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RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH— MYTH AND FACT

Our age is one of great opportunities for the Jewish people, a fact which presents us with both a momentous challenge and a serious obligation.

What opportunities are these? Their roots lie in the political and social emancipation of Jewry which began in Western Europe two hundred years ago, and which has spread from there through the majority of Jewish communities in the world. Welcome as this emancipation was, with its promise of freedom from persecution and brighter socio-economic prospects, at the same time it carried grave danger along with this promise. Indeed, it eventually spiritually decimated European Jewry. Although all of the Torah leaders foresaw this danger, only a few realized emancipation's epoch-making potential for Jewish self-actualization. Among these, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was outstanding. By word and deed, he demonstrated how the falling of the ghetto walls offered the Jewish community a chance to renew itself Jewishly, not just politically. Personal freedom and access to modern science, he said, demanded that the Jews use them to bring Torah life to a higher level of perfection. And in great measure he was responsible for the astounding renaissance of Torah-true German Jewry following his rabbinic appointment in Frankfurt.

All the same factors apply today, in our own generation. The same opportunities, as well as the same dangers, confront us. Nowadays, therefore, just as then, we must turn to the Torah leadership of past and present for guidance in responding to the challenge. If understood correctly, Rabbi Hirsch's message—usually referred to as *Torah im derekh erets* (“Torah together with the way of the world”)—is no less important as a guiding principle today than it was in his own time. Just as then, it is needed to bring to fruition the momentous opportunities facing us.

TRADITION

Unfortunately, a number of misconceptions about Rabbi Hirsch's message have become rooted in the public opinion,¹ and these impede the broad acceptance it deserves. Our purpose here is to clarify the more commonly misunderstood aspects of the *Torah im derekh erets* principle. Rather than basing our interpretation on the words of Rabbi Hirsch's opponents or on the conduct of some of his followers, as do many of his critics, we will look at the message itself, as formulated by its author.

WHAT IS TORAH IM DEREKH ERETS?

The term *Torah im derekh erets* has been given many interpretations. In its broadest meaning, it refers to the concern of the Torah with this world.² The underlying concept is that the Torah and this world were created as a single system, wherein the world is the basic material that we are to use in the service of God, and on which we are to impress God's will; and the Torah is our guide to accomplishing all this. Clearly, then, *Torah im derekh erets* not only tolerates this world and our involvement with it; it views such involvement as an essential aspect of the Torah's message. The implication is clear: both Torah knowledge and knowledge of this world are essential for a full and successful Torah life.

This does not mean, however, that the two areas of knowledge have equal status. On the contrary: whereas Torah teaches us the purpose of this world and guides us in the path of realizing it, scientific knowledge enables us to take the tools and materials that the world provides and use them effectively toward this purpose. Thus science is to Torah as means is to end, making scientific knowledge subsidiary to Torah knowledge.

COEXISTENCE, SYMBIOSIS, OR SYNTHESIS?

Occasionally the question is raised: just how does *Torah im derekh erets* view Torah and science? Are they in a state of synthesis, where each complements the other? Or in symbiosis, where each is distinct but beneficial to the other's existence? Or in mere coexistence, neither having any special relationship to the other? Once we have grasped the fundamental meaning of *Torah im derekh erets*, the answer is self-evident. If Torah and this world are components of a single system, their correct synthesis is the very essence of Torah life. Both must be studied before we are able to translate the Torah's instructions into reality.

Rabbi Hirsch makes it clear that this is his position. Whenever he discusses secular studies, in his *Horeb* as well as in his commentary to the Torah,³ he stresses that such studies must be undertaken from the viewpoint of Torah, they must serve Torah goals, and they must be tested by comparison with Torah principles. In the words of Rabbi Hirsch's great-grandson: "*Torah im derekh erets* is not to be compared to a physical mixture of two separate components, but rather to a chemical compound."⁴

Rabbi Hirsch never tired of pointing out that the study of science and history is necessary for a deeper understanding of the ways of God and the Torah's message.⁵ His *Commentary on the Torah* is interspersed with references to scientific and historical facts to aid in the interpretation of Scripture. In one annual report of the high school he founded (perhaps the first Yeshiva High School in history), he demonstrates in considerable detail, using tens of examples, how the study of natural science and world history contributes to the student's understanding of the Torah and its message.⁶ In the previous year's report, he discusses the impact that Torah study has on our understanding of general secular concepts: "These two elements [general and special Jewish education] are in truth nothing but the two complementary and closely related parts of a complete and homogeneous education."⁷

