Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch in Perspective:  
Three Contexts

Introduction

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's role in modern Jewish life is usually viewed in one of two contexts: his significance as the formulator of a fundamental Torah-ideology which had and has a profound impact on the Torah-world; and his place in history as an uncompromising leader in the battle against Reform and the struggle to promote, especially among the young, the return to Torah-true observance.

In the first context, Rav Hirsch is commonly known as the proponent of חכם ויזר אליעזר, the oft-quoted and oft-misunderstood philosophy which proclaims the mastery of Torah over every aspect of life. Torah is timeless. It is applicable to every age, in every time and to every facet of what the world has to offer. Subject to the Torah, everything becomes ennobled through it. The Torah-Jew need not fear man's physical domination of Earth or his intellectual pursuits—as long as they are governed and guided by the Torah. חכם ויזר אליעזר is not a synthesis between Torah and the secular world—one complementing the other. Rather, it is the secular world serving as a supplement to the unique Torah. This ideology of חכם ויזר אליעזר as reflected throughout Rav Hirsch's Commentaries and writings, while emphasizing the primary role of Torah study, encourages those individuals who so desire to actively participate in every aspect of life and secular studies as long as this involvement reflects the role of Torah as the supreme calling of the Jew. This principle, accepted to a wide degree throughout the Torah-world, has enabled the more than five generations since Rav Hirsch's time to
actively participate as uncompromising in every field of endeavor to the point that they represent true קדושה השם נבירה בני תורה.

In the second context, Rav Hirsch is known as a leader who successfully built a Torah Kehilla out of the ruins of the Reform-decimated community in Frankfurt. He fought for the truth of the Torah against the Reform and devoted much of his energies to win back for Torah the estranged young men and women of our people. His *Nineteen Letters* and his masterpiece on the *Chorev*, are products of his efforts to present the Torah in a meaningful fashion to both the committed and uncompromised.

Rav Hirsch is known as an uncompromising leader who adhered to the concept of disassociation with any so-called “branch” of Judaism. There is only one Judaism and that is unadulterated, uncompromising, all-embracing Torah-Judaism. Any association with a non-Orthodox organization grants sanction to other than Torah-Judaism. Hence Rav Hirsch engaged in his epic struggle for an independent Orthodoxy which was commonly known as the “Austritt” or secessionist movement. This concept was a forerunner for the eventual establishment of Agudath Israel and it has remained crucial in the ongoing struggle against Reform throughout the Jewish world, including the masses of today.

The absolute acceptance of the supremacy of Torah is the fundamental basis for both the Torah she Bais and the independent Orthodoxy movement. Thus, Rav Dr. Joseph Breuer used to say: “He who properly understands the Torah understands the ‘Austritt’—the principles are the same.”

These two concepts were translated by Rav Hirsch into reality in his model Kehilla and educational institutions in Frankfurt. He urged the development of independent Kehilloth encompassing every aspect of Jewish life. This type of Kehilla environment did and still does foster the enthusiastic commitment of its adherents to the ideal calling of our people. K’hal Adath Jeshurun and Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in New York are modeled in the very image of Rav Hirsch’s vision.

There is a third context in which Rav Hirsch must be understood. As the champion of and as a representative of the very essence of these roles was derived from his personal stature in Torah.

Rav Hirsch was a disciple of Rav I. Bernays and of Rav J. Ettinger, who gave him his Torah. In 1830, at the age of twenty wrote the *Nineteen Letters*. Rav of Emden and in Moravia, which resigned to accept duals in Frankfurt for thirty-seven years he was a thirteenth-century of the *Chorev*, have been prolific writings in *Collected Writings* of Jewish life. He was a knowledge and pers.

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at the age of twenty-two, he became the Rav of Oldenburg, where he wrote the Nineteen Letters and the Chorev. In 1841, he was appointed Rav of Emden and in 1846 he was named the Chief Rabbi of Nikolburg in Moravia, which was then known as an " awarded a coran of Judaism. uncompromising, non-Orthodox Hence Rav Hirsch espoused which movement. This was of Agudath Israel Reform Movement. the fundamental movement used to say: "stands the tall in his generation the aspect of foster the of our introduction. the very essence in Torah. Nikolburg and Oldenburg. In 1830,

The validity of his philosophy and his success as a leader are due to his unquestioned standing in the Torah world for his Torah knowledge and personal integrity.

In our times, when the challenge of scientific-technological developments constantly confronts us; when the challenge of establishing and maintaining Kehilloth, as well as the urgency to further vitalize Torah observance, is greater than ever; when the Reform continues to face us—the need for the teachings of Rav Hirsch is even greater than ever.

Thus, we present three articles* which analyze Rav Hirsch’s work from the standpoint of these afore-mentioned contexts:

Rav Hirsch—The Leader and Fighter
Rav Hirsch—The Gaon in Talmud and Mikra
Rav Hirsch—His Ideology.

We hope thereby to stimulate further the study of Rav Hirsch’s works, the understanding and dissemination of his philosophy, and the encouragement to continue his legacy.

ELLIOTT BONDI

* These articles are based on a series of lectures sponsored by K’hal Adath Jeshurun and the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation in 1985–6.