

# WAYWARD SON

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 339, The First Year of Marriage. Good Shabbos!*

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Dedicated this year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov  
In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

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## Three Lessons To Be Learned From the Chapter of the Wayward Son

This week's parsha contains a Mitzvah that is one of the most difficult commandments to understand - the laws concerning the Wayward and Rebellious Son (Ben Sorer U'Moreh). This young boy does not listen to his parents. The Talmud [Sanhedrin 70a] describes the crimes involved. By today's standards, they do not sound like terrible crimes. The boy is somewhat gluttonous. He engages in small acts of thievery; he eats too much meat; he drinks too much wine.

The Torah tells us that the Ben Sorer U'Moreh [Wayward and Rebellious Son] is brought to Beis Din [Jewish Court]. If the evidence is upheld, he is put to death, based on the principle "better he should die innocent now, than have to be executed as a guilty party somewhere down the road."

The rules and circumstances for a Ben Sorer U'Moreh are so complex, specific and narrow that the Talmud in the eighth chapter of Sanhedrin says that there has never been and will never be a Ben Sorer U'Moreh. So then why, in fact, was the entire section written? The Talmud answers that the section was written in order that we might "expound it and receive reward". In other words, this section was written for the sake of the lessons inherent in it.

The lessons that the Torah wants us to derive from this section are lessons about raising children. The Torah wants to teach us how we should and should not raise a child. It is likely that some grievous mistakes were made in the raising of the Wayward and Rebellious son. The Torah is providing us with clues of what to do and what not to do when raising our sons and daughters.

The Reishis Chochma writes that it is easier to grow a grove of olive trees in the Galil [Galilee] (where the topography and climate were not conducive to olive growing) than it is to raise a single Jewish child properly - even in the Land of Israel (which due to its holiness is very conducive to raising children). We all understand and realize what a very difficult job raising children is.

I would like to point out three lessons in child raising which we can learn from the section of the Ben Sorer u'Moreh.

The Torah writes that the parents must come to Beis Din and testify that "Our child is a rebellious child. He does not listen to us. He is gluttonous." [Devorim 21:18]

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter notes that the language used by the Torah for not listening is "Eynenu shome'ah l'KOLEINU". (He does not listen to our VOICE.) We would have normally expected the expression "Eynenu shome'ah l'DVAREINU". (He does not listen to our WORDS.) In Hebrew, there is a vast difference between the connotation of the word DIBUR [word] and the connotation of the word KOL [voice]. The former means intelligible speech, the latter simply means a voice or a sound.

Rav Gifter says that this is precisely the problem with the child. When he fails to see the logic behind something that his parents tell him, he interprets their (intelligible) "words" as merely "voices". "I don't know what they are talking about. They are from a different planet! They are from a different century!" Since the child does not understand what they are saying, he is determined not to listen to them. Rav Gifter explains that this is precisely the child's problem and this is a common problem in our generation.

The pedagogic lesson here is that we as parents have an obligation to try to make our children understand what we are telling them. But we also have an obligation to let them know that if they do not understand what we are saying - they should still do as they are told anyway, because the parents are wiser, have lived longer, and know better. In spite of the fact that it sounds trite, it is nevertheless true: "One day you will understand" is still the truth. Parents must teach their children the idea that "I know you do not understand it, I know that to you it is only 'koleinu' [our unintelligible voices], but trust us, believe us!" This is what the concept of Mesorah [transmission of tradition] is all about. "Hear my son, the moral instruction of your father..." [Mishlei 1:8], even if you do not yet understand what it is all about.

A second lesson can be learned from another derivation in Sanhedrin. The Talmud derives, based on the same pasuk [verse] quoted earlier, that the voices of the husband and wife must be identical. The Talmud lists a requirement that the husband and wife be of the same height, the same appearance, and have voices that sound alike. Rabbi Zev Leff says, by way of homiletics, that the Talmud is not talking about the pitch or tenor of their vocal chords. The Gemara is teaching that parents must send a single, unified message to their offspring. Children do not deal well with 'mixed messages'. The 'voice' of the parents must be identical because if the child hears one message from his father and a different message from his mother, he will exploit that. Sometimes this requires that

the parents work things out among themselves beforehand. They must come to an agreement regarding what is right, what is wrong, and how they will approach a given situation. Only then can they handle things with a 'single voice'.

The third lesson which can be learned from Ben Sorer U'Moreh comes from the Talmudic derivation of the word 'Zeh'. The Talmud learns from the fact that the parents specify "THIS son of ours" (beneinu ZEH), that the parents must be able to clearly see and point with their fingers to identify the child who has been giving them the trouble.

Why is it that the law of the Wayward Son does not apply to blind parents? Rabbi Leff suggests that if the parents are blind, they cannot see what their son really needs. They will not be able to customize the education and upbringing that they provide for him based on his unique and particular qualities. There is no one way to raise children. Raising children is the most specialized field in the world. That which is good for the first child is not necessarily good for the second child. If, unfortunately, the parents can not see the child, then, unfortunately, the education that they provide will not be based on first hand observations.

Such a child cannot be found guilty as a Wayward Son, since he is not fully responsible for his situation - there were extenuating circumstances in his upbringing.

The Talmud [Shabbos 31a] relates several questions that are asked of us when we go before the Heavenly Court after 120 years. We are asked if we were honest in our business dealings, if we set aside fixed times for learning Torah, if we occupied ourselves with having children, if we looked forward expectantly for salvation, etc. The Zohar adds an additional question to the list. The Zohar adds that after 120 years the Heavenly Court will ask "Did you provide the proper education for your children?" The Zohar says that if a person can answer that question affirmatively, G-d closes the case and refuses to hear any other complaints about the individual. If one can answer this question positively, he is "home free." That is both very encouraging and very frightening!

Halavai [It should only be] that we can all answer that question affirmatively on the Great Day of Judgment.

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