

# Eretz Yisroel, Zionism and Medinas Yisroel in the Philosophy of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

## INTRODUCTION

**T**his past year marked the 100th anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. He left a large legacy of teachings, enshrined in his *seforim* and writings, and the steadily increasing demand for his works, in various languages, is eloquent witness to their continued relevance and the importance of his teachings as a guide for our times. Indeed, anyone studying his works, even those which addressed events of his times, often finds it difficult to believe that they were written 100-150 years ago in a radically different time and milieu.

Yet this does not mean that they have always been clearly understood and taken to heart. On the contrary, both followers and opponents of his teachings have often chosen to

interpret his thought in accordance with their particular predilections, to ignore his basic approach to Torah life and the central theme of his life and works or to simply sidestep what he had to say on the issue at hand—and the more his ideas dealt with burning issues of the day, the greater this temptation proved to be.

*Eretz Yisroel* and, in particular, *Medinas Yisroel* are today in the center of our concerns, and although he lived over a century ago, Rav Hirsch addressed himself to these topics on many occasions. There is a great need, then, to examine his writings and to come to a clear understanding of what he meant to teach us.

Before examining his observations on the subject, however, some introductory remarks are called for concerning his teachings in general, since his views on *Eretz Yisroel* are a direct and logical outgrowth of his basic philosophy. The central theme of Rav Hirsch's life and teachings was a profound and all-consuming *Yiras Shomayim*. Every line of his

writings proclaims the most intense desire to do the will of G-d, and to subordinate all aspects of life to it.

The mention of Rav Hirsch's name almost inevitably brings to mind the slogan "*Torah Im Derech Eretz*." In the first place, it defined his educational system: Torah must be our central concern, but general knowledge (*Derech Eretz*) has a valid role to play in the service of Torah, as an aid in molding the world according to G-d's will. It was this principle—that man's task is *לחקך עולם במלכות ש-די*, to bring *everything* in this world under G-d's rule—that was the root of Rav Hirsch's teachings; not only his educational views, but his teachings on all other subjects expressed his conviction that Jews have to be uncompromisingly dedicated to this goal, in their individual lives as well as in their communal and material endeavors. There exists only one absolute and constant yardstick against which all knowledge and human endeavor must be measured and judged, and that is the Divine Torah.<sup>1</sup>

**Eliyahu Meir Klugman**, a direct descendant of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, lives in Jerusalem and is currently preparing for publication of a *sefer* of *She'eilos Uteshuvas v'Chiddushim* of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch.



**COMMUNITY**

**T**he communal task imposed by G-d upon the Jewish people has its roots in our understanding of world history, as Rav Hirsch points out in the *Nineteen Letters*: since mankind failed in its earliest history to abide by G-d's will, one nation had to be chosen to carry through all generations the message of what G-d wants from man. To carry out this task, the Jewish people was created in Egypt and the desert, with the Torah as its national bond. Unlike other nations, it did not grow into nationhood by developing its own land and state—and it did not receive land and state as a prerequisite for its existence.<sup>2</sup> Existence, survival, and prosperity are ordained by G-d, and are in no way dependent on national resources and political and military might. "The Torah, the fulfillment of G-d's will was to be its soil, its basis and its purpose. Israel's existence as a nation, therefore, was neither dependent upon, nor conditioned by transitory things, but eternal as the spirit, as the soul and as the Word of the Eternal."<sup>3</sup>

"It was as a people that Israel was to demonstrate to the other nations that to dedicate oneself to the fulfillment of G-d's will is equivalent to the attainment of any happiness that man can wish for, that this sacred resolve is sufficient to give stability and security to human existence. It received, therefore, the gifts of a land and of statehood, not, however, as an end unto itself, but solely as a means for carrying out the Torah. Whether or not Israel would possess and retain its land, therefore, depended upon whether or not it would fulfill the demands of the Torah."<sup>4</sup>

Hence, when they failed in this task, they were exiled מפני חטאינו גלינו מארצנו. In their lands of dispersion, the local communities had to become the guardians of their Jewish identity, until they would once again, and hopefully very soon, merit regaining the Holy Land through their loyalty to the Torah. From this understanding of the

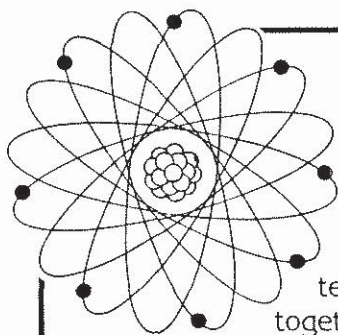
nature and task of Jewish nationhood, flowed Rav Hirsch's attitude both toward the *gulus* communities, the *Kehillos*, and toward the efforts that began in his last years to create a national home in *Eretz Yisroel*.