These quotations should suffice to dispel any suggestion that "[Rabbi] Hirsch posited a coexistence, not a synthesis."^{1b}

UNADULTERATED JUDAISM

Jewish thinkers throughout our history have attempted to synthesize the ideas of gentile philosophers with Jewish thought. Often, this was accomplished by bending Torah ideas a bit, or at best by adding foreign elements to them, as long as an obvious contradiction to Torah did not result. In contrast to this approach, Rabbi Hirsch demands that Judaism be understood "from within itself."⁸ This demand is a central theme in his writing, and he does not hesitate to criticize those who fail to follow it in their ideology, however great they may be as halakhic authorities.⁹

In his steadfast adherence to this principle, Rabbi Hirsch never turns to outside sources for ideological inspiration. He encourages the study of nature, of the nature of man (through psychology and anthropology), and of history—but not the study of the humanities, which deal with the meaning of the world, man's place in the world, aspirations and values, goals and ideas.¹⁰ Even when, on one occasion, dictates of good

manners compelled him to eulogize a gentile poet, he praised that poet for having absorbed many lofty Jewish teachings, and for having enriched the gentile world by clothing those teachings in an inspiring form. Nowhere, however, in an address of fourteen pages, did he imply that we, as Jews, should—or need to—absorb ideas from a gentile.¹¹

Did Rabbi Hirsch himself absorb such ideas? In view of the above, that would be surprising. I, for one, have not found a single foreign idea in Rabbi Hirsch's writings. Granted, often gentile thinkers independently rediscover certain of the Torah's truths, and these are then found in the non-Jewish literature. However, when a Torah authority employs one of these concepts in his writings, it is surely poor scholarship to claim that he took it from the gentile source when the Jewish one was there all the time. The sad fact is, though, that in a generation like ours, a generation which has originated anti-hero worship and turned the dwarfing of spiritual giants into a popular sport, the requirements of good scholarship will inevitably fall victim to the desire for sensationalism. Thus it is that some scholars "discover" foreign influences in the works of even such a purist as Rabbi Hirsch, even when the Jewish source is quite obvious.¹²

Others have not hesitated to accuse Rabbi Hirsch of being a believer in secular humanism, of adoring Western European culture, and of trying to adopt two cultures that he himself was unable to reconcile. And this, without citing any reasonable support for their claims, which fly in the face of Rabbi Hirsch's repeated assertion that any element of secular culture must be measured against the criteria of Torah before it may be accepted into our thought-world as true, an assertion upon which he acted consistently.¹³ The essence of secular humanism is the belief that man is self-sufficient, that on his own, he will inexorably ascend the ladder to perfection. This should be compared to Rabbi Hirsch's comment that even scientific knowledge is dependent on belief in God's creation for its validation,¹⁴—that even modern scientific progress was not possible until the Jewish people spread the knowledge of God's unity among the nations.¹⁵

Rabbi Hirsch lived in a time of great upheaval, when Jews, newly released from their ghetto-prisons, were being granted progressively greater rights. It was easy to become intoxicated with the feeling of freedom, and such indeed was the spirit of the time. Reading Rabbi Hirsch's works, one is impressed by the low-key terms in which he refers to the emancipation. Far from being swept up in the tide of fervor, he repeatedly warns his fellow Jews not to be deceived by the unprecedented liberality they are experiencing. Renewed anti-Semitism

could well be lurking around the corner. One representative warning by him: "Who knows? Perhaps it is just those who are blinded by their exaggerated vision, idolizing emancipation and equality, who will be the cause of reviving the danger of renewed enslavement [of the Jews]."¹⁶ With almost prophetic insight, he writes:

Perhaps the day will come when all the things bestowed upon mankind for its benefit and liberation will become corrupted into their very antithesis. Mankind, instead of assuring its members their legitimate rights of development . . . will serve them the tear-drenched bread of slaves and bitterness. . . . At such time, science, too, will become solely destructive . . . will frantically blind itself with its own brightness. . . . Mankind will vainly exhaust its strength in a blind upsurge of uncurbed desires. . . .¹⁷

In addition to their amazing timeliness, these clear, unequivocal statements give the lie to the above claim that Rabbi Hirsch favored gentile philosophies, in general, and secular humanism, in particular.

