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THE WORLD OF  
RABBI S. R. HIRSCH

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 THE   
**NINETEEN  
LETTERS**

About Judaism

newly translated by  
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revised and with a  
comprehensive commentary by  
**Joseph Elias**



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## List of Abbreviations

BR	<i>Bereishis Rabbah</i>
CA	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Avos</i>
CB	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Bereishis</i>
CBa	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Bamidbar</i>
CD	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Devarim</i>
CM	<i>Choshen Mishpat</i>
CS	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Shemos</i>
CSi	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to the <i>Siddur</i>
CT	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Tehillim</i>
CV	Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Commentary to <i>Vayikra</i>
CW	<i>Collected Writings of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch</i>
DR	<i>Devarim Rabbah</i>
EH	<i>Even ha-Ezer</i>
EIR	<i>Eichah Rabbah</i>
ER	<i>Esther Rabbah</i>
GS	<i>Gesammelte Schriften</i> , Rabbi S. R. Hirsch
IA	<i>Israelit</i> , Rabbi S. R. Hirsch anniversary issue 1908
IH	Introduction to the <i>Horeb</i> , by Dayan I. Grunfeld
JE	<i>Judaism Eternal</i> by Dayan I. Grunfeld
LHL	<i>Living Hirschian Legacy</i> , by K'hal Adath Jeshurun, 1988
MVS	<i>Ha-Rav S. R. Hirsch, Mishnaso v' Shitaso</i> , ed. Yonah Emanuel
NZ	<i>Nachalas Zvi</i> , periodical published by the Rabbiner Hirsch Gesellschaft, Frankfurt, 1930-38
OC	<i>Orach Chayim</i>
SR	<i>Shemos Rabbah</i>
VR	<i>Vayikra Rabbah</i>
WM	<i>From the Wisdom of Mishle</i> , by Rabbi S. R. Hirsch
YD	<i>Yoreh De'ah</i>

## *Synopsis of the Ninth Letter*

Yisrael's unity and strength lay in the Torah and God's protection. When the Jewish people began to rely on the power and wealth of its state, it lost its statehood and land. Its survival in exile was to demonstrate once again that it existed solely through God's providence.

In preparation for the long exile, the Jewish people was once more reunited during the Second Temple period, when the bonds of Torah were tightened. This period also witnessed the rise of Christianity, which, with Islam, spread at least some of the Torah's teachings among the nations.

The Jews were loyal to their spiritual ideals, however much they suffered in exile. Now that they are gaining full civil rights, they must persevere in teaching the nations how to live by love and justice.

# The Ninth Letter

## EXILE

Only for a short time did Yisrael attain its ideal, the fulfillment of its mission amidst prosperity. Moshe, its first leader, had already prophetically foretold that Yisrael would forget God while living on His soil and, led astray by the nations and its own prosperity, would cling to its wealth and pleasures and forget its true task.<sup>1</sup> Thus there came the time when the people of Yisrael would cause the Prophet to lament: “The number<sup>2</sup> of your cities has become your god, O Yehudah.”<sup>a</sup> Hence Yisrael had to be deprived of prosperity, wealth and land, which had led it astray. It had to leave the soil on which it had enjoyed happiness and which had made it arrogantly forsake its duty; it could salvage nothing but the life-spark of its existence: the Torah. From now on, the only bond that would unite Yisrael would be God and its calling—a spiritual, and therefore indestructible, bond.

Thus Yisrael’s mission was, indeed, not rescinded when its statehood came to an end, for, after all, statehood had been meant only as a tool to further this mission. Rather, the ruin of the state was itself part and parcel of Yisrael’s destiny, which was to bring about the revelation of God and of man’s calling. In its dispersion, it was called upon merely to unveil a different facet<sup>3</sup> of the task that it was to fulfill. In fact, as a state Yisrael had committed no sins other than those evident among all the other nations; but that which could be tolerated in the case of

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<sup>a</sup> *Yirmeyah* 2:28.

other peoples could not be excused in Yisrael, for the entire purpose of its existence was to remain pure<sup>4</sup> of such aberrations, since Hashem was its God! The collapse of the state, then, served in its way to educate Yisrael just as much as its former prosperity had done; and its dispersion opened a new, great and far-flung field in which to carry out its mission.

