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SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE LEADER OF MODERN ORTHODOXY

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[Translated from the German by HILDE KISCH]

SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH lives in the memory of his admirers and critics almost exclusively as the founder and organizer of western European Orthodoxy. During his years in Frankfurt all his work was devoted to this cause. Certain utterances and acts by Rabbi Hirsch as a young man seem to be in contrast to the picture derived from his Frankfurt period, but they are usually considered in the light of his later development or altogether denied.

The present essay is an attempt to draw—partly on the basis of documents as yet unpublished—an unbiased picture of Hirsch's early activities which resulted from impressions received in his youth.¹ The author will at-

¹ This refers to documents that were rescued for research through the efforts of my late brother-in-law, Mr. Felix Perle of Breslau. They were part of the correspondence between S. R. Hirsch and my late grandfather, Abraham Heinemann, member of the Synagogue Board of Wildeshausen, Oldenburg. For information concerning Hirsch's activities in Emden I am indebted to Mr. W. Valk, formerly of Emden, now in Petah Tikvah, Israel.

The following abbreviations are used for a number of frequently quoted works: Ho. = S. R. Hirsch, *Horeb, Versuche über Jisroëls Pflichten in der Zerstreuung*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M., 1889). — L. = S. R. Hirsch, *Briefe über Judentum*. Herausgegeben von Ben Usiel. 4th ed. (Frankfurt a.M., 1911). Cf. *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Usiel*. Translated by Bernard Drachman (New York and London, 1899). The English version of the quoted passages is partly taken from this translation. — N. = S. R. Hirsch, *Mittheilungen aus Naphtalis Briefwechsel*. 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M., 1920). — Isr. = *Festschrift des "Israelit" zum 25. Siwan 5668 [1908] mit Bildern und einer biographischen Einleitung* [by Judaeus (?), referring to unpublished letters]. — MGWJ., 1918, 1919 = M. Brann, "Aus H. Graetz's Lehr- und Wanderjahren," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, LXII (1918), pp. 231-265; LXIII (1919), pp. 34-47, 343-363. — JJLG. = *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft zu Frankfurt am Main*.

tempt to offer an insight into the practical and spiritual work of one of the few men who guided western European Jewry when it was facing the danger of being swallowed up by secular civilization, almost defenseless, without support in its literature and without model leaders in its past to lean on.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS

Hirsch's appointment as "Landrabbiner" of Oldenburg was made by the Government without the participation of the Jewish communities. It had been proposed by his predecessor, Dr. Nathan M. Adler, later Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, on the basis of an examination given by him and two non-Jewish government representatives.² Previously an inquiry had been made by the Government of one of their officials in Hamburg whose reply was of remarkable accuracy. It is possible for this writer to confirm that information in all main points and even to supplement some details as far as that is necessary in order to understand Hirsch's activity.

Hirsch was born at Hamburg in 1808. His parents are described by him as "enlightened and religious" ("*erleuchtet religiös*") (L. 2). A photograph shows them with the traditional head-covering, but his father had no beard (Isr.). As far as the study of the Talmud is concerned, it must be said that young Hirsch started it with a "mature intellect and on his own initiative." There is no evidence that he ever attended the Talmud Torah school where even small children were made to study the Talmud; rather, he received instruction from private teachers together with the other children of the family. For a while he worked as an apprentice in a business firm but later decided to become a rabbi in the modern sense of the term, namely, the religious leader of a community.

In this endeavor "only one star guided him somewhat in the beginning" (L. 19), doubtlessly Isaac Bernays, who

² On the preliminaries to his appointment to the position in Oldenburg see Mannheimer, Isr., 17.

in the year of Hirsch's Barmitzvah had been appointed "spiritual warden" ("*geistlicher Beamte*") of the German-Jewish community of Hamburg.³ Hirsch had attended Bernays' lectures on Torah and the Psalms, and he remembered them well even in his later years.⁴ From them he came to conceive the earliest history in the Torah as the tale of the apostasy of mankind up to the time when Abraham appeared as the pioneer of pure faith in God and—a model for us all—"invoked the name of God." From Bernays' lectures, too, young Hirsch learned to understand such Psalms as the fifteenth, and above all their basic ideas, so that he could penetrate into all minute details, unimportant as they might seem. Could it be that as early as then the decision had ripened in the youth's mind to "view" the whole of Judaism in the same way as his master did the Psalms, that is, in the true meaning of Goethe's words on "beholding" things: "dass es erst ins Innre dringt, dann nach aussen wiederkehrt"—that which one sees must first penetrate the innermost and then return outward? Be that as it may, if later on the Nikolsburg talmudists complained that "in the past one used to learn Gemorah and say Tillim; nowadays, however, one says Gemorah and has to learn Tillim" (Isr., 21), the "guilt" for this must be placed on the man who taught Hirsch "to enter the halls of 'Tauroh' with thirst for cognition," that is, for ultimate truth or Weltanschauung.⁵ A stay of one and a half years at Karlsruhe (1828-29) with Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger, a childhood friend of Bernays, proved very advantageous for Hirsch's talmudic studies.

The foundation for his secular knowledge Hirsch owed to the Hamburg "Gymnasium" where he received thorough

³ The lectures on Kuzari in 1838 were not attended by Hirsch but by his brother; Dukesz, *JJLG.*, V (1907), p. 307 and n. 2, is inaccurate on this.

⁴ For the following exposition see Hirsch's Commentary on Gen. 4:26 and Ps. 15 (quotations from Bernays); cf. Hirsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, 1904), p. 324. For the explanation of the first-mentioned passage the *Bibelsche Orient* was used, the author of which, in my opinion, was Bernays. To a third quotation in Hirsch's Commentary to Num. 20:7 ff. and to the unfortunate development of his relations with his teacher I intend to devote a detailed exposition elsewhere.

