

The Daily RYS 7/26/06 Dealing with the Non-observant

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 1 pages 315 - 316.

He adopted a similar approach to all types of blatant violators of the law. As far as was possible, he sought to reduce the severity of the transgression. He once happened to spend a Shabbat in a hotel. Next day, he noticed one of the guests, a young man, sitting and writing up his accounts, oblivious to the Shabbat. Shattering as the experience was to R. Israel, he did not react visibly at the moment. Instead, he began making inquiries about the young man's background and learned that he was employed as an agent by a large commercial concern. He was required to keep a diary and submit daily reports of his transactions, even on Shabbat. R. Israel entered into a lengthy conversation with the young man and kept sounding him out. He could never be persuaded to leave his position. Hence R. Israel implored him at least to reduce his writing on Shabbat to an absolute minimum. The same Saturday night, R. Israel sat up late with him and helped him find the most Succinct form in which to submit his accounts and so minimize his desecration of the Sabbath. [30]

According to reports, R. Israel operated similarly in Koenigsberg. Once he realized that he was unable to persuade store-keepers to close their businesses on Shabbat, he stipulated that they should at least not carry their keys to the store. Instead these should be hidden on Fridays in some place next to the store, from where it was permissible to take the key and insert it in the keyhole.

This is how he conducted his relations with his fellow human beings, both communally and individually, taking total situations into account each time, and looking far ahead into the future. One single purpose animated him all his days - to implant Judaism in every corner, every circle, in every Jewish heart - and to save whatever could yet be saved.

30. Mr. Dov Nathanson reports having heard this from R. Benzion Friedman of Pikeln, to whom it was told by one of R. Israel's disciples. Cf. his gradual weaning of the Memel port traders from Sabbath desecration, above p. 214. Here, too, he must have hoped that a gradual diminution of Sabbath desecration would lead to its eventual complete cessation.