

The RYS Daily 3/12/07 Expands XVI

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The year 5639 was coming to its end (i.e. it was Aug.—Sept. 1879). R. Israel felt his powers waning. He accordingly published a notice in the press: "Now that I have become old and do not know... therefore I address my earnest request to my students and to my colleagues, the great Torah scholars, to get in touch with me, and I shall inform them of my goal and all my wishes." What he intended was to gather them together and submit his new plan to them. But he elicited no response. Some doubted whether they had been included in the invitation. At least one said as much in a letter to him. Some were afraid that they might find his demands too difficult to fulfill. His appeal went unanswered.

R. Israel dispatched a special emissary — his disciple R. Eliezer Shulevitz who had been his personal attendant during his last years in Memel — to Russia to discuss the plan with the great Torah authorities there and to report on their reactions soon after Sukkot. The emissary could find no positive response. Some even threw cold water on the scheme. R. Eliezer, accordingly, sent no report to R. Israel. The plan was doomed.

R. Israel had also conceived of the idea of formulating a number of rules to facilitate the comprehension of Talmud and train students to think logically. These rules would constitute the criterion for testing the soundness of all Talmudic novellae, to determine whether or not they were refutable. Once again he enlisted the aid of R. Eliezer Shulevitz in his project. By way of illustration, he selected a topic in the tractate Bava Metzi'a and derived sixteen rules from it. He instructed R. Eliezer Shulevitz to elucidate various sections of the Talmud to test whether these rules were valid or not. So he began, aided by R. Eliezer, to carry his plan into practice. For technical reasons, completely unrelated to R. Israel, this scheme, too, proved abortive.

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