

The RYS Daily 12/28/07 Cholera VI

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This audacious act led to violent repercussions, and "all the city was astir." Vilna teemed with rabbis and dayanim of towering stature and with long experience in rendering halachic decisions. Many, therefore, resented this young man, occupying no rabbinic post in the city, having the effrontery to give his own ruling so blatantly in so grave a matter. Seeing the reaction he had aroused, R. Israel announced that he would deliver a halachic discourse in the Great Synagogue. Local scholars inferred that he would assuredly deal with this particular subject, and their curiosity impelled them to come and listen to him so as to follow his reasoning, his halachic novellae and his conclusion. To their utter amazement, he did not refer at all, even by a single word, to the incident. Instead he devoted his dialectic construction to a different topic entirely. It was reported, however, that this discourse was so vastly superior to all others that R. Israel had ever delivered in Vilna, both in its profundity and scintillating brilliance, that it overwhelmed and silenced the entire audience. Presumably, he had decided to reveal his genius fully this time, so that all should acknowledge him as a highest Torah authority and once and for all stop disputing his decision and action on that Yom Kippur.

Whenever R. Israel would recall the episode, he would express his deep gratification at having been granted the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah devolving on that particular time, and which had been assigned to him to fulfill by reason of his possessing the requisite courage and resolution.

News of his act spread like wild fire throughout all regions of Russia and beyond and throughout the entire Jewish world. R. Israel was now universally recognized as an authority of gigantic stature — by virtue of his intellectual ability — and his name was venerated far and wide in awed admiration.

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