

The Daily RYS 7/27/06 RYS's Greatness in Torah

The following is from the footnote at the bottom of page 200 of The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1.

[The sefer] Sha'are Zion, p. 23 contains an interesting account of an encounter between R. Israel, and R. Abraham Benjamin Sofer, author of the Ketav Sofer, and rabbi of Pressburg: Once when R. Abraham Sofer returned home from one of the European spas, the leaders of the community went out to greet him. They noticed that he was crestfallen, his eyes moist with tears. Without saying a word to anyone he went to bed. Only some days later, when he had recovered, did he disclose what had happened. Stopping at a wayside inn, he was asked to decide an halachic question. He gave his ruling as he saw fit. Among the guests was a Lithuanian Jew, whose clothing did not bespeak any Torah scholar, and he made some comment. The rabbi, his keen mind at work, was able to give an immediate answer. But the Lithuanian Jew adduced support for his comment and a sharp debate ensued. The Ketav Sofer was completely taken aback and shaken by the acuteness and erudition of his interlocutor. So dejected did he become that he took ill. Later it transpired that this Lithuanian Jew was none other than R. Israel. (As told by R. Zvi Pesach Frank, Rabbi of Jerusalem, who heard it from a Hungarian rabbi). Some add that R. Abraham Sofer was later offered the rabbinate of Brest-Litovsk (Brisk), but he refused, his reason being that he was afraid of the Lithuanian Jewish layman. See also, R. Jacob Glicksberg , Haderashah BeYisrael, (Tel-Aviv, 1940), p. 463 for the evidence of one who actually heard R. Joshua Isaac Shapiro of Slonim, called "R. Eisel Chorif" and known for his tendency to denigrate all the Torah scholars of the time on account of his own mental acuity, say: "I consider myself a lamdan until I enter R. Israel of Salant's door. The minute I just stand before him, I feel effaced in the presence of his Torah." R. Joseph Baer Soloveitchik of Brest-Litovsk (Brisk) is also reputed to have said that R. Israel was "the craftsman and smith" (cf. Jer. 24.1. - Rashi, ibid.).

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