⁵ Hirsch, *Jeschurun*, 1868, p. 133, emphasizing his independence with regard to details in his Commentary on the Pentateuch.

instruction in Latin. This stood him in good stead; his discussions with the "enlightened" Reform rabbis (N.) are replete with Latin quotations. Even a man like Ludwig Philippson "cannot withhold his respect [from Hirsch] when he [Hirsch] tries to fight his adversaries with the sharp and polished weapon of his profound erudition.⁶ In the controversy concerning Jewish oral tradition he would point out to critics of rabbinical etymologies that even Cicero's linguistic derivations are very contestable, though no one can deny his mastery of the Latin language. Another advantage derived from his attendance at the "Gymnasium" was a solid general education, which at the time of his first publication included, for instance, a knowledge of *Tasso* and the works of Shakespeare (L. 1). Above all, there he had stepped into a human environment distinctly different from the old Jewish milieu as far as language and manners were concerned.⁷ That is why correct manners according to the standards of educated Europeans seemed always important to him.⁸

It is true that Hirsch studied at a university (Bonn) for only two semesters, but it was probably there that he became familiar "with the consequential deductions of a Leibnitz and Kant." Courses on the Roman satirist Juvenal and on experimental physics, too, were included in his schedule.⁹ In all his studies Hirsch seems not to have intended to delve deeply into any one subject; rather, he endeavored to enlarge his general education, his knowledge of modern methods in philology and the natural sciences. As far as Semitic languages are concerned, there is no trace of them apparent in Hirsch. However, he shows a strong

⁶ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, III (1839).

⁷ Bernays stressed the need of appointing a Christian teacher for the Talmud-Torah School because of the favorable influence of a "complete stranger" upon the language and behavior of the students; A. Fürst, "Die jüdischen Realschulen Deutschlands", *MGWJ.*, LVIII (1914), p. 518. Cf. Graetz, *MGWJ.*, 1919, p. 37, on the "vernachlässigtes Äussere und die mauschelnde Sprache" of the modern preacher, Solomon Plessner.

⁸ *Isr.*, p. 21 (Nikolsburg); *Historia Judaica*, X (1948), pp. 104 f. (Frankfurt).

⁹ Raphael Breuer, *Unter seinem Banner, ein Beitrag zur Würdigung Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirschs* (Frankfurt, 1908), pp. 213 f.

interest in natural science which comes to the fore even in his late publications; and he never attempted to evade coming to grips with enlightened ideologies based on natural science.

Just as the Gymnasium had done before, so the university had much more to offer Hirsch than mere knowledge and methodological training. There he met young people whose way of thinking to some extent greatly differed from the traditional Jewish approach.

As early as his trip to Mannheim it had been Hirsch's endeavor to become acquainted with the sympathizers of Reform at Frankfurt. He had, for instance, paid a "courtesy call" on the preacher and teacher at the Philanthropin, Michael Creizenach (N. 3). In the latter's house he had also met Abraham Geiger, two years his junior, whom he was to meet again in Bonn where they came to know each other more intimately. Both complained bitterly about the then prevailing situation that Jewish theologians with modern training were suffering from isolation. Together with some friends, all of them differing in their religious views, they founded the "Homiletical Association" for the purpose of improving their ability to preach through mutual criticism. Their friendly relations lasted for a long time and remained firm even after Geiger, as a preacher of Reform, had stated his viewpoint unequivocally in his sermons at the Frankfurt Philanthropin. It was only his sharp criticism of the *Nineteen Letters* that brought their friendship to an end.

POPULAR INSTRUCTION

The inaugural sermon of the newly appointed "Land-rabbiner" was at the same time a Rosh-Hashanah sermon.¹⁰

The past year ought to be surveyed with deep thankfulness. Thoughts of many a broken flower should give way to the joyous feeling "that a new future lies ahead of us and that we will be able to work with even greater strength and vigor." Then the youthful preacher goes on to voice thanks to God, to his parents, the government, his congregation, and after having expressed his gratitude, he urges everyone

¹⁰ Published in Wohlgemuth's *Jeschurun*, I (1914), pp. 73 ff.

"Forward!" ("jetzt vorwärts!"). The way seems pointed out to him in the three calls to be found in the main prayers:

God is the Lord: therefore man must not be wanton in good times and despondent in grief.

God teaches us: His voice is heard like a trumpet in our conscience. "Do not slacken in doing good even if prejudice and indolence prevail when you call for progress; for you work for the sake of your Heavenly Father and therefore no effort is lost."

God teaches us: His voice is heard like a trumpet in our conscience, in nature, in history, but above all—in the Torah. It speaks especially to parents who should lead their children toward the Torah in order "to make their hearts a divine temple where the holy voice makes itself readily heard."

The sermon closes with a prayer invoking God's blessing for the fatherland and Hirsch's own rabbinical work. Its phrasing is in complete harmony with the taste of the time. It shows no trace of the old *derashah*, whose point of departure is usually biblical, and particularly rabbinical, texts, which then proceeds to point out the difficulties in them, and finally arrives at some meaningful truism on life. True, the theme of the sermon, built up in three parts, is taken from traditional Jewish thought. But the discussion follows a strictly systematic course with only occasional quotations from the Bible and among these only two in Hebrew. How strange does the short prayer (leading over to the main part) sound to us with its wish "that the sermon may not be lacking in truth and its words may not be devoid of power"; how un-Jewish and how unlike Hirsch! Unquestionably, it is patterned very much after Christian models. And it is understandable, indeed, that Judaism, striving to overcome the formlessness of the ghetto and to grow into the mould of European culture, should first have conformed to strange models—in much the same way as a young teacher might first pattern his method of instruction after that of a certain pedagogue only to find in the course of time a way of his own to deal with his young students! It ought to be remembered here that even before Hirsch a man like Bernays had preached in his own way but had expressed his very modern ideas in a form resembling very closely that of the old *derashah*. However, there could be no attraction in Bernays' method for Hirsch. For despite the

fact that Bernays' lectures on the Psalms and Jehuda Halevi were well received by his audiences, and although even Heine found his Sabbath sermons spiritually deeper than those of the preachers of the *Tempel*,¹¹ it must be said that not only the public at large, which for the most part did not even understand Bernays, but, as far as form was concerned, even an expert like Isaac Noah Mannheimer, preferred the sermons in the Temple.¹² It seems only natural that in the course of time preachers as well as congregations were bound to develop a taste of their own. The fact that Hirsch won the acclaim not only of the Jews, but also of non-Jews who—certainly at the invitation of the congregations—attended the services,¹³ makes it understandable, indeed, that he should have considered this way of preaching as the best means to educate his congregation and to spread the understanding of Judaism in remoter circles, too.

