



Engaging in Activities Together

As previously explained, non-biological and more distant relatives have the same halachic status as strangers. Therefore, the Shulchan Aruch's rule that it is forbidden to joke around with an unrelated member of the opposite gender applies to them. Relatives who fall into this category include brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. When one interacts with them, one must remember to act in a refined manner. (*Chut Shani EH 21:2; Shiurei Halachah-Rav Felder 11:3*)

It is true that, in some ways, standards are somewhat more relaxed with family members.

For example, if a family is sitting together at a *seudah* or gathering, it is permitted for a man to relate a "good line" to everyone seated in the room, even if there are daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, etc. present. This is permitted because the remark was said for everyone in the room and was not meant to create feelings of closeness to any particular woman or create a lighthearted atmosphere.

Still, one must be careful to maintain an appropriate environment. He must ensure that he is simply saying a good *vort* and not creating an atmosphere of joviality and lightheartedness, which would be forbidden. (*ibid.*)

Therefore, if a gathering will include a program of activities, these should not be the type of activities that create lighthearted interaction between men and women. For example, if a game will be played, much care should be taken to ensure that it is not the type of activity that will create an atmosphere of joking around or excessive jolliness.

If one knows that his family will be organizing the type of activity that may be problematic and he is unable to put a stop to it, he should consult his *Rav* to determine what to do.

It is important to note that even if the women organize their own activities without including the men, they should still make sure to act in a manner that is fully refined. If there are men nearby who can hear what is going on, the women should behave in a manner that is appropriate for a woman in the presence of a man.

We will conclude with the words of the ***Pele Yoetz*** (*erech Ahavas Ish V'ishah*): “A woman must be careful not to joke around or speak excessively or lightheartedly with her husband’s relatives, and she certainly shouldn’t engage in other actions that can lead to familiarity. Instead, she should be modest and refined in her father-in-law’s house in order to ensure that she doesn’t cause anyone to sin because those type of *aveiros*...” (He continues with very harsh words about those who are not careful in these matters.)

“...But those who are careful about these matters will merit upright, holy children, and will live long, healthy, and happy lives.”