

The RYS Daily 4/27/07 Boldly Conceived, Revolutionary Plans VII

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Another vital necessity was the creation of a religious literature in the vernacular. Here again R. Israel spared no effort to bring this idea to realization, and it is well worth relating what occurred at a meeting with R. Samson Raphael Hirsch of Frankfurt. The account will shed light on the extent to which R. Israel was prepared to exert himself in the achievement of any of his goals. Discussing the plight of the Russian Jewry, R. Israel expressed the opinion that the only way to influence youth was to provide them with literature in Russian, directed to that end. He, however, had no idea how to proceed, since those capable of committing their thoughts to writing knew no Russian, while those who had mastered Russian were not faithful to the spirit of Judaism. Samson Raphael Hirsch suggested that certain German Judaica be translated, since non-Jews could be employed to perform this task. R. Israel approved the idea and asked Rabbi Hirsch to recommend works he thought worthwhile translating. The latter suggested the writings of Rav Plessner. Rabbi Dr. Naftali Ehrmann was present at the discussions. R. Israel was his mentor, and he had accompanied R. Israel there. He remarked that he could think of no work more suitable than R. Samson Raphael Hirsch's own Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel, on which Rav Hirsch commented that he would deem it a great merit if his writings could bring any benefit.

After they had parted, R. Israel asked Dr. Ehrmann to obtain copies of Rav Hirsch's works and bring them to him that same evening. R. Israel had not yet sufficiently mastered German, and he read with such difficulty that it took the two of them till midnight to cover the first letter. Nevertheless, R. Israel persevered, and did not become weary of sitting up night after night for several weeks with Dr. Ehrmann until they had completed the book. R. Israel found the work well worth translating and came to the conclusion that it should be rendered into both Hebrew and Russian. To what extent he succeeded is not known.

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