

There is an old proverb, in the finest and juiciest Yiddish vernacular, which expresses a great and unfortunate truth — "As the Gentile goes, so goes the Jew". This pointed and biting comment on the Jew in exile is amply attested to by our history. The Cannanites worshipped idols — — and later the Israelites did. In the middle ages, the Christians developed ascetic sects — — and then some Jews propounded a form of asceticism which smacked of Christianity. The Poles and Cossaks wore a certain type of clothing, and then the Jews adopted and sanctified it and continued to wear it — — even long after it had passed out of style. Wheteher culturally or sociologically or religiously, the Jew has often fallen prey to this form of mimcry which calls for adopting and adapting the worse forms and features of other peoples.

Our Sages, in the beautiful homilies they usually employ, underscore this point. In this week's Biblical portion we read of the twelve Meraglim who were sent to the Promised Land by Moses. Their mission was clear and to the point. They were to spy out the land and report their findings to Moses and the people. Two of these special investigators, Kaleb and Joshua, were profoundly impressed by the beauty of the Land, its great possibilities and the tremendous potentials of the Israelites in developing and thriving in that country. The other ten spies, however, did not take such a sanguine approach. They were cowed by some giants they had encountered. They brought back reports which sound like a Biblical version of Jack and the Bean-stalk. Disconcerted, discouraged and disheartened, they submitted a gloomy and pessimistic report. Now pessimism as a highly contagious disease, and soon they infected most of their fellow Jews. The results were tragic and the wrath of G-d was incurred. But what caused this state of affairs? The Meraglim must have undergone some special experience which contributed to this campaign of fear and hysteria which they engendered. The Rabbis supply the "missing link" in the Biblical narrative. One giant, they relate, ate a pomegrante and then threw away the shell. And then the Meraglim climbed into that shell to seek shelter in it.

You see, my friends, what our Bages want to indicate with this story is that the Meraglim were people who had no self-respect. They were "Golus Jews" or "Shtadlanim" even before the Jews settled in Israel. Some Jews, they mean to tell us, will accept even a hollow shell, as long as it was once used by a non-Jew. They are willing to accept it even after it has been emptied of its life-giving pulp and after it has been discarded. Indeed "vie ess ** kristelt zich, azoi yidelt zich". Twelve staunch princes of their people seeking shelter in a second-hand pomegrante shell! What a shame and disgrace; what a notorious self-debasement!

And the Bible itself does not fail to predict the results of an attitude of this sort. By their own testimony, the Meraglim indict themselves when they say:

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That lesson of self-respect, of not accepting the shells of strange ideologies, of not dancing to someone else's tune, is something which must be impressed upon us with all firmness. A glaring example of that lack of self-respect we Jews display on occasion happened some short while ago when a Jewish mayor of a Jewish city in the Jewish State visited this city. The bus drivers of that mayor's city demanded of him, legitimately, that they be granted their one day off on Shabbos. The mayor of Haifa agreed that they deserve a one-day-a-week respite - but not on Shabbos! Any day, but not Shabbos! Here is a man who has done his utmost to keep the streets of his city clean and the avenues of his soul muddy. And let alone that the voices raised in protest were few and far imbetween, but the committee selected to lay out the welcoming mat saw fit to do him honor with a non-kosher reception. Again the protests were feeble when a storm should have been raised and when every pulpit in the country should have thundered against this unmitigated chutzpah and brazen effrontery and presumptuousness.

Why was there no open and clear repudiation of this sort of arrogant audacity? Because, my friends, we had buried our heads in the empty shell of nationalism thrown to us by others. Nationalism can be Jewish too. But only when it is vested with the holiness and sanctity and spirit which is typical of our people. Nationalism without these elements, secular nationalism, is only a hollow shell of an idea which was already out of vogue and being discarded by others when we picked it up. The real lovers of Zion were those who did protest this travesty. The others were and are not. How can we expect the respect of others for our people and our religion, if we do not manifest any respect for them.

One can cite example after example of Jews, especially American Jews, indulging in sycophantic mimicry and imitation of everything which tastes of non-Jewish sophistication. This month of June is particularly appropriate for mention of some of the more flagrant examples of Jews adopting christological ceremonies and features and integrating them in the marriage ceremony. The notorious "double-ring" ceremony, for one, is a gentile ritual which seems to have some fascination for some Jews. Or take some modern authors — and here I have in mind one of the finest books on Judaism expounded in modern terms ever to appear — who mar otherwise excellent remarks by constant and consistent reference to a "Judaeo-Christian" tradition. Here too one detects an attempt, however unconscious, to cringe and beg acceptance from the non-Jew by hiding in the discarded shells of their pomegrantes.

One wonders what has happened to our Jewish pride and self-respect. We appeal not for vanity, but for self-respect; for the free expression of our desire to pick our own fruit and not grovel in the waste baskets of others for mere shells long discarded. When that day comes, Israel will be ours indeed in the fuller, more meaningful sense. Then we will have gained more than a land - we will have won back ourselves.

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ciriticien - old freme, esp. verse ? 212(113 11/112 73)1 - but
worked out nicely (JHL); also, undrash about shell (fourd
31/120 hr: 100 hr) is novel (JHL).
Semmis short - sermonette styl- for het days
smaller summer audiences.