Therefore, after a short time in exile, before Yisrael set out on its long journey through the ages and the nations, God gathered this people once more on its own soil—for a reunion,<sup>5</sup> as it were, in the parental home—to tie even more securely the spiritual bond of Torah that, thereafter, would alone join it together. On the eve of Yisrael's journey, it produced an offshoot<sup>6</sup> which had to become estranged from it in great measure, in order to bring to the world—sunk in idol worship, violence, immorality and the degradation of man—at least the tidings of the One Alone, of the brotherhood of all men and of man's superiority over the beast. It was to teach renunciation of the worship of wealth and pleasures, albeit not their use in the service of the One Alone. Together with a later offshoot, it represented a major step in bringing closer the goal of all history.

Then Yisrael was scattered throughout the wide world, among all the nations and regions, in order to accomplish its mission there. The Prophet's call reverberates: "Back to the wilderness."

Back to the wilderness; pave there the path of the Lord!  
 Make smooth in evening gloom a path for our God!  
 So that, when every valley will be lifted, and hill and mountain  
 are leveled,  
 And all the rough ground is smoothed and the ridges are made  
 even,  
 There will be revealed the glory of the Lord,  
 And all flesh shall see that the mouth of God has spoken.

[*Yeshayah* 40:3-5]

Indeed, in exile Yisrael accomplished its task better than during prosperity. *Galus* was meant, first and foremost, to

perfect Yisrael. After all, Yisrael had witnessed with its own eyes the ruin of all the power, all the glory and all the splendor which had dazzled it and which it had begun to idolize. Surely it would never again make wealth, power and grandeur the gods of its life. And so, without power, glory, splendor or, indeed, any means of support devised by man, it was sustained by its loyalty to the One Alone. The spirit and fulfillment of the Torah, the only treasure it had rescued, supported it and enabled it to live amidst suffering and agony, ruin and the blows of unrestrained, savage fanaticism.

All around it, other states, high and mighty in their human power, have disappeared from the earth, while Yisrael, devoid of might and majesty, has lived on through its loyalty to God and His Law. Could Yisrael fail, then, forever to venerate this one God as the only God in its life and to accept His Torah as its sole duty? Indeed, it proved that its training had not been in vain. A thousand times, fanatic fervor—defended in the name of violent delusions—opened before Yisrael the door to full earthly happiness if only, with one single word, it would deny the One Alone and express disloyalty to the Torah. But it always flung away this easy key—and instead bowed its neck to the executioner's blow. It scorned the lure of wealth and pleasure and, indeed, sacrificed its own scanty measure of happiness, the most precious treasures of life on earth—wives, children, parents, brothers and sisters, as well as the individual Jew's own life and possessions, and all earthly joys. On every page of history, Yisrael has inscribed with its lifeblood that it venerates and loves only One God and that there are human values more sublime than possessions and the gratification of one's desires.

Its affirmation of loyalty to God and the Torah has been sealed with more than its blood: the entire history of its *galus* constitutes one gigantic altar on which it sacrificed everything that men desire and love—for the sake of acknowledging God and His Laws. This altar has smoked in every part of the world

and among all nations. Is it conceivable that these nations learned nothing from all this? Could they fail<sup>7</sup> to recognize that the higher power preserving Yisrael throughout its experiences is the One Alone, and that the loyalty to Him demonstrated by Yisrael is the task of all humanity?

And now that this altar has stopped smoking? And the dispersed of Yisrael enjoy tolerance, protection and citizenship granted by the nations, and can develop their Jewish life in all its greatness? And Yisrael joins with those states that admitted it, to further their progress and welfare, as enjoined by our prophets? If now, surrounded by a materialistic and hedonistic society,<sup>8</sup> Yisrael were to conduct its life peacefully, in justice and lovingkindness; if all around it the generations were declining, through sensuality and debauchery, but the sons and daughters of Yisrael were to prosper in the youthful strength of pure morality and innocence; if everywhere else families no longer raised young people of purity and dedication to God, but every Jewish home were to be a temple of fear and love of God and trust in Him; if everywhere else all actions were inspired by the love of profit, physical gratification and selfishness, but every Jew, by his silent example, were a teacher of universal justice and love; if thus the dispersed of Yisrael were quietly to flourish as the priests of God and of true humanity—dear Benjamin, if only we lived up to what we are supposed to be, if only our lives were a perfect reflection of our Torah, what a mighty force this would be for reaching the ultimate goal of all human education! It would be more tranquil, but even loftier, more forceful and more effective than our tragic history of suffering and what it revealed about God and humanity. During the years of misery and contempt, our ideal could be attained only imperfectly; but when milder times beckon us to our goal—that every Jew and Jewess, through the example they provide in their own lives, should become priests of God and of genuine humanity—and this ideal and mission await us, can we still deplore our fate, dear Benjamin?

