

"But take heed to yourselves that your heart does not open itself to enticement and you turn aside and you serve other gods." (11:16)

Rashi comments that once one "turns away" from *Torah*, the natural sequence of events is "you will worship strange gods." Once one leaves the *Torah* path, he will eventually turn to idols. This is perplexing! We know that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, works in a specific manner. First, it lures one to turning away slightly by performing a simple act of indiscretion. This goes on for awhile as the *yetzer hora* slowly increases its hold upon the person until it ultimately brings him down completely. Worshiping idols is the last step, the final act of iniquity which is the result of careful digression. Why, then, is the sin of leaving the *Torah* so different? Why does leaving the *Torah* path directly stimulate idol worship?

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, cites his *rebbe*, the *Chofetz Chaim*, who elucidates this matter with an analogy. If two people or two nations battle each other and one emerges the victor, the victory is still not ultimately assured. It is always conceivable that the one who was defeated will recoup and triumph in a second campaign. The only time that victory is secure is when the vanquisher relieves his captive of his weapons. Now that he no longer has his armament, his defeat is confirmed.

Likewise, in the battle against the *yetzer hora*. Even if the *yetzer hora* has succeeded in enticing a person to sin, his "success" may be short lived. After all, the sinner may perform *teshuvah* and deny the *yetzer hora* success. When the *yetzer hora* lures one away from *Torah* study, however, a critical occurrence has now taken place. The individual no longer has the weapons with which to ward off sin. He literally has nothing with which to fight. This is consistent with *Chazal's* dictum in the *Talmud Kiddushin 30b*, "I created for him a *yetzer hora*, I (also) created for him the *Torah* as a seasoning to balance and/or counteract the effect of the evil inclination." As long as one studies *Torah*, hope remains for *teshuvah*. Once the *Torah* has been rejected, we are no longer assured of his triumph.

Horav Wasserman claims that this is the rationale behind *Chazal's* intense response to the sin of *bitul Torah*, non-learning, wasting time allocated to *Torah* study. Murder, infidelity and idol-worship are capital sins. Yet, Hashem will overlook them if one is repentant. These sins are the climax of invidiousness. There is still hope, however, for return. *Bitul Torah* is not only deplorable; it is dangerous for one's spiritual/physical well-being.