

The Daily RYS 8/28/06 Truth and Legend II

From "Truth and Legend About Israel Salanter" by Jacob Mark

When I was young I often met Rabbi Israel Salanter. I heard his sermons and his private discourses and had the opportunity to observe him at close quarters I once had the great privilege of being examined by him on my knowledge of Gemara.

Rabbi Israel was born in 1810 in Zhagory, Kovno province, where his father, Rabbi Wolf Lipkin, taught Talmud. After studying at home, Israel was sent to Salanty to study with Rabbi Hirsh Braude, who was renowned as an explicator of Talmud and a man of rare sensibleness. Under his influence, Israel put an end to casuistry and devoted himself to learnedness. But Israel's next teacher, Rabbi Joseph Zundel, an extraordinary man, had a far greater influence over him. All his life, Rabbi Joseph lived like an ordinary, simple man, earning a livelihood as part-time teacher, part-time merchant, notwithstanding his wide repute as a scholar and a saintly man, a disciple of Rabbi Hayim Volozhiner and Rabbi Akiva Eger. When he earned enough

to sustain him for a few weeks, he would retire to a nearby town and live for a while in seclusion, in study and prayer. His whole bearing was saintly in every respect. This extraordinary man became the exemplar whom Israel sought to emulate. As a youngster, Israel used to follow Rabbi Zundel when he would withdraw into seclusion to meditate and study musar. Once, Rabbi Zundel saw him. "Israel," he said, "study musar and be a God-fearing man." Thereafter, Rabbi Israel stayed at his side in the twenty years he lived in Salanty. He used to say even later that in musar and good deeds he could not hold a candle to his peerless Rabbi Joseph Zundel.

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