DIALOGUE

Hirschians Debate the True Meaning of Hirsch

In the last issue of Jewish Action (Summer '96) Rabbi Shelomoh Danziger raised several issues of concern in his review of a new translation and commentary written by Rabbi Joseph Elias on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's The Nineteen Letters. *The debate continues in the following exchange, as Rabbi Elias and Rabbi Danziger each elaborates on his understanding of Hirsch's message.*

RABBI JOSEPH ELIAS

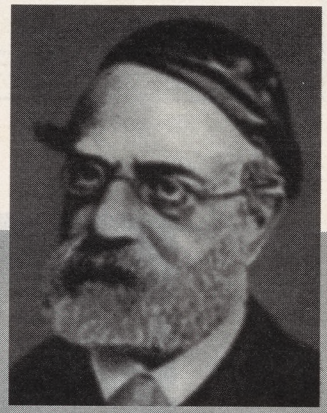
Rabbi Danziger's kind opening remarks in his essay reviewing my edition of *The Nineteen Letters* serve as a prelude to five pages of rather devastating criticism. Rav Hirsch was an extraordinary personality, leading his contemporaries in a revolutionary new approach to the challenges of the modern age. Rabbi Danziger feels that I did not do justice to him because:

1) my manner of presentation does not permit Rav Hirsch's teachings to emerge in full clarity;

2) worse, I misrepresented them in such areas as *kabbalah* and *aggadah*, for the sake of "political correctness."

I disagree on both points and will try to explain why.

1) Rabbi Danziger writes: "...devoted followers of Rav Hirsch, including this reviewer, may well object to the numerous views, cited at every opportunity, of those of different orientation who opposed, and still oppose, Hirschian principles. The virtual effect of this is to counteract, or at least to moderate, some of the most 'Hirschian' concepts of *The Nineteen Letters*." In actual fact, in my introduction I listed as one of the purposes of my commentary, not only to explain Rav Hirsch's ideas but "to set the author's teachings within the broader framework of Torah thought, by tracing their sources...and by showing the relationships and contrasts between the author's ideas and other...schools of thought." This is certainly a well-accepted approach of a scholarly commentary which helps to put the author's words in sharper focus. Rabbi Danziger's criticism reveals a real fear to trust the reader with such an open discussion, even when all views are presented



This reviewer criticized Rabbi Elias for presenting his own views (which are basically those of his great *rebbe*, Rav Dessler, *z"l*, author of *Michtav MeEliyahu*) as postscripts to *The Nineteen Letters* of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. This was called "inappropriate and even unfair." He responds that "showing the relationships and contrasts between the author's ideas and other...[Torah] schools of thought...is certainly a well-accepted approach of a scholarly commentary."

The Nineteen Letters has not been republished for academia by an academic that one should invoke academic scholarliness. *The Nineteen Letters* is the seminal *religious* classic of the *gaon* and *tzaddik*, Rav Hirsch, *zecher tzaddik livrachah.* It is bought and read by those seeking the religious inspiration that this *Hirschian* interpretation of Torah Judaism has been providing to generations of readers for 160 years. The introduction of the *hashkafos* of Rav Hirsch's ideological opponents weakens the overall sharp impression of the Hirschian approach of this classic.

This is the basis of my criticism, and not "a real fear" of open discussion of other views. I favor open scholarly discussion of other views in the proper media, e.g.: *other* books; articles in magazines, such as *Jewish Action*, that welcome legitimate divergent views; and lectures, but not in the republished classic of Rav Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters*. This is especially so, since Rabbi Elias' new edition, because of its many merits and great usefulness (which I have described objectively and sincerely, and not simply to "serve as a prelude" to criticism), will undoubtedly become

RABBI SHELOMOH DANZIGER

fairly and correctly; yet this is what the serious reader seeks and deserves — and what Rav Hirsch himself called for in *The Nineteen Letters*!

Rabbi Danziger, however, claims that my presentation is not fair and correct. Let us see how carefully he read what I wrote. He calls my discussion of *Torah Im Derech Eretz* diffused, dispersed, intermittent. In reality I discussed this subject at length in Letter Seventeen (where Rav Hirsch introduces it) and Eighteen (where he discussed his educational program based on T.I.D.E.). Elsewhere in the book I only point out briefly where ideas presented there relate to the basic theme.

