

'If God grant that the earth will be full of understanding and everybody will speak the same language, Ashkenazic, then only (the form) Brisk will be written.'

So wrote Rabbi Meir Katz, the father of the Shak, in one of his responses. We infer from his words that by 'language Ashkenazic' he means Yiddish, since Brisk is the Yiddish name for the town Brest-Litovsk. Secondly it shows that he took it for granted that the way Jews speak is Yiddish—a simple truth which we have ceased to understand in recent times. You feel in Reb Meir's words a warm attitude to Yiddish. That is how the Jewish people put it, through the mouth of its representative, the Rabbi. Times change. Who is to-day the Jewish people, and who can represent it?

There are great masses of people born Jews who live their whole life with the minimum of Jewishness, on the soul-soil of an alien way of life. We would on the face of it expect them also to abandon Yiddish, the language of that part of the Jewish people that remained faithful to the Jewish past, and we would further suppose that there would probably be such among the faithful who would wage war for their ideals, who would stand up for Yiddish.

But we don't always find the facts agree with what one's commonsense seems to say. The religious Jews say little nowadays about Yiddish, while there is a whole section among the freethinkers to whom Yiddish is an ideal, their whole ideal, in fact. How is it possible? Have we sunk so low that we can look on calmly while all that is ours is taken away from us, and we don't even see that ours is taken away from us?

Ours—for who created Yiddish? Did it grow out of modern theories? Out of the European Maskilic conception of a people—land and language, and nothing more? No, the Jewish people of old, which was the people of Judaism and the Jewish way of life, created Yiddish. Not compulsory separation in the Ghetto, as the assimilationist Maskilim wish to have it, nor just the national separation, as the nationalist assimilationists want it.

We see at the first glance that the first argument is quite untenable. For to begin with, the influence of the German Ghetto had ceased long before, and Jews had been living freely for a long time in Poland when Yiddish really flourished. Secondly, Yiddish grew out of necessity. Jews were thrust out from the 'general cultural life'. The assimilationist Maskilim are greatly mistaken when they think that the 'general culture' of those times was like the

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present, which keeps getting more irreligious, where people who have no relation with any religious belief can live together in some sort of indistinguishable hash.

But the 'general culture' of that time was Christian, and Jews again all lived in the way God had commanded. So how can it be imagined that they had previously both lived in one environment, and that the Jews had then been expelled from it? They could not be expelled, because they had their own great, ancient culture.

Nor can the argument of the nationalist Maskilim, national separation, be valid. What do they mean by national separation? Do they mean the factor that derives from race, from blood? It exists, no doubt. But we have no way at all of detecting its influence, and there is no people of any language in whom we find signs of a recognisable influence of race. It shows that this influence at most can be only small.

If again national separation means the historic sum-total of differences found in this or the other people, then this too is no criterion. So the question remains—where do we get this complex entity from that bears the name culture, what gives it its specific colouring?

This brings us out on the road at last. The separateness comes from the Jewish culture, and Jewish culture always grows on the soil of Jewish belief, of the Jewish faith. It was our own culture that constructed the Yiddish language out of old German.

Yiddish is no exception to the rule. The religion is with other peoples too the creator of their cultures and of new languages. And Yiddish is no exception to the rule in regard to the Jewish people itself. This same creative process was repeated several times in different periods and different places. We have the evidence of several Jewish languages and dialects to show what tremendous creative power there is in Jewishness in this special field of culture. In character and achievement there is no difference between Yiddish and Aramaic, the language of the Gemarrah, Jewish-Arabic, Judeo-Spanish (Spaniol) and the rest. But there is a great difference in fact, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Yiddish embraces the largest part of the Jewish people, both in our times and in relation to our whole past, and Yiddish is the most distinctive Jewish language. The others were in practice much less differentiated from their non-Jewish parallel languages, and not one of them had worked out such a distinct form of its own. In other words, Yiddish is in this point the only language that lives only on the Jewish tongue. For even the holy language, Hebrew, was spoken by other peoples as well.

