

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son... and is father and mother shall take hold of him...and they shall say... “This son is wayward and rebellious.” (21:18, 20)

We all know the story. A rebellious child is brought to the court. His parents are at their wits' end. They have tried everything – from discipline, to love, to coercion and reward. They have gone to professionals, tried every technique – all to no avail. Their son refuses to change. He displays an attitude for which apparently there is no cure. He is brought to *bais din*, court, where the ultimate punishment is carried out: *Yamus zakai v'al yamus chayov*, “Let him die while he is still innocent, rather than having to execute him once he has committed an act of murder.” In other words, why should someone else also die because this boy is incorrigible? He is obviously an evil seed that cannot be controlled. *Chazal* teach us that, while this scenario neither has ever happened, nor will it ever occur, a host of parenting and educational lessons can be derived from this concept.

The *ben sorer u'moreh* seems to have this label attached to himself. It describes a type of behavior that is out of control. Two names for one failing – that is what it seems, a wayward and rebellious son. If so, when we recite *viduy*, confession, why do we say *sararnu*, we have strayed – without adding *u'marinu*, “and we have rebelled?” Are they not one and the same, or do they represent two aspects or types of sinful behavior?

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, explains that a *sorer*, wayward son, can still repent. The *moreh*, rebellious one, represents he who has no way of repairing himself. *Teshuvah* is no longer an option for him. He explains this idea further. The *sorer* knows that he has sinned, and he is troubled by this awareness. If he can only extricate himself from his present situation and maintain the strength of character and resoluteness to confess his sins and return to Hashem – he will be fine. There is still hope for him.

The *moreh*, however, has taught himself to justify every sin that he commits. He finds nothing wrong with his miscreant behavior. He always has some excuse through which he convinces himself that nothing is wrong. Indeed, he is probably doing a *mitzvah*. For him, we have no hope.

Rav Galinsky offers an excellent analogy to underscore the folly of the *moreh*. Apparently, sobriety was a serious problem in Poland. The Polish gentile drank alcoholic beverages like a fish. A good part of the population was often in some state of inebriation. The police were plagued with a multitude of car accidents resulting from the impaired driving habits of the inebriated population. ‘To curb the rising accident rate, the police would put up road blocks in order to pull over drivers and make them drive on a short stretch of highway, used for the specific purpose of determining who was inebriated and who was simply a poor driver. One day, the police pulled over the driver of a car who was weaving terribly from lane to lane. They had the driver come out of the car. His breath reeked of alcohol. This was a no brainer. Nonetheless, he had to take the driving test. He went back into his car and was about to take the test drive, when he said, “First, you must

straighten out the road!"

A similar idea applies to the *moreh*. The only person who repents is one who sees a deficiency in his own behavior. The *moreh* blames his inability to drive straight on the crooked road. It is never about him. It is always the school, the *rebbe*, the parents, the community – everyone else – but it is never his fault. Why should he do *teshuvah*? He has done nothing wrong!

Chazal tell us about two infamous sinners – one who eventually repented, and one whose ignominious behavior and heretical beliefs accompanied him to infamy. Rabbi Elazar *ben Durdia* realized that his entire life of sin had been a total waste. He became so remorseful that he placed his head between his knees and began to cry incessantly. His pain and weeping were too much for his body to handle. He basically cried himself into *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. His entire life he knew that he had been acting inappropriately. He was not giving excuses. He simply wanted to have what he considered a good time. At one point, he realized that it was all a sham. It was not worth living a life of complete abandon. He repented and was accepted into the ranks of the righteous.

Elisha *ben Avuyah* had been, at one point, a great sage. Then something went wrong. He attributed it to his father, who was insincere in raising him for Torah; his mother, who had eaten a prohibited food during her pregnancy with him; a Heavenly voice, that declared that the gates of repentance had been closed to him. Regardless of the reason, Elisha *ben Avuyah* always had an excuse to justify himself, to validate his errant behavior. He was also guilty of *marinu*. His rebellion precluded his repentance.

Rav Galinsky applies this idea to distinguish between Yishmael and Eisav. Avraham *Avinu* had a wayward son, Yishmael. He turned to idol worship, immorality and murder. Our Patriarch banished him from his home. Yishmael found his rightful place in the wilderness, robbing, plundering and murdering travelers. Yet, in the end, he repented and even accompanied his father to the *Akeidas*, Binding of, Yitzchak.

Eisav, on the other hand, was not only *sorer*, he was also rebellious. Born to Yitzchak *Avinu*, he felt that the birthright was his. He sought every way to justify his behavior. He tried to fool his father by asking *halachic* questions and marrying pagan girls at the age of forty, emulating his father who had married Rivkah *Imeinu* at the age of forty. When he heard that his father did not approve of Canaanite women, he married Yishmael's daughter. Eisav always performed evil with a positive tinge to it. His descendants and successors, Edom/Rome, built "holy" crusades, pogroms, and holocausts as part of their spiritual beliefs. They are loath to come out and openly declare their animus toward us. Instead, they always validated their actions as part of their religious beliefs. This is why, like their forebear, Eisav, they never repented. The *sorer* u'moreh does not have to repent. After all, what has he done wrong?