Vastly more serious and indeed incomprehensible is Rabbi Danziger's assertion (stated no less than three times!) that I advocate isolation from the world and forsaking Israel's mission to the nations. He refers the reader to pages 323-5. I do list in these pages a number of "intrinsic problems in the *application* of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*" — but in the following pages (325-8) I respond, point by point, and state clearly what Rav Hirsch would have answered: that today's Jews, even if they wanted to, are just as unable to isolate themselves as were the Jews of his day. My own conclusion about T.I.D.E. is set out clearly in those same pages. It can be summed up in my quotation (pp. 326-7) from Rabbi Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg, surely a staunch champion of T.I.D.E., and in fact in Rabbi Danziger's own formula for T.I.D.E. in our time: "more Torah and less *Derech Eretz*."

2) But what about misrepresentation of Rav Hirsch's views? Were his positions on *kabbalah* and *aggados* (the examples given by Rabbi Danziger) as much in conflict with what is today generally accepted in the Torah community as the reviewer claims? Or is Rabbi Danziger's intent to show major conflict where it is not warranted, as I believe? Considering Rav Hirsch's courageous independence in addressing his contemporaries in a way to which they could relate, one may be tempted to take the first view; but a careful analysis of what he actually wrote shows differently.

Concerning *kabbalah* the *Nineteen Letters* are very clear: "One aspect of Judaism, *the actual repository of its spirit* (my italics), was studied in such an uncomprehending way as to reduce this spirit to physical terms, as man's inner and outer endeavors came to be interpreted as a mere mechanical, magical dynamic building of cosmic worlds — thereby often reducing all those activities ... to mere preoccupation with amulets" (p. 144). "If I properly understand that which I believe I do comprehend, then it is indeed an invaluable repository of the *Tanach* and the Talmud, but it was also unfortunately misunderstood ... Had it been correctly comprehended, it might perhaps have imbued the practice of Judaism with spirituality" (p. 267).

In which way was *kabbalah* misunderstood? It deals with the profoundest philosophical and ethical issues facing man: the relationship between God and

the standard *Nineteen Letters of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch.*

Regarding *aggadah,* Rabbi Elias stresses that "it is important for us to realize — and emphasize — that, without conceding to them (i.e., to *aggados*) specific Sinaitic origin, he (Rabbi Hirsch) shared with other schools of thought the same deep respect for what our Sages taught in the way of *aggados*." Such emphasis is, of course, hardly necessary. Anyone who does not have such deep respect is not an Orthodox Jew. However, "deep respect" is not synonymous with the "authoritativeness" and "binding character" of *aggados.*

Rabbi Elias persists in his position concerning *aggados,* that despite the different starting points of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (i.e., Sinaitic) and of Rabbi Hirsch (i.e., non-Sinaitic in specific content), "*in effect* their attitudes to *aggadah, halachah lemaaseh* (in practical terms), differ little from each other." Rabbi Elias does indeed concede that "Rabbi Danziger has, of course, the right to place full emphasis on the points that divide the two schools of thought." He concludes by urging that we overcome fear of *aggadah* ("*aggadah* fear").

We do not fear *aggadah.* What we do fear — justifiably — is considering *aggadah* something that it is not. Rav Hirsch expressed *his fear* that the "opinion that the *aggados* were revealed at Sinai, and that there is no distinction *in this respect* between them and the received *halachos* is a dangerous approach that poses grave danger to the *talmidim*...It nearly, *chas veshalom,* opens the gates of heresy under their feet." If the view of Sinaitic *aggados* (Rabbi Luzzatto) and the view of non-Sinaitic *aggados* (Rabbi Hirsch) "*in effect, halachah lemaaseh* (in practical terms), differ little from each other," as Rabbi Elias would have us believe, then Rav Hirsch would never have expressed such strong fear about the danger of teaching the *talmidim* that the *aggados* are Sinaitic. After all, there is little difference in practical terms, according to Rabbi Elias.

In point of fact the difference is great. If the *aggados* are Sinaitic, then they are vested with binding authoritativeness, which is the position of Maharal and Rabbi Luzzatto, as Rabbi Elias states. According to Rav Hirsch, the *aggados* are not Sinaitic in specific content, and are *therefore* not binding on us as "part of our obligation as Jews," and *therefore* "a person whose reason leads him to differ with the reasoning of one of *Chazal* on any aggadic topic is not considered a *min* or *kofer*."

