

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother. (21:18)

Concerning the incident of the *ben sorer u'moreh*, the wayward son, and its accompanying laws causes one to pause and ask: Why? This could never happen. Why take up precious space to write about a wayward son that (according to the demanding laws that accompany it) has characteristics which are not likely to develop. *D'rosh u'sekabel s'char*, "Learn and you will receive reward": Probably the greatest reward will be derived from learning it properly – with a focus on one's parenting. This way, he will not have to address such a child personally. Having said this, we turn to one of the more well-known questions that abound concerning the *ben sorer*. Why is he *nidon al shem sofo*, "judged according to his egregious end"? Whatever happened to the rule of *ba'asher hu sham*, "as he is there?" Hagar was sent away, together with her son Yishmael, so that he would not influence or harm Yitzchak Avinu. While in the wilderness, Yishmael cried out in pain. Hashem listened. Why? Were he to die now, he would not become the progenitor of his descendants who would be destined to persecute *Klal Yisrael*. Just imagine if we would not have had to contend with *bnei Yishmael* throughout the last millennia. Hashem said, *Baasher hu sham*, "As he is there now." Today, Yishmael is not a problem. Tomorrow is a different issue. We do not punish today for tomorrow. What distinguished Yishmael from the *ben sorer*?

The simplest answer, which is echoed by many commentators, is that Yishmael had done no wrong. His descendants were a different story. The *ben sorer*, however, has already perpetrated acts of spiritual abandon that foreshadow the future. He is evil today. "What might happen tomorrow?" should be rephrased to – "What will happen tomorrow?"

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel writes that Hashem did not judge Yishmael for his ignominious future treatment of the Jews due to the *z'chus*, merit, of Avraham Avinu. Hashem had promised him that he (Avraham) would be the progenitor of a great (in size) nation. Avraham saved Yishmael. Furthermore, *Targum Yonasan* writes that the *ben sorer* was the product of a union between a Jewish soldier and *yefas toar*, gentile captive, who captivated him with her physical appearance. Such a marriage will not produce a child that will repent his evil ways. The cards are stacked against the *ben sorer*.

Horav Yitzchak Ezrachi, Shlita, observes that the *ben sorer's* parents declare, *B'neinu zeh eino shomea b'koleinu*, "This son does not listen to us. Someone who does not listen is incapable of changing his ways. We can talk to him until we turn blue. It will be a waste of time, because he does not listen". He is either incapable of listening or has no desire to do so. The words of inspiration fall on deaf ears. He will never come back. Yishmael had done nothing wrong – and, even if he had proved himself worthy of his ignoble future lineage, who is to say that Yishmael himself had a hearing deficiency?

Perhaps we might add another distinction between Yishmael and the *ben sorer*. Yishmael cried out. He was in pain, so he cried. He was not emotionless. When he hurt he cried out for help: "Please!" The *ben sorer* took no initiative to ask for help. For whatever reason, he did not seem to care. One who does not reach out is not interested. Words of inspiration have to light somewhere. If one does not show emotion, it suggests that he has no heart.

Why does the *ben sorer* not hear? Hearing is one thing; and applying what one has heard to himself is quite another. In order for the words that one hears to be internalized in his psyche, he must hear with his heart. Ears are nothing more than a medium through which sound passes in transition to the heart. If one's heart has turned to stone, if it has lost all sense of emotion, then the sounds picked up by the ears have nowhere to go. The result is the *ben sorer*, who does not listen to the voice of his parents.