SPIRITUALITY

Torah im derekh erets is a highly spiritual concept. It teaches us to devote every moment of our time and every penny of our possessions to the service of God, while at the same time leading a completely normal life. It shows us that whatever natural gifts we have can be used in the service of God. It also teaches that such service, when suited to our particular personality, will bring us satisfaction and happiness, which in turn enable us to function more effectively in this world. *Torah im derekh erets* has an enormous breadth of vision, and accommodates every vocation in its conception of an ideal world.¹⁸ The only requirements are that we turn to the Torah and be willing to follow its guidelines without cavil.

Already in his first work, *The Letters of Ben Uziel* (No. 18) and then in the introduction to his *Horeb*, Rabbi Hirsch goes to great lengths to elaborate on the importance of "the spirit of *Tanakh* and Talmud" as sources of the Torah's message. Rarely among Torah authorities (except hasidic authors) do we find such elaborate emphasis on the study of the spiritual aspects of the Torah. His deep spirituality also spurred him to criticize unsparingly, as the antithesis of the Torah spirit, a bourgeoisie stress on "a good meal and a good drink."¹⁹

Rabbi Hirsch's great preoccupation with the book of Psalms clearly expresses his own spirituality. But not only that. In the course of his monumental commentary on the Psalms, he develops his ideology at length, thus demonstrating its lofty spiritual sources.

The importance of emotions and the limitations of cold reason also find clear expression in Rabbi Hirsch's writings. In explaining why the Oral Torah must not be written down, he goes to great lengths to show that the written word cannot capture the spirit that is so essential to the Torah. He also explains that this is why God's covenant with Israel is based particularly on the Oral Torah.²⁰

A hasidic Rabbi was wont to say: "It is a great mitzvah always to be in a state of joy,"²¹ and this maxim has even become a popular song. Now joy, especially the "joy of a mitzvah," is, of course, an important concept in Judaism; but where in the Torah are we expressly commanded to be always joyous? Only in the writings of Rabbi Hirsch have I found the answer. During *Sukkot*, he points out, we are commanded both to rejoice, and also to be in a state of joy.²² Why the duplication? In his commentary to this verse, Rabbi Hirsch demonstrates that the second of these two commandments has a larger meaning than the first—namely, that we must carry the joy of the *Sukkot* festival into the whole year and be in a constant state of joy. This is surely a most beautiful expression of the spirituality of *Torah im derekh erets*. In the words of Rabbi Hirsch himself, "Joy is the loftiest of the blossoms and fruits of the Tree of Life—the Torah."

When presenting his rationalistic explanations concerning the significance of the Torah's commandments (*ta'amei mitsvot*), he prefaces his work by stressing the limitations of such efforts, lest anyone think that the full meaning of a mitzvah may be grasped in this way.²³ There is much mystery in the Torah, and it is important that we be aware of the limitations of our intellect. But equally, common sense dictates that we refrain from dwelling at length, and in detail, on these mysteries: "That which is beyond you, do not investigate; that which is concealed from you, do not probe . . . you have no business with mysteries."²⁴ Rabbi Hirsch follows this rule faithfully.

His attitude toward kabbala followed the halakhic mainstream: awe, tinged with trepidation.²⁵ It is both ironic and revealing that 150 years ago, when rationalism reigned supreme in the secular world, Reform leadership attacked Rabbi Hirsch for his leanings toward kabbala, while contemporary secularists—in consonance with today's *zeitgeist*, dominated by existentialism and mysticism—criticize him for his

lack of appreciation of kabbala.²⁶ Still, it ought to be mentioned that Rabbi Hirsch made extensive use of the *Zohar* in writing his *Horeb*.²⁷

Here a true story, that, perhaps more than anything else, testifies to the spirituality of Rabbi Hirsch's ways. About sixty-five years ago, Rabbi Shimon Schwab, then a young yeshiva student in Lithuania, approached a number of Torah authorities in Eastern Europe for their opinion concerning university studies as practiced by German Orthodoxy—including Rabbi Hirsch himself, as well as his eminent teacher, the *Arukh leNer*. Rabbi Schwab expected to hear condemnation of the practice. Among the authorities asked was the Gerrer Rebbe, R. Avraham M. Alter (the *Imrei Emet*). He declined to respond in writing, but warned Rabbi Schwab very earnestly to “be careful not to offend the honor of Rav Hirsch, the *tsaddik* of Frankfurt, for he was a living *musar*-book.”²⁸ Who better to judge spirituality than a hasidic rabbi—and if he saw Rabbi Hirsch as a “living *musar*-book,” we may accept this “expert testimony.”

