



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

NOT LIKE THE OTHERS

Acharei Mot carries God's warning that we should not copy the ways of two nations which our ancestors knew well - ancient Egypt and Canaan (Vayikra 18:1-5).

This is part of a general admonition against CHUKOT HAGOYIM, the ways of the heathens.

The problem was both theology and ethics. In fact the two issues were intertwined. Because they had a false theology they had false ethics, and Israel had nothing to learn from them.

It is not just an ancient historical question, because many of the cultures whom we encountered, even in modern times, were also dangerous.

Not only Jews suffered from such regimes and ideologies; their own people were often victimised. Experience proved that when Jews were not safe, nobody was safe.

Sometimes Jews thought it was a counsel of prudence to make their peace with their neighbours, but it rarely worked.

In Germany there were Jewish thinkers

who adulated German civilisation, but it turned against them and unleashed a Holocaust that destroyed the dream of harmonious symbiosis.

What should a Jew do then when it is obvious that a nation failed to meet the standards that were second nature to Judaism?

The answer is twofold - increased dedication to Judaism and its ideals, and unremitting determination to improve the ways of the host society.

Leo Baeck said that the Jew is the eternal protestant who never accepts the present situation as the best of all worlds.

One can and must be a loyal citizen of the country where one lives, but that must never be at the cost of surrendering or squashing the Jewish moral conscience with which one was born.

AHARON'S SONS - ANOTHER APPROACH

Not everyone agrees that Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu met their death because they sinned.

Some expositors view the incident much more positively. The Torah says, "they drew near to the Lord and they died" (Vayikra 15:1).

One school of Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 12) thinks they were impudent towards

God and had to be punished.

Another, reported in the Talmud (Z'vachim 115b) says they died in order to sanctify the honour of God. They loved Him so greatly that they yearned to rise above their physical bodies and attach their souls to the Almighty.

Their death was a reward for their piety; as the Psalmist says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of those that love him" (T'hilim 116:15).

According to this approach, we read their story on Yom Kippur in order to inspire us to dedicate ourselves to God with every fibre of our being. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH