

Ben Sorer Omoreh and Hashem's Judgement Explanation of Rav Lopian, Zt'l

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Devarim 21:18-22 we are told about the *ben sorer omoreh*, the rebellious son who is a glutton and drunkard and gets put to death. The details of this very specific case are given to us in Gemara Sanhedrin 72. Rashi quotes to us from this Gemarah that capital punishment is given because of his end; his gluttonous behavior will lead him to a life of crime that will end up with him being deserving of the death penalty.

The Maharsha in Sanhedrin asks the question that the Re-em asks on Rashi from the Gemara in Rosh Hashana¹⁶ regarding the time that Yishmael was about to die from thirst. The angels were saying that Hashem should let Yishmael die at that point in time because of what his children will do to Am Yisroel. When Am Yisroel was conquered and being deported to Bavel, they passed the land of the Yishmaelites. The Yishmaelites pretended to be compassionate and gave them food but the food was salty. Afterwards the Yishmaelites gave the captives pouches that were blown up with air and caused them to die of thirst. Hashem replied that all of this is in the future and currently Yishmael did not do anything to be deserving of death. [Perhaps the Midrash is alluding to the suffering we are enduring from the Arabs in modern times as well.] This implies the opposite of what we understand of the *ben sorer omoreh*. So does Hashem judge based on the future or doesn't he?

Rav Elya Lopian, Zt'l, author of Lev Eliyahu [a collection of his mussar shmuessim] explains this issue in the following way. In the case of the rebellious son, his actions have already proven the direction he has taken. He already stole meat and wine from his father. He has already shown that he has the inclination to steal and even kill to fulfill his desires and is very much down the wrong road. Therefore, the Torah provided that he dies now before he actually goes further down this road. Yishmael, on the other hand has a possibility of being

changed. Yishmael had not gone down the wrong road yet and was not yet in the category of the Ben Sorer Omoreh.

Rav Lopian states that cruelty was most likely an intrinsic attribute of Yishmael as we see from his descendents behavior, as the expression goes the apple does not fall far from the tree. Nevertheless, bad middos can be worked on and those who truly want to rise above their bad middos can do it. Of course it takes the right guidance. He proves his point from Dovid Hamelech whom the Navi[Shmuel I 16:12] describes as red-haired which made Shmuel Hanavi fear he would shed blood as the midrash tells us. However, Hashem assured Shmuel that Dovid would only kill when ordered to by the Sanhedrin. Even though one might be born under the planet Mars which Chazal tell us give the person bloody tendencies, these tendencies can be channeled to do Mitzvos as for example becoming a shochet [Ritual slaughterer] or a mohel where this bloody sign is being used for Mitzvos. Indeed, if we start when we are young we surely have much chance to eliminate bad middos. But at any age, if one truly puts his/her mind to improving their character and getting rid of bad middos it can be done. Hopefully Hashem will give us the strength to overcome all of our bad middos, develop good middos and use our resources for avodas Hashem.