

If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, who does not obey his father or his mother. (21:18)

In the list of potential familial tragedies, the *ben sorer u'moreh*, wayward and rebellious son, is certainly in the upper stratum. This is clearly a tragedy, given that parents do so much and give all of themselves to raise their children along the proper and straight course. It happens, however, for various reasons or just because Hashem wills it. In other words, parents can do everything right, follow all the guidebooks and *sefarim* on *chinuch*, even *daven* and recite *Tehillim*, and Hashem can still decree upon them to have a *ben sorer u'moreh*. I would like to address the circumvention of this tragedy, by identifying one of the pitfalls of life which sadly is the precursor to such negative behavior on the part of a child from a "good" home.

Let us look back towards the murky roots of the *ben sorer*. The Torah discusses the tension and anxiety that overwhelm the Jewish soldier. First, we must establish that the Jewish soldier was not selected because he was a macho man. On the contrary, he was a righteous, learned Jew who was free of sin. He led an entirely moral and ethical life. The Torah recognizes, however, that, under intense pressure, the most devout can fall prey to desire. A soldier away from the protective barrier of family and community, the *shul* and the *bais medrash*, is apt to defer to external desire – which is what happens to the soldier who desires a *yefas to'ar*, beautiful captive. Captivated by her external appearance, ignorant of her dubious moral and ethical pedigree, he becomes adamant in his obsession for this non-Jewish woman. The Torah issues a dispensation for him to marry her. *Rashi* explains, *Lo dibrah Torah ela k'neged yetzer hora*, "The Torah is speaking only against the evil inclination (which drives this passion)." If Hashem would not permit him to marry her, he would take her illicitly. The next rung of this man's spiritual downfall occurs when he is consequently faced with two wives: one whom he loves; and the other whom he now hates. Yes, the beautiful captive for whom he gave up everything is no longer very beautiful. Understandably, when a marriage is loveless, the tension builds up. When a home no longer falls under the rubric of a *Torahdik shtub*, Torah home, it is no surprise that it produces a child the ilk of the *ben sorer u'moreh*.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, explains that another – all too often ignored – factor contributes to this boy's spiritual demise. He does not obey his parents. *Nu*, this should not render him hopeless. It will not be the first time that a difficult-to-discipline child has turned around and achieved greatness. The *Maggid* says that the key to understanding this boy's psyche is the "Why?" Why does he not obey his parents? The answer is sadly commonplace and happening more and more. He challenges his father, "Did you listen to your parents when you decided to marry a *yefas to'ar*? You did not listen to your parents, and now you expect me to listen to you?"

I have reiterated time and again, "Do as I say, not as I do" does not work. Children inevitably follow their parent's lead. If one wants his son to learn, then he must model learning. As parents, we must set priorities, with priority number one being our children. The father who wishes to waste

his time on meaningless forms of entertainment must be prepared to see similar *nachas* from his son.

Rav Galinsky relates that he visited Mexico City on a fundraising trip at a time when the Mexican currency had been demonetized. Businesses went under, as once-wealthy men became paupers overnight. While the financial end of his trip was a disaster, he succeeded in heartening and bolstering the faith of many. He reiterated the importance of faith and trust in Hashem – two attributes that have maintained our people’s commitment to *Yiddishkeit* during the many adversities that have accompanied our journey in exile.

One individual took his financial ruin personally. Sadly, he blamed Hashem for his losses and, as a result, refused to come to *shul* and completely reneged his ties to the Jewish community. We do not – and should not – judge people; individuals react to loss in different ways. This man simply succumbed to his emotions. *Rav Galinsky* had been friendly with him, having visited him during his many trips to Mexico. Since the man refused to come to *shul*, the *Maggid* visited him. He encountered some difficulty entering the house, but, at the end of the day, the man was a gentleman, and, just because he was “upset” with the Almighty, he did not take out his feelings against the *Rav*. Try as he did, *Rav Galinsky* could not assuage the man’s anger. Even after he explained that his financial ruin had probably spared him and his family from another calamity that might have struck them, he refused to return to *shul* and *Yiddishkeit*.

“Fine, since you refuse to listen, I will speak to the administration of the school where your children attend and have them dismiss your children from the school!”

“Why?” he protested. “What do my children have to do with it? They did nothing. They are excellent students, a credit to their upbringing.”

“That is just it. The school invests in its students. They do so because these children represent a positive potential that will be realized, whereby they will grow up to be a credit to their people. Your children, however, are seriously challenged. If you refuse to *daven*, how will your children *daven*? If you eschew learning, why would your children act differently? If you walk around angry all day, what would prevent them from following suit?” This by no means suggests that children cannot rise up above their circumstances and shine as observant Jews. It happens all the time. The *Maggid* merely wanted to make a point, which he succeeded in imparting. These piercing words were what the man needed to hear in order to catalyze his return to his original committed way of life.