The above-mentioned sermon bears a close structural resemblance to an admonitory message placed by Hirsch in 1834 in Hebrew letters on the synagogue at Wildeshausen and, doubtlessly, also on the other synagogues in that district. The "Message" is presumably a slightly revised Passover sermon delivered at the synagogue in Oldenburg. It begins with the following words:

At a time when everything around us begins to bloom anew, and everything awakens and strides vigorously forward to the blissful life

¹¹ Letter to Moser of August 23, 1823.

¹² *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, VI (1846), p. 62, pointing to Bernays' "Verworfenheit."—In Norden, near Emden, a Jewish visitor found a portrait of Hirsch in the private office of a prominent Christian manufacturer. The latter told him the story of how it happened to be there. It had to do with a lawsuit of his father with a Jew many years ago. The court then imposed an oath on the Jewish party. According to procedural law, the oath had to be taken before the rabbi (Landrabbiner). Hirsch, who held this position at the time, came to that town and on the Sabbath before the projected ceremony delivered a sermon on oaths and uttered in particular misgivings against the taking of any oath. Without Hirsch's knowledge the Christian manufacturer had attended that sermon. The sermon made a deep impression on the audience. The manufacturer thereupon visited Rabbi Hirsch and declared that he would not insist on the oath of his adversary even if he should lose the case. Unaware of this the Jewish party made an identical declaration to Hirsch. This story is significant of both Hirsch's concept of the purpose of a sermon and of the power of his word.

¹³ Graetz, *MGWJ.*, 1919, pp. 351, 357.

for which the Creator has destined it, these words, dear brethren, are to express the wish that our community, too, may stride forward and reach the goal set for all communities in Israel by our heavenly Father. Only recently the feast of Passover has reminded us of our origin and taught us that the same God, who every year awakens his creation from winter to spring, has called us away from the winter of Mitzrayim to an active life that is intended always to progress and to flourish. Is it, therefore, not appropriate for us, dear brethren, to contemplate whether the will of our heavenly Father is being fulfilled in our communities? Whether we, at a time when everything lives up to its purpose, are not tardy and ought to be ashamed before every blade of grass? For truly, now as many millennia ago, the earth changes constantly; now as many millennia ago it must obey the divine law by which it is governed. But as for us humans, God in His wisdom has only taught us to recognize our destiny; it is left to our own endeavor to live up to it, or else we shall never fulfil it.

As the last words show, the train of thought contained in the preceding paragraph is a direct outgrowth of Schiller's epigram:

"Suchst Du das Höchste, das Grösste? Die Pflanze kann es Dich
lehren,

Was sie willenlos ist, sei Du es wollend—das ist's!"

[Do you search for what is highest and greatest? Every plant
can teach it to you.

What it is without a will of its own, you must be with a
will.—That's it!]

It is well known that Hirsch always extolled Schiller's idealism. This is particularly evident in his address on the occasion of Schiller's centenary, where the above epigram is also quoted.

Moreover, the first sentences of the "Message," too, breathe strongly the air of that "general spring" which Schiller's Posa promised to mankind as its redeemer from all religious compulsion, "und neues Leben blüht aus den Ruinen" ("and a new life will blossom forth from the ruins"). It is therefore not surprising that the "Message" calls three times for "progress"—perhaps in a more forceful manner than did Hirsch's call, "And now forward!" in his inaugural sermon. One must ask, of course, what an admonisher like Hirsch understands by "progress." He ex-

plains it to us immediately: It consists in the support of all that is "sound" and in the removal of all that is decayed in "Torah, Avodah, Gemiluth Hasadim."

Torah, he goes on to say, is the central pillar on which everything rests. It points out to us the purpose of our existence. But can we fulfil that purpose if we do not know the Torah and its commandments? It is the task of Avodah to make us strong so that we can practice the teachings of the Torah and it should lead us to the fear of God, to the love of God, and to trust in God. But Avodah is surely rotten in a community in which the father and his family do not rise to pray, in which the house of worship stands empty or is turned into a place of quarrel and selfishness by undignified disturbances and disorder. If, however, brotherly love, Gemiluth Hasadim, is missing in a community, then it is not truly a community in Israel either.

Now then, dear brethren, examine how these three pillars are founded in your congregation!

What about Torah? Do you study or listen to the word of God every day after your work is done or at least on every Sabbath? Can you not arrange your studies so that you may derive even greater benefit from them? Do you make your children go to school sufficiently? Do you bring them up solely for the purpose of enabling them to earn a living or to make true Israelim out of them?

What about Avodah? Are there regular services on the Sabbath, on every Yomtov, and at least on Mondays and Thursdays? Are they conducted with such dignity as is required by their holy significance? Do you really become better and stronger through the divine service and richer in *Yir'a*, *Abavah* and *Emunah*?

How about Gemiluth Hasadim? Are you really, as you should be, a community of brothers? Is there no needy one who lacks help, is there no sick person in want of healing, and no mourner who is not comforted?

Well, dear brethren, these are questions which my words are intended to stir up in you. And if there should be an improvement now and then, here and there, then I shall bless my words because they gave stimulus to it. And may God's blessing also be on everyone who not only listens to the sound of my words but takes them to heart and practices them.

As one can readily see, the "progress" called for in Hirsch's exhortations is essentially different from that propagated by the "progressives." Hirsch called for an adjustment of Judaism to modern forms of expression or modern conceptions only with respect to the divine service, which

he desired to be conducted in a "dignified" manner. What mattered most to him was the fulfilment of the time-honored traditional Jewish demands to be carried out by the individual Jew. The question to what extent he contributed to the realization of these demands in his capacity as Landrabbiner and whether or not he rejected "progress" in the usual sense of the term as a means for further development of Judaism will be answered in the following pages.

