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VARIOUS APPROACHES TO *TORAH IM DEREKH ERETZ*: IDEAL AND REALITY

A.

During the nineteenth century, German Jewry became a source and focus of far-reaching religious and social changes which left their mark on the entire Jewish community. This country was the cradle of those movements which effected a change in the direction of Jewish life: the enlightenment of the Haskalah, the struggle for emancipation, the movement for religious reformation, Conservative Judaism, modern Jewish education, and to a certain extent, the beginnings of the modern nationalist movement. In the course of time, these movements became more widespread in the Jewish world, and it seemed that "from out of Berlin came forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Germany."

Orthodox Jewry, which was loyal to the observance of mitzvot and a traditional life-style from generation to generation, was pushed into a corner and forced to defend itself. By the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of German Jewry still maintained the observance of mitzvot and the values of religious tradition. Nevertheless, the yeshivot were closing one by one; and the "prophecy" of David Friedland of 1799¹ that in twenty years there would not remain even one yeshiva in Germany seemed close to fulfillment. Religious Jewry was forced to fight for its very existence and future. Its leaders were perceptive enough to realize early on that the most significant battle of this war would be fought in the field of education, and that only success in this area would secure the future and mold the character of future generations.

The renaissance of Orthodox Jewry and the assurance of its continued existence can undoubtedly be credited to three rabbi-leaders who arose during the mid-nineteenth century and pioneered and taught a new way. They were Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch, Ezriel Hildesheimer, and Isaac David Halevi Bamberger. Each one worked in his own way and according to his own method; each one fostered many students who deepened the theoretical bases and continued the educational program.

Through their broadly influential historic efforts, the three leaders heightened the esteem of Torah and breathed a new spirit into the Orthodox community. A spirit of dejection and despair was replaced by a new era of recovery and rejuvenation.

The three perceived the changes in the traditional negative attitude toward secular studies as a realistic necessity. These changes were essential for Orthodox Jewry to insure its continued existence and to find its place in modern society, which now demanded general education, appropriate skills and relevant training. But the three leaders differed in their character, in their manner, and in their method, as evidenced by the title given them by their contemporaries: Bamberger—the *Rav*; Hirsch—the *Rabbiner*; and Hildesheimer—the *Rebbe*. The method of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* is actually the teaching only of the latter two; Bamberger opposed it vehemently. He attempted to make do with a minimum of secular studies as the lesser of two evils.² We will therefore not deal with him within this framework, but just note that he himself acquired only limited general education, and that he only seldom wrote in German, and then for the most part in Hebrew letters. His great accomplishment in the field of education was the establishment of an Orthodox teachers' seminary in Wurzburg, which, in fact, trained generations of teachers and even served as a model for similar institutions. Bamberger placed the study of Torah at the center of education and instruction, and the general studies were added only to the extent mandated by the high school curriculum to satisfy the government requirements for accreditation as a seminary. Even in Judaic studies, he opposed any scientific or scholarly addition, and therefore became an opponent of the Berlin Seminary.³ From a historical point of view, it is noteworthy that *Torah im Derekh Eretz* as an educational method appears for the first time in N. H. Weisel's *Divre Shalom veEmet*.⁴ It would appear that this was a conceptual innovation of the Enlightenment; actually, Weisel's educational method was not an original creation, but the result of external influences and the desire to imitate the outside world. Weisel presented his program as a result of his opposition to traditional education, while stealthily integrating himself into gentile society. Therefore, *Derekh Eretz* took precedence over *Torah*. The two components were not equal to him in their value, even though he withdrew under the pressure of opposition. Weisel's proposals stirred up a storm within religious circles, although after a generation or two they were willing to accept them as a basis of education, provided that they accompany an education of mitzva observance and the maintenance of a traditional life-style.

It should be noted that Rabbi Shmuel Landa, son of the *Noda biYehudah*, was the first one to use the combination of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* as characterizing an educational method. He emphasized the need for general studies alongside religious studies as the lesser of two evils, given the circumstances of the times:

Anyone who cannot read or write German will not be considered for and cannot succeed at any profession, and the responsibility is placed on each man to teach his son the language and manner of the country in which he lives. And fathers should see to it that their sons succeed in Torah and *derekh erez*, and the boy will grasp the one while not relinquishing the other. And when he reaches the age of thirteen, “the child will be known by his deed.” If it seems that it is worth pursuing his education, then they will discern what he wants and what he chooses, whether to pursue secular studies or to learn Talmud in order to become a teacher; and if it does not seem likely that he will succeed at learning, he should be directed to study a craft or business, each one according to his own way.⁵

