

The Monastery

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This story concerns a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. Once a great order, as a result of **waves of antimonastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism** in the nineteenth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left: the abbot and four others...all over 70 years of age.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi, from a nearby town, used as a hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monk had become a bit “psychic” and could sense when the rabbi was in the woods. “The rabbi is in the woods again...” they would whisper to each other. One day the abbot visited the hermitage to ask the rabbi if, by some chance, he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot at his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. “I know how it is,” he exclaimed. “The spirit has gone out of the people. IT is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore.” So the abbot and the rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the abbot had to leave. They embraced each other. “It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years, but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?” the abbot asked.

“No, I’m sorry. I have not advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you” the rabbi stated.

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, “Well, what did the rabbi say?”

“He couldn’t help. We wept, read the Torah and as I was leaving he said something cryptic – that the Messiah is one of us. I don’t know what he meant.”

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monk pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi’s words. Could he possibly have meant one of us monks? If that is the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. He is certainly a holy man. Everyone knows he is a man of

light. Certainly he couldn't have meant Brother Elred. He gets so crotchety at times. He is a thorn in everyone's sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi meant Brother Phillip. He is passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you really need him. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah. Of course, the rabbi didn't mean ME. I'm just an ordinary person. Yet supposedly he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for YOU, could I?

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along its many paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling about it. Hardly knowing why, the people began to return to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place and their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another and another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's comment, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.

**if you happen to know the source of this wonderful story...please let me know
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