

“AND IF YOU SHALL REJECT MY STATUTES, AND IF YOUR SOUL ABHORS MY ORDINANCES...” (VAYIKRA 26:15)

This artificially created revulsion is a pretext

THE TORAH DESCRIBES the unfortunate domino effect of a Jew on a downward spiritual spiral. After he stops fulfilling the *mitzvos*, he begins to despise them. Why? The S'forno (ibid.) explains that this person must force himself to feel a sense of abhorrence of the *mishpatim* – the rational, more easily understood laws of the Torah – because it's not natural to despise these logical rules. Therefore, he makes himself feel disgusted by these *mitzvos* – and this artificially created revulsion is a pretext that permits him to throw off the “yoke” or obligation of the commandments, allowing him to indulge in his desires and violate the prohibitions of the Torah. The S'forno compares this psychological attitude to one found in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 63b) regarding Jews who lived during the time of the first Temple. These Jews worshipped idolatry, yet they knew and understood that these idols were in truth worthless. The Gemara explains that their real agenda was to satisfy their lust for illicit relations – and they didn't want to have to hide it from public knowledge. Worshipping idols gave them the excuse to deny Hashem and the Torah, “allowing” them to do as they pleased, publicly. Rashi (ibid.) comments that these sinners so desired to involve themselves in illicit relations that they would rather remove the yoke of Hashem and His *mitzvos* entirely, so that no one could rebuke them for their sins.

They didn't want to have to keep it a secret

Let us study Rashi's comment more carefully. To commit these sins privately, the Jews would not have needed to turn to idolatry and deny Hashem. But the Jews described in the Talmud had such a desire for prohibited relations, that they didn't want to have to keep it a secret. Now they had an additional problem: people will know, and criticize their sinful activities. Subconsciously, they search for a solution to this barrier in their path. The answer: idolatry – because if there's no Hashem, there's no Torah, no restrictions and anything goes. Even though they had no real interest in idol worship, their deep desire for public debauchery – and their interest in not being reprimanded for it – caused their subconscious minds to cast off their belief in Hashem. Their *yetzer hara* had so possessed them as to bring them to the depths of depravity and blind them to any sense of proper behavior. If they were controlled so securely by their desires, why were they afraid of admonishment? Couldn't their *yetzer hara*, so powerful within them, blind them to the rebuke just as it blinded them to the despicableness of their sins?

All that was needed was properly delivered rebuke

How great is the nobility of the human spirit, and the power of true reproof to bring it to the surface! No matter how powerfully they were ruled by their passions, their *neshama* still retained its natural purity and holiness. All that was needed was properly delivered rebuke and their moral conscience would respond. Their *yetzer hara* knew that rebuke could still hit home and cause them to leave their sinful ways, even after they had strayed so far. There was only one way to avoid this potent weapon for spirituality. Only by worshipping idols and denying our Creator were they able to neutralize the power of rebuke.

Let us appreciate the unique ability of rebuke to penetrate our hearts, and redirect us, no matter how distant we may be from proper behavior. If we open our ears, our minds and our hearts to accept the truth, we can be confident that our course will never stray far from the path charted by our holy Torah.