This was an *ex post facto* compromise, following the changing circumstances of the times, but this approach differed totally from the method of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* as it developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. The starting point of Hirsch and Hildesheimer are quite similar. Both of them were distinguished students of Rabbi Jacob Atlinger and Hakham Isaac Bernays. Both of them studied at universities. But while Hirsch left after a period of time, Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer (hereafter REH) was one of the first Orthodox rabbis—if not the first—to graduate from his academic studies with the title “Doctor.” There even exists a similarity in their initial communal activities: Both of them attempted to implement their method in the bordering communities of ultra-Orthodox Hungary—Rabbi S. R. Hirsch (hereafter RSRH) in Nicholsburg (1847–1851) and REH in Eisenstadt (1851–1869). Both encountered vigorous opposition to the programs and innovations that they attempted to conduct; in fact they suffered failure and were forced to leave, and only in Germany did they meet with success. Both of them fought forcefully against Reform, but also distanced themselves from extremism which rejects all general education. Through their work in Germany, they actually rescued Torah-true Judaism, which stood at the threshold of destruction—a task which seemed impossible at that time. Both stood at the head of different Orthodox communities, although they differed extensively about the separation and segregation of Orthodox Jewry. Both established magnificent innovative educational institutions and accorded great importance to the education of girls. And both were great educators with great educational powers whose influence enlightened future generations.⁶

B.

Despite the common aspects, however, there exists a great disparity between them in their outlook and their method of operation. They differed in their attitudes toward the Jewish sense of communality and solidarity, on questions involving the settlement and changing face of *Eretz Yisrael*, on the struggle within Germany over communal problems, and mostly on the perception of the concept *Torah im Derekh Eretz* and its

practical significance.⁷ While Hirsch strove for a complete blending of and organic integration of Torah study and secular studies, REH attempted to combine the two areas as parallel and indispensable, but while recognizing that they are two separate categories which cannot be combined. (Perhaps one can compare Hirsch's approach to a chemical compound and REH's approach to a physical mixture.⁸

The first formulation of RSRH's education opinion is found in his essay "*Torat HaKanaim*" (Amsterdam 5606), one of the few essays he published in Hebrew, and which was written in response to the Reform Rabbis Convention in Braunzweig. "Therefore shall we once again build dwellings for the Torah and knowledge together." His intention was to "true knowledge which loves Torah and is its helpmeet," and to "educational institutions for teachers who will instruct Jews in Torah and *derekh erez*, which, by acquiring both as one, will cure all our afflictions." This formulation was the continuation of his demand to build schools, as was developed in *Iggerot Tzafon*, which he had published anonymously several years earlier.⁹ The synthesis between religious and secular studies does not, according to him, constitute a compromise. It is an integral part of his *weltanschauung*, which takes into account the new reality of his generation and sees the two areas as complementary elements, and not as equal values existing side by side. True, they are not equal in importance, for the Torah is eternal and immutable while "*derekh erez*" is constantly changing.¹⁰ Perhaps the two elements merge until they become indistinguishable, yielding an "*Israel Mensch*," a complete merger of Torah and *derekh erez*. The goal is the education of the Jew and education of the Citizen-person, a desire to fully integrate into the surroundings and remain faithful to the German homeland. One must prepare the youth for a life of participation in the alien society while maintaining his religious distinctiveness.

One must bear in mind, however, what is paramount and what is subsidiary: Torah and Judaism are central, and secular knowledge is of secondary importance. All subjects must be imbued with a clear religious spirit and must be used as a means of achieving a religious *weltanschauung*. The Torah is the source of divine revelation, but divine providence is manifest, in nature and history as well, and these studies are therefore not solely for the sake of enlightenment, but derive from this particular *weltanschauung*.¹¹ The Torah serves as the standard in determining the extent of the merging of the two domains, and it becomes tangible in the life of a person who believes in doing mitzvot, which is more valuable than faith and meditation.¹²

Derekh Eretz has a broad connotation, referring both to a person's preparation for social and civic activity as well as scientific preparation for the battle on behalf of authentic Jewish culture. An Orthodox Jew cannot waiver from this approach if he wished to come through with

dignity in life's battles in the modern era. One cannot isolate himself within the confines of a spiritual ghetto, as expressed by his grandson, Dr. Isaac Breuer: "We cannot be satisfied with teaching our children to observe Torah and mitzvot within the home and family, within a controlled society of life-minded members. We must strive that in a secular environment, too, they will remain faithful to the education that they received at home, that they will stand firm in the face of a foreign lifestyle which draws the young to it."