**NATURE OF A KEHILLA**

**I**t is a common but utterly fallacious view that Rav Hirsch called on Orthodox Jews to leave the local Jewish communities ("Austritt") because he believed that Torah Jews should segregate themselves. In fact, he did not object to

non-observant Jews joining his newly created *Kehilla* as long as they respected its strict Torah standards.<sup>5</sup> What, then, was the issue? *Kehillos* had always been built on the basis of Torah, guided by their *Rabbonim* as described in his essay on the role of the *Kehilla*<sup>6</sup> The *Kehillos*, as they always existed, were the guardians of the spirit and vision of the Jewish people while they were in exile and, hopefully, the means of preparing it for the *ge'ula*. With the rise of the Reform movement, however, many German *Kehillos* were taken over by the Reformers who proceeded to do

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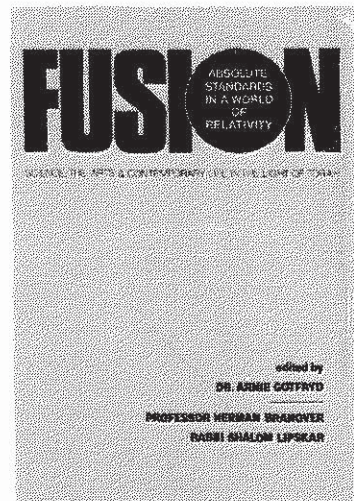


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away with Torah institutions and to "reform" the synagogues. Other *Kehillos* "impartially" provided equal recognition and support to both the Reform rabbis and *Rabbonim*, Temples and *Batei Knesses*. Rav Hirsch (anticipating by a hundred years the famous *psak din* on this subject issued in America in 1956) stressed that an organization not based on Torah, or one giving equal validity to Reform and Torah, has no Jewish legitimacy, and cannot claim to be a *Kehilla*. Membership in such a *Kehilla* not only violates the prohibition against joining with *minim* and *apikorsim* (*Avoda Zara* 17a and 27b) but also constitutes a *Chillul Hashem* of the greatest magnitude, since it is tantamount to an admission that Torah Judaism is not the only valid form of *Yiddishkeit*.<sup>7</sup> Since there was a law in Prussia that every Jew was required to be a dues-paying member of the local Jewish community (whatever its religious orientation), Rabbi Hirsch led the successful battle for a revision of the law (finally passed in 1876), granting every Jew the right to leave a community that was Jewish in name only, and to help set up a legitimate Torah *Kehilla*; and he bitterly fought to obtain acceptance of his *psak*.

This affirmation of Torah as the governing principle of Jewish communal life was not limited to the community structure. Rav Hirsch made it very clear that the same policy had to be followed on the national level, in respect to any Jewish organizations concerned with religious matters or speaking for the Jewish people as a whole. The nineteenth century saw the rise of international Jewish agencies, notably the Alliance Israelite Universelle. Rav Hirsch was invited to become a founding member but refused—and in a letter to Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer (Dec. 15, 1872) he stressed that "I cannot see at all how someone with a straightforward Jewish outlook can join an organization founded for Jewish purposes, whose founder and director is totally estranged from what

is truly *Das Moshe veYisroel*. . . . And it seems to me that if ever there was a period in need of clear thinking, i.e. clarity of pure *emuna* for every individual, that would be our poor and weak age."<sup>8</sup> Hence he founded in 1886 the Free Association for Torah-True Jews—the fore-runner of Agudath Israel<sup>9</sup>—for this very reason; so that Jews would not have to depend on non-religious organizations to represent their interests.

