

Showdown in the Synagogue

written by Yehudis Golshevsky
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A secular Jew worked as a scribe in the government office in Uman. He was known as “der Deutschel,” meaning, someone of German descent.

Somehow, one Shabbat he found himself in the kloyz, the Breslover synagogue in Uman, during Mussaf. They were just reciting the prayer that begins, “A crown will be given to You, Hashem our God.” This prayer is the climax of the service and is recited with fiery devotion, even a kind of ecstasy, in Breslov circles, and in many other communities even today.

As they intoned this special prayer, “der Deutschel” – notorious for his contempt of the religious community and also unafraid of public rebuke – raised his ink-stained hands for all to see. It was as if he were saying that displaying the visible sign of his profanation of Shabbat was the crown given to God, God forbid. This blatant mockery of one of the holiest prayers was clearly calculated to infuriate the Breslovers.

It did. Several young men jumped up, determined to give him a thrashing and toss him out of the synagogue for good. But Reb Noson realized their plan and motioned to them that they were to do no such thing.

He explained, “Why is this man, a self-proclaimed secular Jew, coming into our kloyz? He’s never set foot here before. It’s obvious that some part of him is considering returning to the Torah. He knows that no other house of worship will allow him into their sanctuary. We are his last resort. How can we bar his final opportunity to repent?”

The young men backed off and let the visitor be.

Reb Noson’s words proved prescient. The man slowly began to return to his roots until his Judaism became meaningful to him and he started keeping the Torah.

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh II:618