RSRH's approach is a religious-humanistic one, influenced by German thought of that generation, with its emphasis on human spiritual accomplishments, as was expressed in his famous address on the 100th anniversary of the birth of the German poet Schiller. In this address, Hirsch emphasized that the poet's belief in the brotherhood of humanity, human freedom and just government derives from a purely religious *weltanschauung*, a belief that is close to his heart. The conclusion is the establishment of new educational institutions for the realization of his theories, schools "from A to Z," for boys as well as girls. A prototypic comprehensive school of great educational strength was founded in Frankfurt, a secondary school with preparatory classes, in which a full combination of Judaic and secular studies was conducted as a necessary condition for the success of the complete religious education. It should be noted that the number of hours devoted to secular studies exceeded that of religious studies—this, in order to mollify the government—and as a result of this the religious studies were limited.¹³

REH chose an entirely different route.¹⁴ Despite the philosophical, humanistic direction in which he guided Hirsch, he took a practical, pragmatic position. He was not by nature an abstract thinker and did not attempt to develop a general philosophy of life, but rather attempted to solve contemporary problems in the light of halakha. His motto was: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths," (Proverbs 3: 6); his intention was that one must recognize in everything the greatness of the Creator and the truth of His Torah. The secular sciences, too, are a great aid in this, but, as has been said, his method is one of combination and not one of synthesis. *Derekh Eretz* is a necessary addition to a deeper understanding of Torah. One must remember, however, what is primary and what is secondary. "Talmud Torah together with *derekh erez* is a weapon in the arsenal in the obligatory war on behalf of Torah and the careful observance of its commandments."¹⁵

REH attempted to restore the moral ideal of the "*talmid hakham*." He valued the yeshiva as the focus of Judaism, and demanded the study of *Torah she-be'al peh* and the revitalization of Torah centers in order to overcome the breakdown of Jewish society.¹⁶ But the yeshivot could not be restored in the traditional forms, because it was necessary to prepare teachers and spiritual leaders who would be able to wrestle with contemporary problems. They therefore would need a broad secular education as

well, so that they could take an active part in the communal struggles and would be able to make determinations in questions of modern life and would bear the responsibility for the education of the next generation and the molding of communal life. REH established a yeshiva in Eisenstadt in which secular subjects were widely studied; this was the first yeshiva which was conducted in this way, and the prototype of all yeshiva high schools. It was an unprecedented phenomenon to see a *rosh yeshiva* himself teaching Talmud and mathematics, Torah with *mefarshim*, as well as Latin and German literature. His intention was not to establish a customary yeshiva, but an institute for rabbinic training, as the secular name of the institute attests. He saw in this the mission of the generation.¹⁷ This method aroused strong opposition among Hungarian Jewry, but REH remained steadfast in his opinion and did not change at all in the face of the harsh criticism; "I cannot change even one bit from my divine obligation for which I am destined to be held accountable; I must continue to do as I have done until now, and I am fully convinced that in the fullness of time no way is possible other than by means of a seminary in accordance with my intention."¹⁸

In Berlin, there was no desire for an integration of Judaic studies and the secular enlightenment. The seminary's students studied in two separate institutions—in the rabbinic *bet midrash* and in the university, with the object of training rabbis who were both *talmide hakhamim* and holders of academic degrees. The *bet midrash* was devoted solely to Torah, and, in time, the greatest Torah scholars taught there, from Rabbi D. Z. Hoffman, (author of *Melamed leHo'il*) to Rabbi Y. Y. Weinberg (author of *Seride Esh*). True, various religious studies were taught in a scientific in-depth method, a practice which aroused suspicion and reservation on the part of Hirsch and his followers; but REH saw the realistic necessity of this method. The secular studies were held in a different institution. For students who did not complete their secular secondary studies, preparatory courses were added within the walls of the Seminary. REH's objective was to train outstanding *talmide hakhamim* to be armed with the tools of knowledge and research, "citizens in the republic of scholars," who would be cognizant of their social, educational mission and would be capable of leading the struggle of the coming generation for the future of traditional Judaism.¹⁹

C.

The great disparity in the approaches of these two personalities is even more apparent in the communal and educational context.

RSRH was an intellectual who established a *weltanschauung* based on his philosophy. REH made no attempt to define an ideological method