HIRSCH'S ADMINISTRATION OF HIS OFFICE

Hirsch's own activity, too, was for the most part devoted to the tasks urged by him upon his congregations in the "Message." Graetz, who once substituted for the Landrabbiner during the latter's absence on a trip, reports that ritual questions would sometimes come up for rabbinical decision. But since he also tells of having spent the fast day of the seventeenth of Tammuz by himself, meaning without a divine service,¹⁴ one can hardly assume that Hirsch's time was heavily taken up by halachic decisions as had often been the case in the days of the old rabbinate. Nor do we find any report of organized social welfare work initiated by him during his stay in Oldenburg, in contrast to his activity in Emden and Nikolsburg. Thus only "Torah" and "Avodah" remained, and to them Hirsch dedicated all his efforts with complete devotion.

In the rural communities it was customary to entrust all synagogal duties as well as religious instruction to a "Kultusbeamte" ("cult officer") who was also placed in charge of *Shebita*. The choice and engagement of these officials were also attended to by Hirsch. There is information available that on two occasions a teacher had to be appointed in the congregation. Each time it was the Landrabbiner who carried on the necessary correspondence and came to an agreement with the candidate on the terms of his appointment. All complaints submitted by the congregants were investigated by him on regular inspection trips.

¹⁴ Graetz, *MGWJ.*, 1919, pp. 346 f., also on supervision; cf. p. 360 on the lack of religious observance in Oldenburg.

Hirsch's influence on the course of instruction consisted primarily in his endeavor to find teachers who could also give instruction in German.¹⁵ Furthermore, in 1841, he recommended the use of the newly published dictionary by Johlson, preacher and former instructor in religion at the Frankfurt Philanthropin, thus departing completely from the general custom. Although appreciating full well how greatly his own views differed from those of that extreme reformer, Hirsch never hesitated to agree with him on the technique of instruction or to make use of his achievements.

Even more "modern" must seem to us the fact that Hirsch translated parts of the Mishna and sent copies of his translation to the teachers, although it was difficult to prepare such copies.¹⁶

During his stay in Oldenburg Hirsch personally took part in teaching school.¹⁷ But only for three and a half years was he to enjoy the eagerly grasped opportunity to derive from instruction the stimulus to probe more deeply into the sources of religion.

Hirsch Graetz was born in the province of Posen in 1817, and thus was only nine years Hirsch's junior. Having been brought up exclusively in the traditional Jewish manner, the reading of enlightened literature plunged him into grave doubts about Judaism and rabbinism in particular. Then one day the eighteen-year-old youth came upon the

¹⁵ Letters to Wildeshausen of April 26, 1838 and April 30, 1841.

¹⁶ According to *Isr.*, p. 10, he translated the "Mishna."

¹⁷ Graetz was his substitute, *MGWJ.*, 1919, p. 347. A teacher is mentioned, *ibid.*, p. 45. In Emden county Hirsch founded several Jewish elementary schools. In the elementary school of Emden Jewish subjects were taught on Sundays and Wednesdays in the afternoon and students of the highschools participated. Instruction was given in postbiblical history, not, however, in Talmud. Boys had to study Mishna while *Pirke Abot* were explained to girls also. Hirsch personally gave instruction to the adolescent youth (boys and girls in separate classes). Modern textbooks, seemingly including those by Johlson, were used. In the beginning, the fundamentalists were displeased by Hirsch's novel methods and he was made the subject of satirical poems which were sung.

Nineteen Letters, finding therein "an idea of Judaism never heard of or anticipated before and well supported by convincing arguments." Having found out the name of the author of the "divine epistle," he asked the "Ezra of our spiritual Galuth" for permission to become his disciple. Hirsch agreed by return mail and offered him room and board in his own home if Graetz really wished "to learn 'Tauroh' for the sake of 'Tauroh.'" "Full of blissful hope" the youth, then nineteen years old, started out on his journey to "Ben Uziel."

Their first morning together was devoted to the study of Gemarah; no details on this are given us by Graetz. "Before dusk we started to study Tehillim; but ah! how different it all became through his profound exegesis! After a few days we read together Heine's 'Salon'" (which Graetz happened to know already from excerpts). "But my master asked me: Ought we not to tear our clothes as one does when listening to a blasphemy?"¹⁸ He wanted to burn the book and pay the librarian for it. What faith! Would God that his example were an inspiration to me to do similar things." Such sincere pain, however, did not induce Hirsch to set limits on his pupil's unbridled desire to read, which remained just as ardent as ever before. While on a trip Hirsch only cautioned him against Bayle, because this author laid great emphasis on sensuality: "That is not useful but detrimental. Read only the purely scientific parts." Graetz (in his diary) promised to live strictly according to the precepts of his master. In bringing the "scientific" aspect into harmony with tradition, Hirsch was most helpful to his pupil. Even when traveling together he discussed with Graetz the dietary laws and the laws on mourning on the basis of his general conception of Judaism. For the young man such talks were "blissful."

But Hirsch could not enjoy to any great degree teaching "Tauroh" in such a manner. Avodah, on the other hand, seemed to offer a wider field for his activity.

¹⁸ MGWJ., 1919, p. 47. In the original the Hebrew expressions were used. Hirsch was particularly offended by the fact that Heine had written in full the name of God.

Above all he felt responsibility for his congregants' attendance at divine services, especially in the small congregations. Upon receiving complaints from Wildeshausen, he asked the chairman of the board to "exhort those absent, and if that should have no results, to submit a proposal to the Landrabbiner to mete out punishment."

Hirsch's ideas on how services should be conducted are described by him in a letter of December 15, 1839, written to his friend, Simon May (Isr. 18). There he makes a distinction between "the weak who have thrown away the consecration of a priestly life" and those "who sleep," that is, between the indifferent and those who faithfully adhere to Judaism but who supinely watch its decline. From this the following remarks can be easily understood:

"But our services, our services—yes, my dear, as far as they are concerned, your complaints are justified, and even more so since it would be so easy to remedy the situation. But not for the sake of the weak, for it seems to me that not one of those weak ones would be one iota more Jewish if our services were more dignified. If, at some future time, you should choose a life companion and were to love your bride only in her Sunday best, then woe to you for the paltriness of your love! However, he who loves his bride sincerely will also want her to have beautiful finery. And so it is in this case: If one does not love Judaism even in a dusty dress, one will not love it in a fancy one either. Therefore it is not for the sake of the weak but for you who are strong, or rather for the sake of Judaism itself, that everyone who loves it should wish it to be dignified at all times, and that includes also the services; and one should not only wish for it, but contribute as much as possible to make this wish come true. And what a comparatively easy task it is to bring, with only a little tact and even the scantiest resources, more life and dignity into our services! I know this from my own experience, since I have tried it out here for several months with what little means I have at my disposal."