Only later in the *teshuvah* does Rav Hirsch speak of the possible error of taking literally what was meant to be allegorical. Rabbi Elias, however, lists as item (3) of Rabbi Hirsch's view the possibility of taking literally what was meant allegorically, and then continues in item (4): "*Therefore* (emphasis added) a person whose reason leads him to differ with the reasoning of

world, the working of Divine Providence, and the interaction between God and man. These are questions that, by their very nature, transcend the realm of the worldly and mundane. Yet we have no way to describe and discuss them except in our mundane language. Therein lies a grave danger: just as we must not, God forbid, take "the hand of God" in a literal, physical sense, so too the expressions and descriptions used by *kabbalah* must not be taken in a literal mundane way. Yet, this was almost unavoidable when *kabbalah* became popularized (hence the restrictions imposed by the Rabbis as to who was permitted to study it). Very clearly this is what Rav Hirsch referred to when he wrote that "what was to be understood as inner perception was seen as external dreamworlds," to be manipulated by "amuletic practices" and the "magical building of cosmic worlds." There is not the slightest indication that he ever questioned the validity of the essence of *kabbalah*, its extramundane teachings (properly understood), and its interpretation of "man's inner and outer endeavors."

But this is not Rabbi Danziger's understanding. He puts forth his own idea on what *kabbalah* is, which he seeks to read into Rav Hirsch's words. Thus he equates *kabbalah* and *aggadah* as merely being "both, in his view, rhetorical and metaphorical works"; "*the proper understanding of kabbalah* (Rabbi Danziger's italics) should have been ethical, not extramundane." "It is in *this* midrashic, metaphorical sense that Rav Hirsch considered *kabbalah* 'an invaluable repository of the spirit of *Tanach* and Talmud.'" Very clearly Rabbi Danziger excludes here the extramundane foundations of *kabbalah*. We must ask: which Torah authority, of whatever camp, has ever put forward this interpretation of *kabbalah*? Certainly Rabbi Joseph Caro, the *Shelah*, the Vilna Gaon, or the *Nefesh HaChaim* did not. Nor did the *poskim* who considered *kabbalah* (unlike *aggadah*) in their halachic deliberations, from the *Remah* down to the *Mishnah Berurah* (which contains more than 200 references to *kabbalah*). Yet Rabbi Danziger ascribes this view to Rav Hirsch without the slightest shred of evidence. True, Rav Hirsch consistently chose to offer rational ethical explanations in his work. (The reasons for this decision of his are discussed at length in my commentary.) But nowhere does he indicate that he considered his rationalistic interpretation of the *mitzvos* as negating *kabbalah*, rather than as an alternative to it. In fact Rav Breuer quoted the Grosswardeiner Rav, Rabbi Mosheh Fuchs, as saying that anybody who knows *kabbalah* will find kabbalistic ideas throughout Rav Hirsch's *Chumash* commentary, though clothed in rationalistic terms. Moreover, there are in it actual outright quotations from the *Zohar* (albeit unattributed), such as to *Bereshis* 2:15.

Rabbi Danziger mentions Rav Hirsch's objection to philosophical speculation about God, "mystical as well as philosophical." In the first place, his primary objection was to the religious philosophers because their efforts to remove any thought of Divine corporeal-

Chazal on any aggadic topic is not considered a *min* or *kofer*." The implication is that one who differs is not a *min* or *kofer* because he cannot be required to accept literally what may be allegorical. This is juxtaposing the two quotations (3 and 4) out of context, and the result is a shifting of Rav Hirsch's intent, which is that one is not a *min* or *kofer* because *aggados* are not Sinaitic.

In my review, I quoted from Rav Hirsch's *teshuvah* the passage that states that his view of *aggadah* is based on the tradition of the *Geonim*, Rav Sherira and Rav Hai. These are (in very literal translation) the words of Rav Sherira Gaon (*Otzar HaGeonim*, *HaPerushim*, *Hagigah*, p.60): "Rav Sherira Gaon, *z"l*, wrote in *Megillas Setarim* concerning the subject of the *aggados*: 'Those statements that are [homiletically] derived from scriptural verses and are called *midrash* and *aggadah* are subjective conjecture (*umdana*)...Therefore we do not rely on *aggadah*. And they (the Sages) have said: We do not learn from the *aggados*...And whichever of them (i.e., of the *aggados*) is correct (Heb. *nachon*), what is supported by reason and scripture, we accept; and there is no end or limit to *aggados*!'"

