

Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan... and do not follow their traditions. (18:3)

Rashi explains that *Klal Yisrael* is herein enjoined not to emulate the customs and practices of the nations, such as attending theaters and stadiums to watch the gladiators battle one another. We are being taught here a new perspective on Judaism. There are areas of human endeavor which, although not Biblically or Rabbinically prohibited, are nonetheless inappropriate for the Jew. As we will see in the next *parsha*, which begins with the words, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, "You shall be holy," the Jew has a higher calling: to sanctify himself. It is not enough to perform *mitzvos* and distance oneself from sin; one must achieve a level of *kedushah*, sanctity and *adinus*, spiritual refinement.

Veritably, what distinguishes us most from other nations and cultures is our *emunah*, faith. While other nations may also have faith-based religion, our faith is comprised of an inner-feeling of G-dliness. A Jew does not feel distant from Hashem. Indeed, this dimension of spirituality permeates a Jew's entire essence. Everything that we do, all of our mundane, physical acts should be infused with G-dliness. Our culture is spiritual in nature; our goals and objectives are focused on spirituality. The concept of reward for a good life is spiritual. Thus, one may observe the Torah, perform acts of loving-kindness, never sin; yet, if he is not focused on G-dliness, he is missing the essential component which defines Judaism.

The Torah describes our nation as an *am segulah*, a treasured People. This does not define us as racially superior, but as racially unique. It describes us as a nation that is especially close to Hashem, a relationship that is qualitatively better than that of the other nations of the world. In other words, we may not necessarily be better, but our relationship with Hashem is closer. This is because we accepted the Torah and live by the Torah. We made the responsible choice to accept additional obligations and responsibilities on our collective self. This grants us greater and more personal access to the Almighty.

To maintain this unique closeness one must be infused with G-dliness. *Mitzvah* observance and Torah study cannot be extraneous activities. They must be intrinsic parts of our lives. Therefore, any practice which does not contain a G-dliness component within it is a practice which distances us from Hashem. It is just not the "Jewish" thing to do.

The **Nesivos Shalom** questions the **Piaczesner Rebbe, zl**, who, upon reaching the age of forty, said, "What can I now accept upon myself? To study more Torah? I think that I am doing all that I can. To distance myself from desire? *Baruch Hashem*, thank G-d, I am not in any way subject to the blandishments of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. What am I missing? I am missing, simply, to be a 'Jew,' I appear as a human being, similar to a figure on a drawing. What is missing from the picture? The *neshamah*, soul, of a Jew! Therefore, I hereby want to 'convert' myself to become a 'Jew'!"

Powerful words from an individual whose depth of understanding taught him the profound truth concerning the meaning of Judaism. Even if a person observes everything that is demanded of him, and he follows along the path of Torah and *Kedushah*, it still does not define him as a Jew. He must devote every aspect of his life – everything that he does – to Hashem. The *Nesivos Shalom* concludes that, when we recite the blessing of *Shelo asani goy*, “Who has not made me a non-Jew,” we should ask ourselves if this applies to every limb and organ of our bodies. Could it be that a component of non-G-dliness exists within certain areas of our bodies? Are we “Jewish” through and through?