

The RYS Daily 4/29/07 Respected by the Maskilim

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In the light of all R. Israel's efforts, he became considered by the Maskilim as being favorably disposed towards their views. They published reports in the newspapers that R. Israel approved the study of secular sciences, and that "he had ordered those receptive to his remarks to study the language of the land and to become loyal subjects of king and country."

One writer devoted a lengthy article to this theme, and transcribed an address purported to have been delivered by R. Israel himself to bachurim in Krinki:

"Just a few months have passed since G—d caused the 'Glory of Israel, to dwell in our midst, none other than the Ray, true Gaon, repository of exalted character traits, honored eminence of Israel, holy and glorious name, the rabbi, R. Israel of Salant, may he live... Now when the Elul days arrived and the hearts of the children of Israel were trembling and affrighted at the sound of the Shofar growing ever stronger and announcing the imminence of the Day of Judgment, when everyone of Israel purifies his heart sevenfold of every dross and defilement and corrupt habit... then did all the bachurim of the city who lodge in the Bet Midrash pay a visit to the eminent Gaon in his home for him to preach his pure lesson and delightful ethic to them. Now it happened on the first day that they said to him: 'Our Rabbi, Crown of our Heads, and Glory of Israel! Teach us knowledge; give us instruction how to approach nearer to G—d and the way of life, so that we may merit life in the world to come: Then, after they had made their request, the Glory of Israel asked them; 'You tell me first whether you know how to behave with proper intelligence in this world.'What duty devolves upon man insofar as he is man? Do you know the way of the world, the condition of the times, and what these demand of us? Have you learned the laws of derech erez (polite and refined behavior) ? Will you learn Russian, the language of the country, as the government requires in these days and times?' Now, when one of the young men asked: Was it not forbidden to learn the language of the land, R. Israel answered: `No, my son! You did not ask wisely. You must not say or mention such absurd things as these! If you wish to take a lesson from me and to listen to me carefully — I can tell you this. You have made a great mistake. This is not the way that G—d has chosen. Behold, happy is the man who will, truly and faithfully, choose the straight path so as to find favor in the eyes of G—d and man, which is the middle road, "to take hold of one and not let go his hand from the other," and to join Torah and secular knowledge together. To avoid the conflict between the condition of the times and laws of the Torah, learn to know the laws and judgments of our holy Torah, delve into the depths of its obligations and fundamentals, and also stretch out your hand to the "tree of knowledge" to eat of this fruit, which is "holy for giving praise". And it will come as lubrication within you and illumine your eyes. Now, who is the man that is called pure, upright and wholeheartedly righteous? He who is good to Heaven and good to human beings" How can you expect to find favour in the eyes of G—d, if you do not wish first to find favor in the eyes of man, and especially in respect of something that is a necessity, irrespective of whether it is to be deprecated or to be praised, for is this not "your wisdom in the eyes of the nations" in whose shadow we take refuge and in whose

land we dwell, that our enemies and those who would ostracize us shall not say for all times: Look and see how every Jew is just like an "untrained calf", not knowing how to converse, having a speech impediment! — Do not hate or despise those who love [secular] wisdom, but instead hate wickedness, falsehood, deceit, iniquity and wrongdoing. Keep far away from arrogance and purify your hearts from all clouds of imagination that dull and darken the luster of truth, and love goodness and kindness and modest behavior, for this alone is all of man ... and then you will find favor in the eyes of G—d and man ... to be perfect in everything."

The article called forth a stormy reaction in the press. Some time later it appeared over the signature of "He, who sees and is not seen," claiming that, as far as he was concerned, the letter was a forgery, and addressed an open request to R. Israel to make his views public.<sup>16</sup> R. Israel did not reply to the correspondence, even though he was not at all accustomed to remain silent whenever any remark was addressed to him."

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