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"Torah Im Derekh Eretz: Where Do We Go From Here?"

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at

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In many ways, this Samson Raphael Hirsch Conference at Yeshiva University is a historic occurrence which is long overdue. It is a puzzle to me that Hirsch and his thought were never accorded a full course of study at Yeshiva when, to such a large extent, Yeshiva University is a proud fulfillment of his teachings. This event, therefore, is an act of mutual legitimation. The fact that Mrs. Hannah Schwalbe is a great-granddaughter of the legendary Samson Raphael Hirsch, and that it is in her and her husband's honor that the professorship has been established by their family, is a happy omen for the future. If, in the realm of ideas, Frankfort and Washington Heights are really that close, can Broadway forever remain the "great divide" between Bennett Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue?

Hirsch was one of the giants of German Jewry. As a leader and educator he was eminently successful. He was personally responsible for the flourishing Denkglaubigkeit -- or "enlightened Orthodoxy" -- that survives him to this day. Thoroughly Jewish, and also a completely modern Western man, he aspired to bring about a harmony between the two traditions and outlooks. He tried to formulate a Jewish Humanism, demonstrating that the Humanism so popular in the Europe of his day had Jewish roots. Hence, his superman, the Yisroelmentsch. And hence, too, his great educational program of synthesis under the slogan of Torah im Derekh Eretz.

A word about nomenclature. I confess that I have never been very happy with either of the terms used to describe the Weltanschauung that both Hirsch and Yeshiva share. The term Derekh Eretz never seemed to me to be adequate because it is too

broad -- it admits of a large variety of interpretations, from business to conjugal relations, and therefore does not adequately describe the world of culture to which Hirsch meant it to refer. I am equally dissatisfied with the term Madda, because it is too narrow -- in modern Hebrew especially it refers to science, and the culture to which we have in mind as the companion of Torah is far greater than science alone.

I believe that the most felicitous term is: Hokhmah, "wisdom." It is both broad enough and narrow enough, and it has a distinguished history and hoary antecedents. As that corpus of knowledge counterposed to Torah, the Midrash states: "If one tells you that there is Hokhmah amongst the Gentiles, believe him; that there is Torah amongst the Gentiles -- don't believe him" (Lam. R. 2:17).

Moreover, Maimonides -- who is (despite Hirsch's criticism) Jewish history's most honored example of the successful synthesis of Torah and culture -- himself uses the term Hokhmah, rather than Derekh Eretz or Madda. Indeed, Professor Isadore Twersky ^{א"י} has gathered an entire list of references to his Mishneh Torah in which Maimonides consistently introduces the term Hokhmah, even when the original Talmudic text refers only to Torah! (See his "Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah" in Studies in Jewish Law and Philosophy, pp. 55-72.)

It is relevant, I believe, to draw your attention to one such remarkable passage in Maimonides that Twersky failed to mention, but that speaks directly to the issue of Torah and Derekh Eretz or Torah Umadda as a cultural-educational principle.

Maimonides (Hil. Rotzeiah) codifies the law of the

manslaughterer who is condemned to exile as follows: "...So, a father who killed his son is thereby condemned to exile. This holds only for a case where he killed him during a time that he was not teaching him, or while he was teaching him an additional skill which he does not need. But if he was punishing his son in order to teach him Torah or Hokhmah or Umanut (skill or trade) and he died, the father goes free."

Now, this exemption from exile because the manslaughterer was in the process of performing a mitzvah is found in the Mishnah (Makkot 8a) in which Abba Saul says that only when one was involved in a non-obligatory act do we mandate exile for manslaughter, and this excludes such cases as the father who strikes his son, the teacher who disciplines his student, and the bailiff who killed one who resisted coming to court, all of whom are exempt. The Gemara (ibid.) adds that in the case of teaching Torah, the law holds even if the student was already learned but the father or teacher wished to add to his learning. The Talmud (ibid., 8b) continues that this principle of additional learning obtains only for the study of Torah, but not for the study of a trade such as carpentry. In the latter case, once the son or student has already mastered one skill, there is no mitzvah to teach him an additional one, and therefore if he was beaten to death in the course of teaching him a second skill, the manslaughterer must go into exile. The teaching of a first skill, however, is a matter of making a living and therefore is considered a mitzvah. Rashi refers, in this respect, to the well-known passage in the Talmud (Kid. 30b) that just as a father

is required to find a wife for his son so is he required to teach him a trade.

