

The biography of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch touches upon the lives of two of my great-grandfathers both of whom came under his influence and worked with him in close association during the 37 years of Hirsch's fruitful and crowning achievements in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. My mother <sup>my</sup> used to recount that as a girl of barely 6 she remembered the commotion and tremendous excitement on the streets of Frankfurt stirred by the funeral of the famous and revered master in 1888. But in true movie-style (and I am sure you are all ardent visitors of the cinema) we shall resort to a flashback and return to my family remembrances towards the end.

Samson Raphael Hirsch was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1808. He came into the world at a time when Germany as well as the rest of Europe was still resounding to the emancipation call of the French revolution which had occurred less than 20 years before. The political upheaval was accompanied by a <sup>very</sup> profound re-evaluation of the cultural and spiritual standards that had previously existed. I am quoting from the writings of Jacob Breuer, a great-grandson of Hirsch: "The new liberalism unleashed the forces of capitalism. Science and research proclaimed the human mind to be the final authority. Individualism and humanism relegated religion to be on an equal footing with the secular in life. Simultaneously, under the impact of these new forces, the walls of the Ghetto began to break down.... Until then most of its inhabitants had taken little part in the cultural life of the outside world. The influx of the revolutionary ideas found many unprepared. The result was spiritual chaos of the first magnitude.

It was ~~into~~ into this period of so-called enlightenment (Haskalah) and against this sort of background that Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was born in - of all places - the city of Hamburg which was then one of the chief centers of the Reform movement. It is important to keep this <sup>in order</sup> in mind <sup>in order</sup> to properly appreciate the miraculous attainments of Hirsch's own "revolutionary" ideas which were destined to save Torah\*Judaism in Germany.

Hirsch grew up under the influence of the great Talmudic scholar Chacham Bernays who symbolized the new and ideal type of spiritual leader through his profound Torah learning on the one hand and a deep knowledge of modern philosophy and literature on

the other. He left a powerful and lasting impact on his great disciple.

In 1828 Hirsch left Hamburg to continue his talmudical studies at the Yeshiva of the great Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger in Mannheim from whom he subsequently received his S'michah. Hirsch's outstanding knowledge of Torah, Talmud and Codes was soon recognized and after completing his secular studies at the University of Bonn, he was called in 1830 to the post of Chief Rabbi of Oldenburg, in Northern Germany. This post offered to the 22 year old young rabbi was left vacant by Rabbi Nathan Adler also a disciple of Chacham Bernays. It is interesting to note from Dayan Grunfeld's book "Judaism Eternal" where he quotes an article by Cecil Roth, that Hirsch was then also applying for the Chief Rabbinate of England, a fact that is little known, apparently; and between him and Nathan Adler, <sup>who were</sup> both candidates, Adler won out. Cecil Roth writes: "It is interesting to speculate what difference might have resulted in English Jewry had Hirsch been appointed". So Rabbi Hirsch went to Oldenburg. Here, Jacob Breuer writes, "confusion and ignorance was prevalent in the minds of the contemporary generation which substituted the idea of a wrongly conceived emancipation for the truth of historical Judaism! Hirsch was not discouraged, though, He realized that this ignorance of true Torah values could only be remedied by re-introducing especially the young people to the old yet eternally new way of Torah-life (much as that need still exists today right here in America). In 1838, therefore, he ~~wrote~~ <sup>published</sup> his first important book called "HOREB" subtitled "Essays on Israel's Duties in the Diaspora" and addressed <sup>it</sup> primarily to "Israel's thinking young men and women" (so the dedication reads). This Sefer has just been published in excellent English translation and is available in all Jewish bookstores. All commercials aside, I can highly recommend it to all of you, You will find in it, very concisely and to the point, the answers, from a halochic point of view, to many of your most intimate questions, problems that bother an adolescent sometimes out of proportion. In 125 years, since its first publication, it has lost none of its tremendously value for every thinking Jew who wants to live a Torah-true life every day of the year.

At about the same time, although written 2 years earlier, Hirsch published his famous "NINETEEN LETTERS ON JUDAISM" in which, patterned after the "dialogue" method used by Yehuda Halevi in his "KUZARI", he defends traditional Judaism against all contemp-

orary critics by means of an imaginary correspondence between a young rabbi and philosopher "Naphtali" and a youthful intellectual "Benjamin".

In 1841 Hirsch changed positions again and assumed the office of the "Land Rabbinate of the Hanoverian Districts of Aurich and Osnabrueck" (so goes the official title!). He moved his residence to the city of Emden. Here he continued the fight against Reform and here he formulated the well-known principle of "TORAH IM DERECH ERETZ" which has almost become Hirsch's trademark and which has served as the rallying call for Torah-true Jews up to this very day. The principle (from a verse in Mishna Ovot), simply means in Hirsch's interpretation "The relationship between Torah and the civilization of a given epoch". The supremacy of Torah, yes, but not to the exclusion of a general education. We shall come back to this fundamental point in Hirsch's philosophy at the end of this talk, and this might also offer a fine springboard for your discussion from the floor.

