

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Chasa Risa *bas* Yosef Osher *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Power of Humility

## PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH 5777

Last week, we addressed (to some extent) the seemingly contradictory notions of judgment emerging from two different areas of the Torah. Yishmael had been banished from Avraham’s house and forced to wander the desert, where he might have died of thirst. The angels contended that he should not be saved, as his descendants would torment B’nei Yisrael in the future. Nonetheless, Hashem ruled that he would live – he was to be judged on the basis of present actions, not future travesties, and at the moment he was innocent. When it comes to the *Ben Sorer U’moreh* (Wayward Son), however, the Torah mandates his execution to prevent him from turning to a life of pillage and murder in the future! The Mishnah explicitly states: **בן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה נִדוֹן עַל שְׁם סוֹפוֹ** – “A *Ben Sorer U’moreh* is judged on the basis of his end.” As mentioned last week, the classic commentators elaborate on the inherent distinctions between these two instances to effect a resolution. Here we shall focus on one more approach to this issue from a contemporary Torah scholar.

### What’s in a Name?

Now, it should be noted that Yishmael actually did not have the most stellar standing. Recall that he had been ousted from the house of Avraham for a reason – namely, Sarah was alarmed by his improper conduct (*cf. Rashi, Bereishis 21:9*). Furthermore, he is described, at the time, as “*yatza l’tarbus ra’ah* – having gone over to evil ways” (*ibid. v. 14*). This, then, would seem to compound the issue. Yishmael himself sounds quite similar to a *Ben Sorer U’moreh* – and yet the former was spared, while the latter is designated for elimination!

R’ Yitzchak Ezrachi (of Mir Yerushalayim) explains that for all of his faults, Yishmael possessed one key quality, which was his saving grace. And this is alluded to in his name. “Yishmael,” of course, derives from the root word **שמע** – to listen. As long as a person retains some willingness to hear and consider the admonition of others, there remains some hope. The *Ben Sorer U’moreh* reveals an attitude whereby he displays absolutely no regard for or submission to the reasoned voice of authority. As emphasized by the Torah: **כִּי־הָיָה לְאִישׁ בֶּן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה אֵינָנו שׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל אָבִיו וּבְקוֹל אִמּוֹ וַיִּסְרוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם** – “When a man shall have a wayward and rebellious son, **who does not listen** to the voice of his father or mother; and they chastise him, but **he does not listen** to them” (*Devarim 21:18*). Shut off to listening, all hope of repentance is extinguished. Thus, his course is set and unchangeable, and his life is thereby forfeit. But **יִשְׁמַעֵאל** was different; he may not have been behaving properly, but he could still listen. And sure enough, he lived up to his name. Toward the end of this week’s *parshah*, Rashi (*Bereishis 25:9*) relates that Yishmael in his later years in fact did engage in *teshuvah* (repentance).

There is another quality extolled by the *Ba’alei Mussar* (Masters of Ethical Instruction) that is inextricably linked with the capacity to listen: namely, the all-important trait of *hachna’ah* (literally: submission), an ability to relinquish one’s own ego and accept the instruction of others. And – as demonstrated by Yishmael – this quality serves as the gateway to *teshuvah*. Interestingly enough, the Mussar classic *Chovos Halevavos* (Duties of the Heart) contains an entire section elaborating on this trait – termed *Sha’ar Hahachna’ah* (Gate of Submission). Immediately following this section is the *Sha’ar Hateshuvah* (Gate of Repentance), for, as the *Chovos Halevavos* explains, it is the former that leads directly to the latter.

As we shall see, the Vilna Ga'on highlights the connection between these two entities in a most fascinating way.

### **Fear of *Hachna'ah***

We are all familiar with the fact that, on Rosh Hashanah, we blow the shofar in a manner that goes well beyond the minimal requirements of the law. In addition to the initial blasts performed after the Torah reading, we then carry out more blasts in connection with the special Mussaf blessings. This is outlined in the Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah 4:5*), which states:

בולל מלכיות עם קדשת היום, ותוקע. זכרונות, ותוקע. שופרות, ותוקע.

“One includes the recitation of the verses of *Malchiyos* (Kingship) together with the blessing of sanctifying the day – and then blows the shofar. (He then recites) *Zichronos* (Remembrances) and then blows; followed by *Shofaros* and then blows (again).”

The reason Chazal provide for this extra blowing is “*L'arbeiv es hasatan*” – to confound the Accuser (*Rosh Hashanah 16b*). How, indeed, does the repetition of the shofar-blasts accomplish this effect? Tosfos explains that the added blasts strike fear into the Satan's heart. Upon hearing them, he thinks he may be hearing the shofar that will herald Mashiach's arrival – and signify the termination of Satan's reign. Two sets are required, explains Tosfos, because he is not overly concerned after the first time. It is only once he hears the second round that he begins to experience real fear.

The Vilna Ga'on (commentary to *Yonah 3:6*) clarifies the progression of Satan's predicament. He attributes the two sets of blasts as directed towards two classes of Jews: the first set is aimed at the more prominent activists who stand in the forefront, while the second set is geared for the simpler folk. And this is why Satan is only concerned by the latter blasts. The prominent ones, explains the Ga'on, tend to have more prideful hearts. As a result, they are less likely to be affected by the shofar blasts; since they generally lack *hachna'ah*, the Satan reasons, there is much less of a chance that they will do *teshuvah*! This is why he is not particularly worried by the first set. But when he hears the shofar sounding yet again – this time geared toward the regular members – he begins to experience real fear, for these are people who, lacking the swagger of the notables, are more apt to be humble. These Yidden thus present a real danger (for the Satan) – since they are more likely to experience *hachna'ah* in their hearts, they are more likely to do *teshuvah*. Once they do *teshuvah*, the *Ge'ulah* (Final Redemption) shall come, which spells doom for their Accuser.

Thus, from Satan's fear we learn a powerful lesson about *hachna'ah* and *teshuvah*. Namely, we discover that is quite likely that Mashiach will arrive in the merit of the “simple” Jews, who are more naturally inclined to the quality of *hachna'ah* (cf. *Yerach L'mo'adim, Yamim Nora'im*, vol. I, pp. 438-440).

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