One can easily see that Hirsch rejects decidedly "services of the old careless pattern" at which, as his pupil Graetz put it, "everybody shrieks loud enough to make your ears tingle." Hence, the challenging question in his "Message," whether the services are of a dignified character, as befits their holy significance. However, it is not to meet the requirements of the new times or to get a hold on the half-

uprooted that the divine service should be "dignified," but solely for the sake of its holiness.

"Several months ago," which probably means on Rosh Hashanah 1839, nine years after his inauguration, Hirsch took a further step in this direction. He speaks of a "minimum of means" at his disposal. These words cannot point merely to the suppression of disturbances by him, as no means are necessary for such a purpose. They must refer rather to a choir, although in 1839 this feature was doubtless considered a sign of Reform.¹⁹

Almost without exception Hirsch opposed changes in the ritual. In the aforementioned letter he gives the following explanation to a friend who objected to the prayer against "slanderers and transgressors": It refers only to the wicked, and according to "the trend of the times" the whole community sins only through error (see Num. 15, 26), therefore the latter is not meant by the prayer.

According to *Horeb*, § 688, every individual Jew may speak the language of the land; the congregation, on the other hand, must maintain Hebrew and must keep the younger generation from being ignorant of that language by educating it to "the true spirit of Israel" ("*Jisroelgeist*"). It is a fact that the manner of expression in the *Piyutim* seems strange to us because of our unfamiliarity with *jüdische Wissenschaft* on which they are based; but their wide dissemination is justified (*Horeb*, 671). That is why Hirsch left them unaltered, to the great vexation of his disciple Graetz (*MGWJ.*, 1919, 356).

On the other hand, it was commonly known in Hamburg, where Graetz made a stopover on his return trip from Oldenburg, that "B. U. [Ben Uziel] had abolished the *Kol Nidre* prayer." In his talks with Bernays and Hirsch's uncle, Mendelssohn, Graetz, too, "had to fight against *Kol Nidre* that he [Hirsch] has abolished at my urging, of course, thereby making many enemies for himself" (*MGWJ.*, 1920, 144 f.). These words coming from a man who, half a year before, had attended the services in Oldenburg, demonstrate that the *Kol Nidre* prayer had

been abolished at least in the city of Oldenburg, and only at a time when Graetz was already entitled to believe that he was exercising a decisive influence on his master, i.e., about 1838 or 1839.

This decision by Hirsch cannot come as a complete surprise to anyone who reads the *Horeb* carefully. For while the detailed analysis of the divine service therein deals briefly even with *Lechab Dodi*, for instance (§650), nothing at all is said about *Kol Nidre*. Neither is it mentioned in connection with vows, much as it must have suggested itself to Hirsch as the starting point for his objections against any vow (§471).

Hirsch's attitude toward *Piyutim* and *Kol Nidre* is very revealing indeed. Both were introduced only in post-talmudic times and are therefore not required by the *Halachah*. Each was strongly opposed in the early Middle Ages by adherents to the old tradition, as can be easily understood.²⁰ Nevertheless, whereas most of the *Piyutim*—and in large part precisely the finest among them—were hardly appreciated, *Kol Nidre* won over everyone's heart, not because of its content,²¹ which is given thought only by very few worshippers, and scarcely because of cabbalistic influences,²² but because of its wonderful melody and the elevated feelings usually connected with this first of all the Yom Kippur prayers.

This attitude of the congregations toward *Piyutim* and *Kol Nidre* had a decisive effect on most of the traditional-minded rabbis. They clung, of course, to *Kol Nidre* and did not object to a considerable abbreviation of the *Piyutim*.

¹⁹ According to Zunz's *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden*, first published in 1832 in Berlin, choir and organ should not be used if they would cause serious discord; see Zunz, *op. cit.*, 2nd. ed. (Frankfurt, 1892), p. 491.

²⁰ Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Leipzig, 1913), §§24, 39; Elie Munk, *Die Welt der Gebete*, II, 2nd. ed. (Frankfurt, 1936), pp. 250 f.

²¹ The popularity of religious and patriotic songs is hardly dependent on their content. From 1888 to 1914, "Heil Dir im Siegerkranz" was sung with enthusiasm in Germany in spite of the fact that the bearer of the crown, fortunately, had no chance of winning any "Siegerkranz."

²² Munk, *op. cit.*, pp. 255 f.

Young Hirsch, on the other hand, came to a directly opposite decision. Just as he tried to conceive the whole of Judaism on the basis of its spiritual content, so he also conceived the divine service. What does *Tefillah* mean to him? To judge ourselves, to be strong enough to pass sentence on ourselves and our relationship to God (*Horeb*, §618). In this endeavor the *Piyutim* can help us if we will lift our souls to the "Tauroh"-nearness of their authors. The very fact that they are inwardly remote from our time and our kind ought to be a spur to us. Has *Kol Nidre*, too, such inner value? If Hirsch had found a positive answer to this question, we would read about it in the *Horeb* or in one of his later writings, in which he usually liked to defend customs improperly treated by the reformers. *Kol Nidre*, therefore, cannot have meant much to his inner feelings, but he drew the logical conclusion from this fact only after many years of careful consideration. According to Graetz, a prayer shown by Hirsch in manuscript form to his Hamburg friends was presumably intended to replace the *Kol Nidre* prayer as a dignified opening of the service.

It is understandable that the news of this "reform" and perhaps also of the introduction of a choir should have caused great excitement among the orthodox Jews of Hamburg. As we shall see later, much ill feeling had already been created by the attacks in *Horeb* on "the Polish teachers" and the Pilpul cultivated by many great teachers. Now, the abolition of the *Kol Nidre* prayer seemed to confirm the apprehension that Hirsch, in spite of his attacks on Geiger's ideology in *Naftali's Briefwechsel*, had gotten on an inclined plane himself. However, that was by no means so.

