

The RYS Daily 1/3/07 Leaving Vilna IV

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1, pages 219 - 220.

Maskilim still loyal to Torah criticized R. Israel for his action. They sincerely believed that had he assumed control, he would have been able to direct the Seminary as he saw fit, and his students would have gained proficiency both in Torah learning and secular knowledge as well. R. Israel seemed disinclined to disclose the true reasons behind his refusal. When asked why, he offered excuses, all, apparently, designed to satisfy the particular questioner.

To Dr. Trachtenberg, a communally active Maskil of Vilna, he stated : `For a rabbi to be equipped to answer every difficult inquiry submitted to him, and which might be a vital matter for the poor, he must possess a basic knowledge of all branches of Torah learning, and at the same time be deeply G-d fearing and steadfast in his faith. He (R. Israel) did not believe that students of such a seminary could fulfill all these requirements, and so he could not take the responsibility on himself."

Years later, he gave this expression to his motives in a letter to R. Jacob Lipschitz, also a well-known communal leader : "The basic deficiency of the Rabbinical Seminary is that it will nullify the necessity of being learned in order to render halachic decisions ... Our eyes have seen (the results in) Germany. Even among G-d-fearing this has been completely forgotten, since they have the opinion that one only needs the Shulchan Aruch and piety in order to issue halachic decisions. And this is not so, as those familiar with learning and ruling well know — and among almost all the older generation, learning, with G-d's help, has not yet been extinguished — that for practical decisions men of great scholarship are required. As time is now progressing, we do not know whether great Torah scholars will be found (in the future)."

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