Keep yourselves pure—O ye that bear the weapons of the Lord!  
 For not in levity should you go forth, nor walk in carelessness,  
 For He that walks before you is the Lord, and your ingatherer is  
 the God of Yisrael.

Behold—only if my servant be wise  
 Will he be high and exalted and very great.  
 Even as many were amazed at thee, “Has not his appearance lost  
 all semblance of man

And his likeness all that is human!”  
 So will light come to many peoples,  
 And princes shall close their mouths,  
 For what was not told unto them they shall see,  
 And what they never heard they shall comprehend.

“Who would have believed our report,  
 The arm of the Lord, upon whom is it revealed?  
 He rises as a sapling before Him, and as a root from arid land.  
 He had neither form nor beauty that we should look upon him;  
 Nor comeliness that we should desire him.

He was despised and forsaken of men;  
 Delivered to sorrows, acquainted with sickness,  
 And when God hid His face from him, we despised him and  
 considered him not,

Yet 'twas but sickness from us he bore;  
 Pains we had inflicted were his burden.  
 And as for us—we deemed him touched by the finger of God,  
 Stricken by God and afflicted!

But he, though stricken through our sins,  
 Though crushed through our iniquities,  
 The bond of our peace he took upon him,  
 And in His congregation<sup>b</sup> there was healing for us.

We had all gone astray as sheep;  
 Each one had turned to his own way;  
 But the Lord afflicted only him—  
 Smote him for the sin of us all.  
 He was oppressed, was harshly persecuted,  
 Silently endured and opened not his mouth.  
 As a sheep to the slaughter he was led,  
 As a lamb before the shearers he remained dumb,

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<sup>b</sup> A wound is תַּבִּיחָה, not תְּבִיחָה.



Nor opened he his mouth.  
 Of kingly rule and judgeship was he deprived,  
 And his fate, who could tell it?  
 For he was cut off from the land of life,  
 Through the sin of the nations came affliction unto him.  
 The wicked brought him to the grave,  
 The arrogant and powerful were the instruments of his death,  
 Though violence he had never used  
 And deceit was not in his mouth.  
 But the Lord found His purpose in his affliction and sickness,  
 That if he should yield himself as an offering,  
 He should see posterity, prolong the days,  
 And the purpose of the Lord should be fulfilled through his hand.  
 Through suffering he should gain insight,  
 Should learn to be content,  
 And with his knowledge propagate the right,  
 And do My service unto the many whose sins he bore.  
 Therefore shall I give him a portion among the many,  
 With mighty ones his lot shall be,  
 Because he laid bare to death his soul,  
 And suffered himself to be counted with sinners,  
 Whereas he had only borne the sin of the many  
 And for sinners suffered himself to be stricken.”  
 Shout gladly, O barren one, that has never borne;  
 Break forth in gladsome shouting and rejoice,  
 Thou that has never known the pain of childbirth,  
 For more are the children of the desolate one  
 Than of her that has a husband, says the Lord.  
 Widen the space of thy tent,  
 The carpets of thy dwellings, let them expand,  
 Keep them not back;  
 Make long thy cords, thy pegs make firm,  
 For to the right and to the left shalt thou spread forth.  
 Nations shall join themselves to thy children,  
 And desolate cities will be inhabited.  
 Fear not, thou shalt not be put to shame,  
 Be not abashed, for thou hast no cause to grow pale,  
 For the shame of thy youth thou wilt forget,  
 The disgrace of thy widowhood no more remember.  
 For thy Lord and thy Creator, “Reconciler of All Contradictions”  
     is His Name,

And thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Yisrael—God of the whole earth is He now called!

For as a wife forsaken and sad the Lord recalls thee,  
“O spouse of youth, do not thou despise thyself,” says thy God.

For a short moment I forsook thee,

But with great compassion I take thee back.

In overwhelming wrath I hid My face for a moment from thee,

But with everlasting mercy I have compassion upon thee,

Says thy Redeemer, the Lord.

For as No’ach’s Flood is this to Me;

Even as I swore that No’ach’s Flood should no more come to pass on earth,

So have I sworn no more to be wroth with thee,

No more o’er thee My anger hot to pour.