Where the influence of the faith ends, there also ends the culture-creating process, and the deep differences between peoples disappear, as we see it among

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Jews and among the other peoples. One glance at Europe provides ample material of such facts. But our Leftists have gone blind where spirit is concerned, and they don't see it, and that army of freethinkers which has turned Yiddish into a banner is using the creation of the faith against itself, in the belief that the force which created it is now old and decrepit, and the child can manage by itself. The 'Yiddishist' war against the faith, which is mostly waged also against Hebrew, sometimes blinds one of our own too, so that he sees only the danger of Yiddishism, and sometimes doesn't even understand the role of Yiddish, especially if he has been unconsciously infected with Leftist views. He is too short-sighted to see that there is no difference between Yiddishism on one side and Hebraism on the other, that they are both the same irreligious nationalism in different dress. He doesn't see that the whole conflict Yiddish-Hebrew, folk language-national language, is only a conflict between true brothers, that Hebrew is not the holy tongue, though to the Bolsheviks the Torah and Tchernichovsky, forgive me for coupling the two, are both the same enemy.

But the people knows that under the smattering of Hebrew words lies apostasy, assimilation, non-Jewish life—and the people disregarded the slogan 'Hebrew or Russian' and simply held on to its mother-tongue.

Even in Western Europe you can meet already to-day people of the second immigrant generation who can speak Yiddish. This too is characteristic—that we see reports from time to time from Israel about a meeting in a Synagogue, where someone wanted to speak in Hebrew, and the assembly of religious Jews protested vigorously, insisting on Yiddish. They were not fooled, it seems—they sensed the profane under the sanctity. The people also realise that the ostensibly practical argument is hollow, that it won't do to be for ever teaching millions of people to speak Hebrew, because a Polish and a Moroccan Jew sometimes meet. Where it is necessary they understand each other, without any theories, and without that sort of Hebrew which is just as mechanical and soulless as Esperanto. But this is not understood so well by individuals at the top, who dismiss Yiddish contemptuously.

This contempt stems from two roots of the Haskallah, whose influence is much more powerful among us than appears at first sight. The attitude to Yiddish shows it clearly. The Maskilic hostility has slowly eaten its way into us. The two roots are stuck in nationalism and in the earlier assimilationist views of certain West European orthodoxy. The Maskil, whether nationalist or assimilationist-orthodox, lives in a world which is not in essence Jewish, or only half-Jewish, and has therefore among other things also lost its language, or is losing it. One lot of nationalists think and speak all the time of the importance of the national form, and they don't see that before their eyes they

have complete and ready, alive, the very thing about which they keep weaving elaborate theories. Their influence is also felt among us, not so much in words as in consequences.

The Maskilised orthodox again (and this is perhaps a diminishing category) fails to understand that God's command to be different from the nations is greatly facilitated if we are also different in language. Not only does he miss seeing the great value of Yiddish for the maintenance of the people as a whole and of its soul, but he also can't understand the importance of the form in the whole structure of Jewishness, from which we derive the second fundamental value of Yiddish. So that being under these Maskilic influences he stands with blind eyes and repeats all the silly absurdities: Yiddish is really not our own language, it isn't a nice language, it's a mixed language, it is a corrupt German, no other people in the world speaks it (!) and other such bright clever things, which both Jewishly and scholarly are nonsense.

