

## The RYS Daily 11/23/06 Early Life of RYS V

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At the age of fourteen, R. Israel became engaged to the daughter of R. Jacob Halevi Eisenstein of Salant, a descendant of the "Shlah" (R. Isaiah Horowitz). An incident occurred which throws light on the characters of the two fathers-in-law. At the time of the engagement, R. Jacob had pledged a dowry of 300 roubles to the young couple. He suffered business losses and was unable to meet his commitment. Hearing this, another father, wanting R. Israel for his own daughter offered R. Jacob 10,000 roubles to release R. Israel from his obligation. R. Jacob came to Zhagori to tell R. Zeev that he was prepared to break off the engagement, and leave R. Israel free to marry the daughter of the wealthy parents. R. Zeev refused to listen. He called his wife into the room, and all three drank to the success of the originally planned match and set the date for the wedding.

R. Israel spent eighteen years in Salant. By operating a small business his wife was able to provide for their needs, while he devoted himself completely to Torah study. A local resident, R. Elijah b. Nehemiah, placed an attic at the disposal of R. Israel and his colleagues. There he attained a phenomenal mastery of Torah learning. Young as he was, he gained fame as one of the true Geonim of the generation, and particularly for his unique approach to the logic of Torah learning. "He kindled a new light in his approach to learning and analytical study." In those days the works of the Earlier and Later Authorities were not readily available and so attention would be concentrated on the manipulation of the text of the Talmud, the elaborations of the Tosafot, and the comments of the Maharsha on the particular spot. All explanation and invention would arise from studying the text *ad locum*. R. Israel's constructions, by contrast, would extend over the entire range of the Talmud. "He began to present his novellae and pilpul discourses in which he included the entire Talmud and Tosafot, all combined together with awe-inspiring acuity, and he performed wonders to the astonishment of the great scholars of the time at this remarkable phenomenon."

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