

A MESSAGE FROM PARASHAT “KI TEITZEI”- 2014-09-01

The Torah instructs us how to deal appropriately with a “ben sorer u’ moreh”- a rebellious son, just a bit over Bar Mitzvah age. It is at this time when a boy’s impulses begin to be aroused and it is at this point that parents must exert themselves to strengthen the influence of Torah. Failing to do so, the boy’s emerging appetite may become too powerful for anyone to restrain. If the lad fits all the criteria required to be labeled as a ben sorer u’ moreh, he is executed.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 71a) comments that because of the many detailed requirements which are necessary, the actual occurrence of a ben sorer u’ moreh is virtually impossible. However, Rabbi Yonatan disagrees and states that he actually sat on a grave of a ben sorer u’ moreh. Some commentaries explain that Rabbi Yonatan did not mean it literally for Rabbi Yonatan was a Kohen so he could not have sat on a grave. What he meant was that he was aware of a child who *almost* met all the requirements needed to be designated as a ben sorer u’ moreh. But if that is the case how could Chazal (Sages) have been so sure that such a case will never be a reality?

I heard an answer from Rabbi Yochanan Zweig, that there are four cases of capitol punishments in the Torah and following each execution of the guilty party, a “public announcement” is required, stating the person’s name, and the crime for which he was executed (Sanhedrin 81a). The purpose for these announcements is to instill fear into the populace, thereby preventing a repeat occurrence of the transgression. By the “meisit” who is executed, (one who entices others to go astray from G-d) the Torah states, (Devarim 13:12) “All Israel shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do such an evil thing.” By the “zaken mamreh”, a Rebellious Elder, (17;13) after his execution the Torah states, “The entire nation shall listen and fear, and they shall not act willfully any more. And finally, by the case of “false witnesses” who falsely accused someone of committing a murder, they too shall be executed, to which the Torah comments (19:18) “And those who remain shall hearken and fear; and they shall not continue again to do such an evil thing in your midst”. However, in case of the ben sorer u’ moreh, after execution, it merely states (21:21) “And all Israel shall hear and they shall fear” but no comment concerning “that it shall not happen again”, for indeed, it never did actually happen.!

The lesson we learn is that whereas a “meisit”, a “zaken mamreh” and “eidim zomemim” (false witnesses) are adults beyond our control and must be dealt with forthright and harshly, a “ben sorer u’ moreh” young boy, who was just Bar Mitzvah, is never deemed as beyond all hope.. If the parents are not capable of controlling him then the onus rests upon the leaders of the community to muster all its resources, by providing this family with Torah leadership, educators, guidance counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, but giving up on him is NOT an option. This message rings true to our times and to all generations.