Though the mountains should be moved,

And the hills be shaken,

My mercy from thee shall not be moved,

And My covenant of peace shall not be shaken,

Says He that has compassion with thee, the Lord.

O thou poor, storm-driven one, unconsoled,

Behold, in rare clay shall I set thy stones,

And establish thee in sapphires.

Of crystal shall I make thy windows,

And thy gates into flashing stones,

And all thy territory into stones of pleasantness.

And all thy children shall be disciples of the Lord,

And great, therefore, shall be the peace of thy children.

Only through righteousness canst thou be established.

Keep far from wrong, for thou needst not fear,

From terror, for it will not come nigh unto thee.

None shall fear aught but Me; who, therefore, among thee

Could fear that aught would befall thee?

Verily, I have created every artisan

That blows the coal in the fire

And brings forth a tool for his work;

I have created every destruction

That it may bring forth birth;

No weapon, formed against thee, shall succeed;

Every tongue that rises against thee in judgment thou shalt refute.

This is the inheritance of the servants of the Lord,

And of those whose righteousness is from Me, says the Lord.

Each one who thirsts, let him come to the water;  
 You that have no silver, come, buy and eat;  
 Come, buy without silver and without price  
 Wine that revives and milk that nourishes.  
 Why weigh you out silver and receive not bread,  
 Your earnings and receive no satisfaction?  
 Harken unto Me and eat that which is good,  
 And may your soul be delighted with abundance.  
 Incline your ear and come unto Me;  
 Hear, so that your soul may be quickened,  
 And I will make with you an eternal covenant,  
 The ever-faithful love of David.  
 For behold, I gave him as a witness for the peoples,  
 Communicating and enjoining duty to the nations.  
 Behold, a people which thou knowest not, thou wilt call,  
 And nations that know thee not unto thee will hasten,  
 For the sake of the Lord, thy God, the Holy One of Yisrael that  
 adorns thee.  
 Seek the Lord, the ever present;  
 Call upon Him, the ever near.  
 Let the passionate forsake his way,  
 And the man of violence his counsel,  
 And let him return to the Lord;  
 He will have compassion upon him;  
 Even to our God, for He forgives much.  
 Verily, My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
 And your ways are not My ways, says the Lord.  
 For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
 Thus are My ways high above your ways,  
 And My thoughts above your thoughts.  
 For as the rain and the snow fall from heaven  
 And return not thither again,  
 Until they have watered the earth and made it bear  
 And caused plants to spring forth;  
 Thus also My Word, which goes forth from My mouth,  
 Shall not return empty to Me;  
 But it carries out what I desired,  
 And accomplishes that for which I sent it.  
 For in joy shall you go forth, and in peace return,  
 Mountains and hills shall greet you with joyful shouting,  
 And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands;

Beneath the thorn-bush the cedar rises even now, and the myrtle  
 beneath the thistle,  
 And shall remain as glory to the Lord, reminder of hidden time;  
 Shall nevermore be uprooted.  
 Thus has the Lord said, Take heed of justice!  
 Practice righteousness! Then will My salvation soon come,  
 My righteousness then will soon be revealed.  
 Happy the man that practices this,  
 The son of Adam that holds fast to it.  
 He who keeps the Sabbath that he profane it not,  
 Keeps his hand that it do no evil.<sup>c</sup>  
 Neither should the son of the stranger that joins himself to the  
 Lord  
 Say, “Verily, the Lord will separate me from His people.”  
 Neither should the childless<sup>d</sup> speak,  
 “I am a dry tree!”  
 For thus says the Lord to the childless ones who keep My  
 Sabbaths,  
 Who choose what I desire and hold fast to My covenant,  
 “Verily, I shall give them in My house, within My walls,  
 A place and a name, better than sons and daughters;  
 I shall give him an everlasting name, which shall never be cut  
 off;  
 And the strangers who join themselves to the Lord,  
 To serve Him and to love the Name of the Lord,  
 To dedicate themselves to Him as servants.  
 Whosoever gives heed to the Sabbath, not to profane it,  
 Whosoever holds fast to My covenant,  
 I shall bring them all to My holy mountain,  
 I shall cause them all to rejoice in My house of prayer,  
 Their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be pleasing upon My  
 altar,  
 For My house—a house of prayer shall it be called for all the  
 nations. [Yeshayah 52:11 to 56:7]

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<sup>c</sup> Compare the idea of Shabbos in Letters Thirteen and Fifteen.