## THE RETURN TO ZION

**I**t is therefore not surprising that Rav Hirsch reacted with the same clarity of thought when the first stirrings of modern Zionism appeared on the Jewish scene. His sense of the mission and duty of the Torah nation dictated his reaction to the rise of secular Jewish nationalism—and to religious Zionism, as well. Actually, Rav Hirsch had put his thoughts on this subject on paper well before the new movements bestirred themselves. In 1836 he published *The Nineteen Letters*, and in 1837, *Horeb*. They (as well as his Commentary to the *Chumash*) breathe his love and dedication to the Jewish people, his sense of the uniqueness of the Holy Land and the pain of our exile. In clear words, he spelled out that *golus* was the result of our failings and that it could only be ended by our return to Torah. In a later essay he wrote about the Reform Rabbi of a small town who refused to mourn our exile on *Tisha B'Av* because he felt that he was at home in Germany; and Rav Hirsch commented that if the deliverance that Jews always hoped for merely meant return to a small Levantine state—like all other states—it was indeed not worth longing for. What we have always been looking for is the spiritual regeneration as the result of which we will return to Zion to dwell under the wings of the *Shechina*.<sup>10</sup>

Material so far mostly unpublished—personal correspondence as well as articles in publications of that time—strikingly illuminates



how Rav Hirsch applied these principles to the issues of his time<sup>11</sup>. The material before us shows Rabbi S. R. Hirsch's deep concern with the well-being of the Jewish inhabitants of *Eretz Yisroel*, the provision of financial support, the creation of a hospital, etc. He warmly supported the efforts to create agricultural settlements where the colonists could earn a livelihood; thus, in 1883 he issued an urgent appeal for support of the new and struggling community of Petach Tikva, stressing that it would be built upon strictly Torah lines and provide all the religious services needed. In 1885, the monthly *Jeshurun*, which he had founded, published an article in favor of the *Ezra* organization and its efforts to help establish religious agricultural settlements in Palestine; it proudly reported that eight had already been established. Rav Hirsch, it must moreover be noted, was deeply involved in helping Russian Jewry, which lived under the dual threats of pogroms and starvation. About this situation, he was in constant touch with Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor, and considered Palestine an ideal refuge for Russian immigrants.<sup>12</sup>

Why, then, did he totally reject the efforts of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalisher, one of the central figures of the *Chibas Zion* movement? In the early 1860's, Rav Kalisher sought—directly and through intermediaries—to enlist Rav Hirsch to join him in leading the movement and considered him an excellent prospect for supporting his efforts to solve the Jewish problem and bring the *ge'ula* through ingathering the Jewish people on the holy soil of the Promised Land and its rebuilding. Yet he was rebuffed every time. In a letter to R' Yaakov Lipschutz<sup>13</sup> in 1886, Rav Hirsch reported that Rav Kalisher had finally reproached him that he was delaying the *ge'ula*, and that, in response, he had asked him to leave him alone, since "that which they considered a great *mitzva* is in my eyes no small *aveira*."<sup>14</sup> In a previously unknown letter to Rav Kalisher,<sup>15</sup> Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch eloquently states the reasons

for his attitude, and it is as relevant today as when it was written 125 years ago. There were four issues that motivated him.

(1) First and foremost, he stresses that "our obligation is only to follow in the well-trodden paths of our ancestors and early leaders who only held before our eyes the need to be *Chareidim* with all our might, to mend our ways according to the Torah, before our G-d, to remove obstacles from our midst, and to look forward to the *ge'ula* every day if we but hearken to his voice. They never imposed upon us an obligation to clear the way for the *ge'ula* by strengthening and repairing the Holy Land, but by strengthening and repairing our hearts and deeds, in order to be redeemed." (In fact, in a letter to Dr. Luria, of Frankfurt D'Oder, Rav Hirsch expressed the fear that the movement to settle *Eretz Yisroel* would actually keep people from doing *teshuva*.<sup>16</sup> Those aware of the confusion of the minds

that Zionism subsequently created in *Klal Yisroel*, even among Torah Jews, will surely appreciate the utter clarity of Rav Hirsch's vision.)

(2) Rav Hirsch put great emphasis on the warnings of our sages against




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the efforts to bring the *ge'ula* and *Moshiach* by any means other than spiritual regeneration and Divine intervention. The *Gemora* (*Kesubos* 111a) states that G-d imposed three vows (1) *shelo yaalu bachoma*—that *Klal Yisroel* should not regain *Eretz Yisroel* by themselves, (2) *shelo yimredu b'umos*—that they should not be disloyal to the nations, and (3) the nations were enjoined not to overly subjugate *Yisroel*.

