

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son that will not listen to the voice of his father or the voice of his mother . . . and they shall say . . . 'this our son is stubborn and rebellious he will not listen to our voice.'" (21:18,20)

The *halachos* that abound regarding the *ben sorer u'moreh*, rebellious son, preclude its practical application. Indeed, in *Sanhedrin 71A* the *Talmud* states that there has never been an incident of *ben sorer u'moreh* which culminated in the boy's execution. According to the *Talmud*, the *parsha* of *ben sorer u'moreh* was included in the *Torah* for the sole purpose of study and reward. This indicates the importance of the *parsha's* message regarding the proper method for the education of children. Nonetheless, the approach to teaching the specific message presented seems questionable. Why did the *Torah* not simply state the positive factors concerning effective parenting? Evidently, proper fulfillment of this lifelong responsibility is so crucial that it cannot simply be read, it must be studied and contemplated over and over until one has become totally imbued with its message.

Chazal derive many lessons from the specific wording of the text which focus upon the uniqueness of the parent-child relationship. Hashem, our Father in Heaven, directs us in the correct manner of raising our children. We are responsible to follow His mandate as interpreted by our *Torah* scholars, so that we merit to see *Torah nachas* from our children.

The *Torah* characterizes the *ben sorer u'moreh* in these words, "*he does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother.*" *Horav M. Gifter, Shlita*, explains the distinction between "*kol*," voice, and "*divrei*," speech. He posits that "*divrei*" applies to an intelligible voice, whereas "*kol*" is used even for a sound which is not comprehensible. The source of the *ben sorer u'moreh's* insurrection is his tendency to listen to his parents only when their guidance "make sense" to him. If he fails to understand, or if he is not in total agreement with their thinking, he refuses to accede to their wishes.

A child must learn the value of respect for parents. This can be effected only when the child realizes that the source of parental authority is, in reality, Hashem. One must subordinate to his parents' wishes because Hashem has commanded him to do so. True, parents should attempt to explain the reasoning behind their directives, commensurate with a child's level of maturity and comprehension. Nevertheless, obedience to parents is Hashem's mandate and not subject to human approval.

When the parents bring their son to the *Bais Din*, court, they say, "*This son of ours.*" *Chazal* explain that both parents must come and together point to their son. They should be in complete harmony regarding his insubordination. If they are not in agreement, their child receives mixed messages. A child who receives mixed messages from his parents will, in turn, manipulate one against the other

in order to fulfill his own desires.

It is also important for parents to "see" their child. They must perceive who he is. Being mindful of a child's personality and natural tendencies is an integral part of parenting. A child who is not understood by his parents is not to be blamed for his rebelliousness. Situations occur in which, due to their own shortcomings, parents emotionally destroy their children. Such a child cannot be deemed a *ben sorer u'moreh*. A child is not born evil. Rather, he may be either improperly educated or not educated at all. As parents, we have an enormous responsibility to provide for the physical and spiritual future of our children. Fulfilling our obligation towards our children takes priority over all other responsibilities