<sup>d</sup> The childless (and, above, the barren one) refers to Yisrael, whose achievements in history are not as clearly visible to the eye as are those of other nations.

## Editor's Notes to The Ninth Letter

**1. Forget its true task** Yisrael's failure was particularly reflected in the non-observance of *shemittah*. As pointed out previously (in L8n8), this *mitzvah* expresses the fact that *Eretz Yisrael* belongs to God ("for the land is Mine" [*Vayikra* 25:23]); that it was granted to the Jewish people only so that it would live a life of Torah ("He gave to them the lands of the nations...in order that they should guard His ordinances and observe His teachings" [*Tehillim* 105:44-45]); and that the Jews' material well-being on their soil would be assured if they fulfilled their task, but that if they failed to do so the land would revert to its Owner. Hence the non-observance of *shemittah* would necessarily bring about the exile of the Jewish people—and the Babylonian exile lasted exactly seventy years, the number of *shemittah* years that had not been observed during the preceding centuries.

Moreover, just as the people felt that the land was their very own, they felt the same way about their other possessions, including their Hebrew slaves, to whom they refused to grant freedom after six years, as the Torah requires. Hence, when the Babylonians were already at the gates of Jerusalem, the freeing of these slaves was made the test of whether the Jews were worthy to be saved from the hands of the enemy; and their failure to comply made the fall of the kingdom and the destruction of the Temple inevitable (*Yirmeyah* 34).

**2. The number** This verse is usually rendered: "Your gods are as many as the number of your cities." However, Rabbi S. R. Hirsch translates it literally to mean that the number of their cities—their power and prosperity—was their god, worshipped by them. Believing in its strength and the power of its hands, Yisrael had to be shown that prosperity is not assured by material resources and strength but only by Divine blessing, earned through righteous living. When this was not maintained, power and strength would not help and, in fact, would disappear. This was predicted in the two *tochachos*, admonitory sections, of the Torah (*Vayikra* 26 and *Devarim* 28) and was fully

realized in the history of the Jewish people.

**3. A different facet** In this letter, as well as in CD 4:26-27 and, at greater length, in *Horeb*, §236, Rabbi S. R. Hirsch points out that the dispersion of the Jews among the nations was not a rejection of God's people, as Christianity argued, but was intended to serve a double purpose. First, as our Sages point out (*Gittin* 88a), the speedy removal of the people from *Eretz Yisrael* saved them from complete destruction: had they remained, their spiritual decline due to their reliance on power, which so tragically affected their political, social and religious life, would have reached a point of no return. The loss of their state and land made them fully aware of their dependence on God. Second, in preserving their spiritual heritage among the nations, they awakened and nurtured among these peoples seeds of a different way of looking at the world and living one's life. (In some of his writings, though not in CT, Rabbi S. R. Hirsch actually interprets *Tehillim* 106:35, "They mingled among the nations, and they learned their deeds," to have a twofold meaning: even though Jews tended to pick up alien ideas from their host nations, these nations also learned from the Jews.)

This positive aspect of *galus* was stressed by Rabbi S. R. Hirsch in many places (see CD 29:27 and 31:29, for instance), for it clearly imposed special obligations on every Jew within the non-Jewish world. He has been heavily criticized for putting forth this view. After all, it has been said, this was the view of the Reform movement, propounded to make existence in *galus* an ideal rather than a punishment and opening the door to assimilation. Yet this criticism of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch is totally unwarranted. The Reform movement saw in the dispersal of the Jews an ideal, replacing the longing for a return to Zion and the coming of the *Mashiach* with the utopian concept of world fraternization. Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, on the other hand, never viewed *galus* as the goal of history (see GS, V, 546-47); his writings constantly emphasize the Jews' prayers for the speedy coming of the *Mashiach* and the reunion of the Jewish people around the *Beis ha-Mikdash*.

Moreover, the idea of a positive reason for *galus* did not originate with Rabbi S. R. Hirsch: our Sages state (in *Pesachim* 87b) that "God exiled the Jews among the nations only so that they should gain converts"; the Maharsha explains that exile could not have been meant solely as a punishment for sins as other punishments were readily available, and, he notes, the Talmud therefore states that another pur-

pose of exile was “to spread faith among the nations of the world” (see also VR 6:5, and *Tanchuma, Devarim* 52). Similarly, *Ha’amek Davar* finds in *Bamidbar* 14:21 “a hint that the edict dispersing Yisrael among the nations actually brought about the revelation of God’s glory by the Jewish people (I have subsequently seen this explanation offered by our Sages in *Pesikta Zutresa*).” Indeed, the entire institution of a Chosen People was designed to bring about the recognition of God by the other nations (see L7n1). The two purposes of exile that are mentioned by Rabbi S. R. Hirsch were stated in almost the same words by Rabbenu Bachya (*Kad ha-Kemach*, the section on *Ge’ulah*): “The first is that the nations may learn thereby of the existence of God...and His providence over the affairs of men, and the second is that we may be cleansed of our sins....”

