

“And you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form... If a man will have two wives, one beloved and one hated... If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son.” (21:11,15,18)

Chazal derive a valuable lesson from the juxtaposition of the laws of the ben sorer u'moreh, the rebellious son, to the case of the man who has two wives, one of whom he hates, and to the incident of the beautiful captive, in which the Torah gives a dispensation, a concession to human weakness, allowing the Jewish soldier to marry this woman. Chazal perceive this marriage, which serves to prevent worse manifestations of the unbridled passions of man, as the precursor of the disobedient and rebellious son. A wife taken in a such a manner will probably ultimately become an object of aversion to her husband. It is, therefore, no wonder that such a union can – and will – produce a ben sorer u'moreh. When the relationship between husband and wife is rooted in a concession to lust, it often results in aversion. A child reared in such a home has little choice but to grow into a rebellious monster.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, z.l., finds a parallel to support this idea from an earlier episode in the Torah: the dor ha'mabul, wicked generation of the Flood. They were evil, base and immoral, deferring to every abominable act of debauchery. Their degenerate behavior, however, did not just appear overnight. It was a slow process, the yetzer hara, evil-inclination, building up steam, starting with a simple heter, dispensation, developing into a full-blown act of immorality. What was the origin? How did it all begin?

The Torah tells us that Lemech took two wives for himself. What seems to be an innocuous act, corresponding to the contemporary lifestyle, was actually, according to Chazal, a philosophy based on lust. Rashi cites the Midrash that sheds light on this practice of taking “two” wives. It seems this was the practice of the generation of the Flood. They would take two wives, one to bear children and the other to satisfy their base needs. The latter was meant not to have children and was, therefore, pampered like a bride. The former, on the other hand, would be left alone, bereft of her husband's care and companionship. She spent her life in mourning like a widow. Keeping this Midrash in mind, we now have an idea why the Torah details the life of Lemech, his exploits and that of his descendants. The Torah is telling us how a generation became as evil as the people during the time of the Flood. They evolved. They were the result of a unique yetzer hara, evil-inclination, the yetzer hara of permissible desire.

Lemech was one of the leaders of his generation. He developed for himself a philosophy which ultimately was followed by the rest of his generation. This philosophy was the precursor of the deluge that destroyed almost all of mankind. Lemech conjectured that since Hashem wants man to procreate, the wife – who is taken for the fulfillment of this mitzvah – becomes a cheftza d'mitzvah, an object of mitzvah, which means she is holy. How could he inject his personal desires into this

mitzvah? This would be degrading the mitzvah. Lemech decided to alleviate this “problem” by taking a second wife – one for mitzvah and one for himself! The “mitzvah” wife would serve a purpose and otherwise be left alone in scorn, while the “other” wife would be there for him. In truth, both wives were there for one purpose – to serve Lemech. Lemech wanted to have his cake and eat it, too.

The yefas toar, beautiful captive, was also a concession to the yetzer hara. It was a “taavah shel heter,” permissible desire. In any event, it reflected desire, base lust. The consequence of this “heter” is the ben sorer u’moreh. These are the descendants of desire: the generation of the Flood and the ben sorer u’moreh. It began with a heter, permission, and ended with murder, immorality, and idol worship. When one seeks a heter for himself, if his sole purpose is self-aggrandizement, he is taking the first step toward idol worship.