

The RYS Daily 12/31/06 Leaves Vilna I

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That very year (1848) the incident _ occurred which induced R. Israel to leave Vilna. All over Russia the battle had been joined between the European "Enlightenment" and the Judaism of tradition. The spirit of the German Maskilim had invaded the country, and scholars and literati had hailed it as progress and renaissance and had striven to graft it on their Judaism. They enlisted the support of the sympathetic Russian government in establishing "modern" schools (as opposed to the existing Cheder schools) where general knowledge and European languages would be taught to Jewish children. They also appealed to the government to open Rabbinical Seminaries, which would incorporate Torah and secular studies in their curriculum, and produce rabbis educated in languages and secular disciplines. Two such seminaries were established by government order, the one in Zhitomir and the other in Vilna."

The latter city had become one of the main centers of the Haskalah. Many of its outstanding protagonists were concentrated there, among them: Mordecai Guenzburg, Abraham Baer Lebensohn ("Adam Hakohen"), his son Micah Joseph, Samuel Joseph Fuenn, Kalman Schulman, Ch. L. Katzenelbogen, A. Zackeim, M. Nathanson, et al. Many were still observant and faithful to the spirit of Ancient Israel, and they sincerely sought a synthesis of Torah Judaism and modern knowledge, through which, they believed, honor would redound to Jewry.

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