"If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son." (21:18)

The law regarding the *ben sorer u'moreh*, wayward and rebellious son, is a difficult one to understand. Just because the boy devours a sizeable amount of meat and guzzles too much wine, does that make him guilty of a capital punishment? He is punished, however, because of what he will eventually do. Let him therefore be put to death now before he commits a serious crime. This is not a law that can be adjudicated by *Bais Din*, the earthly court system. The law of the *ben sorer* is from Hashem, who knows what this boy's future will bring.

The law, however, does not seem consistent with what the *Torah* teaches us concerning Yishmael. He was in the desert, suffering and in pain, and Hashem sustained him *Ba'asher hu sham*, according to what he is now (*Bereishis* 21:17). So what if his descendants refused to give us water? So what if we have suffered for years from the Arabs? Now is what counts, and now Yishmael is nothing more than a child. Why is he different than the rebellious son who is judged in accordance with what he will become?

Horav Mordechai Ilan, z.l., distinguishes between Yishmael's *yichus*, pedigree, and that of the *ben sorer*. The rebellious son is the end product of a union between a Jewish soldier who deferred to his *yetzer hara*, evil-inclination, and a *yefas toar*, beautiful captive. It was a marriage that was allowed only because of a special Scriptural dispensation. It was doomed from its very genesis. The *ben sorer u'moreh* is clear proof. Such a child has within him very little future to which to look forward. Therefore, he is judged according to his future. Yishmael, on the other hand, as the son of Avraham *Avinu*, had his roots in the foundation stone of *Klal Yisrael*. Indeed, he repented before his death. He was, thus, judged according to his present circumstance. Apparently, when we judge a person, we must take everything into account, because every factor plays a defining role in determining the outcome of a person.