It is true that Hirsch never belonged *wholly* to the orthodox, a fact that later was to be clearly felt in Nikolsburg and Frankfurt. The innovations introduced by him establish that his plea for "progress" voiced in his inaugural sermon and in the above-mentioned "Message" to the congregations was, like that of the reformers, aimed at various institutions in Judaism. These innovations, however, were kept in firm bounds by Hirsch's faith in the *Halachah*. Changes in school and synagogue were not intended to re-

strict the latter but rather to present it in a dignified way; and in his opinion it was elastic enough to stand them well. Hirsch tried to explain and to prove this concept of *Halachah* in his literary work.

"SELBSTERKENNTNIS" ["SELF-COGNITION"] IN JUDAISM

Despite the great amount of special work devotedly performed by him in the service of the tiny Oldenburg communities, Hirsch found time for publications the importance of which reaches far beyond the bounds of his office and even beyond his generation. In the present essay they will be appraised only in so far as they are connected with his activity in Oldenburg.²³

As in Hirsch's practical religious activities, so also in his literary work one can notice a gradual clarification. It is appropriate to examine the first two writings (L. and Ho.) apart from the third (N).

"In an age when contrasts stand out so sharply against each other, and when truth is on neither side, in such an age the man who *belongs to no party*, who has only the cause at heart and serves it alone, cannot expect approval from any side." This statement made in the last of the *Nineteen Letters* seems to be in complete contradiction to Hirsch's later position as leader of "Orthodoxy." The truth is that the party system in 1876 was very much different from that in 1836. Nineteenth-century Judaism in Germany was faced with two questions: (1) the cultural question, Was Judaism to be preserved in its pre-emancipatory form? and (2) the religious question, Was it to be considered an immutable divine creation or a man-made work subject to change? As far as the *religious* question was concerned, Hirsch never wavered. Belief in the divine origin of the laws of the Torah and in their obligatory nature is the pre-supposition for Hirsch's concept of Judaism even in his early writings: Let him who does not share this belief

²³ In the Introduction to my new (Hebrew) edition (Jerusalem, 1949) I tried to evaluate the contents of the *Nineteen Letters*.

never read the *Horeb!* (Preface.) There was certainly no one of the old school who surpassed him in the conscientious observance of all ritualistic prescriptions relating to the conduct of one's daily life.²⁴ With regard to the *cultural* question, however, his attitude was entirely different from that of ghetto-Judaism, and that for reasons of—orthodoxy. For the *Taurob* knows only of one difference between Israel and the nations: We were given 613 commandments, of which merely seven have to be observed by the others. These commandments of "*Taurob*" regulate our relationship not only with God, but also with the world and our fellow-men. Thus they also affect our "secular" (profane) life deeply and force upon us a certain isolation, though by no means a fundamental cultural segregation.²⁵ The ghetto-Jew, on the other hand, feels himself to be different from the Gentile in his whole character—and wants to remain so. He looks at emancipation with suspicion, not merely, as Hirsch did, because of the danger it constitutes to the religious duties (L. 16, toward the end) but rather because of the inducement it presents for assimilation to the surrounding world in dress and in language.²⁶

Hirsch, on the other hand, used the language of Europe and its literary expressions with evident pleasure. He sanctioned all customs practiced in the Jews' environment if "they have been introduced for sensible reasons and are not rooted in a strange religion" (Ho., §505). It is true he demanded for halachic reasons that wives "cover their hair," but they were not required to wear a cap (*Haube*) as his mother had done and as his teacher Jacob Ettlinger had asked his daughters to do, the cap being the mark that distinguished between the Jewish and the Gentile woman. In contrast to both his teachers Hirsch wore a rabbinical gown with white bands; and an engraving he had made in

²⁴ In ritual observance he went too far for young Graetz; *MGWJ.*, 1919, p. 356.

²⁵ This was clarified by Hirsch only later in his comments on the story of Abraham.

²⁶ Cf. S. Weingarten, *Hatam Sofer and His Pupils* (Hebrew; 1905), especially p. 42; also p. 30 on *Minbagim*. In upholding *Minbagim* Moses Sofer went far beyond Hirsch (Ho., §474).

Oldenburg shows him in this gown without a beard and—without head covering.²⁷ He stressed his thorough knowledge of Latin and of world literature, but certainly not in order to boast. Rather he wanted to show that a faithful son of the "*Taurob*," too, could be a good European—and vice versa.

According to Hirsch, the musty atmosphere of ghetto-Judaism not only had a crippling effect on our human qualities, but the *Taurob*, too, pined away if it was approached "under Polish guidance" (L. 1). For a "spiritless spirit" ("*geistloser Geist*") that contents itself with sophistry (L. 18) "has seized upon laws full of life and meaning and reduced them to mummies" (L. 10, beginning). The "merest word-knowledge of the Torah" is being taught "without any elucidation or spiritual fervor," and "it is a stroke of luck, indeed, if that is the only thing" (L. 17, end), if all duties are not understood merely as a dull *opus operatum* or a charm to ward off physical ills, or if the idea of "Hasidism" is not misunderstood as asceticism (L. 15, in the middle).

According to Hirsch, this sort of dull and stupefying study should be replaced by the endeavor to comprehend Judaism out of its own spirit, "in order to lead the thinking among the young men and women in Israel" (Ho.) "to a kind of Judaism that understands itself" (L. 18, in the middle). Instead of teaching Talmud to six-year-olds, it would be far better first to open up the minds of the youth—both male and female alike, for a woman can achieve much in our time (Ho. § 446)—that they may understand the significance of the *Taurob* as a guide in their *Lebensanschauung*, for the religious interpretation of the world and humanity as God intended it to be (L. 2). Make

²⁷ This engraving is now in the possession of the Hebrew National Library at Jerusalem. To be absolutely sure, I also showed it to a number of friends.

²⁸ According to Elbogen, *A Century of Jewish Life* (Philadelphia, 1944), pp. 574 f., Rabbi Solomon Tiktin of Breslau remarked "about 1840 in reference to Abraham Geiger that anyone who had attended a university was *ipso facto* disqualified to be a rabbi."

them see Israel's task as a preacher of true humanity (L. 9, middle; 16, middle) and the purpose of the Commandments to consecrate us as *Menschisroel* so that they may be fulfilled through "a life from within" (L. 15, middle).

