

# Mussar Can Change Your Destiny

## פרשת כי תצא

Volumes of literature have been written explaining the topic of בן סורר ומורה. Most famously, Rashi comments that a rebellious son is killed to save him from punishment. As Rashi states, "Let him die worthy and not guilty." The Ralbag explains this topic as follows: "A child who exhibits this bad nature and is not receptive to direction from his parents or בית דין, especially at this stage of his youth in which receptivity to Mussar is critical, reveals about himself that he will continue in this destructive path until he corrupts himself and others." The Ralbag emphasizes two components that predict this child's future behavior. One, is his bad nature. His insatiable appetite and indulgence in wine and meat at such a young age to the extent of being ready to steal, indicates a life of corruption. Two, is his inability to accept the rebuke of his parents and בית דין.

It is not uncommon for us to see people who act inappropriately in their youth and reject rebuke. We have all seen these same people change later, on their own, due to one of life's many wake up calls. Clearly we are being told by the Torah that a בן סורר

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is a unique child whose appetite is so unbridled, and whose nature is so bad that there is no hope for change. The בן סורר ומורה is not the common everyday trouble maker. Yet the Ralbag tells us, despite his bad nature and insatiable appetite, if he would have been open to the guidance and the rebuke of his parents or בית דין, hope for change remains, and his future is unpredictable. We can derive a powerful insight into the importance of being able to receive rebuke. If being receptive to Mussar can offer hope for a בן סורר ומורה to change, how much more so can we change through accepting rebuke.

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However, receiving rebuke from others is extremely difficult, and we have a resistance to it. The Alter of Slabodka explains, that the source of being resistant to the help of other people is rooted in our greatness, and our drive for independence. He supports this idea with the words of ברכת המזון in which we ask Hashem, "And let us not need the gifts of human beings or their loans, but only from Your full, open, holy, and generous hand. So that we don't experience embarrassment, and shame forever." He derives from here that receiving from others is a slight to the honor and dignity of our Neshama, and we will be embarrassed forever. Therefore it is imperative that we set aside time to learn Mussar and rebuke ourselves. Only in this way will we be totally receptive, as this approach to Mussar won't impact our dignity negatively. In addition, through learning Mussar we will enhance our dignity through working on ourselves independently, and becoming self-responsible.

As Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are approaching, we are all focused on change and improvement. At times change may seem out of reach and unattainable. We can glean from the above Ralbag that learning Mussar has the power to provide hope to a hopeless situation. Our key to Teshuva is learning Mussar.