

19. The Legacy of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch זצ"ל

The relationship of Torah and secular knowledge is defined by Rav S. R. Hirsch, זצ"ל in his commentary on the *תורת כהנים* on ויקרא, chap. 18, posuk 5:

ללכת בהם עשם עיקר, ואל תעשם טפלה; ללכת בהם: שלא יהא משאך ומתנך אלא בהם, שלא תערב בהם דברים אחרים בעולם שלא תאמר למדתי חכמת ישראל אלמד חכמת אומות העולם, ת"ל ללכת בהם, אינך רשאי ליפטר מתוכן. i.e. "ללכת בהם", in them is the whole purpose of your life to be, they are to form the whole principle of your life, the absolute, not just accepted with conditions as being secondary; your whole spiritual acceptance and activity is to occupy itself solely with them so that you never introduce and mix alien matters with them, that you do not say: "now I have studied Jewish wisdom, I will go and study the wisdom of other nations", that is why it says *ללכת בהם*, "thou mayest not depart from their sphere". If we understand these sentences of the *תורת כהנים* aright, then the sentence which stands at their head: *ללכת בהם עשם עיקר ואל תעשם טפלה* forewarns one not to take the following sentences to mean that one is completely to

ignore and remain in ignorance of all knowledge and science which has been gained and nurtured by non-Jewish sources or which have no direct bearing on the knowledge to be gained by the study of the Torah. Inasmuch as what is commanded is: *עשם עיקר ואל תעשם טפלה* the permission to occupy oneself also with other spheres of knowledge is assumed. Only, the knowledge of the Torah and the understanding we derive from it is to be our principal concern and to be regarded as having been given to us as the absolute and firmly established Truth. Only as accessory knowledge and in as far as they serve to truly help the study of the Torah and are subordinated as the *טפלה* to the *עיקר*, are they to be studied. But the Torah and all its teachings must always remain that which we have received from Above and must be the yardstick by which we measure all the results obtained by other spheres of learning. Only that which is in accordance with the Truths of the Torah can remain true for us. All that we accept intellectually as well as all our actions must always be considered from the point of view of the Torah and be within the lines of the doctrines it teaches, so that we only accept and adopt that which is in accordance with them, and do not adulterate the knowledge we draw out of the Torah with ideas which have developed from other and strange premises. We are not to consider Torah-knowledge as being the same as other knowledge; so that the Torah is for us only another branch of all other knowledge; that we have a Jewish knowledge, have Jewish Truths, but that there are also, with equal importance and having equal authority, non-Jewish knowledge and non-Jewish truths; and after we imagine we have exhaustively absorbed the Jewish thoughts we turn with the same mind to get hold of the non-Jewish ones, and so, placing in our minds and feelings one teaching next to the other, one Truth next to the other, and lacking complete conviction of either, surely go to spiritual and moral ruin in discordant teachings and opinions. But as surely as the Torah comes from G-d, and all other knowledge and wisdom which have been found by Man only

consist of the results of Man's limited insight into the actual nature of things, so sure is it to us, that for us there is only one teaching, knowledge and truth by which all else must be measured, and all other have only conditional acceptance and can only have value in conformance with it. So that when we study and occupy ourselves with other spheres of knowledge we still never leave the basis and aims of the Torah, to which alone all our intellectual work is dedicated *and from which אינך רשאי ליפטר מחובך*.

Rav Hirsch is usually accepted as the exponent of the Torah im Derech Eretz philosophy. This principle is explained by his grandson, Dr. Isaac Breuer, as follows:

"He was strictly opposed to compromise or reconciliation, or even a synthesis: he demanded full and uncompromising rulership of the Torah. The Torah cannot endure co-rulership, far less tolerate it. As a true revolutionary he seized the liberalistic individual, the liberalistic, humanitarian ideal, liberalistic capitalism, and the human intellect, celebrating orgies in the liberalistic science, and dragged them as "circumstances", in the narrowest sense of the word, to the flaming fire of the Torah to be purified or, if need be, to be consumed. As a true revolutionary he solved the unbearable tension between the Torah and the new era which had dawned over the Jews of Western Europe. He invaded the new era with the weapons of the Torah, analyzed and dissected it down to its last ingredients, and then shaped and reformed it until it could be placed at the feet of the Torah, as new nourishment for the Divine fire. The proclamation of the rulership of the Torah over the new era was the historic achievement of Hirsch's life for his own contemporaries." -- ("Hirsch as a Guide to Jewish History" in Fundamentals of Judaism, published by Feldheim, 1949.) Unfortunately, the principle of Torah im Derech Eretz is grossly misunderstood by our contemporary Jewish orthodoxy. It does not mean that one who is a full-fledged citizen of hedonistic America and at the same time keeps the laws of the Torah, is a follower of Torah im Derech Eretz. Not to violate the laws of the Torah

certainly deserves praise and recognition but it is not an embodiment of the Hirschian philosophy.