What we learn from this is that according to the Talmud there are two ways that the father is exempt from exile in the case of manslaughter on the grounds of being involved in a mitzvah act, and they are: the teaching of Torah and the teaching of Umanut, a trade. What is revealing to us for our thesis is that Maimonides cites not two but three examples -- Torah, Umanut, and Hokhmah, even though the last item is not mentioned in the sources. Hence, Maimonides decides halakhically that a father is required to teach his son Hokhmah, and this Hokhmah is not to be confused with a skill or a trade.

We conclude from this passage -- and there are many more like it -- that Hokhmah has no particular reference to parnasah or making a living (in the language of the Talmud: hayuta). I shall return to this theme shortly.

As this theme of Hokhmah developed through history, it took different forms in different places. Closer to our own times, in Frankfort it became Torah im Derekh Eretz, and in New York it became Torah Umadda.

There are certain differences in nuance between them. For instance, the study of Torah as an intellectual exercise of profound conceptual dimensions is more noticeable in the latter than in the former -- possibly a consequence of the fact that Torah Umadda derived from Eastern rather than Central Europe, with its more well developed conceptual methodologies in the study of Torah. (Of course, certain very notable exceptions occurred as, for instance, R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, and other

such.)

Second, Torah im Derekh Eretz was decidedly anti-Zionist, hence closer to the Agudah, and communally separatist, standing for the policy of Austritt. Torah Umadda was much more hospitable to Zionism, more likely than not its advocates were aligned with Mizrachi, and usually sought linkages to the rest of the Jewish community.

I wish to mention, only en passant, that I have written on the relation of Torah Umadda of the Hirschian variety in comparison with the "synthesis" idea of Rav Kook in my Faith and Doubt. I shall return to the content of that essay very briefly a bit later on in this lecture.

Yet, despite these differences, there is an underlying identity of approach between both varieties of this view. Both agree that Torah and Hokhmah have a common origin in divinity. They represent the word of God and the world of God. (It is true that there may be subtle differences in the provenance of both in the supernal spheres of divinity, especially in the works of the Kabbalists, such as in R. Hayyim Volozhiner's Nefesh ha-Hayyim -- but they are sufficiently close so that the basic idea holds.) Thus, the oft quoted gimatria that, numerically, the Name Elohim is 86, the same as ha-teva, nature. Or the mystics' assertion that the word for world, olam, derives from he'elam, hiddenness; thus, divinity inheres in the world as such, except that it is obscure^h, whereas in Torah it is revealed. Both, therefore, are essentially creations or emanations of the Deity; both are worthy (though in different degrees) of study and research, although their methodologies may be radically different. And the

study of each of them must lead back to the same goal: drawing close to God. Of course, as I implied, Torah always remains supreme, especially in that its innate divinity is in a state of revelation as opposed to the divinity that is immanent in the world (i.e., Hokhmah), where it is concealed.

Where do we go from here?

Whereas the other papers to be delivered at this conference will, among other things, plumb the depths of the Hirschian synthesis, Torah im Derekh Eretz, I shall suggest some areas for development in the future. I do this, first, because whereas "Torah" is constant, the other pole, no matter how we designate it, is always in a state of flux. Culture -- whether science or art, technology or philosophy -- is always changing, and the challenge to advocates and practitioners of Torah im Derekh Eretz is always a fresh one. Second, the Orthodox Jewish community today, strangely, seems to be recoiling from the effort to live in both worlds and to accommodate both disciplines. This is true, I believe, in both the Eastern and Western halves of Washington Heights -- in the worlds of Torah im Derekh Eretz and the worlds of Torah Umadda. Our task, then, is to continue the work of Rav Hirsch and his successors, and of Dr. Revel and his successors. Permit me to outline four such areas for further development.