JEWISH NATIONALISM AND ERETS YISRAEL

Rabbi Hirsch viewed Judaism as primarily nationalistic in nature, not “religious” *per se*. He stresses that Jewry is a people and not merely a religious community. In his commentary to the Torah, he demonstrates this contention clearly and ascribes to “thoughtlessness” any effort to classify Judaism as a “religion.”²⁹ He defines Torah literature as “Jewish national literature” and Torah education as “Jewish national education.”³⁰ Concerning the exile, while not denying the positive contribution the Talmud assigns to it,³¹ he declares: “As long as the Jewish national organism is in exile, it is sick.”³² No wonder that the *Seridei Eish* wrote that Rabbi Hirsch “must be deemed a wholehearted extreme nationalist.”³³

Concerning the central role of *Erets Yisrael* in Torah thought, he is just as explicit. He writes that while the Torah is meant to accompany us wherever we must wander, a full Jewish life—materially and spiritually full—is limited to *Erets Yisrael*, and that God Himself established an especially tight bond between the people and the land of Israel.³⁴ Indeed, when discussing *Erets Yisrael* his comments uncharacteristically border on the mystical. He points out that before Abraham came to *Erets Yisrael*, God merely spoke to him; only in *Erets Yisrael* did God appear to him.³⁵ Developing the idea, he explains that when God wanted to rejuvenate mankind and return His presence to earth, He chose a

land that was suitable for that purpose, one which would enable those who live in it according to God's will to reach the highest levels of spirit and morality; and that land is *Erets Yisrael*. Elsewhere he suggests that, because *Erets Yisrael* was spared the ravages of the Deluge, it retained the pristine quality of the earth.³⁶

Rabbi Hirsch expressed his love for *Erets Yisrael* not only in word, but in deed as well. He warmly supported the 19th-century efforts to develop self-supporting agricultural settlements in *Erets Yisrael*; he raised money for them,³⁷ and in 1883, he issued an urgent appeal to support the pioneering community of Petah Tikva.³⁸

In view of all this, how can we explain occasional claims that Rabbi Hirsch was anti-nationalist? These seem to be based on two facts. Rabbi Hirsch, with all the importance he attached to Jewish nationalism, always emphasized that only Torah imbued it with significance. A second source of misunderstanding on this score is his refusal to cooperate with Rabbi T.H. Kalischer's efforts to settle *Erets Yisrael* within the framework of *Hibbat Tsiyyon*, which advocated establishing a Jewish homeland in *Erets Yisrael*. He refused to cooperate because he saw these efforts as violating "the three oaths,"³⁹ which prohibit all efforts to end the exile by force, as well as rebellion against "the nations." This prohibition would remain in force as long as the nations of the world opposed such settlement. Rabbi Hirsch did not regard the political efforts of the fledgling Zionist movement as voiding the Torah's restriction.⁴⁰

What, we may well ask, would have been Rabbi Hirsch's attitude toward the present State of Israel? Answering such a hypothetical question is always speculative. However, we may be able to make a reasonable suggestion. To make an educated guess, let us first see how this century's Torah authorities viewed the historical developments they witnessed. Rabbi Meir Simha of Dvinsk, better known as the *Or Same'ah*, declared that when the League of Nations (at the San Remo conference) decided to establish a Jewish homeland in *Erets Yisrael*, that decision removed the restrictions of "the three oaths."⁴¹ Another outstanding halakhic authority, the *Avnei Nezer*, also made the restriction conditional on the attitude of the nations of the world.⁴² Even Rabbi Velvel of Brisk, known for his uncompromising anti-Zionist stand, declared that the UN resolution approving the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine "was a smile from divine providence; but the ones in charge ruined it."⁴³

Many other outstanding authorities evidently were following the same line of reasoning when they saw, in these events, both an opportunity and a challenge. Among them were R. Yosef Hayyim Sonnenfeld,

Rabbi of the “Old Yishuv” in the first third of this century; his successor, R. Y.T. Dushinsky; R. T.P. Frank, author of *Har Tsvi*; R. Yosef Kahaneman, Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh; R. Eliyahu Dessler, author of *Mikhtav meEliyahu*; and R. Eliezer Bloch, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Telzh.⁴⁴ Since their position on this issue is eminently reasonable, as evidenced by its near-universal acceptance among the greatest Torah authorities, there is no basis to assume that Rabbi Hirsch would disagree with them. Presumably, he too would agree that under the present circumstances, *aliya* and any effort to improve the State of Israel, materially and spiritually, should be most welcome.

