

This son of ours is disobedient and rebellious; he does not listen to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.

The *Torah* deems the *ben sorer u'moreh* to be incorrigible. Consequently, he is put to death for his intractable behavior. What has he done that is so bad, that it is considered to be incorrigible? In his inimitable style, **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, analyzes the laws of *ben sorer u'moreh* as a primer for parents to learn valuable lessons in child-rearing. He defines "*sorer*" as turning away, implying a persistent straying from the prescribed path he is to follow. "*Moreh*," on the other hand, is a stronger, more aggressive term which implies a self-willed personality. An individual with this personality trait not only fails to do the right thing, but he persists in doing precisely that which he knows to be wrong.

Horav Hirsch cites the *Sifri* which defines *moreh* as being in open confrontation - as a matter of principle. The *Sifri* reinforces this thought with the notion that he responds to his father with passive disobedience, simply ignoring his requests. On the other hand, he reacts to his mother with blatant hostility. Likewise, he ignores the *Torah*, but reacts violently -- with open defiance -- to its spokesmen and disseminators. Interestingly, we note the divergent parenting roles attributed to the father and mother. The father is compared to the *Torah*, setting down the general guidelines of right and wrong. The mother is like the "*dayanim*" judges/teachers who adjudicate, teach and disseminate the law. After all, the mother performs the most important function, the basis upon which all ensuing learning rests, the practical daily training of the child.

The *ben sorer u'moreh* is purposely perverse and obstinate. Specifically at a time in a young man's life when he is to be maturing, developing a sense of seriousness, he is deliberately disobedient. Any other type of disobedience against Hashem or his parents at this time of his life -- or even this type of disobedience at any other period in his life -- would not comprise an indelible sign that he is beyond hope. Such rebelliousness as evidenced by *zolel v'soveh*, a glutton and a drunkard, occurring at a time when a young man should be cultivating moral posture, apparently indicates that any further efforts to reach out to this youth would only be futile.

A *zolel* is a full-blown glutton, so greedy that his desire for good food transcends any moral considerations. The *zolel* is an obvious drunkard. He personifies the worst kind of moral degradation. In order to be liable for the death penalty, the crime - itself and the manner in which it is committed - must manifest a total deficiency of the morality that ought to be inherent in a human being. His sense of human dignity should make him feel disgusted at the thought of gluttony. Thus, the death penalty is instituted only for gluttony unrelated to any kind of religious observance prohibition. There can be no extenuating circumstances, no external justification for his animalistic actions. If he ate *treifah* food, we can assert that his perversion led him to openly defy the *kashrus* laws and flaunt his newly-found progressiveness. Indeed, we see here that the son must indulge in gluttony in such a manner that his disobedience is directed only against his parents - not against Hashem. Moral depravity seems to be measured by rebellion particularly against parents, more so

than against parents **and** Hashem.

As *Horav* Hirsch notes, the paradox of the *ben sorer* law finds a striking resemblance in "contemporary" society. (We must keep in mind that *Horav* Hirsch lived over one hundred and fifty years ago.) How often do we find people who would do anything for their parents, except obey Hashem? Children today would spend their last penny to provide for their parents. Yet, some of these same children have no compunction about selling their parents' happiness for the few dollars they will make by working on *Shabbos*. The thought of the grief they cause their parents has no effect upon their lifestyle.

While such discrepancy in honoring one's parents may be enigmatic, is it any different than the previously discussed law of *ben sorer*? The law of *ben sorer* regards a willful act of disobedience against parents alone as a more serious crime than an act of disrespect towards parents that also defies the will of Hashem. Does that mean that our age is producing an attitude that is consistent with the *ben sorer* law?

Horav Hirsch attributes this moral degeneration to a moral hypocrisy in the home. Children who have more respect for their parents than they have for the Almighty must sense a lack of sincerity in their parents' voice when they ask them to carry out Hashem's command. This lack of earnestness translates itself into a serious double standard, of which the parent is unaware. Children are astute. They are able to read between the lines to perceive their parents' true inclination. Children are distressed when they are able to distinguish between the mood in which their parents asked them to do their personal bidding and that in which their parents asked them to perform Hashem's will. When we make Hashem's will our own, then our children will make His will - theirs.