

The RYS Daily 11/15/06 Attitude towards His Son's Secular Studies

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1 pages 313 - 314.

R. Israel, however, was deeply distressed that his son had abandoned the study of Torah, since the son had excelled so well in it in his youth. The father derived no comfort at all from the son's remarkable achievements in the world of science, and cut off his support during all the son's student years. R. Israel exerted every effort to restore his son to Torah study. When Hamaggid reported in 1865, that "Mr. Lipkin was on his way to Koenigsberg to engage in advanced research, "the editor added that this was the son of R. Israel of Salant, and that he was "a pride to his saintly father, the Gaon, as well, may he live, who did not prevent the son from attending lectures at university, and so to integrate Torah and science, for the greater glory of the sons of our people." A few weeks later the same periodical (No. 11) carried a letter over the signature of R. Israel with these remarks: "Since Truth is the lamp at the feet of the righteousness that goes about on earth, I find it my duty publicly to proclaim that no glory accrues to me, as the slip of your pen would seem to indicate, in respect of my son. On the contrary, to me this is a 'bitterness of the spirit'. My heart grieves at the path which my son has wanted to set for himself. Whoever loves his soul and has the power to persuade him, to turn his desire not to run counter to my will and wishes, will do a great favor to one as depressed in spirit as I am today".

Nor was there any contradiction between R. Israel's personal attitude and his simultaneous efforts to spread Judaism in academic circles. There was nothing in his views to prevent him from trying to infiltrate Torah inside the walls of the university and to influence students. Furthermore, he employed every means at his disposal to guard his son against straying from Judaism. He journeyed specially to St. Petersburg to extract a three-fold promise: that his son would observe Shabbat, refrain from eating trefah food, and not shave. [27] He would say that were he able to disguise himself as a woman, he would go to work in the restaurant patronized by his son, so as to supervise the kashrut. He also requested R. Isaac Blazer, then rabbi in St. Petersburg, by mail, to keep an eye on the son. [28] In this way, it is said, the son remained a loyal Jew.

[27.] As related by Rabbi A. D. Berkovsky. Presumably this was the journey to St. Petersburg undertaken that year, 1872, as mentioned above, in connection with his political activities. R. Naftali Amsterdam is reputed to have related that, when R. Israel was in St. Petersburg, several of the university professors remarked to the son that they would want to see what made his father so great. The son suggested that they ask his father the most difficult question in geometry they could propound. They submitted a problem which had engaged their minds at that time. R. Israel studied it for a few minutes, and solved it to the astonishment of all the specialists in the field (told by R. Abraham Braude).

[28.] R. Israel's last letter to R. Isaac Blazer concerning his son's conduct elicited the reply that the son had not tasted gentile baked bread for the past three months R. Israel

understood this to imply that his son had been dead for three months, since no other bread was available in the capital.

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