

The RYS Daily 12/1/06 Early Life of RYS XII

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1 pages 193 - 194.

Just then the business operated by his wife collapsed, and he was forced to seek some other means to support his growing family. He deeply desired so to arrange his financial affairs that he could at the same time make contact with people. For some reasons of principle, which he would not disclose, he refused to consider accepting any rabbinical office. Such positions were in fact offered to him, and the community of Brest-Litovsk (Brisk) had sent him letters of appointment. The same position had also been offered to his friend, Rabbi Samuel Salant, but the two had made a pact earlier that neither would ever become an official rabbi, and both refused the offer. Rumor has it that R. Israel had more than thirty reasons justifying his refusal to accept any such appointment.

The reasons were, apparently, personal. He later encouraged his own pupils and sons to achieve proficiency in their studies, so as to be able to render correct Halachic decisions, both for their own and for the benefit of others, and also to accept office as rabbis ²⁷ Possibly he wished to avoid confining himself to any single locality, and to retain his freedom of mobility, necessary for broadening the range of his influence and for initiating schemes comprehensive in scope. Asked once why he would not become a rabbi, he answered, smilingly: "Every large city must have ten unoccupied males ²⁸; how much more does a whole province need at least one such person.

Note: The footnote below begins on page 193 and continues on page 194. It refers to an earlier sentence on the book on page 191 which reads, "He did not hesitate placing the blame squarely upon them [the great leaders of the past generation] for the spiritual decline that had set in."

24. A shocking incident occurred in Vilna. It was the custom of the affluent to celebrate weddings in their families in one of the town squares and with great pomp and ceremony. A shoemaker had become wealthy, and he, too, arranged to hold his daughter's wedding with the same fanfare as the wealthy. They resented his effrontery, and when the shoemaker, accompanied by his relatives and guests, was on his way home, a rich man stepped up, removed his shoe and asked the shoemaker how much it would cost to repair the sole. The incident was brought to R. Israel's notice. He was shaken. "I am certain," he said, "that the great Torah scholars of the past, now dwelling in Can Eden, will be brought to trial because they did not teach the people knowledge and good manners, and did not educate them sufficiently to make such morally depraved incidents impossible." (Told by his older disciples).

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