Rav Hai Gaon (ibid.): "Rav Hai was asked: What distinction is there between *aggados* that are written in the Talmud (the error of which we are obligated to remove [through interpretation]) and *aggados* that are written outside the Talmud? He answered: Whatever has been fixed in the Talmud is clearer than what has not been fixed in it. Nevertheless, if the *aggados* that are written in it (i.e., in the Talmud) are not [logically] founded or are erroneous, they are not to be relied on, for there is a rule: We do not rely on *aggados*. However, whatever is fixed in the Talmud, the error of which we are obligated to remove [through interpretation], we should do so. For had it not possessed substance it would not have been fixed in the Talmud. If we find no way to remove its error [through interpretation], it becomes like unaccepted dicta. But in the case of what has not been fixed in the Talmud (i.e., non-Talmudic *aggados* found in the *Midrashim*) we do not need [to do] all this. If it (i.e., the *aggadah*) is correct and fine, then we discourse on it and teach it; otherwise, we pay no attention to it." (This is the basic source of Rabbi Shmuel HaNagid's similar statement printed in his *Mevo HaTalmud* in the back of *Masseches Berachos* of the Vilna *Shas*).

There is a world of difference between this earlier tradition concerning *aggadah* of the *Geonim*, whom Rav Hirsch advises us to follow ("for whoever separates from them separates from life," to use Rav Hirsch's words in his *teshuvah*) and the later approach of Maharal, or Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, or *Michtav MeEliyahu*.

With regard to *kabbalah* let us try to remain focused on the issue before us. What is being dis-

ity "in the end run very nearly into the danger of losing all idea of the personality of God" (*Bereshis* 6:6). While he was surely not in favor of philosophizing about the essence of God, there are many passages in Rav Hirsch's writings that speak about God's attributes, closely following kabbalistic ideas (e.g. *Shemos* 15:6, about God's "right hand" and "left hand," or *Tehillim* 104:1 and 145:6). These are good examples of how the ethical teachings that Rav Hirsch draws from *kabbalah* are deeply rooted in its extramundane essence.

There is indeed one verse (*Vayikroh* 7:38), quoted by Rabbi Danziger, which suggests an outright rejection of *kabbalah*: the *korbanos* "do not form a chapter of kabbalistic, magic mysteries." However, lo and behold, Rav Hirsch never wrote this. The word "kabbalistic" was inserted by Dr. Levy in his English translation. The original German text reads "[*noch*] *bilden sie fuer sich ein Kapital thaumaturgischer, magischer Mysterien*," "they do not form, by themselves a chapter of thaumaturgic, magical mysteries." According to Webster, thaumaturgic means magical miracle working — all we have here is a repetition of the words which Rav Hirsch used to describe the *misuse* of *kabbalah*. There is no indication whatsoever, then, that Rav Hirsch rejected or denied the transmundane aspect of *kabbalah*. It may be revealing, in this context, to note that Dr. Isaac Breuer, grandson and loyal disciple of Rav Hirsch, introduces kabbalistic concepts in his *Neue Kusari*, notably the *Sefiros* (see his *Concepts of Judaism*, edited by J.S. Levinger).

Yet Rabbi Danziger is so convinced of his own ideas about *kabbalah* that he accuses such eminent Hirschian interpreters as Dayan Grunfeld, and Yaakov Rosenheim (and by implication Rav Schwab who shared their views on this subject) of falsifying Rav Hirsch's teachings "in the interests of ideological correctness." What about Rav Hirsch's preparatory notes for the *Horeb* drawn from the *Zohar*, and the "echoes and parallels to kabbalistic literature" in his works? Rabbi Danziger replies that "they were put to use only in the kind of rational concepts we find in the *Horeb*." Yet these notes as well as the "echoes and parallels" are so clearly rooted in the essential transmundane substance of the *Zohar* (as mentioned above) that obviously Rav Hirsch could not have negated the latter. For another matter, if Rav Hirsch only drew upon *kabbalah* for midrashic metaphorical purposes, how do we understand his praise of the Ramban's understanding of the spirit of Judaism, considering that the Ramban's whole approach was pervaded by *kaballah*? And, finally, what about the kabbalistic marginal notes in Rav Hirsch's *siddur* which Dayan Grunfeld reported he himself saw? Can they reasonably be explained away as mere homiletic inspirational ideas? In short, with all due respect to Rabbi Danziger, I do not believe that *we* are the ones misinterpreting Rav Hirsch's position.