It is this demand for "self-cognition on the part of Judaism" that establishes Hirsch's position "between the parties." It separates him, of course, from the old traditionalists who do not want to see the forest for the trees, as well as from the new progressives and their forerunners. For self-cognition means cognizance of a phenomenon out of its own roots and its particular symptoms. According to Hirsch, Maimonides' explanations of Judaism are based on Aristotelian ideals rather than on those contained in the *Taurob*. Many details presented by him with praiseworthy minuteness in *Mishne Torah* seem to be completely irrelevant in his foundation of the laws as set forth in the *Moreb* and were therefore altogether removed by the reformers. Thereby a truly scientific explanation of Judaism was made impossible, however. For just as a scientific theory can be convincing and satisfying only if it fully explains all observed phenomena and none contradicts it, so a concept of Judaism can be given recognition only if it is in complete accord with all the facts contained in the *Taurob* (L. 18, note).

The fact that the reformers did not try to comprehend Judaism in "an organic way," as we would say today, that is, out of its own roots and its own fruits, is surely a grave mistake in Hirsch's opinion. But it is also the *only* shortcoming with which the reformers are reproached in the *Nineteen Letters*. It ought to be especially stressed that those things in which the reformers differed from Maimonides and Mendelssohn, in dogmatic as well as in practical respects, are at best merely hinted at in a vague manner.²⁹ Instead of the scorn poured out by the *Bibelsche Orient* (that is to say, by Chacham Bernays) on the followers of Friedländer, the *Nineteen Letters* express benevolent ap-

²⁹ One may compare the discussion with Michael Hess and the Frankfurt reformers who referred to Maimonides and Mendelssohn; Hirsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I.

proval of a good intention. "Be wroth with none! Respect all! For they all feel the shortcomings that exist; all desire that which is good, as they conceive it! Therefore you should respect their intentions, but you may well mourn and weep when you examine the aims to which their efforts are directed" (L. 17).

Here "the left hand pushes back and the right hand draws near" (according to a talmudic saying). In the literal sense, the author hoped to offer a platform on which both "parties" could meet without being unfaithful to themselves. Hirsch was convinced that "things will change in Israel" (L. 18, at the end). And not alone through his theoretical argumentation as a new basis for Judaism did he hope to convince. His ordinances, too—that instruction be based on the old traditional faith but that it be modern in method, and that divine services do justice to both Halachah and modern taste—were to demonstrate how the new concept of Judaism ought to be translated into reality. When Hirsch, in his inaugural sermon at Emden (1841), prompted by his experiences in Oldenburg, set forth his opinion on how to set up "a regular school system" and on how to effect "a liturgy evoking true devotion," a liberal Jewish journal stated admiringly that he had the ability "to rid graying orthodoxy of all its drawbacks and to place it in a clear light so that it could develop further, reconciled with the spirit of the time."³⁰ Just that was his aim.

But only very few stepped on Hirsch's platform. His Hamburg friends thanked "with abuse and intimidations" the man "who had the courage to speak publicly about a subject hitherto passed over mostly in silence."³¹ Moreover, Abraham Geiger, who founded the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie*, published in its first year's issues two comprehensive reviews of the *Nineteen Letters*, one written by the editor himself. Both rejected sharply the kind of historic Judaism built up by Hirsch.

It was probably under the influence of these critiques that, after the publication of *Horeb*, Hirsch decided to

³⁰ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, V (1841), p. 689.

³¹ Letter to Josephat of Adar 5596 (March, 1836); *Isr.*, p. 36a.

continue with *Naftali's Briefwechsel*. Like the *Nineteen Letters*, this continuation was not intended originally for the exclusive purpose of criticizing the reformers. Rather, it was to serve as "a calm discussion of other topics related to Jewish science and life" (N. 3), at the same time also calling attention to the most recent reform publications. Only later, in the course of the work, did Hirsch come to recognize the full danger of these writings, and not merely as seen from the traditional standpoint. In his opinion they contained a deception that everyone must be anxious to dissipate "no matter to what religious opinion he may adhere" (*ibid.*), namely, the conscious or unconscious deception (N. 5) that "the reformatory change can be proven to be based on the Talmud and *Judaism itself*," and thus disregard for basic laws or their abolition could find support in the Bible and in rabbinism.

True, Hirsch also turned against, among other things, utterances that seemed offensive to him—for instance, against Geiger's remark about the "doglike obedience" ("*Hundegehorsam*")³² of those who uphold the Commandments simply as divine ordinances and not because of their purpose to impart "a moral stimulus"—and against the reproach of "willfully distorting and twisting the meaning of the Scriptures" (N. 51) raised by a certain rabbi against the Talmud. But what Hirsch was mainly fighting for and his reasons for so doing are expressed in some remarks contained in his reply to the critics of this work (*Naftali's Briefwechsel*):

Let anyone think this or that opinion to be or not to be appropriate to the time, to educational or emancipatory trends, or to convenience. I will not oppose him. However, he must not represent things as being in accord with the Talmud and Bible if they are not. No friend of Judaism will *resent any* reform of any Jewish religious condition that is shown to be really justified in the ancient documents of Judaism. For how could anyone friendly to Judaism be averse to any kind of *life* rooted therein and *flowering* from it! But every friend of *lawful progressive endeavor* ("*gesetzliches Fortstreben*") must be doubly opposed to every *unlawful effort*. For, as the unlawful is destructive in itself, so it is also a hindrance to the lawful. The fact that they

³² N., 13. Cf. also Hirsch's comment on Gen. 22.

aspire to a scientific theology, that they do *not* strive after it, that all their writings are devoid of any serious scholarliness, that is what puts the pen into my hand.³³

