

The RYS Daily 11/21/06 Early Life of RYS III

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Young as Israel was, R. Zvi took a deep liking to him and taught him personally. This, however, did not suit the rabbi's wife, and she resented her husband lowering himself to the level of teaching a small boy. Once she turned to him and demanded to know: "How long are you going to take care of this son of a melamed" (teacher of little boys) ? Stung by the insult to his father, the boy retorted: "That melamed knows more than many a rabbi !" The rebbetzin became incensed, and drove the boy out of the house. For a long time afterwards she would close the door in his face. The rabbi, however, let him in through the window and continued studying with him. Somewhat later, R. Israel's father paid a visit to R. Zvi, and in the usual manner, the two Torah scholars engaged in halachic discussion. Impressed by R. Zeev's brilliance, R. Zvi called his wife into the room. "See," he said, "You became angry when Israel said that his father knew more than many a rabbi. But he was right. R. Zeev knows more than I do."

It was not long before Israel had covered the entire Talmud, and with such comprehension that R. Zvi would call him, "Little Alfasi." When a noted rabbi visited R. Zeev and noticed him teaching a boy standing on a chair, he asked in amazement: "Have you become a children's schoolmaster?" R. Zvi replied "He is no child. He is a little Alfasi."

So high was the level of his scholarly achievement, that at the age of fourteen, Israel had compiled a small volume of his own Halachic novellae. On advice of R. Zvi Braude, the work was dispatched to R. Akiva Eger in Posen (Poznan) for his comment. The latter, however, did not send any acknowledgment. Later on, a Salant Jew happened to pass through Posen. At the request of R. Zvi Braude he visited R. Akiva Eger, who in turn mentioned that he had received a remarkable book, a work of absolute genius from some young man in Salant. He had refrained from acknowledging its receipt and expressing admiration the work deserved, because he could not fathom why it had been sent to him so far way, when it could have been submitted to R. Zvi Braude right there. He concluded that the author and R. Zvi had become embroiled in some controversy, and that the author must have intended to exploit R. Akiva Eger's commendation to his personal advantage."

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