

The RYS Daily 9/6/06 Truth and Legend X

In 1857, in his best years and at the height of his career, Rabbi Israel left Russia for Germany. He went originally for medical treatment to Halberstadt. Then, seeing the sorry situation of Judaism among the German Jews, he thought he could accomplish more in Germany than in Russia. He remained abroad until the end of his life.

The contributors to Ha-Shahar, being greatly interested in Rabbi Israel's life and work, once criticized him for leaving Russia, his native land, where he had a vast arena in which to work, and dedicating himself to foreign Jews - only about one-tenth the number of Russian Jews. I think I understand why. Rabbi Elijah Levinson of Kroettingen, Rabbi Israel's close friend and advisor, once told me how Rabbi Israel himself had explained it. "When horses panic and start galloping downhill, anyone who tries to stop them midway risks his life. The horses will trample him. But after the horses have rushed down the hill, it is possible to halt and bridle them. So, too, with the Jewish communities. In the large Russian cities, they are still in headlong downward flight and nothing can be done for them. But the communities abroad have long ago levelled off and now something can be done for them."