

## "Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt where you dwelled; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you." (18:3)

Why are these two nations singled out from among the other nations of the world? The prohibition against following the immoral practices of the nations applies to all of the nations. **Horav Itzele Voloshiner, zl**, explains that people tend to justify their environment. The Jews might have thought they could follow the practices of the Egyptians because they lived in Egypt. After all, "When in Rome do as the Romans." It is especially difficult to live in a country and act "different" from everybody else. Perhaps, the Jews thought that since Hashem was bringing them to Canaan, it might be acceptable to follow in their "traditions". The *Torah* responds that although it is particularly difficult to ignore the lures of one's environment, a Jew should rise above his surroundings.

**Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**, notes that these two nations were the paradigms of immorality and obscenity. Their behavior was viewed as abominable even by their gentile neighbors. Yet, the *Torah* particularly mentions these two nations as providing an important lesson to us. We might think that, indeed, it is wrong to emulate the practices of those evil nations which are steeped in vulgarity and licentiousness.

What about those nations who are not by nature evil, who simply desire to have a "good time"? Are we permitted to act "permissively," emulating the way of life of much of contemporary society? Are we allowed to "relax" the restraints put upon us? By emphasizing the two worst nations, the *Torah* implies that sin is a gradual process. The first error, the slightest deviation from a *Torah* lifestyle, sets in motion a course of sinful behavior which can ultimately lead to a complete spiritual and moral degeneration - as was manifest in Egyptian and Canaanite culture. The Jew must always be on guard, for today's error can develop into tomorrow's sin.