

## **KI TEITZEI - 5773**

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

This parasha contains one of the most perplexing and dramatic halachot of the Torah- the laws of the Ben Sorer U'moreh (21:18-21)

The situation involves a male child between the ages of 13 and 13½ who begins to “act out” in a very dangerous manner. He steals from his parents; he is gluttonous in his consumption of meat and wine. The Torah prescribes a very severe punishment. The parents must bring the child to the Beit Din, who will sentence him to stoning, the most severe punishments mentioned in the Torah.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (72a) asks why the Torah was so harsh with the Ben Sorer U'moreh for behavior that certainly does not warrant the death penalty. The Gemara answers that the Torah realizes what the eventual outcome of such an adolescent will be. Eventually, he will not be able to sustain his needs and lifestyle financially and he will resort to rob from people. He will eventually get into an altercation in which he will take someone's life. It is therefore better that he be put to death while he is relatively innocent than letting him come to robbery and eventually murder when he would deserve the death penalty.

The Gemara adds that according to one opinion –the situation of a Ben Sorer U'moreh never actually occurred and never could occur. The reason for this is that the legal conditions necessary to execute such a child are so exacting that it is unlikely and virtually impossible for them to come to fruition. The Gemara justifies the fact that an “impossible” event is given so much coverage in the Torah with the principle of DEROSH VE'KABEIL SECHAR- “expound its lessons and receive reward for that”.

What does that mean to us in practical terms?

Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a practicing psychiatrist, suggested that the Torah is talking about the anguish of loving parents who are called upon to make that heart breaking decision. What is in the best interest of their son, the Ben Sorer U'moreh? Should they deny the true facts about their son's addiction or face reality and surrender their son to the Beit Din knowing very well that he will be executed. By doing so, are these parents cruel and insensitive? What if a child had a malignancy on his leg and the only chance for survival would require amputation of the leg, the parents who brought that child to the hospital to have his leg amputated would not be viewed as cruel parents but as merciful parents. So too, this idea applies to the parents of our parasha, who bring their son to Beit Din to undergo the punishment for a Ben Sorer U'moreh. This is the only way, under those circumstances, to save –at least the Olam HaBa –of this child.

Looking beyond our parasha, when a relative or friend of ours is known to us to being addicted to alcohol , to drugs, or to gambling, should we show our love by covering his

problem with excuses and perpetuate the problem? Or, should we show our love by surrendering him to the authorities who can rehabilitate and hopefully cure the problem. Or else, removing parents from a home environment and placing them in a nursing facility is not an easy decision children are called upon to make. Life often presents us with challenges and hard decisions. Hopefully, we will make the right decisions.