

The RYS Daily 5/18/07 Last Days XI

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In Kovno, his disciples gathered around him. He delivered Musar Talks to them, and he exhorted them to carry on his Musar doctrine. He gave guidance to the various Musar institutions and breathed new life into them all.

We do not have any information that would explain why he chose that particular time to come to Russia, nor do we know what he did there. Yet we do possess knowledge of one task that he undertook and from which he did not desist until he had brought it to a successful conclusion.

The younger Baron, David Gunzburg, had conceived the idea of establishing a new Rabbinical Seminary to replace the earlier institutions that had closed down. He approached the Russian government for its cooperation. The information reached R. Israel, and he became alarmed at the new evil that might befall the community, as had been the case with the previous seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir, the results being all too well known. R. Israel had spoken to the younger Baron previously, when he was living in Paris, and had advised the abandonment of the project, but apparently the arguments had fallen on deaf ears.

R. Israel met with his committee. They discussed the ways and means to cope with the new situation. Should they complain directly to the authorities and let them know that the Jewish population was adamantly opposed to such institutions? This would result in a direct confrontation with the Baron and his friends. Or else, should the efforts first be directed towards the Baron himself, and he be made aware of the grave responsibility he was taking upon himself, and how much the project was fraught with danger, even to the point of dividing the Jewish community. The first alternative was also dangerous. After all, the Baron and his associates wielded considerable influence in government circles, and had charge of all Jewish affairs in Russia. If tensions were to arise between them - considerable harm could ensue. R. Israel came to the conclusion that it was incumbent upon them to follow the path of peace first, and so the second plan was adopted. All the prominent rabbis and larger communities were to address polite letters of protest to the Baron and to implore him to renounce his new scheme. R. Israel next summoned R. Jacob Lipschitz, personal secretary and confidant of R. Isaac Elchanan, and requested him to invite his rabbi to be the leader in the performance of the mitzvah, i.e. to be the first to register his protest with the Baron. After him, the rest of the rabbis were to follow suit.

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