

"But if you will not listen to Me, and will not do all these commandments, and you will despise My laws. And your souls reject My regulations, so that all My commandments, not be fulfilled, whereby you break My covenant." (26:14-15)

Rashi cites the *Toras Kohanim* who develops these *pesukim* into the seven point step-by-step spiritual deterioration of an individual. *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Zt"l* vividly explains the cause and effect of each step of this regressive deterioration.

"But if you will not listen to Me" - The decline begins with "not listening" to Hashem's word which is defined as not "learning" the *Torah's* precepts. The person who does not study and acquaint himself with Hashem's precepts, becomes disobedient. The result of this theoretical sin is practical defection, or "you will not do", one who does not "learn" will ultimately not "do", since he has no practical knowledge of the *mitzvos*.

"And you will despise My laws" - The defection then continues to the third step. Once he loses the theoretical knowledge and understanding of *Torah*, and for all intents and purposes has put *Torah* away in his daily life, he must now justify his lifestyle to himself. This is performed by converting this defection into "progress", by viewing with contempt those who faithfully adhere to the *Torah*. Thus, the fall from *Torah* which began with lack of study, progresses to non-performance of its precepts, followed by contempt of the *Torah* and its adherents.

"And your souls reject My regulations" - Unable to come to grips with the understanding that it is pure deep-felt conviction and free-willed enthusiastic love and devotion to Hashem and His *Torah* which produces the loyalty of its adherents to the *Torah*, the apostates search for external causes to explain this riddle. They find these causes in the institution of Jewish social life; above all, in the bearers and promoters, the *Torah* scholars who receive the full weight of their hatred. They feel towards the *Torah's* adherents, becomes transferred to the spiritual bearers and guardians of the *Torah*.

"So that all My commandments, not be fulfilled" - Until this point, this defection has not gone beyond apostasy in one's own life, and hatred towards the *Torah* and its followers. However, the tendency toward this direction gradually grows into a persecuting intolerance; that which one does not honor, should similarly be rejected by others, and that which one does not practice shall likewise not be practiced by others. In others words, a general declaration of war is declared on the *Torah*, disturbing and hindering all who are faithful and loyal to it. In order to succeed, it is necessary to state that their fight is not against Hashem and His Holy Will, but rather an act of salvation for the benefit of humanity. Their statement is simply to defame Hashem's work, the Revelation is relegated to a myth, Moshe and the Elders to imposters, and the transmitters of *Torah* Law from Sinai as deceived deceivers. The Jewish Laws must cease to have the status of

"My commands". There still remains one last step to be taken.

"Whereby you break My covenant" - One last thread which binds them with Hashem's covenant must be torn asunder. This is, the complete denial of the existence of Hashem. On the downward path of apostasy they are inevitably brought to this last stage. As long as the thought of Hashem still lingers, as long, even with wavering doubt the conception of His existence still finds room in their souls, then the accusing voice of his conscience finds no rest. In order to quell this glimmering spark they must audaciously stamp out this last vestige of conscience and belief.

This very poignant and profound thesis becomes all the more powerful when applying *Rashi's* commentary to *"If you will not listen to Me"* - *"that you did not toil in Torah."* It wasn't a "not listening" which originated this regression, but rather a study without fervor and toil. How diligent and careful must we be in our approach to *Torah* study, so that a simple lack of toil in *Torah* can cause such a terrible regression in one's spiritual life.