

The RYS Daily 2/8/07 Germany IV

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R. Israel effected a veritable revolution in the entire city. The community was receptive to his Musar ideas, and accepted his instruction. His influence extended to all sections of the Jewish population and he became renowned throughout the entire area. He founded a Talmud study circle ("Chevrah Shass") which attracted a large number of participants, and this group, too, exerted a profound effect on the city. On his recommendation, R. Isaiah Wohlgemuth, the local dayan, was appointed rabbi of the city, and contributed greatly to the improvement of the community.

It must be noted that when R. Israel arrived in Memel, Judaism there was in a deplorable state, as it was in the rest of Germany. Jewish stores were open on Shabbat, and the local merchants whose businesses were, for the most part, involved in overseas trade would have their shipments at the port loaded and unloaded on Shabbat. R. Israel's approach to them was characteristic — patient and gradual. The first time he entered the synagogue they attended, and wanted to preach, he asked whether any Lithuanian Jews were present. Told that there were, he said no more and left as he had come. The next Shabbat, he was there again. Discovering that no Lithuanian Jews were there this time, he addressed the congregation. After having expatiated on the value and sanctity of the Shabbat, he concluded: "It might be necessary to take delivery of shipments on Shabbat - but surely no one is forced to write." The merchants agreed, and undertook not to write any more. Some weeks later, R. Israel appeared again and delivered a Sabbath address. Then he went further: "It may be necessary to unload merchandise on Shabbat, but surely it is not imperative to load." Once again the merchants conceded that he was right. Some time later, he came again and admonished them about unloading as well. So he proceeded step by step, until, as has been said, he had effected a complete revolution.

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