

GUARDIANS OF OUR  
HERITAGE

(1724-1953)

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utterance, all the Orthodox elements of Germany were not in entire agreement with Rabbi Hirsch. Among some of them, many of his practices, and his progressive system of education (of which more later) aroused wonderment. Rabbi Bamberger's view, however, deepened, sharpened, and perpetuated the rent among the Orthodox, a situation which Rabbi Hirsch saw in all its tragic implications. Rabbi Bamberger passed away a year after the incident, but in his name, the opponents of Rabbi Hirsch within the Orthodox group continued their battle. It is proper to emphasize that the former explicitly wrote that also for the future was it forbidden for the Torah-true members of the Reform community to look upon its council as the council of a Jewish community, and it was their duty to establish their own community council.

#### IX. "TORAH WITH DEREKH ERETZ"

Already in 1844 Hirsch proclaimed an educational system, the essence of which he summed up in the maxim of the Fathers: "*Torah with Derekh Eretz.*" The insistence upon the study of general sciences was no innovation among the Orthodox of Germany; Samson Raphael Hirsch's two most distinguished teachers, Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger and, particularly, Rabbi Isaac Bernays, had earlier affirmed it.

Samson Raphael Hirsch's innovation consisted in his establishment of the Orthodox school in Frankfort in which he concretized the system of education embodied in that dictum. In the achievement of this school he saw his life's accomplishment, no less than in his communal and literary achievements. To his qualities of leader and fighter which had been shown up to now, there was now added another one: that of the great teacher, adored and never forgotten by the thousands of his disciples, boys and girls. His community he served as rabbi and preacher, clear-purposed and inspiring enthusiasm, but to the school he was founder, teacher, principal, organizer, and supporter, all in one. From the day of its founding in 1853, to 1877, Hirsch himself directed the institution, together with all his other tasks and duties. He designed and implemented himself all educational and organizational tasks in the school, which has served as model to all others, combining Torah with *Derekh Eretz*. He had to do so much of the work himself because of a lack of teachers "who had a true under-

standing of Torah and secular studies", for there was no seminary to train such men.

The school project had to struggle at the outset not only against the wrath of the Reformists, but also against the lack of faith of the members of the Orthodox community, which prevented their sending their sons and daughters to his school. Hirsch had to gather the donations for the support of the institution, going from house to house; often was he obliged to plead with parents to entrust their children to him. He wrote expository and polemic articles, many writings on pedagogical subjects astonishingly in accord with the educational ideas of the Twentieth Century. He worked devotedly and ceaselessly to perfect the institution, eventually overcoming the lack of faith and frequent disparagement.

In his testament he wrote concerning his followers: "*which I took out of the hand of the seducers of the time with my sword and with my bow*"—this applies to thousands of his pupils, boys and girls.

One of them writes: "He conversed with us in our own language, took interest in every blow dealt us by pupils of the *Philantropin*, checked on the class of the stamps we exchanged, gave a rigorous examination to our footballs—in brief, he was our intimate." Another one relates: "He never raised his voice to a pupil. If he traveled to another city, he would say to him, 'Behave so that they will see you are a pupil of Rabbi Hirsch.' He influenced them by his personality; the look of his burning eyes was engraved deep in the memory of those he had educated."

His personal influence reached very far. A certain youth society that sent him its constitution, he urged to have its members participate in regular sessions of Torah-study as the main part of its program of activities; and to consult the local rabbi regarding any doubt that might arise. A certain rabbi he counseled to suffer imprisonment for the purpose of exerting an influence against violating the conscience of Jewish children in a Gentile school.

The meaning of the slogan "Torah with *Derekh Eretz*" in Hirsch's system was not confined to the "principle of enlightenment" alone. In his statement against Reform, he wrote in 1854: "Judaism is not a mere religion, the synagogue is not a church, and the rabbi is not a clergyman (priest). Judaism is not an appurtenance to life, and to be a Jew is not part of the mission of life. Judaism encompasses life in its entirety. To be a Jew is a sum of our life's mission—in synagogue and in kitchen; in field

and in counting-house; in the office and on the speaker's platform; like father, like mother, like son, like daughter; like servant, like master; as man, as citizen, in thought and in feeling, in word and in deed, in times of pleasure, in hours of abstinence; with needle as with chisel or with pen. To be a Jew—in a life which in its totality is borne on the word of the Lord and is perfected in harmony with the will of God—this is the scope and goal of Judaism. Since Judaism encompasses the whole of man and in keeping with its explicit mission, proclaims the happiness of the whole of mankind, it is improper to confine its teachings within the "four ells" of the house of study or of the home of the Jew. Insofar as the Jew is a Jew, his views and objectives become universal. He will not be a stranger to anything which is good, true and beautiful in art and in science, in civilization and in learning. He will greet with blessing and joy everything of truth, justice, peace, and the ennobling of man, wherever it be revealed. He will hold firmly to this breadth of view in order to fulfill his mission as a Jew and to live up to the function of his Judaism in areas never imagined by his father. He shall dedicate himself with joy to every true advance in civilization and enlightenment. But all this on condition that he be never obliged to sacrifice his Judaism at any new level but rather fulfill it with even greater perfection."

