

OHR YISROEL, RABBI SALANTER'S INNOVATIONS - PART 9

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Not only would it do us well to set aside special times for Mussar study, it would also help to have a special place to study it. So R' Salanter suggested that every community should dedicate a "Mussar House" for the exclusive use of Mussar study that would be well-stocked with Mussar texts, would always be open, and would be welcoming of both scholars and lay-people.

But, why would one need a special place for that -- why not study in one's synagogue, Beit Midrash, or at home, many have asked?

It's because despite what we've come to understand about the importance of studying Mussar for our own well-being, still and all the practice has almost vanished. So, something original and striking had to be proposed. Setting aside specific places to study Mussar was just such an innovation; and it was reasoned that the very existence of Mussar Houses would remind us of the centrality of Mussar study.

But certain conditions had to be met. A Mussar House would have to provide a certain atmosphere: it would need to be a place where one can easily emote (which isn't always the case in one's home or a Beit Midrash), and where one can find the appropriate texts (which isn't always the case in one's synagogue).

A Mussar House would also encourage Mussar study for other reasons. It would serve as a place where more advanced Mussar students could inspire others less advanced than they, simply because the latter would be in close proximity to the former in a place dedicated to Mussar greatness. And it would be a place where one would accustom himself to regular Mussar study, much the way one goes to synagogue regularly to accustom himself to regular prayer, or to a Beit Midrash to accustom himself to regular Torah study.

And lastly, the very existence of a specific Mussar House would emphasize the vital importance of Mussar study to the community and would remind those who don't attend it to at least study Mussar elsewhere.

Text Copyright © 2010 by [Rabbi Yaakov Feldman](#) and [Torah.org](#)