THE RULE OF TORAH IN PUBLIC LIFE

If Judaism is primarily nationalistic, it follows that concern for national needs is central to a Jew’s duties. In the political constellation in which Rabbi Hirsch functioned, there was no general national framework, so that these obligations applied towards the community, which he saw as “a nation in miniature.”⁴⁵ This explains the strong emphasis in Rabbi Hirsch’s writings on the duty of the individual to see to the health of the community. The fact that a whole volume of his *Collected Writings* is devoted to this subject is ample testimony to such emphasis.⁴⁶ One of the categories of commandments in his *Horeb* is *mishpatim* (jurisprudence), to which he devotes twelve chapters, including one on courts of law and witnesses—all these as applying today. In addition, there is a chapter on “obligations towards the community.”⁴⁷

One of the recurring themes in his writings is the castigation of the widespread error which sees Judaism as mere religion. Torah must inspire and govern all aspects of life, to the extent that circumstances permit it. Thus he writes:

And that is why the Torah was designed, both in substance and in form, so that it may, indeed must, claim the total and constant devotion of an entire nation, of all its generations, with all their thoughts and emotions, all their aspirations and actions, down to our present day.⁴⁸

Therefore, too, his writings are full of anguish over the government interference that limits the implementation of all this.⁴⁹ And hence, also, we must reject emphatically any suggestion that Rabbi Hirsch “tacitly accepted modern society’s allocation of the place of religion at the margins of public life.”^{2c}

THE UNITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Rabbi Hirsch had an exceptional sense of responsibility toward the Jewish community at large and toward the individuals composing it. As is well known, he devoted his whole adult life to their advancement. When R. Simha Zissel of Kelm, the renowned disciple of R. Yisrael of Salant, wrote his famous letter extolling the intense involvement of German Jewish Orthodoxy with Jewish suffering abroad, he mentioned only Rabbi Hirsch by name, for his share in the efforts for persecuted Russian Jewry. R. Hirsch may well have been the moving force behind the major relief and rescue campaign.⁵⁰

Faced with the unbelieving Jews of his time, including Reform rabbis and their followers,⁵¹ he applied Rambam's ruling concerning the descendants of the Karaite heretics. Rambam declared that, because of their upbringing, they were to be considered as acting under duress and therefore blameless; they were to be brought back to the national fold and the Torah "by words of peace."⁵² This, declared Rabbi Hirsch, was the way to approach our wayward brothers even today.⁵³

But while he maintained peaceful and friendly intercourse with *individuals* who had strayed, he did not go to the extent of compromising any of the Torah's principles. Regarding these, he was absolutely firm, and, significantly, this led to his rejecting any cooperation with *organizations* that challenged the Torah's authority. In his opinion, an organization was defined not by its members, but by its program. Thus, an organization might be heretical, and so would have to be ostracized, even though all its members and leaders might be blameless and were to be drawn close—as private individuals.

Rabbi Hirsch ruled that when a Jew is confronted with a choice of joining or not joining a Reform congregation, he is forbidden to join, since such voluntary joining is tantamount to legitimation. This principle was called *Austritt* (secession), and it stands whether or not the Reform congregation provides for the religious needs of Orthodox members, for it is based on the prohibition of endorsing heresy, not on the likelihood of eventual interference with the member's practice of Torah law.⁵⁴

It is surely significant that Rabbi Moshe Feinstein takes a similar position,⁵⁵ going so far as to prohibit joining a charitable organization where the Sabbath is desecrated, since such joining would constitute a tacit endorsement.⁵⁶

Some authors have suggested that were Rabbi Hirsch around today, he would apply the *Austritt* principle to the State of Israel, since

the majority of its government are non-believers. But this opinion seems to lack all basis. Firstly, Rabbi Hirsch issued the ruling that *Austritt* was obligatory only after Prussian law had made membership in the Reform congregations optional. Only then did membership imply endorsement of the community's ideology. In contrast, being a "member" of the state in which you live is not optional; every inhabitant must pay the state's taxes and is subject to its laws. Hence, living in a state does not imply endorsement of any ideology.