There are many examples of the extent to which Maskilic psychology has spread its influence over us. I want to mention only one instance which has to do with the language itself. The old Haskallah created an ugly, Germanised corrupt language, and modern Haskallah has not of course improved it to make it more Jewish, though it has departed from the openly Germanised path. The religious Jews have in recent times hardly bothered to guard their old language, and have sometimes admitted the new influence even in the Yiddish translation of the Bible text. And now, when Yiddish has come into wider use they have simply taken over the language of the freethinkers, which has assimilation in its soul, their words, their forms, their syntax. We hadn't the strength to construct something of our own. They introduced a Germanised orthography, which looked philologically stupid—and we followed them in this, and are holding on to it tighter than they are, for they have already replaced it with some brand-new spellings—and it's even a good thing for us to be dancing in their footsteps, because the old Germanised orthography is still less Jewish. Who among us thought that our own old orthography was not so bad, and that we could easily build on this base a scientific and national orthography? No, it didn't occur to us. 'Language . . . orthography . . . not important!' We neglect our own affairs; we don't consider that Jews must conduct themselves finely in everything, and in so important a matter as language as well. The language of a people should be something well-shaped, and it isn't all the same whether its writers kill the language, or they take pains to bring out the order and the beauty which lie in the language itself.

Nor should it be said that this needs philological preparation, and the subject is too dull. First of all, not everybody need deal with it, and secondly it is the same everywhere: details are not dull, if you know why the work is

being done—and the purpose is to form, to refine, to beautify the instrument of our worship and our service, and so better it. We must serve God with beauty.

Now we come to the third value. The value of separation and the value of form which I mentioned before bear a relation to the people as a whole. Demanding aesthetic treatment of Yiddish because it is a means of service, we approach the territory of the individual. And here we see that the importance of Yiddish is just as great. A language that is spoken has a direct impact, and does not need the middle-road of the mind. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav knew what he was doing when he left instructions in his will that his stories must not be published otherwise than with the Yiddish original. That is how we must also understand the fact that Chassidism strengthened the position of Yiddish. When Chassidim wanted to pour out their soul they found the way in the language which was on their tongue. That is how the holy Levi Yitzchok came to sing in Yiddish. It is interesting in this regard to note the difference between Jewish changes and Maskilic reforms. The strengthening of Yiddish did not diminish by a hair the importance of the holy tongue—while the West European Maskil's way of thought went like this: The holy tongue is hardly understood now, or perhaps no longer understood at all. Therefore it must be discarded, and we must say our prayers in the language which the people speak. This is not a problem of language, but of psychology. The prayers in German did not oust the holy tongue, but Yiddish was dying among these people, so Maskilic psychology thought up such things. Where Jewishness flourished the people used the religious values of both languages, as the women's Techinoth testify.

But Yiddish entered the religious life not only in the field of emotion, but also of the mind. Here we have the fourth great value of Yiddish, the intellectual and the pedagogic. This means, Yiddish was used for intellectual purposes, for literature, chiefly translations, paraphrasings, commentaries. For the fact could not be ignored that there are parts of the people for whom the road of the holy tongue is too hard or even impossible, and it was realised that they must not just be left out in the wilderness. A whole people can't all be scholars—and they must have God's word in the speech of those who achieved something with their publications. It is important to remember that this part of the people was a large one because it included a whole half of the people—the women and girls, besides many men. This also strengthened the emotional factor. Translations were made of the Bible and some of the other literature. The large number of these translations, paraphrasings and commentaries show how well the matter was understood. There is no need to quote examples from the leaders of the people, such as the approbations of the Bible translations by

Blitz and Witzhausen, (which incidentally have only the translations, without commentary). There were also original works.

I think that the value of the older Yiddish literature is not appreciated as much as it should be. Who knows where we might have been to-day if Rabbi Isaac ben Reb Jacob had not written his Tze'enu U'renu. I mean, it is quite unnecessary for any little youngster to-day to shrug his shoulders and sniff—'Womanish stuff!' He doesn't realise that without the Tze'enu U'renu he might not be studying his Gemarrah now.

The most important intellectual victory of Yiddish is the fact that we learn everything in Yiddish. The small boy in Chedar and the Gaon are linked together in life and learning through the language. We mustn't think that only what is printed is a fact which counts. No, because the spoken Yiddish is the garb of the intellectual life, its importance is beyond calculation, even if what is said in Yiddish is afterwards written down and printed in the holy tongue and Halacha language.

