



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

RAV KEHILLA, OHEL EPHRAIM IN NOFEI HASHEMESH

MAGGID SHIUR, DAF YOMI, OU.ORG

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The Power of Personal Example

Among the many difficult sections in *parashat Ki Teitze* is the law of the *Ben Sorer U'Moreh*, the wayward and rebellious son. Hazal famously debate whether such a case ever actually occurred.¹ Yet even if the law is primarily theoretical, the Torah included it because it contains a timeless lesson about human influence and responsibility.

WHAT IS A "SORER U'MOREH"?

What does the term *sorer u'moreh* mean? Rashi explains: סורר - סר מן הדרך. *Sorer* refers to one who has strayed from the proper path. Regarding the word *moreh*, Rashi writes: מסרב - דבברי אביו, לשון ממרים - He rebels against the words of his father; it is a term of defiance.²

Thus, according to Rashi, the *Ben Sorer*

U'Moreh is a child who not only abandons the proper path but actively rebels against authority.

The *Yalkut Gershuni*, however, cited by the *Esh Tamid*,³ offers a striking alternative insight. Perhaps the word *moreh* could be understood literally, as a *teacher*.

At first glance, this seems paradoxical. The *Ben Sorer U'Moreh* is not a teacher; he is precisely the one who requires guidance. Yet, he teaches by example. His danger lies not merely in his own behavior but in his ability to influence those around him.

EVERY PERSON IS TEACHING SOMETHING

The *Ben Sorer U'Moreh* does not necessarily gather followers and explicitly encourage them to imitate him. Rather, his very lifestyle becomes a lesson. Through his conduct itself he teaches others, who observe him and learn from his actions.

Every individual serves as a role model, whether intentionally or unintentionally. We often assume that influence requires speeches, classes, or formal instruction. In reality, the most powerful lessons are often communicated silently through behavior. Children learn not only from what their parents say but from what they see. Students absorb not only their teachers' words but their values. Communities

3. *Eish Tamid*, name of author

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are shaped not only by ideals that are preached but by ideals that are practiced. The *Ben Sorer U'Moreh* is dangerous because he becomes a living example of the wrong values.

WHY WERE THE EGYPTIAN FIRSTBORNS PUNISHED?

The *Esh Tamid* applies this principle to one of the great questions surrounding *Makkat Bechorot*.

Why were the Egyptian firstborns singled out for punishment? Were they more wicked than everyone else? After all, the entire Egyptian nation participated in the oppression of Israel. Furthermore, why do Jewish firstborns observe the custom of *Ta'anit Bechorot* on Erev Pesach? None of the other plagues required a special annual commemoration by those who were spared. Why should the firstborns specifically express gratitude for having been saved? The answer lies in understanding the role of the firstborn.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP

The Torah grants special status to the firstborn because the firstborn naturally serves as a model for younger siblings. Parents remain the primary educators, but older siblings often exert enormous influence. The younger children watch them closely. They imitate their behavior. They learn what is acceptable by observing how their older brothers and sisters live. The *Esh Tamid* suggests that the Egyptian firstborns were punished because they served as the negative role models who shaped the moral culture of Egypt. The cruelty of Egypt did not emerge in a vacuum. The attitudes and behaviors of the leaders of each household shaped the generations that followed. Because they carried greater influence, they bore greater responsibility.

THE JEWISH FIRSTBORN

This insight also sheds light on the custom of *Ta'anit Bechorot*. Hazal teach that the Jewish



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people in Egypt had descended to a spiritually dangerous level. Various Midrashim describe the ministering angels questioning why Israel deserved salvation while Egypt deserved destruction. The Jewish firstborns therefore had reason to reflect upon their own responsibility. Had they fully utilized their position as spiritual leaders within their families? Had they inspired those around them? Had they served as proper role models? The annual observance of *Ta'anit Bechorot* becomes an opportunity to reaffirm that leadership.

WHY A SIYUM?

This may also explain the widespread custom that firstborns participate in a *siyum* on



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Erev Pesach. At first glance, this seems surprising. How can participation in a celebratory meal exempt one from fasting? The answer may be that the purpose of the day is not merely abstinence. The goal is positive leadership.

A siyum represents dedication to Torah, perseverance in learning, and commitment to spiritual growth. When a firstborn celebrates Torah achievement, he demonstrates precisely the type of influence he is meant to exert. He becomes a role model. He publicly affirms that true leadership is rooted not in power or privilege but in Torah and personal example.

AVRAHAM AVINU: THE ULTIMATE MODEL

This concept appears in Hashem's description of Avraham Avinu:

כִּי יִדְעֵתִי, לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו, וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ ה'.

*For I have known him because he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Hashem.*⁴

Many commentators note that the Torah never records Avraham delivering formal lessons to Yitzhak. How, then, did he educate his family? The answer is that Avraham's life itself was the lesson. His kindness taught kindness. His faith taught faith. His integrity taught integrity. He educated through example. The greatest shiurim are often not spoken, rather they are lived.

4. Bereshit 18:19

THE SHIUR WE ARE ALWAYS GIVING

The lesson of the *Ben Sorer U'Moreh* is that every person is a teacher. Whether we realize it or not, others are watching us. Our children, students, friends, family members, and colleagues learn from our conduct far more than from our words. The question is not whether we are influencing others. The question is what we are teaching. A single act of integrity can inspire generations. A single display of kindness can transform a family. A single commitment to Torah can elevate an entire community.

Like Avraham Avinu, we may never know the full impact of our example. Yet every day we are giving a shiur, not only through what we say, but through how we live. May we merit to become role models who inspire others toward Torah, mitzvot, *chesed* and *yirat Shamayim*, and may our actions teach lessons that endure long after our words have been forgotten. ■



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