

## The RYS Daily 9/7/06 Truth and Legend XI

hi 1858, Rabbi Israel lived in Koenigsberg, trying to strengthen Judaism especially among the student youth. Then he moved to Memel, which he liked most and where he stayed the longest. Memel was then a bustling commercial city whose trade always brought thousands of Jews from the dozens of surrounding provincial towns. In Memel he applied to the Prussian government for citizenship and studied to perfect his German so that he could deal with the public officials in matters concerning the Jewish community.

Neither his age nor his ill health kept him from seeking to reinforce traditional Judaism so it might better resist modern trends. Seeing how great was the ignorance of Judaism even among the Orthodox, he concluded that preaching on ethics and morals was inadequate when the study of Torah was being neglected. He tried to introduce modern methods to study the Talmud, for young people could no longer devote to it eight to ten hours a day for many years. He first sought Orientalists to prepare a dictionary of the Aramaic words in the Talmud. He went to Berlin on this mission, but nothing came of it. It then occurred to him to have the Talmud translated into Hebrew and published with a brief and simple commentary. It was his plan to assign about one hundred rabbis to this task, each to translate about thirty leaves. But nothing came of this either. Perhaps the rabbis opposed the idea as "reform" or perhaps few knew Hebrew well enough. Then, seeing that young people were giving up the Talmud altogether, Rabbi Israel thought of translating it into a modern European language - a notion that aroused considerable protest at that time among the Orthodox. Rabbi Israel believed the Gentile world ought to be acquainted with the enormous cultural riches in the Talmud. Gentile Students, he thought, would more likely sharpen their wits on the Talmud's logic and reasoning than on Greek and Latin classics. It was his conviction that the younger Jewish generation would have more respect for the Talmud if the Gentiles recognized it as a great cultural monument. They would remain closer to the Jewish tradition, then, and take pride in their people and their religion. But unable to accomplish anything in Germany on this project, Rabbi Israel, then over seventy, went to Paris hoping to find greater understanding there. But there also, after two years, he was unsuccessful; I heard from his close friends that he deeply regretted this trip.