

## “TOLERATING A DIFFERENT WAY”

Many Jewish laws are justified by the commandment to be different. “In their ways you shall not walk,” declares the Torah. Jews have not only insisted upon the right to uniqueness, but on the importance of society’s acceptance of divergence.

In “Judaism Inside Out,” Rabbi Joshua Chasan writes: “The fondest dream of Jews is to be different; to embrace difference as normal.” Despite lip service about the glory of diversity, people tend in practice to be fearful and reticent about those whose ways are genuinely different. But as the world grows smaller, the acceptance of difference -- not without judgment, but certainly without violence -- is the prerequisite for the survival of humanity.

In Malcolm Bradbury’s “The History Man,” Dr. Zachary, a Jewish refugee from Germany, declares that in opposition to fascism there should be, “a chaos of opinion or ideology.” When a colleague, angry about a visiting speaker, pronounces, “Do you know what the consequences of inviting that man would be? One doesn’t tolerate --” Dr. Zachary interrupts with, “But that is just what one does. One tolerates.”

Throughout history Jews have sought not approval, but tolerance. We seek it not because it is easy, or pleasant, but because we know that intolerance can bring the apocalypse.