To this model of the Jewish man, God-fearing and punctilious in observing the *mitzvot*, who engages all his energies to deepen his religious consciousness, and to find the correct relationship between his Judaism and the universe and all that it contains, Hirsch applied the name "*Israel-Man*". The Torah is the fount of God's revelation, but also in nature, as in history, the will of God is revealed to the eyes of "*Israel-Man*". The "*Israel-Man*" must know God's Torah and dedicate himself to its study and observance. But he also must open his eyes and look at the wonders of the Lord in nature and the mighty deeds of the Lord in history. The study of nature and history, with all their ramifications, in the view of Samson Raphael Hirsch, is not a requirement of "enlightenment" alone but a requisite flowing from its concept of the "*Israel-Man*".

"Torah with *Derekh Eretz*" as a "principle of enlightenment" served him only in the category of a "temporary (emergency) ruling" (*horaat shaah*); "Torah with *Derekh Eretz*" as a system in the apprehension of Judaism, belonged, for him, to the category

of instruction throughout the generations. King David, peace be upon him, was not bound to the need for nature and history studies; a Jew of 19th Century Germany was so bound. In his letter to Rabbi Bamberger, Hirsch wrote: "‘Torah with *Derekh Eretz*’ is the sole true principle which will lead our generation from the sickness and confusion of the present to truth, peace, and cure."

His approach to nature is well illustrated by his famous remark after his visit to Switzerland: "I shall now be able to give the proper answer if they will ask me in the True World, ‘Have you seen my Switzerland?’" There was not a trace of dual values or double aim in his grasp of "Torah with *Derekh Eretz*".

Rabbi Hirsch quotes a saying of the Rabbis: "Any one who associates the Name of Heaven with the unseemly thing (idolatry) shall be uprooted from the world." "Torah with *Derekh Eretz*" is not "the Name of Heaven joined to the unseemly thing" but a unitary and all-inclusive concept of Judaism, all of which is devoted to the cause of Heaven. "Before heaven and earth we openly confess," he continues, "that were our Torah to demand that we abstain from everything going under the name of civilization and enlightenment, then, without vacillation should we honor this demand, since our Torah is our faith, the word of the living God, and besides His words there is neither counsel nor understanding."

He was not unaware that his conception of the principle "Torah with *Derekh Eretz*" carried, hidden within it, some dangers, and he admitted explicitly in his letter to Rabbi Bamberger that this aphorism of the Sages served as a subject for debate and dispute. When the close friend of his youth, Gershon Jehoshaphat, informed him that he had begun to study in the university, he wrote to him: ". . . I desire greatly to know what kind of university life you had, what was your main pursuit, and whether your scientific work became for you a supplement required by the time, a supplement which was only a burden. Or did it give you, as it should have given you, an illumination of the spirit in which your own wisdom should become united with that wisdom which is the heritage of the assembly of Jacob? Because of this it is highly important that you choose with caution the branches of science with which you will occupy yourself, and that you decide for what objective you will devote yourself to them."

The program of studies which Rabbi Hirsch marked out in *Horeb* many years before the founding of the school in Frankfort, shows clearly the nature of his conception :

1. The Hebrew language
2. The mother tongue (German)
3. Bible

and as fields auxiliary to Bible study

4. Science of nature and man
5. History
6. Science of living (*mitsvot* based on written and oral Law)
7. Writing and arithmetic

There is here no division between "sacred studies" and "secular studies" but all studies are directed to working out a unitary, Jewish personality: "*Israel-Man*".

An added characteristic feature in Hirsch's teaching should be underscored: Judaism as a message from all humanity. "*Israel-man*", who derives the recognition of his Creator from Torah, nature and history, looks forward to the acceptance of the Kingdom of Heaven by all the world and exemplifies this kingdom in his own life, private and public. The Torah was given to Israel, but it was destined to be universal, in the end of days, like nature and history. "*Israel-Man*" brings about not only the redemption of Israel but also the redemption of all mankind: "to set the world aright by the Kingdom of the Almighty."

In the eyes of superficial critics a contradiction seems revealed in Rabbi Hirsch's system: "On the one hand, an extremeness" in demanding autonomy for the Orthodox community, and on the other, a "spirit of compromise" on the question of enlightenment. The truth of the matter is that there is here neither extremeness nor readiness to compromise, but a consistency in grasping Judaism as the presentation of the Kingdom of God on earth and the likeness of the Jew as "*Israel-Man*". Hirsch viewed an Orthodox community, subservient to a Reformist community structure, as a forcible dethronement of God's Kingdom, just as he saw it in the restriction of the Torah-Jew to the walls of the synagogue or the house of study—both an unbearable limitation of the rule of Torah in life.