

## The Daily RYS 8/23/06 The Cholera Epidemic II

From the Mussar Movement, Volume I, Part 1, pages 211 - 213.

R. Israel warned everyone to obey the doctors' instructions implicitly, since so the Torah required. So stringent were his rulings, that he issued a proclamation to the effect that eating fish (which the doctors had forbidden) was tantamount to eating pork! One of the Vilna dignitaries, R. Isaac b. Zalman approached R. Israel. He had always been punctilious in eating fish on Shabbat. He had now cooked the fish himself. Could he at least taste the soup? R. Israel answered: "Buy pork and eat it together with the fish!"

At the same time he encouraged and exhorted the people not to be afraid, not to mourn excessively over the dead, since sorrow debilitated body and nerves and lowered resistance to disease.

His clear position in such conditions is further attested to by his letter to one of his friends years later, when the dread disease struck Vilna a second time: "Everything has its season, and every purpose a time' - At this time, when malady has made its appearance in the land, and G-d protect us, even here - Now this is what one must do, and it stands to reason, not to be afraid of it at all - for what is man's life in any case, and who knows whether his path is right; also to take care to follow doctor's instructions, since even according to our faith we are bound to be guided by their words, and to assume the yoke of living in this world, for (the sake of) Him Who is good and does good. Now it was our experience in the past when the disease was most intense, G-d protect us, that whoever undertook to observe (lit. "Bent his shoulder to bear the yoke") the conduct imposed by the doctors in eating..., wisely and not foolishly, was not affected by any disease or illness, G-d protect us. Since in a time like this, according to the law, all religious practice is changed therefore one must not be excessively sorrowful on the Holy Days, and it is the time to observe and serve G-d in joy, and this is our protection."

He regarded the entire responsibility as thrust upon his shoulders. Any mishap attributed to lack of promptness filled him with distress. A baby died. R. Israel feared that the rescue operations might have been at fault, and he became very much depressed. He wanted to go to the child's grave and beg for forgiveness.

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