

The Daily RYS 9/3/06 Truth and Legend VII

When Rabbi Israel delivered a sermon, looking at his audience with his gentle kind eyes, it seemed to me that his first thought probably was: How I pity these poor dear Jews who will someday endure great sufferings for their sins. From his heart the words cried out: "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be returned." Observing that the congregation wept, too, he thought they were surely repenting, and then his face became radiant with joy.

Rabbi Israel taught musar by trying to improve human nature and the relations between people. His watchword was "Know thyself." Each man was to analyze himself, improve himself, learn his weaknesses in order to conquer them. If pride was one's weakness, a man should try to wean himself from it. Or if one was given to anger, stubbornness, obduracy, he ought to learn little by little to master his rage, his obstinacy, his inflexibility. Rabbi Israel used to say that every man could improve himself until love of mankind came naturally to him. He used to teach that a man should not desire another's property not because the Torah commanded "Thou shalt not covet," but because one would scorn an ugly distasteful act, much as one would spurn rotten fish. Only by self-discipline can man reach this State.