

Perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. (29:17)

Gall and wormwood? What is the meaning of these terms? One who is a sinner is evil. The Torah is speaking about a person who does not see the evil that he perpetrates. Such an individual will say, "Peace will be with me." In truth, he agrees that there are others who are evil – but he is not one of them. He is one of the "good ones" who have the audacity to bless themselves and contend that they warrant blessings in their lives. Apparently, a wide gap exists between reality and this person's perception of himself and his actions. This is the person who thinks that he is good, but actually he is a root flourishing with gall and wormwood. Today it is only a root, but soon it will become full-blown evil. In many ways, such a person presents a greater danger to himself and others.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that the Torah here refers to the man who is observant, who performs *mitzvos*, despite the great "difficulty" involved, who feels that he deserves great reward for going out of his way for Hashem. He attends *minyán* every day, but makes a big thing out of it. Rather than serving Hashem with excitement and joy, it becomes a drag about which he is always complaining. This person might remain observant throughout his life – carrying out all of Hashem's commands – but his negative attitude will impugn his ability to transmit his observance to the next generation. His children will just see his negativity and bitterness. Not everyone has the capacity to overpower the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, to avoid such a heavy burden. His children might not be disciplined and obedient enough to serve Hashem under such "difficult" conditions.

People must realize, acknowledge and express the joy inherent in serving Hashem. Otherwise, they become the root flourishing with gall and wormwood, that in the next generation will manifest itself in an overtly evil and sinful manner. If a parent sits by the *Shabbos* table lamenting the financial loss he is suffering by not working, he is sowing the seeds of discontent within his children. The father who openly and actively expresses his joy in being able to serve Hashem, however, will reap the *nachas*, spiritual pleasure, of witnessing his future offspring express a similar attitude.

Horav Moshe Leib Sassover, zl, was the paragon of joyful *mitzvah* observance. This, together with his unparalleled love of all Jews, earned him a reputation of distinction even among the greatest *Chassidic Rebbes*. He would say: "How fortunate are the poor who must trust in Hashem. It is the rich who should be pitied, because they think their security is in their wealth." He was wont to say, "*Simchah*, joy, is far superior to tears." (Praying to Hashem with effusive joy and excitement supersedes bewailing and funereal emotion.) *Chazal* (*Berachos* 32b) teach that even when all the Heavenly Gates are closed (and prayer cannot penetrate the Heavens), the Gates of Tears (*Shaarei dema'os*) are never shut. Joy, however, is more powerful than tears, because whereas tears require an open gate, joy is able to penetrate the most dense gates.