And now to the question of *aggadah*. Rabbi Danziger faults me for belittling the differences

cussed, or what we should be discussing, is not *kabbalah* per se, or Rabbi Elias' view of *kabbalah,* or my view of *kabbalah*, or Dr. Isaac Breuer's view, but *Rav Hirsch*'s view of *kabbalah* as it emerges from the text of his own words. Thus, unjustified are the words of Rabbi Elias: "He (Rabbi Danziger) puts forth his own idea on what *kabbalah* is, which he seeks to read into Rav Hirsch's words." Nowhere in my review have I put forth or mentioned my own view of *kabbalah*. Rabbi Elias continues: "Thus he equates *kabbalah* and *aggadah* as merely being both, in his view, rhetorical and metaphorical works." The implication of "*he* equates" and "both, in *his* view, [are] rhetorical and metaphorical works" is that "he" and "his view" refer to Rabbi Danziger. *I* did not equate anything. I wrote that it is my understanding, based on Rav Hirsch's words, that *Rav Hirsch* did the equating. Thus I wrote: "*To Rav Hirsch* (emphasis added), *kabbalah* is 'an invaluable repository of the spirit of *Tanach* and *Talmud*' in the same sense as the *aggadah* contains that spirit. Both in his view (i.e., in Rav Hirsch's view) are rhetorical and metaphorical works." Rabbi Elias again: "*the proper understanding of kabbalah* (Rabbi Danziger's italics) should have been ethical, not extramundane." The whole sentence that I wrote was: "His complaint is (i.e., Rav Hirsch's complaint is) that *the proper understanding of kabbalah* should have been ethical, not extramundane." I was expressing my reading of Rav Hirsch's complaint, not my own view of *kabbalah*, as has been implied.

Now to the substantive issue. Rabbi Elias argues that my reading of Rav Hirsch's attitude toward *kabbalah*, according to which Rav Hirsch complains that *kabbalah* should have been interpreted in human, ethical terms rather than in the extramundane-theosophic sense of cosmic influence on "worlds and anti-worlds," has never been put forward by any "Torah authority, of whatever camp."

Even if this *were* so, it would simply be one more among other unique contributions that Rav Hirsch has made to Torah *hashkafah*. As a matter of fact, however, Rav Hirsch was certainly familiar with the well-known *She'elos Uteshuvos Rivash*, which weighs heavily in subsequent *p'sak halachah*, including the *Shulchan Aruch*. In *teshuvah* 157, we find the views about *kabbalah* of:

1) Rabbeinu Shimshon of Chinon, author of *Sefer HaKerisus*, whom the Rivash in his *Teshuvos* (157) called "greater than all others of his generation."

(2) Rabbeinu Peretz HaKohen, colleague of the RaN, and *rebbe* of the Rivash (ibid.).

(3) Rabbeinu Nissim, the famous and illustrious RaN, also *rebbe* of the Rivash.

(4) and the Rivash himself, Rabbeinu Yitzchak ben Sheshes.

All these towering *Gedolei Olam* had strong

between Rav Hirsch and Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto on this subject. Rav Hirsch writes in Letter Eighteen: "Let us look at the *Halachah* as merely expounding the basic conception drawn from *Tanach*. Let us see in the *Aggadah* merely the expression of the same spirit, disguised in allegorical form." In my commentary I raised the question of how this statement (and other similar ones) accord with Rav Hirsch's view that *aggadah* is not from Sinai and therefore not binding on us. In response I carefully analyzed his position as set out in his responsa (I did not merely "allude" to them, as Rabbi Danziger says) and also his introduction to the *Chumash*. I did not in any way gloss over the basically different starting out points of, say, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto and Rav Hirsch; but I concluded that "*in effect*" (my words there) their attitudes to *aggadah*, *halachah lemaaseh*, differ little from each other. We can readily see this by comparing their positions in detail. Here are the views of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto and those who take a similar approach:

1) The statement of the Yerushalmi that "Talmud, *Halachos* and *Aggados* were all told to Moshe at Sinai" is to be taken in its simple literal meaning. While the contents of the *aggados* is from Sinai, the way they were recorded was determined by *Chazal*; unlike *halachos*, many were expressed in "coded" form, hiding their message (Ramchal, *Ma'amar Al Hahagados*).

