

The RYS Daily 3/18/07 Public and Political Action III

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1, pages 277 -78.

The evil decrees reached their climax in 1851. That was the year the military service law was enacted. R. Israel thereupon dispatched one of his men, R. Elchanan Cohen, to St. Petersburg, there to take up residence and to devote himself to Jewish affairs. R. Elijah Levinsohn, a rich merchant who financed many an undertaking, donated his whole cash resources, some 1500 roubles, towards these projects. As for R. Elchanan Cohen, beside being a well-known business man, he was also learned and intelligent, and he remained in the capital until 1879. He succeeded in gaining access to the ruling circles, and became the lookout man for the prominent Jews of the time: Baron Gunsburg, Poliakov and others, and succeeded in having several harsh decrees abolished.

It is a fact that in 1881, when R. Elchanan was no longer living, and, in the wake of the pogroms of that year and other tribulations and evil decrees, the various public figures convened a meeting in St. Petersburg. In the middle, the treasurer, Leon Rosenthal rose and declared: "All the present decrees have come upon us because that excellent communal figure, M. Cohen, is dead and we have not succeeded in replacing him with someone to watch over public affairs. Had he been alive, he could have averted the evil."

R. Elchanan maintained contact with R. Israel all the time, and would do nothing without prior consultation with him. For a specific period, R. Aaron Nevizesky, R. Zeev Cohen and others would also travel to St. Petersburg, and stay there for months at a time.

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