The division of service between the sacred tongue and Yiddish still exists to-day. Here too we could have an extension of the role of Yiddish. We can easily picture a great scholar writing a new commentary in Yiddish, and from what we have seen till now, it will not oust Rashi, God forbid, and the sacred tongue will not lose its greatness, sanctity and practical value. In this field the position will probably remain like that. But in other fields the rôle of Yiddish is growing, and it will have to occupy a great place in our literature. There are masses of people who must be given both fine literature and scientific knowledge on the basis of Jewishness, not popularisation nor trash, but classic works. (I don't of course mean that classics can be created by programmes).

In the modern period the people were not given anything, and this often led them to turn to the irreligious literature in Yiddish. The end of it is irreligiousness or at least a strong Maskilic influence. True, the modern literature is cutting itself off from the Jewish tree and cannot endure, but meanwhile it is doing damage among us, and we have no gain from it, nor from the modern Hebrew literature—they are only European literatures in supposed Jewish language.

It will be something quite different if we have a Jewish literature in Yiddish, which will spread from end to end, on every side, and in all fields of Jewish life and Jewish ways. Then we shall be privileged to read poems and songs by truly great poets, not as to-day where the poetry we have is written by irreligious people, and if we get any poetry of ours it is bad versification. And it is rarely lyrical—mostly so-called epic, on historical themes. Is it only chance that we have no poets to-day who write songs of God's ways? Are we still justified in calling ourselves the people of faith? Apparently religious

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Jews think it is beneath them to write poetry. King David didn't think so. There is only one thing to keep us from despair—there still are folksongs, and we still have a folk who sing the holy Rabbi Levi Yitzchok's songs.

God gave us such a precious possession, our own language, and if we continue in the same way as now we shall fritter away His gift. One of the reasons for which the people of Israel was redeemed from Egypt, says the Gemarrah, was the language—'Because they did not change their language.' Let us hope that we shall one day, in the coming years, be entitled to claim the same privilege for ourselves.

Isaac Katznelson

In our generation every Jew, even if he hasn't himself been in any of the ghettoes and extermination camps, should consider himself not as one who lives, just that, but as one who has remained alive, which is more and different. One who has remained alive after a shipwreck still feels the tragedy of the shipwreck. That is how every Jew should feel the disaster of the six million. If it is fobbed off with official remembrance days it is forgetting by remembering. Theatricalised grief is a desecration.

There was a great fuss made about Anne Frank's Diary. What are twenty such Diaries against one page in the records of Isaac Katznelson, written in the concentration camp Vitel? Every Jew who wants to remember must read again and again Isaac Katznelson's journal that he kept in Vitel. He must keep returning to such works of the Churban as Katznelson's 'Song of the Slaughtered Jewish People'. That is more, immeasurably more than he can get from the best memorial speeches. Reading Katznelson is to suffer, to be destroyed with the Jewish millions, to be burned and to rise from the ashes and demand a reckoning.

In writing that work the martyr Isaac Katznelson became himself a survivor, one of those who have remained alive. He will always rise from the ashes to demand a reckoning from those above and those below.

Till the Churban, Isaac Katznelson was a graceful, musical poet with a Heinesque manner and a bent for feuilletonism. Even his ponderous poems—and they were not rare—gave the impression of something light, because while the poet wept, his rhyme frolicked. In his Hebrew poems Katznelson often surprised one with his playful inventive rhymes, smooth and gay. His facile swinging rhymes prevented us from taking his song and his grief seriously.

He came from a good comfortable home, gently nurtured, surrounded with parental affection, a wonder-child, an infant prodigy dancing into our literature. Afterwards he was a teacher, in constant contact with children; he wrote songs for children, children's plays, all sorts of things like that. He never grew out of being a wonder-child, not even in those works where he tried as a mature artist to express himself to his world. Katznelson who wrote Hebrew and Yiddish poems, many of them weighty and original, though unintegrated, who wrote a robust prose, and fine one-act plays, and all sorts of things, big and small in various literary genres, strained every nerve to achieve a crowning work. But he could not get away from his playful rhymes.