A. The Communal Area. In this area, the followers of Torah im Derekh Eretz have been more successful than those of Torah Umadda. The Gemeinde has better communal organization, and it is far more cohesive -- probably as a result of the superiority of

the German sense of community, and the traditional loyalty to the Kehilah that it fostered, as opposed to the communal chaos that prevails in the cauldron of American Jewry. Torah Umadda is in danger of losing its anchorage and its identity as a clear and distinct educational and metaphysical Anschauung, because it is sometimes dissolved in a kind of de facto sociological soup. By this I mean, that everyone who observes Kashruth and Shabbat and gets a B.A. automatically claims to be "Modern Orthodox," and hence assumes that he/she has a kind of free membership in the Torah Umadda society. We must make it clear, however, that lo kol ha-rotzeh li-tol et ha-shem yitol. Torah Umadda stands for excellence in Torah studies (as well as excellence in secular studies) and in uncompromising dedication to the observance of the mitzvot. It must never be mistaken for an excuse for flippancy or laxity in either the study of Torah or the observance of the Commandments.

B. Torah Pluralism. The necessity for the Jew to strive for both Torah and Hokhmah (and it is a necessity, not a compromise, as we shall have occasion to explain a bit later) must not be looked upon as a denial of legitimacy of those who spend their lives in the pursuit of Torah alone. I do not mean that Torah im Derekh Eretz or Torah Umadda is an inferior kind of life and therefore must take second place to "Torah-only." Rather, I mean that the pursuit of "Torah only" must find a dialectical place within the conceptual framework of Torah im Derekh Eretz, that we must elaborate a line of thinking which will not set one against the other, but which will find a place for exclusive Torah studies

within the rubric of Torah and Hokhmah. Permit me to repeat something I mentioned in the essay I wrote in comparing Hirsch and Kook with regard to this matter:

Rav Kook speaks of two tendencies of the Jewish spirit. One is directed inwards; it is a deepening of the sacred, and is represented by the traditional yeshivot. The other is an outward one, relating the within to the without. Just as the intensification of the sacred is embodied in the old-type yeshivah, so the relating of the sacred to the secular is the function of the university. (We must forgive Rav Kook if, despite his courageous criticism and warnings issued at the time, he allowed himself the extravagance of imagining that the Hebrew University would fulfill the lofty mission he assigned to it; hindsight is always wiser than foresight. But his analysis is valid.) It is the second tendency, the centrifugal motion of the sacred to the secular, that is of utmost consequence to us. The merging, or synthesis, of Torah with Wisdom is not meant to make up for some lack of Torah, but rather to create something new and original in the world of the spirit through these combinations. Kook tells us that the sacred is not antagonistic to science, but first he reminds us that it vitalizes all, it is that which gives life to the secular disciplines. Kodesh and hol are functionally and indissolubly related to each other. "The sacred must be established on the foundation of the profane." They are related to each other as matter to form -- the secular is matter, the sacred, form -- and "the stronger the secular, the more significant the sacred." Just as the body must be healthy in order for the spirit to flower, so secular knowledge should be of superior quality if the sacred is to benefit. This intimate relationship of sacred and secular is given its strongest expression when Rav Kook writes that the yesod kodesh ha-kodoshim comprises both the element of the sacred and the profane. This implies the significant notion, which Kook later states explicitly, that there is nothing absolutely profane or secular in the world. There is no absolute metaphysical category called hol; there is only the holy and the not-yet-holy. This Kook version of Synthesis is the very antithesis of secularism, which recognizes the sacred only in its insularity. Kook's centrifugal kodesh is so overpowering and outgoing, that hol or the profane loses its absolute character even before its encounter with the sacred. It is, as it were, fated from its creation to submit to the sacred.

