

OHR YISROEL, RABBI SALANTER'S LETTERS - PART 2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

"Is there a fool who'd walk in darkness when there was a brilliant light shining right in front of him?" R' Salanter asks. Given that no one would be such a fool, R' Salanter asks, Well then, "who wouldn't reflect upon his actions in order to draw close to" such a light? That is, is there anyone who'd dare avoid the truth of the consequences of his actions and settle for the bleak ignorance of it? It's unlikely anyone would.

But R' Salanter then accuses us all of such short-sightedness. And he counsels that in order to avoid that we'd need to consider the reality of the Afterlife, where the dark nature of our misdeeds will be made manifest and truth will shine.

Why don't we think about that while we're still alive and can better ourselves? Because all we care about is our own reputations and good name, he says. And as a consequence "our minds are in turmoil, and our energies are drained" in pursuit of that rather than our ultimate status.

We thus neglect Torah study as a result (after all, there's only so much time in a day, and if a chunk of it is spent concentrating on that, then what time is left for Torah?), and we grow lax in our mitzvah-observance and in character development.

What can we do, he asks rhetorically? We can concentrate on Mussar study right here and now, and learn how to set our spiritual priorities. For Mussar will remind us that life is short, and that we'll all eventually be called upon to answer for our actions in this world. Indeed, Mussar itself is the great light that shines right before our eyes alluded to above and our avoidance of it is the terrible darkness.

"Set up daily, fixed times" to study it, R' Salanter suggested. And do all you can to stick to that schedule. Study the very most ennobling works, he continues, and study them with fervor, slowly, intently, emotionally, and consciously (see R' Salanaters' Innovations [2]) so as to be inspired and spiritually savvy.

Turning directly to his disciples to whom this letter is actually addressed, he makes this point. Be patient, though, when it comes to yourself (and don't expect quick change), and humble when it comes to others. For his disciples were to have others study Mussar too, and were nevertheless not to consider themselves better than others.

And they were each to use the unique gifts granted them from G-d to accomplish that end rather

than think that one has to be someone he actually isn't. To be sure, this last point is specified to R' Salanter's disciples, as we said, but the truth is that we all need to take that to heart.

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