

The RYS Daily 1/16/07 Kovna V

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1, pages 231 - 232.

R. Israel's first accomplishment was to raise the dignity of Torah learning. Heretofore the system of "eating days" had obtained. The students would eat their meal each day of the week in a different private home and would sleep in the Bet Midrash where they studied. This system degraded the students in their own estimation and in the eyes of others as well. R. Israel abolished it. He arranged that the students' meals be brought to the Bet Midrash, and he also assigned them lodgings in comfortable quarters. This example was immediately copied and spread to all the communities of Lithuania and Zamosc:

To save the needy humiliation, he made it the rule that all, rich and poor, had to eat the same meals. Nor was the identity of the student eating the food he provided disclosed to any householder. Here R. Israel followed the Talmudic dictum: "He gives and knows not to whom; he takes and knows not from whom." [6]

[6] Bava Batra 16b. R. Israel had introduced the same procedures in Bet Midrash in the Zarece compound beforehand. A revealing episode is recounted: A certain donor, a carpenter by trade, would send an elaborate meal to the Bet Midrash every day. He, however, became consumed with curiosity to know the identity of the recipient. Each day he would beg the beadle (shamash) to tell him. The matter came to R. Israel's ears. He agreed to disclose the identity of the student and to send him, to the carpenter's house; in return, the carpenter was to disclose how much the meals had cost him so far. The carpenter kept his part of the bargain and the student, who happened to be the son of a very rich family, and did not need to receive his keep from others, came to the carpenter's home, took out double the sum that the carpenter had spent and laid the money on the table. After thanking the carpenter for his kindness in the past, the student left. The carpenter rushed to R. Israel and begged him to take back the money. R. Israel categorically refused. To atone for his wrongdoing, the donor undertook henceforth to send two meals daily, and never again to try to discover the identity of the students who were fed at his expense (Sare Hameah, Vol. II, p. 271, as related by R. Jochanan Zarchi).

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