

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son . . . and all the men of his city shall stone him with stones that he die. (21:18,21)

Rashi offers the reason for this extreme punishment. The *ben sorer u'moreh*, rebellious son, is punished because of what he may become in the end. The *Torah* delves into his final intentions. In order to satisfy his insatiable desires, after first consuming his father's wealth, he will stand at the crossroads and rob people. In order to satisfy his "needs," he may even murder. Consequently, the *Torah* said, let him die innocent rather than guilty.

This approach to retribution is, however, not consistent with *Rashi's* thesis in *Bereishis 21:17*. When Yishmael was condemned to die as a child, the *pasuk* states *oa tuv ratc*, as he is there. *Rashi* interprets this to mean that Hashem punishes an individual commensurate with his present state. Yishmael was currently an innocent child who was not deserving of death. If such is the case, why is the rebellious son judged according to "future actions"?

Horav C.M. Katz, z.l., responds in the following manner. Life on *Olam Ha'zeh*, this temporary world, has meaning and value only as long as it serves as a corridor to *Olam Ha'bah*. We spend our lifetime in this world as an opportunity for passage to the real world. When the *Torah* sees that the rebellious son has determined the course of his life to be antithetical to *Torah* standards, his life no longer has value. A life which will never lead to eternal life has no meaning.

This profound statement obviously does not preclude the opportunity for *teshuvah*, repentance. By all indication the rebellious son has charted for himself a course of evil and self-destruction from which there is no return. How diligent must we be that every endeavor of our life focuses upon the reality of true life, rather than the folly of mere existence!