Likewise, an academy dedicated to the study of science and philosophy, not in order to serve the understanding of Torah or to further the aims of the Torah but as the independent search by the human intellect to understand and control the world around -- even when added to a department of profound and very scholarly Torah studies -- this is not an outgrowth of the Torah im Derech Eretz Weltanschauung of Samson Raphael Hirsch.

Also, a secular university in Israel, albeit under skullcap auspices, complete with Judaic studies, is extremely remote from a Torah im Derech Eretz school even if it has established a "Samson Raphael Hirsch chair" as part of its academic set-up, something which almost borders on blasphemy.

The Orthodox professional who is not regularly "koveah ittim batorah", or otherwise lacks in the performance of mitzvohs, or who is immodest in dress or behavior, is not a follower of Samson Raphael Hirsch. From all of Hirsch's prolific writings, it becomes evident that his main concern was to establish the majesty of the Divine Word and the role of the Divine Will as revealed in the Torah, to dominate all the highways and by-ways of mundane life.

Those who abuse Torah im Derech Eretz as a "hetter" to lead a life of easygoing and lenient "Yiddishkeit" or those who consider the Hirschian idea as a compromise between the right and the left in Jewish thinking have distorted the meaning of the principle as laid down in the Mishne, Avos, Perek 2, 2: "Beautiful is the study of Torah combined with Derech Eretz for the effort to attain both makes one forget to commit sins". The Torah is not a mere branch of human knowledge, one discipline amongst many others, but rather must the Torah dominate all secular knowledge and all worldly activities. Equally so, the community of Israel, Klal Yisroel, as well as all Kehillos and organized communities,

be they local or international -- which are all segments of Klal Yisroel -- are not supposed to be mere branches of a neutral Israel but are to be totally independent. The Torah community is not beholden to any non-Torah community and it does not even recognize its authenticity. This is the essence of the Hirschian Austritt (separation) ideology. The so-called "Austritt" is the militant vigilance of the conscientious Jew defending the Torah community against all encroachments from the non-Torah powers that be. The "Austritt" and Torah im Derech Eretz go hand in hand, they form "one package", so to speak, and both these aspects of Hirschian thought have one aim: the total domination of Torah over all thinking and actions of individual and national life.

He who separates the rule of the Torah over all facets of the communal life of Klal Yisroel from the rule of the Torah over all human knowledge, in short, he who separates the "Austritt" from Torah im Derech Eretz, renders a disservice to both. Instead of becoming an inspiration to serve G-d in the spirit of *בכל דרכיך דעהו*, Torah im Derech Eretz is reduced to become an excuse for being "modern but frum", an excuse for the cultural assimilation which plagues the modern Orthodox Jew who considers this world a kosher pleasure cruise eventually resulting in all the sorry hangovers of our age.

Let us therefore beware of some common misunderstandings. The motto does not have its accent on the last word but on the first word. It is TORAH -- underscored for double emphasis -- with Derech Eretz.

Furthermore, the leit-motif is neither Torah and Derech Eretz nor Torah U'Madov -- the two are not equal partners -- nor must it be twisted around into Derech Eretz plus Torah. It is neither a synthesis of Torah with assimilation nor a bloodless orthopraxy blended with earthbound Americanism.

It is none of these.

It is Torah im Derech Eretz. It means G-d's Torah in its totality, utilizing Derech Eretz as the means to bring about

the Torah's full realization.

It means: Torah as a Divine nourishment and the human Derech Eretz as the aromatic ingredient to bring out the Torah's intrinsic flavor to its most perfect bloom.

There are two schools of thought and they are both legitimate. One is "Torah Only" and the other is Torah im Derech Eretz. All Torah-conscious Jews work for the same goal. There are various methods and various avenues of approach. They all lead up to the ultimate end of:

"יתגדל ויתקדש שמי' רבה"