

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

The *ben sorer u'moreh*, wayward and rebellious son, is an anomaly within the parameters of *halachah*. The Torah punishes only when one actively sins. The Torah does not mete out punishment just because the individual is destined to sin. Yet, the *ben sorer* is executed *al shem sofo*, because of what he will ultimately do in the end, later in life, when he cannot get what he wants. He will murder to satisfy his desires. Kill him now, before he takes an innocent life. Truly an anomaly.

*Ramban* posits that the *ben sorer* warrants two punishments: one for degrading and rebelling against his parents; one for being a drunkard and a glutton, which transgresses the commandment of *Kedoshim tehiyu*, "You shall be holy" (*Vayikra* 19:2). One's life must be focused on strengthening his relationship with Hashem. A man who is a drunk and a glutton is focused on satisfying his immediate physical desires. Perhaps this *ben sorer* is undeserving of public accolade, such that he will not receive honor, but death? Just because he cannot control himself?

*Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita*, explains that the Torah is not focusing on the punishment of death, but rather, on the *z'chus*, merit, one has to live. Life is sacrosanct. It is Hashem's ultimate gift which He bequeaths to us for a reason, a purpose. We all have a mission to accomplish. Some have greater missions than others; thus, some are blessed with greater physical, spiritual, material wherewithal, so that they can practically and effectively complete their Heavenly-designated mission. No one has a mission to be a glutton and a drunkard. That, by its very nature, is the antithesis of life.

*Zachreinu l'chaim, Melech chafeitz ba'chaim... l'maancha Elokim chaim*; "Remember us for life, the King Who wants life... for Your sake, the G-d of life." We do not simply ask for life because we want to live. We ask for life because we want to live a life of meaning, a life of value, a life for G-d's sake! *Chizkiyahu HaMelech* asked Hashem to remember his *z'chusim*, merits. He indicated that he had performed a great service for *Klal Yisrael* by concealing from them the *Sefer HaRefuos*, Book of Cures. This volume, authored either by *Adam HaRishon* or *Shlomo HaMelech*, contained within it a cure for every single ailment. *Rashi (Pesachim 56b)* explains that *Chizkiyahu* saw that people stopped praying to Hashem when they became ill. They no longer beseeched His mercy. They had the "fix-all," the Book of Cures, that circumvented the need to pray. Thus, the book did more harm than good, because illness is Divinely ordained in order to compel people to turn to the Almighty in prayer. This strengthens and enhances their relationship with the Divine.

*Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, wonders why the *halachah* of *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, which overrides the entire Torah, was not relevant. If the *Sefer HaRefuos* could save lives, how could *Chizkiyah* dare hide it, thus endangering countless Jewish lives? The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *Chizkiyahu's* intrepid action, ratified both by Hashem and the Sages, teaches us that a life devoid

of sincere, heartfelt prayer, a life that is empty, unblessed with a relationship with Hashem, is not worth living. Life is meaningful and sacred when it is a medium to cling to the Source of life: Hashem. When man places his trust in himself, in books of wondrous cures or in the practitioners who expound them, his life has lost direction and purpose. Our merit for life is, *l'Maancha*, for Your sake. Nothing else matters. One who is prepared to live *l'Maancha* has a right to petition *zachreinu l'chaim*.

*Chazal* teach that a case of *ben sorer u'moreh* has never existed because of all the many criteria necessary to qualify this boy for premature execution. The *Bais Yisrael* adds a caveat of his own. A person can be judged only based upon his own personal wrongs. If the blame is singularly upon him – then he is deserving of punishment. The *ben sorer u'moreh* is certainly not blameless, but can we contend that the full weight of his sins are upon him? Can we say that he had no mitigating circumstances in his life that caused him to turn out this way? What about his father, the one who married the *yafes toar*, beautiful captive? He was the one for whom the Torah made a *yetzer hora* dispensation, because, otherwise, he might have allowed for his physical passions to get the better of him. We must remember that the apple does not fall far from the tree. I might also add that once the apple “falls” from the tree, it probably becomes a little smashed and soiled. It is no longer the same apple. When one takes all this into consideration, it is not surprising that the *ben sorer* did not happen. Too many factors had to contribute to enable that outcome to occur.

The Torah writes that the *ben sorer einenu shomea* does not listen to the voice of his father or the voice of his mother. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 71a) derive from there that, if either parent is deaf, the boy does not become a *ben sorer*. The *Imrei Emes* wonders how *Chazal* derive from the boy's inability to listen that, if either parent is deaf, the boy does not become a *ben sorer*. (If the parents claim that he does not hear them, it means that they hear each other, or they are aware that he does not listen to them. This indicates that neither is deaf.) How does a parent's inability to hear ameliorate his/her son's rebellion (not listening to them)? The *Imrei Emes* explains that, if one of the parents does not hear, it is no wonder that the son does not hear. We learn by example, even if the example that one projects is not his/her fault. At the end of the day, the boy sees that not hearing can become not listening and regress to ignoring and ultimately eschewing what the parent asks of him.

Nothing is lost on a child as he/she grows up and matures. While we would hope that the child focuses on the positive lessons to be derived from his/her parents' character representation, we would be remiss to ignore the obvious: he/she sees and learns from the negative as well. The onus of guilt cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of the rebellious son.