

The Jew Who Ruined the Temple

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In the little village where I found myself on my vacation, the American citizen Henry Rose was a neighbor of mine. The house, which he owned, stood near my hotel. He has lived in this village a good few years, makes an easy living, and has a lot of time to enjoy himself.

True, not just with any other one would he spend time. He is proud of his American citizenship. Knows almost by heart the text of the American constitution, knows the names of all the senators and of important Republican congressmen, and even addresses them with the title "Honorable".

It is evident that he holds America in very high esteem, and won't hear a word of criticism about American institutions.

It's fortunate that for Henry Rose it is easier to speak in Yiddish rather than in English. Therefore he speaks Yiddish with me. But when the talking takes place outside, and if a real American passes by, he abruptly stops the conversation, greets the passerby in pure English: "How do you do, Mr. Nelson? Very nice day...but maybe it will rain later"... Having recited his piece, and receiving from the real American a reply "yes" or "maybe", he turns again to me

in Yiddish and tells me who that Nelson is, and how he became friendly with him. After that he tells me that he lives very well with the Americans. "They are a very fine people", and after that he tells me a secret in my ear.

"-better than our Jews".

One might think that Henry Rose is, God forbid, an anti-semitic. We must clear him immediately of this accusation. Just the opposite, he is a friend of the Jews, but despite his love, he does see their shortcomings.

Their first shortcoming is that they Americanize themselves with difficulty.

- Very difficult - he sighs, and we see that it makes him ill.

I ask him for an example, because it seems to me that the village Jews are a little too much Americanized.

He gives me as an example a story about a Temple.

The story of the Temple is such:

In the village there gathered some dozens of Jewish families, and they decided that they must have a home for religious services...one may not be actually pious, but it is not appropriate in front of the goyim. They have their church, so we must have ours. Naturally, Henry Rose does not mean a small study house like in Europe, but a small Temple on a side street. Instead of a "khazn" - a Cantor, instead of a "rov" - a Rabbi, and similar improvements.

And money is no obstacle since all the Jews were, thank goodness, not poor.

They bought a plot of land from an important American citizen who, for a Jewish church, gave it up for a very low price. There was built a beautiful, small Temple. In outward appearance it looked like their churches with an American style. Inside it was like a synagogue. But Rose called it a Temple as he recalls what they were like in the greater cities in Europe for the upper classes.

- What is the difference between a Temple and a small synagogue? - Henry Rose poses a question to me, and answers at once himself:

- In a small synagogue all pray together. In a Temple, however, it's left to the Cantor, and the congregation - either it is silent, or if one does not rely completely on the Cantor, he prays along, but quietly so as not to cause a disturbance.

And that is how it was for several years. They simply were afraid to open their mouths during a service. It was not appropriate. It was, as it were, a Temple.

And now we have a story. In a beautiful summer day there moved into the village a Jew with a beard, actually one of those truly European Jews, and opens up a stationery shop and becomes a resident. A citizen he is not, but a resident, yes. Do you understand? So I already understand that from that Jew we will not have any glory...Admittedly, the beard is not the real problem. Real Yankees also have beards although their beards are more respectable...But what else? This Jew comes to the Temple, and there is no point in asking him the difference between a Temple and a synagogue!

...The Cantor begins chanting, and the Jew starts up with a melody as if he were still in Eyshishok...I had a terrible premonition, he is killing the Temple.

So I go to him after the service, and remark to him quietly in Yiddish:

- Mister - I say - this is a Temple, not a synagogue. Here it is not customary to pray loudly...

He smiles and answers:

- If you can make in America a Temple from a church, then one can certainly make a synagogue from a Temple.

And do you think he did not accomplish this? He had such an inner strength that he used to give a shout with his familiar melody "blessed be he who speaks". This awakened in another one the desire, in a third one, in a fourth one; first a little independent, quietly, then higher, higher...until it came to the Halleluyahs and after that to the "Sh'ma Yisroel" - There became a commotion like in a true synagogue...and for the repetition of the Shmoneh Esray the Cantor forgot that he sings from Sulzer's siddur, and he went over to the familiar way with the true melody..

Now there is no Temple: they pray plainly, like in the old country, hollering, bowing, and when saying the "aleynu", even spitting out..

