

## Who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother. (21:18)

The *parshah* which deals with the *ben sorer u'moreh*, the wayward and rebellious child, is one of the most difficult *parshiyos* to address. As a rule, *pikuach nefesh*, saving a Jewish life, pushes aside *Shabbos*. Yet, the young *ben sorer* – who so far has not committed an act of defiance that carries capital punishment – is sentenced to death, due to what he might (possibly will) do one day when he is unable to satisfy his desires. He could take an innocent life. Apparently, the Torah, with its far-reaching perspective, views his execution as necessary, as it is better that he should die when he is still innocent, rather than when he has taken a life and is guilty of murder. The question that plagues every educator and parent: How did he get this way? How does a seemingly good boy descend to such a nadir of iniquity at an early age?

The *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, offers an explanation that is not only frightening, but it should also generate a sense of parental introspection about how they raise their children – as opposed to what they see (or do not see) at home. *Einenu shomea b'kol aviv u'b'kol imo*, “He does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother.” The child does not listen to his parents. He displays no respect, and he does whatever he pleases. His parents' instructions to him carry absolutely no weight. The *Chasam Sofer* explains that the voice of his parents which he does not hear is not the voice of instruction, but rather, their expressions of Torah and *tefillah*. The boy grew up in a home in which the *kol Torah*, the sounds of Torah, were stilled.

He never saw his father learning or even being *maavir sidrah*, reviewing the weekly *parshah*. He saw him reading the newspaper or a book, or glued to the computer for no educational reason. Likewise, he did not hear his mother's weeping when she lit the candles *erev Shabbos*. This was common fare in homes throughout the Orthodox Jewish landscape. The mother would usually walk in dressed for *Shabbos*; some wore a white apron and white *tichel l'kavod Shabbos*. It was her private time to communicate with Hashem, to ask Him to bless her family. This was usually followed with the recitation of the first *perek*, chapter, of *Sefer Shmuel* (which includes *Shiras Chanah*, which became the prototype for prayer). He never saw his mother *davening* or reciting *Tehillim*. His home was observant, but lacked the warmth generated by “sound” – the sounds of love for Hashem, His Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. Had the young boy heard these expressions of love, he might have altered his trajectory from “down” to “up.”

*Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita*, supplements this idea. The *parshah* commences with the incident of the *yefas toar*, the maiden of beautiful form. The Jewish soldier sees a young gentile maiden in captivity, and, since it is during a war, everyone is frightened and his mind and common sense are under intense pressure. The soldier is unable to think straight, and suddenly he wants to marry this captive. Nothing will stand in his way. His *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, is working overtime and refuses to let go. If he cannot have her legally, then he will have her through illegal channels. The Torah grants him a special dispensation. The “why” is not important – now. The

Torah, however, does allude to one thing: the consequences of this marriage is; having two wives, one whom he hates and one whom he loves. When a person marries purely for physical gratification, the marriage will not endure. The couple might live under one roof, but the love and respect that constitute the glue of marriage will disappear with time. The second result of this marriage is the *ben sorer u'moreh*. When one marries to satisfy his *yetzer hora*, he will not produce a worthy child, a child of whom he is proud.

*Rashi* attributes the hated wife and the wayward child to the soldier's marrying the *yefas toar*. What was wrong with that? The Torah explicitly permitted this marriage under the appropriate circumstances. If he did nothing wrong, why should he be punished? *Rav Turk* explains that *ben sorer* is not a punishment, but rather, a direct result of his marriage to the *yefas toar*. It is inevitable when: a child grows up in a home in which his parents are concerned primarily with *gashmius*, physicality and base desire; a child sees his father involved in Jewishly inappropriate, lustful behavior; he sees his mother adorning herself in a manner unbecoming a *frum*, observant woman – *Mah yaaseh ha'ben v'lo yecheta*, "What should the child do but sin?" He was a good boy in a miserable situation. We can never forget that our children are watching and will, for the most part, outdo us.

The following story was written up in *Peninim* a while ago. It is a classic from which we all can – and should – learn. I repeat it because of its inspirational value. Who knows? Someone might read it and take heed. *Horav Moshe Sherer, zl*, was America's *shtadlan*, intercessor. As head of *Agudas Yisrael* he, with the guidance of the *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants, was the primary mover of American Orthodoxy post World War II. His devotion to *Klal Yisrael* and to the Torah was legend. He did not make one move without first consulting with Torah leadership. What were his roots? What inspired his phenomenal growth? What motivated him to devote his life to *Klal Yisrael*? His mother with her sincerity in faithfully trusting in Hashem, was his primary inspiration.

Whenever any of the Sherer children came down with an ailment (of any sort), Mrs. Basya Sherer immediately ran to the *Stoliner Rebbe, zl*, to petition his blessing. (In those days, *emunas chachamim*, faith in our Torah scholars, was very real. I witnessed this attitude in my own home. My parents were not learned Jews, but their faith was fierce and unshakable.) The *Rebbe* instructed the devoted mother to add another candle to light along with, her *Shabbos* candles. If we take into consideration that she had a sizable family to begin with and the number of typical children's ailments, Mrs. Sherer's *Shabbos* candles were numerous. Indeed, when the young Rabbi Sherer brought his *kallah* home for a *Shabbos*, she took one look at the various *leichter*, candelabra, and thought she was marrying into a family of epic numbers!

While this in and of itself was meaningful, Mrs. Sherer's ritual during *hadlokas ha'neiros* was the primary event that inspired the young boy. His mother would light the candles and proceed to weep profusely for some time. The young boy took this all in and wondered what it was that his mother was saying. She had no *siddur* in front of her, so she could not be *davening*. Why was she crying so much? Everything seemed to be fine in their home. He decided that he would find out what his

mother cried so much about. He decided to hide under the table secretly when she lit candles. The table was not big enough to cover his entire body – so his hands were sticking out. His mother did not notice this.

His mother, walked over to the *leichter*, candelabra, and covered her face. She recited the *brachah* with an added personal prayer. *Ribbono Shel Olam...baleichten zolst Du Di oigen fun meine kinderlach in Dein heiliga Torah*, “Please Hashem... Light up my children’s eyes through the precious words of Your holy Torah.” She spoke these words over and over, “Please let my children perceive the beauty of Your Torah.” The young boy just sat there and listened. It sunk into him. His mother was praying for him to grow in Torah. At that moment, one of his mother’s hot tears fell on his exposed hand (sticking out from under the table). He would never forget that tear drop. He closed his hand as if it were a precious diamond. That teardrop which touched his hand seared through to his heart. He was determined to make his mother proud of him. He would illuminate the world with Hashem’s Torah. He kept his word.