Having denied the absolute character of the profane, does this imply a blurring of the distinction between kodesh and hol? The answer is an emphatic No.

This is how Rav Kook conceives of the relationship of kodesh and hol. There is a havdalah, so as to allow for the intensification of the sacred in its centripetal motion; and this, itself, is prelude to its outward centrifugal movement, where it reaches for the profane and transforms it into the sacred, a transmutation for which it has been waiting from the moment of creation. The fact of kodesh leads to the act of kiddush. -- Faith and Doubt, chap. II

Now, this intensification of the sacred in its inward motion -- that, indeed, is the "Torah-only" realm of study. This serves as a justification of both the existence of the traditional Yeshivot where Torah only is studied, alongside the more "modern" institutions where secular studies are taught as well; even more -- this theoretical structure justifies a "Torah only" track as part of Torah Umadda in the same institution. That, indeed, is what we now have, more than ever before, at Yeshiva University: the existence of Kollelim alongside the dual curriculum. What is needed for the future is the inculcation of an awareness into those who pursue the "Torah-only" track that the end result of their intense studies of Torah must ultimately lead to the sanctification of the profane -- for otherwise it fails to fulfill its promise and potential.

C. Response to Critics. I have in mind here both the critics from without and the critics from within.

In the course of the resurgence of the "Right wing," Torah im Derekh Eretz and Torah Umadda have been denied legitimacy, or have been denigrated as be'diavad, i.e., a

necessary compromise with a hostile environment. To some extent, in its more benevolent aspects, this criticism is a continuation of the hesitation which East European Jewry had towards the Hirschian school, even though they personally held Rabbi Hirsch in the greatest esteem. They considered that it was kosher only for Western or Central Europe, where Torah im Derekh Eretz was a kind of stop-gap for assimilation. But two things should be said about this: First, if anything, conditions in America today argue much more for a Torah im Derekh Eretz philosophy than they did in 19th century Germany. Second, Hirsch never meant it to be a compromise, nor is Torah Umadda to be taken as a compromise.

Moreover, such a flippant attitude towards the heroic endeavor to achieve a synthesis of Torah and Hokhmah is obscurantist, and ignores centuries of highly creative development in Spanish Jewry, in Provencal Jewry, in German Jewry -- and in American Jewry. The distinguished exemplars of the Hirschian synthesis approached their secular studies with a religious fervor that in many cases exceeded the devotion that others brought to their Torah studies... And I do not believe that our teacher, Rabbi Soloveitchik, views his own broad and profound cultural learning as an embarrassing compromise.

What we must do as well, is learn to respond to the patronizing posture that secular studies are excusable only because of parnasah (livelihood). I have always been irritated by this argument, and suspect that it is proffered only because it must be used by the opponents of Torah Umadda -- since they too pursue certain kinds of secular studies, and need a rationalization for their inconsistencies. Some of the most

vociferous critics of Torah im Derekh Eretz have themselves gone through universities, and yet deny the legitimacy of our point of view. But if, indeed, parnasah is the excuse -- it is a very weak reed indeed on which to lean. If Torah im Derekh Eretz is apikorsut, is parnasah ever an adequate excuse? Is our devotion to Torah so fragile, that we are willing to sell it out for an additional few thousand dollars a year? If our opponents really regard secular studies as halakhically wrong, they must outlaw not only the study of humanities and art and science, but also accounting and computers, because somehow they issue from the context of a university where the "sinful" disciplines are taught. To be consistent, all Orthodox Jews must go into the trades and not the liberal professions; they must be businessmen and plumbers and carpenters and welders, but nothing that requires university-type booklearning. They must also defy the civil authorities and deny their children high-school and even elementary school education, because literature and history and biology are treifa. That would have the virtue of consistency -- and would also be a distortion and sterilization of Torah, doing violence to its shelemut and making of it a cripple. Nicholas Murray Butler once said that the extremes are consistent and passionate -- but absurd.