Second, and more fundamental, the government of a democratic state is merely a body appointed to manage those affairs that are of common interest to the inhabitants. In contrast to a religious community, it is not the task of a democratic government to provide an ideology. The government does not stand for an ideal; people do. Thus, the State of Israel reflects the opinions of its citizens; it is Torah-true to the extent that they are, no more and no less. It also follows from this that becoming a citizen does not at all endorse the ideology of the majority; it simply changes the extent to which the State is Torah-true. Hence, there seems to be no rational basis for applying the *Austritt* principle to the State of Israel—nor for the assumption that Rabbi Hirsch would have applied it.

GREATNESS IN TORAH

Reading Rabbi S.R. Hirsch's commentary on the Torah carefully, one cannot but be impressed by his thorough command of the Talmud. Not only his commentary on *Mishpatim*, which is an excellent summary of the Talmudic conclusions in *Bava Kama* and *Bava Metsia*, but even his commentary on *Leviticus* demonstrates a total grasp of the conclusions in the order of *Kodashim*, where the text is notoriously corrupt and the student is often left confused as to the final outcome of the Talmudic discussion. Furthermore, throughout his commentary, dozens of *aharonim* are cited repeatedly.⁵⁷

Rabbi Hirsch's halakhic response to Rabbi S.B. Bamberger's challenge on the issue of secession from the general congregation ("*Austritt*") covers 66 printed pages, and, most amazingly, is dated a mere six days after the date of Rabbi Bamberger's letter. There, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch rebuts Rabbi Bamberger's criticism, point by point, with an impressive display of erudition, based extensively on Talmud, *Tosefta*, *rishonim* and *aharonim*.⁵⁸ Rabbis from all over Europe, and even from America, turned to Rabbi S.R. Hirsch with their halakhic queries; a

recently-published collection of his responsa, numbering about one hundred and covering the four parts of the *Shulhan Arukh*, contains many examples.⁵⁹

What he practiced himself, he also saw as the ideal, the goal for the general public:

Our task in life has no greater enemy, and there is no greater cancer on our present state, than ignorance. Study Torah thoroughly—Torah, the Prophets, *Kethuvim* (Hagiographia), Talmud and decisors. And do not study out of a desire to be a rabbi. Study Torah as a businessman, a tradesman, an artist, a doctor, or a scientist.⁶⁰

This as far as the ideal is concerned. What happened to Torah scholarship under *Torah im derekh erets* in practice? We have already pointed out that since Torah is meant to guide our life in this world, it stands to reason that knowledge of this world is an aid to understanding Torah. Indeed, many Torah authorities support this idea explicitly. And in fact Rabbeinu Bahya, and following him, Maharal, declare: “It is a known fact that all the seven [secular] wisdoms are a ladder by which one ascends to the divine wisdom.”⁶¹ Rambam, too, sees scientific knowledge as a prerequisite to understanding Torah wisdom.⁶² An even stronger statement was made by the Gaon of Vilna.⁶³ A community endorsing *Torah im derekh erets* should, then, be expected to produce greater Torah authorities than a community that neglects this principle. Yet, in fact, the reverse has been observed. During the seventy years that Western European Orthodoxy was under the influence of the *Torah im derekh erets* principle, it produced very few outstanding Torah authorities.

The puzzle, however, vanishes when we consider some statistical facts and a bit of historical background. In considering the number of Torah authorities coming from Western, as compared to Eastern, Europe, the relative sizes of the two Jewish populations must be taken into account; Western Jewry was only a few percent of European Jewry as a whole.

