

"Lest there should be among you a man or woman . . . whose heart turns away this day . . . lest there be among you a root that is fruitful (in) gall and wormwood." (29:17)

The *Ramban* explains that the individual whose slight deviation will eventually grow into blatant evil is at present a pious Jew. He stands in seeming direct contradistinction to the full-fledged believer in paganism. Nonetheless, the *Torah* combines the two into one group. Indeed, their only point of divergence is intellectual belief. To the unknowing onlooker, they may appear to be two very different people. One is an obvious heretic, while the other acts like he should be grouped with the devout. The *Torah* says, however, that appearances are deceiving. The two individuals act distinctly, but their heresy is essentially similar.

Horav A.H. Lebowitz, Shlita, makes a profound observation from this concept. Two students can be sitting together studying in the same classroom. They may come from similar backgrounds, but if their paths diverge even slightly, they can be worlds apart ten years later. The slightest noticeable deviation must be immediately ameliorated, or it can end in spiritual tragedy. Even if the disparity is not immediately noticed, it can become evident in later years when this sinister behavior manifests itself in the way one raises his children.

Horav Lebowitz tells a story about *Horav E.M. Bloch, z.l.*, who was once waiting in the Chicago train station, preparing to board a train to New York. A few feet away stood a train about to leave in the opposite direction to California. He questioned his students concerning the distance between the two trains. When they responded that it was only a few feet, he disagreed, "*Theses two trains are 3000 miles apart, since one is going to California and the other to New York.*" The message is clear. Two students can be standing next to each other, but if they face "different directions," they are worlds apart. We should never ignore the slight deviations in actions, thoughts, and even attitudes, either in others or in ourselves. That which seems to be innocuous today may manifest itself as evil tomorrow.