Rav Hirsch reiterated these prohibitions on many occasions. He mentions them twice in the *Horeb*<sup>17</sup>, refers to them in his first work, *The Nineteen Letters*<sup>18</sup>, stresses them again in the *Chumush*<sup>19</sup>, and mentions them twice in the Commentary to the *Siddur*<sup>20</sup> the last work to flow from his pen before his passing in 1888, and written at a time when the Zionist movement was already gaining momentum.

"It became essential that the Jewish people be reminded for all times of another important fact: namely, that *Yisroel* must never again attempt to restore its national independence by its own power; it was to entrust its future as a nation solely to Divine Providence."<sup>21</sup>

"But such a reunion [from the *golus*] cannot be brought about by human action or even only through the intermediary of human effort. We must wait for G-d himself to sound the shofar."<sup>22</sup>

(3) Rav Hirsch proceeds in the letter to Rav Kalisher to question "how one can see the beginnings of the *ge'ula* in the fact . . . that a few Jews [who are] far from the ways of Torah and *mitzvos* and are from the new type of those who have cast off the yoke of Judaism, have become prominent in the eyes of the government."<sup>23</sup>

In addition, he states that he "absolutely cannot see nor even imagine that *Hashem* should choose non-religious people as his messengers [to bring the *ge'ula*]." We know, of course, that Rav Hirsch prohibited being partners with such men in the leadership of *Klal Yisroel* (the *Austritt* principle).<sup>24</sup>

(4) Moreover, he expressed reservations from the practical angle:

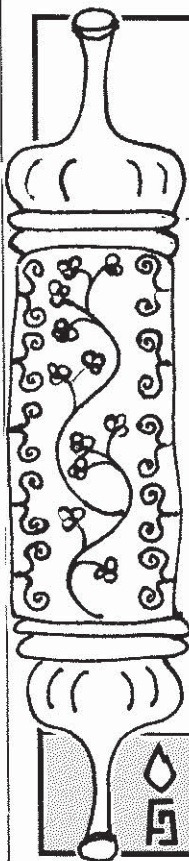
"While I see in the development of agriculture a good way to reduce the poverty and deprivation of our brethren in the land of our fathers, . . . the worry does not leave me that it will be another stumbling block in the Holy Land by increasing *Chillul Shabbos* and the violation of the *mitzvos hateluyos baaretz*. . . . May G-d speedily send Eliyahu, the Angel of the Covenant, as He promised, to clear the way for *Moshiach* and to turn all our hearts to our Father in Heaven, and may He speed our redemption and the salvation of our souls."

In an essay published at the very time that he was being pressured by Rav Kalisher, Rav Hirsch had written in the same spirit:

"The fact that the future of both Israel and mankind will culminate in the achievement of Israel's mission as the nation of priests of G-d's Torah serves to stress the certainty that the preparation for that future

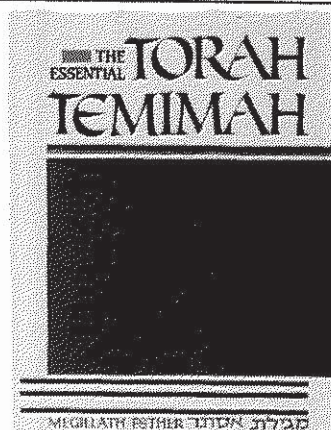
requires a further and deeper knowledge and an even more faithful and fuller observance of the Torah. Only then will we render ourselves worthy of the *ge'ula*. This fact condemns the recent efforts of so-called Reform endeavors who would like to antiquate the Torah on the one hand, as well as all endeavors to convince us that the *ge'ula* will be hastened by taking physical possession of the Holy Land and by the reclamation and cultivation of its soil."<sup>25</sup>

If the *ge'ula* could only be attained through loyalty to Torah, through recognition of the Torah as the bond uniting the Jewish nation, through an unequivocal commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, and through leaders inculcating this spirit—efforts to bring the *ge'ula* through purely political and economic endeavors could only serve to distract from the real task and therefore impede rather than further the coming of *Moshiach*.