But there is an even more important factor to consider. That worldly knowledge was flourishing in 19th-century Western Europe is well known. But what of Torah? For at least seventy years before the *Torah im derekh erets* principle was revived, governmentally imposed emancipation—without Torah guidance—and, later on, the misleading Reform movement, had been eradicating Torah knowledge in Western Europe, so much so that when Rabbi Hirsch arrived in Frankfurt, he found a spir-

itual desert. (Emanuel Schwarzschild, later the president of Rabbi Hirsch's congregation, reports that even in Frankfurt, known for centuries as a bastion of Torah learning, he was the only one of his generation who still put on *tefillin*.)⁶⁴ Large populations do not change quickly, and they certainly do not become learned quickly; it is surely reasonable, then, to allow seventy years to repair the destruction wrought during a previous seventy years. Thus, Rabbi Hirsch himself was able to set up a religious educational system, but one that extended no further than high school. His son-in-law and successor established a Yeshiva, and gradually, it became fashionable for parents to send their sons there to study for a year or two before going off to University. The result of this exposure was that these students continued learning Torah even as they pursued their academic studies. When the next generation, their children, arrived, we already find gifted young men traveling to the Eastern European *yeshivot* to deepen their Torah knowledge—and in the end, a few of them became outstanding Torah authorities and returned “home” as spiritual leaders. But that was indeed the end. It is not difficult to guess, however, how the community would have progressed had not Hitler and his hordes reduced European Jewry to a mere shadow of its former self.

SUMMARY

There is good reason to claim that *Torah im derekh erets*—enthusiastic involvement with the challenges posed by this world—is the need of the hour. It is unfortunate that some aspects of *Torah im derekh erets* have often been misunderstood. Setting the record straight will, it is hoped, make the message of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch attractive to a greater number of people.

NOTES

1. Some systematic misrepresentations of Rabbi Hirsch's ideology:
 - a. Noah H. Rosenbloom, *Tradition In an Age of Reform* (Jew. Publ. Soc., Phila.: 1976). Reviewed by M. Breuer in *Tradition* 16:4, pp. 140-149 (Summer 1977). Among his contentions: Rabbi Hirsch was an ignoramus in Talmud; his philosophy was borrowed from Hegel; his secession decision lacks halakhic basis.
 - b. Rabbi Dr. N. Lamm, *Torah Umada* (Aronson, Northvale, NJ, 1990), especially chapter 5. This chapter contains a large collection of derogatory criticisms leveled at Rabbi Hirsch's position during the past century.

Among these are: “he was enamored of German culture;” “his message lacked spirituality;” “he opposed Jewish nationalism;” “he was intolerant of non-believers;” and, most amazing of all, “the schizoid effect,” that Rabbi Hirsch put Torah and science side by side, without reconciling them. Significantly, almost all of the references cited by the author are from secondary sources, over two thirds drawn from a university symposium (Ref. e, below).

c. Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks, *Tradition in an Untraditional Age* (Valentine, London 1990; pp. 12-14). The author claims that to R. Hirsch, Judaism was “confined to ‘religious’ rather than ‘national’ motifs.”

d. Rabbi T.Y. Kook, *HaTsofe*, 24 Tevet 5733. Here it is claimed that Rabbi Hirsch hastened to split the community unnecessarily and against the unanimous opinion of the other Torah authorities. Reviewed by David Henshke, *HaMa’ayan*, Tammuz 5733, pp. 41-51.

e. *Torah Im Derekh Erets*, M. Breuer, ed. (Bar Ilan University, 1987). The proceedings of a conference. Note especially the last contribution to this symposium, which concludes with a sharp and unfounded attack, based on nothing more substantial than a statement by the author’s father-in-law. There we find claims such as that Rabbi S.R. Hirsch favored *galut* and was enamored of secular humanism.

