

## **Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch in Perspective: Three Contexts**

### **Introduction**

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's role in modern Jewish life is usually viewed in one of two contexts: his significance as the formulator of a fundamental Torah-ideology which had and has a profound impact on the Torah-world; and his place in history as an uncompromising leader in the battle against Reform and the struggle to promote, especially among the young, the return to Torah-true observance.

In the first context, Rav Hirsch is commonly known as the proponent of *תורה עם דרך ארץ*, the oft-quoted and oft-misunderstood philosophy which proclaims the mastery of Torah over every aspect of life. Torah is timeless. It is applicable to every age, in every time and to every facet of what the world has to offer. Subject to the Torah, everything becomes ennobled through it. The Torah-Jew need not fear man's physical domination of Earth or his intellectual pursuits—as long as they are governed and guided by the Torah. *תורה עם דרך ארץ* is not a synthesis between Torah and the secular world—one complementing the other. Rather, it is the secular world serving as a supplement to the unique Torah. This ideology of *תורה עם דרך ארץ* as reflected throughout Rav Hirsch's Commentaries and writings, while emphasizing the primary role of Torah study, encourages those individuals who so desire to actively participate in every aspect of life and secular studies as long as this involvement reflects the role of Torah as the supreme calling of the Jew. This principle, accepted to a wide degree throughout the Torah-world, has enabled the more than five generations since Rav Hirsch's time to

actively participate as uncompromising בני תורה and בנות תורה in every field of endeavor to the point that they represent true קדוש השם.

In the second context, Rav Hirsch is known as a leader who successfully built a Torah Kehilla out of the ruins of the Reform-decimated community in Frankfurt. He fought for the truth of the Torah against the Reform and devoted much of his energies to win back for Torah the estranged young men and women of our people. His *Nineteen Letters* and his masterpiece on טעמי המצות, the *Chorev*, are products of his efforts to present the Torah in a meaningful fashion to both the committed and uncommitted.

Rav Hirsch is known as an uncompromising leader who adhered to the concept of disassociation with any so-called "branch" of Judaism. There is only *one* Judaism and that is unadulterated, uncompromising, all-embracing Torah-Judaism. Any association with a non-Orthodox organization grants sanction to other than Torah-Judaism. Hence Rav Hirsch engaged in his epic struggle for an independent Orthodoxy which was commonly known as the "Austritt" or secessionist movement. This concept was a forerunner for the eventual establishment of Agudath Israel and it has remained crucial in the ongoing struggle against Reform throughout the Jewish world, including ארץ ישראל of today.

The absolute acceptance of the supremacy of Torah is the fundamental basis for both the עם דרך ארץ ideology and the independent Orthodoxy movement. Thus, Rav Dr. Joseph Breuer זצ"ל used to say: "He who properly understands עם דרך ארץ understands the 'Austritt'—the principles are the same."

These two concepts were translated by Rav Hirsch into reality in his model Kehilla and educational institutions in Frankfurt. He urged the development of independent Kehilloth encompassing every aspect of Jewish life. This type of Kehilla environment did and still does foster the enthusiastic commitment of its adherents to the ideal calling of our people. K'hal Adath Jeshurun and Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in New York are modeled in the very image of Rav Hirsch's vision.

There is a third context in which Rav Hirsch must be understood.

As the champion of עם דרך ארץ and as a רב ומנהיג בישראל, the very essence of these roles was derived from his personal stature in Torah.

Rav Hirsch was a חלמיד of Chacham I. Bernays זצ"ל of Hamburg and of Rav J. Ettlinger זצ"ל, ערוך לנר, who gave him his היתר הוראה. In 1830,

at the age of twenty-two, he became the Rav of Oldenburg, where he wrote the *Nineteen Letters* and the *Chorev*. In 1841, he was appointed Rav of Emden and in 1846 he was named the Chief Rabbi of Nikolsburg in Moravia, which was then known as an עיר ואם בישראל. In 1851, he resigned to accept the historic call of a tiny group of Torah-true individuals in Frankfurt where he built his monumental Kehilla over the next thirty-seven years until his death. There he wrote his Commentaries on חומשי תורה and ההלים which, together with the *Nineteen Letters* and the *Chorev*, have become integral parts of Torah-learning today. His prolific writings in his journal *Jeschurun*, subsequently published as the *Collected Writings*, offer profound meaning for almost every aspect of Jewish life. He was recognized throughout the Torah world for his Torah knowledge and personal integrity.

The validity of his philosophy and his success as a leader are due to his unquestioned standing in the עולם התורה.

In our times, when the challenge of scientific-technological developments constantly confronts us; when the challenge of establishing and maintaining Kehilloth, as well as the urgency to further revitalize Torah observance, is greater than ever; when the Reform continues to face us—the need for the teachings of Rav Hirsch is also greater than ever.

Thus, we present three articles\* which analyze Rav Hirsch's work from the standpoint of these afore-mentioned contexts:

Rav Hirsch—The Leader and Fighter

Rav Hirsch—The Gaon in Talmud and Mikra

Rav Hirsch—His תורה עם דרך ארץ Ideology.

We hope thereby to stimulate further the study of Rav Hirsch's works, the understanding and dissemination of his philosophy, and the encouragement to continue his legacy.

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\* These articles are based on a series of lectures sponsored by K'hal Adath Jeshurun and the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation in 1985–6.