The first paragraph of the above statement demonstrates that Hirsch did not aim at rejection of the "heterodoxy" *as a whole*. His criticism was directed not against men "filled with noble enthusiasm for the welfare of the Jews, but against those who look upon Judaism as an antiquated phenomenon" (L. 18). One of these men was Gabriel Riesser, whose frank "confession" of faith, according to Hirsch, "is very honorable just because of its straightforward sincerity" (No. 103). "He would not quarrel" with such men, and it is a fact that he fought radical opposition to religion only occasionally during his stay in Oldenburg³⁴ as well as later. His main attack was always directed against those *Jewish* theologians who claimed to stand well inside the pale of Judaism despite their divergent opinions and to conceive it more correctly than did those adhering to traditional views. There can be no doubt that Hirsch fought them above all for *religious* reasons, because of his close tie to Bible and Halachah, as each line of his work bears witness. But he battled with them, too, for *scientific* reasons, since every explanation of a phenomenon must explain all its individual aspects in order to be true (similarly also the *Nineteen Letters*). Hirsch fought like a man who relishes "a flourishing life" and disdains rigid mummifications, as he stated in his "Message" to the Oldenburg community. He fought like one who saw *legitimate progress*, namely, progress, as far as it is based on and justified by the Halachah, discredited and hence gravely *threatened* by illegitimate progress. This same thought was to be expressed by Hirsch several years later at Emden in his criticism of the Brunswick Rabbinical Conference.³⁵

It must be for these three reasons that Hirsch considered the "closed phalanx" (N. 78) built up around Geiger as

³³ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, III (1839), pp. 234, 516. Italics are mine.

³⁴ Cf. *Isr.*, p. 9a.

³⁵ Published in *Nabalat Zvi*, I, p. 82.

the greatest danger to Judaism as he envisioned it, a danger far greater than that constituted by the backwardness of the "old school" ("*der Alten*"). That is why he changed his tone considerably in dealing with the reformers. True, we find him still "weeping a melancholy tear" over Geiger's argumentation (p. 13), but at the end he complains bitterly that almost no one (his own teachers included) dares to oppose "lies" with the "truth" (N. 78 f.). So it happened that in this work of his, completed in the summer of 1838, a tactical change took place leading Hirsch in a direction which he was also to follow in the future during his stay at Emden and Frankfurt though not at Nikolsburg.

Did this change in Hirsch's tactics also constitute a change of opinion? True, Hirsch found himself an ally in the book of a sixteenth-century Spanish foe of philosophy, which a few years later was to be re-published by eastern European Jews antagonistic to Enlightenment.³⁶ But Hirsch heard in it not only attacks on Aristotelianism, which were well in line with his own criticism of the *Moreb*, but also a reproof of the *Pilpul* and of false wisdom, as well as an admonition to a "true and pure study of the *Taurob*" (N. 69 f.), the latter being no less strongly pressed upon the reader in the *Nineteen Letters*.

Above all, Hirsch's theory is supplemented by his acts in practical life. It was only after the publication of the *Mitteilungen aus Naphtalis Briefwechsel* that Hirsch made up his mind to introduce a choir and to abolish the *Kol Nidre* prayer, thereby showing how serious he was about "reforms" not in conflict with Halachah.

The last years of Hirsch's activity in Oldenburg, then, saw, not a change of mind in him, but a considerable clarification of his standpoint in the right as well as in the left direction. In Hirsch's opinion there even exists a certain inner connection between his polemics against Geiger's group, on the one hand, and the modernization of the divine services, on the other. In the aforementioned letter of

³⁶ On Joseph ben Hayyim Jawetz, *Or ba-Hayyim* (N., p. 68) see Kaminka, *Jüdisches Lexikon*, III (1929), p. 163 and *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, VI, p. 48.

December, 1839, written to a school friend at Hamburg (Isr., 18 f.), he complained, not about the "weak" in Israel, but about the "unpardonable somnolence of the others," that is, of the strong who do nothing to make the service "dignified," and "without moving a muscle allow a rabbi to hurl the reproach into their faces that the whole Talmud consists only of roguery and immorality." Hirsch considered it a holy duty of the teachers in Israel to take up the fight in both directions. He himself stood completely alone in his struggle, especially in Oldenburg, and that was true "in the literal sense of the word." But just as he admonished his friend to be "cheerful and circumspect," so he was himself. Here we can quote his Schiller again: "The strong man is mightiest alone" ("*Der Starke ist am mächtigsten allein*").

It was this very standing alone that enabled Hirsch to express his concept of Judaism clearly and unequivocally in word and in deed, "without having to squint to either side out of minor considerations that disfigure everything" (N. 79). There were two sides to his activity, both having been considered by us in their proper mutual relationship: his "legitimately reformist" labor and his "scientific presentation." Both were the result of his double, personal experience of Judaism and Europeanism, of a Judaism restricted to carrying out its divine task and little appreciative of all "national" customs and of a Europeanism keeping inviolate its belief in divine revelation despite the "enlightened" quality of its character. It is essential for the understanding of Hirsch's twofold achievement, the spiritual and the practical, to know that this double experience was absolutely natural for him: He evidently had just as little doubt about the unity of the Book of Isaiah as about the right of the Jew to wear European dress and his appreciation of Schiller. Moreover, the conviction gained from both, that Judaism with modern methods as applied by world culture can recognize its own character and state it, was to him beyond any doubt. Aware as he was of the involved and difficult problems of its interpretation in detail, he always kept a "perfect equilibrium" regarding the foundation of his concept.

This explains, on the one hand, the hypothetical form of his assumptions as found in his commentaries, as well as the moving modesty with which "Ben Uziel" speaks to the intellectually only half-grown Graetz,³⁷ and on the other hand, the extremely sharp language employed by the young writer against the *Moreh*, much to the surprise of his admirers even down to our own generation. The almost somnambulist assurance with which he could make his way between extremes enabled Hirsch to become the leader of a vacillating youth. Today even those who disagree with his ideas will be united in their respect for his "homogeneous personality"³⁸ that devoted its unusually constructive talents, in spiritual as well as practical tasks, to the reconstruction of Judaism.

³⁷ Graetz, *MGWJ.*, 1918, p. 261: ". . . erwarten Sie keinen schon vollendeten Meister, sondern einen selbst noch im Forschen begriffenen Mann"; cf. also letter to Mendelsohn of 1836, *Isr.*, p. 17.

³⁸ Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* (Berlin, 1933), p. 79.