In 1846 Samson Raphael Hirsch, now having attained the stature of a Torah leader of world-renown, accepted the Chief Rabbinate of the province of Moravia. This was part of the Austrian empire with Nikolsburg as its central community. There Hirsch occupied a position of great Jewish as well as political influence. But he was faced with two opposing factions. The "old school" as against the "maskilim", the enlightened. Everyone expected the author of HOREB and the NINETEEN LETTERS to reconcile the two camps. While each group claimed their rabbi as their own advocate, Hirsch maintained a Yeshiva to which students flocked from all parts of the province. He also took up the fight for the enslaved Jews of Austria and Hungary by becoming their vigorous spokesman as a member of the Austrian Parliament. His fiery language and brilliant rhetoric impressed the political leaders so that Jewish emancipation and equality before the law became a recognized state of affairs. Yet Hirsch knew only too well that the future of his people depended not on its political status but on its spiritual power as centralized in Kehiloth and Yeshivoth. And so, with the vision of a true genius and considering it a "divine call" he proceeded to "the most heroic deed in his life". He resigned from his high office as Chief Rabbi of Moravia and accepted a call from a mere handful of men( eleven to be exact) desperately clinging to Torah in the face of Reform's greatest triumph in the city of Frankfurt-am-Main.

One of my great-grandfathers, Emanuel Schwarzschild, was one of those eleven men in the Frankfurt of 1851. He published a little booklet which he called a "Frank Word". In it he pointed out that it was in those days considered disgraceful for an educated young man to admit to his friends that he still prayed with Tallis and Tephillin. Even Milah was attacked as a "barbaric rite" by the Society of the Friends of Reform". The study of Talmud was considered contemptible and those who still dared to continue their "Shiurim" in Mishna and Gemorah had to do so in attics for fear of the police, as some Jews had denounced the study of these "barbaric documents", as contrary to the integration of the Jew into citizenship of modern society".

Yet the eleven courageous young men received permission from the city administration to organize a private religious society known as "Religionsgesellschaft", within the framework of the community. Without much hope for success they turned to the famed Moravian Chief Rabbi, head of an entire network of Kehilloth, member of Parliament, and offered him the obscure position of rabbi in a small private society. Unexpectedly (and over the vigorous protests of his constituents) Hirsch accepted.

In Frankfurt Samson Raphael Hirsch found the fulfillment of his dreams. He plunged into his work with extraordinary vigor. The challenge was enormous, the opposition fierce. He began by founding a school (elementary and secondary) which was later to bear his name. "No hurry for a new synagogue", he wrote to my great-grandfather who acted as secretary for the group, "first we need a school to build up a new generation of knowledgeable and loyal Jews to whom Judaism is their life's purpose". He knew that the orthodox institutions had to be equipped in an esthetic manner in order to obtain the respect and recognition of the outside world. Consequently, the school building (which incidentally was partly financed by <sup>an</sup> ~~some of the~~ orthodox Barons Rothschild living in Frankfurt) became the most modern of its kind. Then a beautiful new synagogue edifice was erected. Shechita and Mikvah were restored, etc. The Kehillah grew in astonishing proportions. Yet Hirsch's fight for an independent autonomous orthodoxy was only beginning. At that time, the Government made it obligatory for every Jewish citizen to belong to a recognized Jewish community. To Hirsch it was unthinkable and a basic violation of his whole spiritual structure of independent Torah-life, that his Kehillah should rise within the framework of a Jewish community

which was dedicated to the Reform of Judaism. Almost from the first moment of his arrival in Frankfurt Hirsch fought for the principle of complete religious independence. His final triumph came in 1876 when the Prussian Parliament passed the Law of Secession ("Austritt") which guaranteed the full independence of orthodox Kehilloth from Reform congregations. Many Kehilloth in the Germany of that time followed Hirsch's example and founded "Austritt" congregations. However, there were some Torah authorities who engaged Hirsch in lengthy correspondence about the validity of his decision from a halochic point of view.

After his arrival in Frankfurt Hirsch resumed his ~~literary~~ literary work. In 1854 he founded "Jeshurun" a monthly magazine which was to inculcate the spirit of Judaism and Jewish life in home, community and school. Many of Hirsch's articles appearing in "Jeshurun" were later gathered in the six volumes of his "Collected Writings". In 1867 Hirsch began the publication of his monumental "Commentary on the Pentateuch" which appeared book by book and is now also available in English in its entirety. It was followed in 1882 by his "Commentary on the Psalms" and by the "Commentary on the Siddur" which was published posthumously in 1906.

Samson Raphael Hirsch died on the 27th of Teveth 5649 (1888). "Our generation," Jacob Breuer writes, "is confronted by similar problems in new clothing (and Rabbi Bulman will probably touch on those). More than ever, World Orthodoxy and Jewry beyond are in need of the guidance and teaching of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch."