

The Daily 8/17/06 What RYS Looked Like

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What did R. Yisrael Salanter look like?

No photograph of [R. Yisrael Salanter](#) exists, apparently by design on his part. But I heard from a reliable source that his son, R. Yitzhaq Lipkin looked just like him, as sons sometimes do.

I tracked down a picture of R. Yitzhaq. This would seem to be the only way to get an idea of what R. Yisrael looked like. So here it is:



And I would just supplement this photo with a wonderful description of R. Yisrael in Mekor Baruch (this is from the English (excerpted) translation, [My Uncle the Netziv](#):

I remember one particular incident that left a deep impression on me, as well as many far older and wiser. I was sitting in the beis hamedrash, as was my daily custom, talking and learning with one of the young boys I had befriended, when suddenly an old, distinguished-looking man walked in wearing immaculate rabbinical garb without a spot or wrinkle. His whole bearing exuded complete order and cleanliness; he literally sparkled from head to toe. It was truly a pleasure to look at him. His facial expression mirrored his uniform: he had a

shining face and perfectly combed hair. Obviously, he was a very important, highly regarded individual.

My friend and I, who had become accustomed to seeing all kinds of eminent people coming into the beis hamedrash, were not too excited at his appearance. We assumed that he was just another Rav, not unlike all the others who passed through Vilna, until two strange things happened which made us take more notice of him. The first was the unusual way in which the shammas of the shul came over to him after he had taken his place at one of the tables that stood along the wall. After speaking to him with the utmost reverence for a few moments, the shammas walked out and returned a few minutes later with a bundle of handwritten manuscripts which he handed over to him. The distinguished guest, who had swept away any particle of dust from the bench before sitting down, took a lustrous silk yarmulke from his pocket, took off his hat, placed the yarmulke on his head, and began to study the manuscripts intensely. We had never before witnessed this kind of greeting from the shammas and began to see that the man before us was indeed extraordinary.

The next thing we noticed was how, from moment to moment, other noteworthy individuals began to gather around him: Torah scholars, rabbis, and other respected men of the community either took a seat near the man or stood in front of him, all of them displaying a great deal of respect for him. About a half-hour later, the man was surrounded by people who were listening with rapt attention to every word he said. At this point my friend and I allowed ourselves to go and stand among the crowd. By now extremely curious as to who this person was, I pushed my way in close enough to hear the conversation. As I got closer, I heard them discussing the greatness of the Vilna Gaon. They were describing his profound wisdom in all areas of the hidden and revealed Torah and how it far surpassed that of his generation...

(it continues for a couple of pages, an old man recollected the Napoleonic wars and how the cemetery in Vilna was almost impacted with the a decree from the French that the cemetery be plowed over to make way for a flat terrain for their troops, but the tide of the war changed and it never happened, and the people of Vilna attributed it to the merit of the Gra, interred in the cemetery, then the guest made remark about how the Gra's body would doubtless have been without decay and that it would be a "very small thing for the Chosid.")

...At this point I could no longer restrain myself and asked around as to the identity of the guest and was told he was none other than HaGaon Rav Yisroel Salanter. The manuscripts brought to him by the shammas were the handwritten manuscripts of the Vilna Gaon himself!