What is equally as much required is a new infusion of courage into some browbeaten erstwhile advocates of Torah and Hokhmah in both its forms. Time does not permit me at this occasion to go into a full treatment of some of our weak-spined brethren who seem so very delicate and so vulnerable to intimidation. Several articles have appeared in the last year or

two years, written by our own people, which sadly announce our obituaries, some even declaring that there never was a Torah and Hokhmah community! Such statements, probably offered for their shock value, blithely ignore major sections of Jewish intellectual history and development by gedolei Yisrael. I referred earlier to some of them, and prefer not to be repetitive. At any rate, for the future we shall have to strengthen the weak and encourage the crest-fallen.

D. Further Theoretical Research. I wish to suggest an effort to develop a Torah-Hokhmah approach out of material normally regarded as totally inimical to this philosophy. What I have in mind, is East European Jewish theology or mahshavah of the late 18th and 19th centuries, especially that involved in the Mitnagdic-Hasidic controversy, an area in which I have had some passing interest.

Because this subject requires a great deal of explanation, I shall merely adumbrate certain basic principles in a very abbreviated manner, in the hope that those who already are acquainted with the material will perhaps be encouraged to undertake further work in the area.

One of the fundamental differences between the Mitnagdic and Hasidic thinkers was in how they viewed the world, whether as apart from or infused by divinity. The Gaon of Vilna and R. Hayyim of Volozhin emphasized the transcendental aspect of Elohut, and therefore saw the world as a creation of, but separate from, God. The Hasidim, however, were immanentistic, and heavily emphasized melo kol ha-aretz kevodo, the inherence of

divinity in the natural world.

As such, Mitnagdism conceived of the world as basically "secular," containing no essential dimension of kedushah. Taken to an extreme, of course, this can lead to secularism, although in the hands of authentic Jewish thinkers it never did. The best one can hope for, in the development of a Torah and Hokhmah outlook, is that secular studies can be justified as an aid for the better and deeper understanding of Torah. Thus, the famous statement of the Gaon (the authenticity of which has been erroneously challenged), that, "he who lacks one part of Hokhmah will lack ten parts of Torah..."

The Hasidic world-view, however, contains much greater possibilities. Because the world has infinitely greater potentials of inherent kedushah, all activity, not only that which is halakhically prescribed, is potentially of religious value. Not only in the realm of mitzvah (the obligatory), but also in the realm of reshut (the neutral or permissible) can one find great religious significance. This, indeed, is one of the pillars of Hasidic doctrine.

A further developement of this doctrine occurred in the elaboration of the idea of avodah be'gashmiyut, the idea that one can serve the Lord through corporeality. This is an idea, which, in its own way, also carries with it certain dangers, namely, that of antinomianism: If everything can be a mitzvah, then there is no mitzvah... and Halakhah loses its potency. Of course, this never happened in the hands of authentic Hasidic leaders, although the Mitnagdim were very quick to pounce on any manifestation of such anti-Halakhic activity

which resulted from this theological premise.

This idea of avodah be'gashmiyut lends itself to the idea that just as the material world can be used in the service of the Lord, so indeed can the study of the physical world -- and this includes all disciplines, the humanities and the arts as well as natural science -- be used to enhance one's religious sensitivity and devotion.

Hence, further careful study is needed to elaborate this idea of the validation of secular disciplines as an extension of avodah be'gashmiyut from the indulgence in the material world to the study and mastery of our mundane environment. What must also be investigated in such a study is the relation, in Hasidic thought, of avodah be'gashmiyut to avodeh be'ruhaniyut (itself not quite clear) that would apply to a doctrine of Torah and Hokhmah based upon it.