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## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

**W**hat does all this mean for our situation today? Has it all been made irrelevant by the fact that a state has come into existence? Most certainly not. The view that one holds about the desirability or permissibility of seeking a Jewish state surely must affect the way one relates to it once it exists. It has been argued that since the United Nations resolution of 1947, one can no longer object to the establishment of a Jewish State in *Eretz Yisroel* as being a "rebellion against the nations." However, even if it were so, this does not affect Rav Hirsch's other concerns.

It has been argued that with a Jewish State in existence, *Torah Im Derech Eretz*—the conviction that all existing worldly conditions should be brought under the direction of Torah—would dictate a full acceptance of this State and an effort to bend it in all its dimensions to the will of the Torah. But this argument totally ignores Rav Hirsch's "Austritt" principle, his

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emphasis that the communal and material life of the Jew can legitimately only be organized purely on a Torah basis. Not only can the *ge'ula* not be brought in any other way, but any effort to organize the Jewish people in any other manner is illegitimate. The present State's political and judicial foundations—"a State not of the Torah but of the Law," as defined by the *Knesset* and the courts, in Ben-Gurion's words—are those of a state like all modern states, a State of Jews but not a Jewish State. Almost prophetically, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote in 1855 about just such a state:

"The modern view is that the Jewish State, both of the past and

of the future, is to be regarded as belonging to the same class as all other political phenomena. It has lost all consciousness of the unique nature of the Jewish State and its differences from all other states. In that state, too, it sees only an institution in which the development of the political elements mentioned above is the goal to which everything else including Temple (*Beis Hamikdash*) and Torah is to be subordinated as mere means and instruments. . . .

"But this modern view is just—modern. It is not the old Jewish view. It is in fact un-Jewish and untrue. . . .

"It is for this *galus haShechina*, this Exile of the Majesty of G-d, as our ancestors with true insight called it, it is for this sad disfigurement of the Torah that Jewish tears are shed and Jewish hearts grieve. Not for his own *galus* but for the *galus* of the Torah does the Jew mourn. And must this mourning die away, must this sorrow disappear, must these tears dry up, if the nations become more humane and just, if they loosen the chains on the hands and feet of *galus*-weary Israel, and an emancipated Israel steps into the company of non-Jewish states as a fully privileged member? Will the Torah be any the less in exile for this? Will the *galus* of the Majesty of G-d be brought to an end by this? Will the Torah have found its own soil again, will it be more at home on earth, will it now strike deeper roots and will it put forth blossoms and bring to openness all the fruits of blessing and salvation for which it should serve as the everlasting tree of life? Or has it to endure new and harder trials, is it faced with new *galus* sufferings, is it threatened with a new and more painful and bitter exile?"<sup>26</sup>

So where does this leave us today? Let us be clear about it. It has absolutely no bearing on our relationship to the Holy Land and the *mitzva* of *Yishuv Eretz Yisroel*, nor on our relationship to our fellow Jews living there. We must do everything we can to help assure the welfare and security of the *yishuv*

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in *Eretz Yisroel*. We must rejoice with the flowering of Torah in *Eretz Yisroel*, and do everything in our power to further it. We must do whatever is possible to further *mitzva* observance and prevent desecration of the Holy Land.

But our relationship to the State *qua* state is a different matter. As Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל often emphasized, the establishment of *Medinas Yisroel* has led to some form of Jewish identity for many individuals, in all parts of the world, who are otherwise totally estranged from the Jewish People. It has enabled every Jew to come and live on the soil of the Holy Land. It has seen an extraordinary flowering of Torah studying and Torah institutions. And it has extended recognition—albeit imperfectly—to such fundamentals of Judaism as *Shabbos* and halachic marital status; we certainly must work within the State to further the true interests of the Jewish People.

Yet, after all has been said, *Medinas Yisroel* is a modern, secular, parliamentary state. Clearly, it is not the Jewish State, projected by our prophets, for which we have been taught to yearn (as Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch so lucidly explains), and that would express our national identity as the *Am HaTorah* and the beginnings of the Messianic Redemption.

It follows clearly from Rav Hirsch's teachings, then, that we cannot embrace it in its present form with any enthusiasm. Rather it can only be viewed as a political fact and we must work within it to further the true interests of the Jewish people, the *Am Hatorah*, as we would in any political setting in which we find ourselves<sup>27</sup>—but we cannot recognize it as an expression of the Jewish national identity and the coming of *Moshiach*. ■

#### Footnotes

1. See Hirsch commentary to *Vayikra* 18:4.
2. *The Nineteen Letters*, seventh letter, ninth letter.
3. *ibid* eighth letter.
4. *ibid*.
5. To be a member of Rav Hirsch's *kehilla* one was required to be circumcised and not intermarried. To be an officer, one was required to be a *Shomer Torah u'mitzvos*.