2. Rabbi Y.Y. Weinberg, see note 27, below. Rabbi E.M. Klugman, *Shemesh Marpe*, Mesorah, NY (1992); pp. 327-335. Cf. also L. Levi, *Tradition* 28:1, pp. 46-79 (Fall 93).
3. A few examples:
 - a. Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, *Horeb*, R.I. Grunfeld, ed. (Soncino, London: 1962), sec. 551.
 - b. Rabbi Hirsch, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, on Lev. 18:4 and Deut. 6:7.
4. M. Breuer, *HaMa’ayan* 9:1, p. 15 (*Tishrei* 5729).
5. Rabbi Hirsch, *Letters of Ben Uziel*, XVIII (p. 273 in the J. Elias translation, Feldheim, 1995): “To contemplate nature with the perception of David, to listen to history with the ear of Isaiah.” Cf. also the *Commentary on Deuteronomy* 4:32, 6:4, and 16:1.
6. Rabbi Hirsch, “The Relation of General to Specifically Jewish Education,” in *Judaism Eternal*, R.I. Grunfeld, ed. (Soncino, London, 1956), Vol. 1, pp. 203-220.
7. Rabbi Hirsch, “On Hebrew Instruction as Part of a General Education,” *ibid.*, pp. 188-202.
8. Note 5, above.
9. Cf. Rabbi Hirsch’s criticism of Rambam (note 5, above, pp. 264-5).
10. Consider, for example, the curriculum for his school (in note 3a, above), where he includes, in addition to the subjects listed here, also the language of the host country, but not its literature. A more detailed program was published in *Festschrift zur Jubilaeumsfeier des 50jaehrigen Bestehens der IRG* (Frankfurt A.M., 1903; p.34). There we read, as an item on the program of study: “Reading to the point of independent comprehension, by means of prosaic and poetic writings”—a clear reference to *belles lettres*. But again—just as in *Horeb*—for the sake of knowledge of the language, and not for any valuable message these writings might carry. In all his volu-

minous writings, I am aware of only a single reference (in note 6, above) to the study of non-Jewish literature by Jews as being desirable. Even there, the reference is to “the realm of knowledge,” rather than of ideas; evidently he intended scientific and historical writing, and not *belles lettres* and the humanities, dealing with aspirations and values. This is further confirmed by the fact that the numerous illustrations given by Rabbi Hirsch in this context are all taken from mathematics, mechanics, physics in general, geography, biology, and above all, world history. No example from non-Jewish humanities is given as capable of contributing to Torah life.

11. Rabbi Hirsch, “*Worte gesprochen bei der Schillerfeier 1859*,” *Ges. Schrift*, 6:308-321.
12. Cf. notes 1a and 3a (p. XLI), above.
13. Cf. note 3b, above.
14. Rabbi Hirsch, *Commentary Genesis 2:19*.
15. *Ges. Schrift*. 2:32.
16. In passages where the ultimately anticipated improvement of human morality is discussed—a context which virtually begs for a reference to the rising level of morality among the nations—there is no such reference. (Cf. note 5, VII; *Collected Writings* 6:240-255; *Commentary on Leviticus 26:42*. The quote is from note 27, below, p. 300, “On Anti-Semitism.”)
17. *Ges. Schrift*. 4:105. Engl.: *The Hirsch Haggadah*, Feldheim, 1988; pp. 269-270.
18. Concerning total dedication to Torah, see *Horeb*, sec. 4. Concerning the universality of professions, see *Commentary to Genesis 48:3*; *ibid.*, 17:6.
19. *Ges. Schrift*. 2:383. *Coll. Writings* 7:342.
20. *Commentary, Exodus 34:27*.
21. Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, *Likkutei Moharan* II, no. 24 (p.51).
22. *Deuteronomy 16:15*.
23. Introduction to *Horeb*.
24. *Hagiga* 13a.
25. For documentation, cf. my *Mul Etgarei haTekufa* (Jerusalem, 1993—Engl. edition, *Facing Current Challenges*, to be published); Talk 60.
26. Rabbi I. Grunfeld, Introduction to *Horeb*, p. cxxi.
27. *HaRav S.R. Hirsch, Mishnato veShitato*, Y. Emanuel, ed., Jerusalem (5722); “The Mitzvah of Milah” [from preparatory notes for *Horeb*], pp. 339-341.
28. Rabbi Shimon Schwab, personal communication.
29. Note 5, above, VII and *Commentary to Exodus 10:7*.
30. Note 6 above, p. 188, and Note 7, p. 203.
31. Cf. *BT Pesachim 87b*. Rabbi Hirsch’s references to this idea, see note 50 below, pp. 283-4.
32. *Siddur, amida-prayer, birkhat Hashiva*; p. 139.
33. Rabbi Y.Y. Weinberg, *Seridei Eish* 4:368-9.
34. Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, *Commentary to Exodus 25:12*. *Ibid.*, *Leviticus 18:24*.
35. *Ibid.*, *Genesis 12:6-7*.
36. *Ibid.*, *Numbers 13:33* (according to the opinion that the Deluge spared *Erets Yisrael*).
37. Quoted in note 27, above, pp. 285-7. *Shemesh Marpe*, Rabbi E.M. Klugman, editor (N.Y., 5752/1992); “Letters” no. 35.

