaith marriage. It would not normally be expected to have a non-Jewish spouse treated warmly and naturally, as if nothing were wrong.

On the other hand, we are taught not to judge others unless we imagine ourselves to be in a similar situation. If someone disapproves of your spouse, for whatever reason, how would you want that person to behave toward your spouse? Would you be pleased if he/she acted coldly, rudely? Would you want to maintain a positive relationship with someone who disdained your spouse?

If you alienate the non-Jewish partner of a Jewish relative or friend, wouldn't that almost certainly damage or end your relationship?

One approach is: that person sinned, I want nothing to do with him/her or spouse. Another approach is to try to maintain a good relationship with the Jewish person while having as little to do as possible with the non-Jewish spouse.

Another approach is to deal with intermarried couples as fellow human beings. Although we don't approve of interfaith marriage, neither do we approve of rudeness. We don't know the inner life of that couple. Could the non-Jewish spouse be considering conversion to Judaism? If so, our coldness could turn the person away from Judaism.

I think it's best to be as inclusive as possible. As Bruria taught, one should disdain the sin, not the sinners.

Is it proper to publicly announce donors' names and contribution amounts in shul?

Many synagogues find it essential to conduct public appeals in order to raise funds. Calling names of donors is a way of increasing contributions. It encourages people to participate as generously as possible, and discourages people from avoiding to make their donations. Their reputations are at stake!

Is this ideal? Absolutely not. Wouldn't it be so much better if everyone contributed generously and promptly, so as to preclude the necessity of public appeals for funds? These appeals degrade the sanctity of the synagogue, often causing frustration and embarrassment.

While halakhic justification for this practice can be found, it is still unseemly and unpleasant.

But the problem isn't primarily with the fundraisers: the problem is with the community at large.

If everyone met their financial responsibilities generously, there would be no need for public appeals. But—unfortunately—it is the rare synagogue that can maintain itself without public appeals that name the donors and the amount of donations.

Some synagogues have sought other ways of raising funds e.g. scrolls of honor, online campaigns, appeals without actually mentioning donors' names etc.

Let each of us contribute as generously as we can. If we all do our share financially, we will be contributing to the holiness of our sanctuaries. And if we don't meet our financial obligations on our own, get ready for the next appeal in shul!

Is it proper to pressure family members of a get refuser?

“Get” refusal is reprehensible. It is never justified, regardless of any personal grievances that may be at stake. If a marriage has effectively ended, a “get” must be given and received promptly. The “get” is not a bargaining tool. The divorcing couple should settle its disputes directly, in a beth din or civil court. Holding back on a “get” is unethical, sinful, and a hillul Hashem.

“Get” refusers apparently persist in their wickedness in spite of external pressures. Either they are spiteful, greedy or malicious. Whatever can be done to prod them to give/receive the “get” should be done. This includes treating the refuser as one in “herem.” Isolating the person socially and in business can be helpful.

Is it proper to put pressure on family members of the refuser? The answer depends on whether or not such pressure can be effective. In some cases, family members may strongly support the refuser. In other cases, family members may have no influence on the refuser.

But if there is a chance that family members can play a constructive role, and you can speak with them calmly and reasonably, then by all means speak with them. If the refuser realizes that the family is being disgraced and pressured, perhaps a “get” will be forthcoming.

“Get” refusal reflects badly on the refuser, on the family and community. It reflects badly on Torah and halakha. We must do our best to eliminate this shameful behavior from our midst.