

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

It takes incredible strength of character and extraordinary devotion to Hashem for a parent to make a choice: in favor of Torah values and love for the Almighty over human emotions of love.

*Rabbeinu Bachya* says that parents' love of G-d must supersede the love they have for their children. Thus, if the Torah commands parents who have sadly raised a wayward and rebellious son to transfer that son over to the court for what might be his untimely execution, they must be prepared to do so. *Baruch Hashem*, never has there been a case of *ben sorer u'moreh*; first, due to the criteria necessary and, secondly, probably due to the difficulty in seeing it through. I choose my words carefully, because this is a subject no one wants to touch. Are there any parents so perfect in their devotion that they say that they are blameless in their son's spiritual demise? The boy is not punished unless absolutely no mitigating reasons justify his errant behavior. In other words: Is there a perfect parent out there who can say, "I did nothing to contribute to this tragedy." (I did not think so.)

We have another reason. *Chazal (Sanhedrin 88b)* teach: "A *ben sorer u'moreh* whose parents are inclined to forgive him of his rebelliousness, their absolution is accepted." The boy goes home to his mom and dad. This *halachah* begs elucidation. The *ben sorer's* punishment actually precedes whatever terrible sin he might commit. At that point, he is just a glutton and a drunkard. He has not committed a sin that warrants capital punishment. but, he will. Thus, he is executed before he commits the murder that in all likelihood will occur. What is achieved by the parents' *mechilah*, forgiveness?

*Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, explains that parents know their child. If parents forgive, it is because they have gazed deeply into the psyche of their son and decided that beneath the dross of evil character, hope exists. He is still their little boy. His actions do not reflect his true essence. They might reflect a troubled, angry boy, but still a boy, for whom they can have hope. Regardless of the bleakness of a situation, parents always find a way to help their child overcome the obstacles and reach his/her potential. Nothing is stronger and more determined than the love of a parent, for their child. It never ceases. Therefore, parents can sense if a modicum of decency exists within their son and focus on bringing it to the fore, so that their son's behavior and attitude will change.

The level of evil of Menashe, *Melech Yisrael*, bordered on degeneracy. No other Jewish king descended to his level of perversion. Fifty-five years of non-stop evil had brought him to such a nadir of spiritual erosion that no one could – or wanted to – help him – except for his Father in Heaven. He screamed and cried bitterly until Hashem "dug out" beneath his Heavenly Throne a pathway for Menashe to repent. For three years, he repented. What is the meaning of, *Chatar lo chatirah*, "He dug out for him a tunnel beneath the *Kisei HaKavod*, Throne of Glory?" *Rav Zaitchik* explains that Hashem "dug in," penetrated into Menashe's soul until He found a single strand, a narrow pathway to a spark of emotion, of sensitivity, that could initiate the *teshuvah* which would ultimately cause him to be spared the fate that he deserved. Hashem did not give up on Menashe. Why should parents give up on their errant son?