To the extent that the exile served to spread knowledge of God, it has been a positive step in world history; but, if the Jewish people had not sinned, the same objective could have been attained without the exile (see CD 28:37, the last sentence). Thus *galus*, far from being an ideal, must always be seen as a result of our sins. Moreover, the lesson that it was to teach the Jewish people about the vanity of power and possessions—thereby cleansing it of its sins—could be taught only through deprivation, pain and suffering, a fact that Rabbi S. R. Hirsch fully acknowledged (see CW, II, 426ff.). Not only can there be no freedom for us in exile (CSi, p. 138), no peace and normal life (CSi, p. 113), but there can be no full observance of the Torah even if we want it (CD 30:8-10) and no proper leadership; instead, there are corrosive influences which tend to lead us astray from the paths of Jewish truths (CSi, p. 139).

Even if our material and social conditions improve and we achieve full rights in the countries of our dispersion, we cannot rejoice, for this was not what we mourned for in our exile in the first place (see L8n8). What we looked for was spiritual rehabilitation, and that has actually become even more difficult in an age when it is so easy to assimilate to the non-Jewish world (JE, I, 126ff., reprinted in CW, I, 135ff.). This is, indeed, the most difficult stage of exile, and we have not so far passed this test (see n8, below, and L16n4). Indeed, were it not for the providential kindness of God Who does not reject us completely in exile, but sends us leaders who keep the spirit of Torah alive among us and in front of the nations, the purposes of exile would never be achieved (CW, II, 426-27). Our Sages actually suggest that, if the Jewish people does not deserve redemption from exile at an earlier

stage, it will be redeemed at a time previously set, when the redemption will be “forced,” so to speak (*Pesachim* 98a). The reason may be the desecration of God's Name among the nations that is inherent in the Jewish people being in exile and not living up to its task (see *Yechezkel*, with commentary by Rabbi Moshe Eisemann [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1980], 36:20).

**4. To remain pure** See L7n1 concerning the purpose of a Chosen People and the resultant stricter demands made on this people, as stressed by Amos (3:2).

**5. A reunion** Rabbi S. R. Hirsch offers here an interpretation of the period of the Second Temple which follows the approach of Abarbanel (*B'chukkosay* and *Ki-Savo*). This approach is based on the indications, given by *Chazal*, that the return from the Babylonian exile and the building of the Second Temple would have meant the final and permanent redemption if the Jews had merited it; but they did not, and, in consequence, the return from Babylonia constituted only an incomplete, interim reunion (see *Berachos* 4a, *Sanhedrin* 98b, and Rashi on *Yechezkel* 43:11). To Abarbanel, in effect, the first and second exile formed one long exile, only interrupted relatively briefly by the period of the Second Temple; and both *tochachos*, *B'chukkosay* and *Ki-Savo*, speak of this long exile. This is also the view of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch (CD 28:1 and *Horeb*, §306); and even the Ramban, who relates the two *tochachos* to the first and second exiles respectively, agrees that the period of the Second Temple represented an “incomplete redemption” (*Vayikra* 26:16). Indeed, it appears that the leaders of the people wanted to underline this fact in various ways: by not building the Second Temple according to the plans for the messianic Temple prescribed by *Yechezkel*; by not choosing rulers from the House of David to govern the nation; by using Aramaic as the common language, and using the names of the months that were brought from Babylonia (see *Emes l'Ya'akov* on *Shemos* 12:2; see also Rabbi A. Wolf, *Nevi'ei Emes*, pp. 179-181).

Since the Second Commonwealth did not turn out to be the final redemption, its purpose became the preparation of the Jewish people for the long exile ahead through the tightening of the bonds of Torah—and this was, indeed, what the Men of the Great Assembly and their successors did. “They were convinced that...their own era...was merely an introductory period to what was to follow....The precepts and the institutions which they established have prompted and preserved the