6. *Judaism Eternal* Vol II "Jewish Communal Life."
7. Rav Hirsch's lengthy exposition of this entire subject will be published shortly in Vol VI of the *Collected Writings*.
8. Published in *Hamaayan* 5714 (1), also in *Igros Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer*.
9. R'Jacob Rosenheim in his memoirs describes this connection at length.
10. *Vol I Av* (1).
11. The author is grateful to Prof. Mordechai Breuer for making available to me the Sanger collection, a treasure trove of authentic Hirschian thought, and for other assistance so graciously rendered.
12. Letter to his son-in-law, Michael Levi of London, *Hamaayan* 5716, (1).
13. Secretary to HaRav Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor of Kovna.
14. "As far as Rav Kalisher is concerned, I and those close to me know nothing. This is not surprising for I was absolutely opposed (*misnaged muchlat*) to Rav Kalisher זצ"ל in this matter. Three or four times he wrote me and sent me his writings and books and entreated me to stand at the head of his movement regarding *yishuv Eretz Yisroel* until in the end he wrote me and reproached me as if I were delaying the *ge'ula*. I requested that he leave me alone in this matter for that which they consider a big *mitzva* is in my eyes no small *aveira* and it is impossible for us to agree on this. I wrote him my reasons and only then did he leave me alone." *Machazikei Hadas*, Piatrikov 1907.
15. Sanger Collection Hebrew MS File VI No. 1.
16. Quoted by Rav Kalisher *ibid*.
17. *Altona* 1837, Eng. Edition P. 461, 145.

18. *Altona* 1836, Sixteenth letter.
19. Frankfurt 1878, *Devarim* 8, 10.
20. Frankfurt 1896, *Feldheim* ed. p. 138, 703. It is interesting to note that his thoughts on the matter changed not one iota for over half a century.
21. *Siddur* p. 703.
22. *ibid* p. 138.
23. A reference to Rav Z.H. Kalisher's view in his *sefer Drishas Zion* that the rise to prominence in gentile circles of such secular Jews as the Rothschilds of Paris and Adolph Cremieux of Paris (French statesman and diplomat, president of Alliance Universelle Israelite, whose children were baptized with his consent) was part of *Hashem's* plan for the ultimate *ge'ula*.
24. In a letter to A.Y. Levin in 1869 Rav Hirsch himself associates the *Austritt* the Chibas Zion movement: "About the purchase of land which you asked about, I will not conceal beneath my tongue that I am disgusted (*bachala nafshi*) with this whole matter. In my humble opinion nothing worthwhile and good for Torah and Judaism will grow from this. And it is not proper for *Yerei Hashem* to join together with the Kol Yisroel Chaveirim (Alliance Universelle Israelite) whose leaders' and directors' hearts are not faithful to *Hashem* and His Torah and are not faithful to His covenant." Sanger collection.
25. *Jeshurun* Vol 9, 1863—Elul 5623 reprinted in *Collected Writings* Vol IV p. 228. My thanks to Prof. Mordechai Breuer for giving me an exact translation from the German.
26. *Collected Writings* Vol I p 339, 345.
27. For a lucid exposition, see *Baayos Hazman* (pp. 14) of Horav Reuvain Grozovsky as to the approach to and relationship with the State.

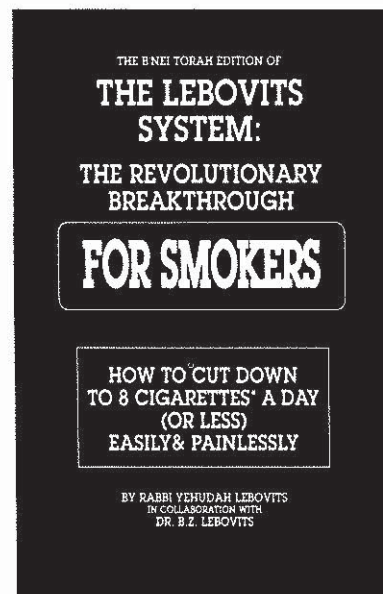
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