

# A GODLY MINORITY

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

In this week's parsha, the Torah presents the ultimate challenge to any minority group living in a society where the majority culture, mores and lifestyle differ radically from those of that particular minority group. Human nature abhors outsiders, aliens, those who are obviously different. And therefore within all of us lies a deep seated drive to conform, to belong, to become part of the perceived whole and not to remain so isolated and strange.

The Torah phrases it succinctly; "How is it that the many nations of the world all worship pagan gods?" Is everybody wrong and only I am correct? Can fifty million Frenchmen be wrong? And therefore "I will also do so," I will join the crowd and bow down before gods of wood and stone handcrafted by humans themselves.

In spite of the absurdity of this logic, it truly reflects human nature. The Talmud teaches us that a great scholar once saw Menashe, the king of Judah, the son of the righteous king Chizkiyah, in a dream. Menashe, at the beginning of his long fifty-five year reign as king, installed paganism as the state religion of Judah.

He later repented but the damage was already done. The scholar asked Menashe how he could have, even for a moment, fallen victim to paganism as a serious belief. Menashe answered him that had the scholar lived in his time and social environment he would have "lifted the hem of the robe he wore to run faster to worship that idol!" Menashe and his society were influenced by the majority culture against all realistic evidence and Divine fiat to the contrary.

Jewish history, over the last three centuries especially, is littered with the debris of majority cultures that have bankrupted and proven to be disastrous. From being "Germans of the Mosaic persuasion" to Marxists of the first order, disastrous results have emanated from Jews following majority cultures.

Today's majority culture of not only tolerating but encouraging sexual hedonism, the pursuit of wealth and gain at any cost, phony universalism and distorted concepts of intellectual and academic rights, is slowly leading to disaster for many unsuspecting Jews. Part of the problem lies in the fact that most Jews, unaware and ignorant of any Jewish history or tradition, simply cannot recognize the trap that they are falling into.

They "pick up the hem of their robes" to run faster to worship the currently fashionable gods of the majority culture. Their attitude is a danger to the very survival of the Jewish people. And yet,

blissfully, no one is allowed to speak against these current majority norms lest one be branded as an obstructionist and old-fashioned.

In this week's parsha, the Torah's warning against blindly following majority cultures certainly should resonate in our current "Jewish democratic" world. We should be careful to choose wisely, listen to our tradition and history and be content to be a Godly minority, unwavering in our principles, ideals and Jewish way of life.

Shabat shalom.  
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