

“Like the practice of the land of Egypt...and like the practice of the land of Canaan...you should not do.” (18:3)

The Egyptian and Canaanite nations were the most degenerate of all nations. Immorality was their way of life, licentiousness was their culture. We are adjured not to follow in their statutes and traditions. The Sefarim HaKedoshim add that even in those areas which are permitted to us, we should act with restraint, holiness and refinement. In other words, we should abide by a Jewish standard of behavior, a Torah approach to living. As Torah Jews, we must strive to act, live and interact differently than what is in vogue in contemporary society. Our lives are different, our goals are different, our purpose for living is different. Therefore, why would we want to act like those around us? Regrettably, the insecure nature of some of our people drives them to behave in a manner which, unfortunately, conforms quite well with contemporary society.

The Piaseczner Rebbe, z.l., the great tzaddik, wrote, lectured and inspired the broken-hearted Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. When he reached the milestone age of forty, he said, “What should I accept upon myself? What should I undertake? To learn more? I think that, to the best of my knowledge, I waste no time. To distance myself from lust and desire? Baruch Hashem, I think I have overcome that. What am I missing? Pashut, simply – to be a Jew! I visualize myself as a human being with everything but a neshamah, soul. I now want to convert myself to be a Yehudi!” What a penetrating statement from an individual whose moral/spiritual rectitude served as the paradigm of what a human being can achieve. The Slonimer Rebbe, Shlita, explains that one can look and act like a Jew, he can go through the motions of Jewishness, but he can still lack his essential Yahadus, Judaism, which must penetrate to his inner psyche. Indeed, when the great tzaddikim recited the daily blessing of “Shelo osani goi,” “that He did not make me a gentile,” they would momentarily reflect, asking themselves, “Is there any organ or part of me that might be lacking in Yiddishkeit?”