

# Long Term Lessons

According to *chazal*, the laws concerning the *ben sorer umoreh* have never been practically applied since the scenario described in the Torah has never actually occurred. Rather one is obligated to learn this topic and become inspired from its messages and lessons.

Rashi teaches us a fascinating ruling in the case of this rebellious child. He is killed '*al shem sofo*', for what will become of him in the future. His gluttonous ways will lead him to steal and kill, therefore *beis din* decrees the death sentence before he does these terrible things. *Chazal* wonder, how can we reconcile this verdict with another ruling, '*ba'asher ho sham*'. In that case one is judged from the place at which he is at the present moment, not based on what he will become in the future. Rashi notes that the angels wanted to kill Yishmael as his descendents would kill Jews generations later. Hashem responded, we will look at where he is now, not what will be in the future.

Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, a famous commentator on Rashi, suggests that the

theoretical *ben sorer umoreh* had already begun his evil acts, while Yishmael at the time had not yet been involved in such destructive behavior.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanater suggests that the *ben sorer umoreh's* negative habits were so entrenched in his being that he was bound to behave in such a dreadful way. He was indeed being judged for the present since the future was so clearly defined by his terrible present. However Yishmael had not acted at that point with such wickedness. It was not a given that his children would follow in his ways, he therefore was judged where he was at that moment. Rav Schwadron sees here a timely message for Elul. He comments that we must introspect at this time of year to insure that our negative patterns are not so rooted within us that we are almost bound to sin. We must ensure that our negative middot aren't an automatic precursor to sin.

Rav Moshe Scheinerman in *Ohel Moshe* develops this idea even further. Hashem judges a person where he is since every person has free choice and has can change his behavior. A person can always do teshuvah and therefore one can't be judged on what may occur in the future. However, a *ben sorer umoreh*, who continuously followed his base inclinations, has obviated his gift of

choice and therefore is punished now for the future that has been predetermined. Such a person has destroyed his self-control and will no longer be able to overcome his desires.

Rav Shach points out a different dimension completely. The Torah teaches us that the *ben sorer umoreh* does not listen to his parents' voice (*Devarim 21; 18*). One who is not open to rebuke, is not open to change and growth. This boy has proven that he refuses to listen to anything or anyone, except his own cravings. Such a person will never change. Rav Scheinerman further shows that this dimension was not present with Yishmael. The Torah tells us what seems to be an extraneous fact, Yishmael's mother took a wife for him from Mitzrayim. This, notes the *Ohel Moshe*, proves that he was able to listen to his parents; at that time he was an open receptacle.

Indeed, there is a powerful lesson here that we can all process and apply. Now is a time to analyze and expose ourselves to the following question: how open are we really to 'listening', to growing? ■

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