2) Hence we cannot derive *halachos* from *aggados*, since we do not know how they should be understood.

3) In fact, some aggadic interpretations could be partly or totally wrong if the speaker was not aware how the *aggados* were meant to be understood (ibid.).

4) Therefore, "when we encounter *aggados* which we cannot understand, we are not required to study them and to base our *Avodas Hashem* on them ... In fact we might otherwise learn wrong lessons from them" (*Michtav MeEliyahu* IV 353-4).

5) Needless to say, the fact that we are limited in our understanding of *aggadah* should in no way weaken our respect for this aspect of Torah.

Now here are the views of Rav Hirsch (quoted from his responsa):

1) "All aggadic statements are not rooted in the transmission from Sinai ... they are rather the personal ideas of the maker of the statement. Even though any intelligent person ... will surely yield to the opinion of any sage of *Chazal* ... because every one of them was greater than all of us put together ... never-

reservations about extramundane Sefirotic *kabbalah*. Thus, the Rivash writes: "I have already informed you what my *rebbe*, the Rav, Rabbeinu Nissim, *z"l*, (i.e., the RaN) said to me *explicitly*, that 'much too much did the Ramban, *z"l*, commit himself to *believe* in that *kabbalah*.'" (These are echoes of the earlier views of the *Baal (Sefer) HaHashlamah* and his nephew, *Baal (Sefer) HaMeoros* on the Talmud, and the *rebbe* of Rabbeinu Manoach, author of *Sefer HaMenuchah* on Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, which were even more critical of Sefirotic *kabbalah*).

Rav Hirsch, who as said, was certainly familiar with the *She'elos UTeshuvos Rivash*, in which these reservations about extramundane Sefirotic *kabbalah* are recorded, expressed his own reservations about these extramundane-theosophic aspects in the way I understood the text of his words.

By granting to *kabbalah* its ethico-midrashic value in "the spirit of *Tanach* and Talmud," Rav Hirsch, while sharing with the enumerated *Gedolei Olam* his reservations about the extramundane-theosophic, was overall more moderate in his attitude toward *kabbalah*.

When he writes about the extramundane interpretation of *kabbalah*, Rav Hirsch uses the terms: a) "external dream-worlds"; b) "magic mechanism"; c) "a means of influencing...theosophic (from, *theosophia*, mystical knowledge of things about God) worlds and anti-worlds"; d) "magical...building of cosmic worlds."

Rav Hirsch comments on *Leviticus* 7:38: "They (i.e., the *korbanos*) are neither a concession to a generation that was still steeped in heathen ideas (i.e., Rambam's explanation), nor do they form a chapter of kabbalistic, magic mysteries." Rabbi Elias informs us that the word "kabbalistic" in this passage does not appear in the original German, which should be translated: "nor do they form in themselves a chapter of thaumaturgic (magical miracle working), magical mysteries." The word "kabbalistic" does not appear, but the idea is the same: "a magic mechanism" ("urgic") that has a supernatural influence and effect ("thauma") on phenomena of any part of the cosmos, i.e., a mystery rite. This is a characteristic feature of *kabbalah*. It is "magical," "theosophic," "thaumaturgic," and deals with "magical mysteries" — by any other name, "kabbalistic." In his commentary, Rav Hirsch is rejecting both the Maimonidean and the mystical (kabbalistic) interpretation of *korbanos*. He is certainly not coming to reject only a *mundane* understanding of the mystical interpretation of *korbanos*!

Rabbi Elias' interpretation is that Rabbi Hirsch was objecting only to the popular anthropomorphic conception of extramundane realities taken "in a literal, mundane way." For this Rav Hirsch did not have to raise his objection to "external *dream*-worlds" or "*theosophic* worlds and anti-worlds." For according to Rabbi Elias' interpretation those external theosophic worlds and anti-worlds actually exist, but not in the mundane, gross way in which they are popularly taken. There are too many places in Rav Hirsch's writings where he stresses that Torah Judaism is rational, not mystical, concerned with human improvement, not knowledge of and effect on heavenly realms. Two brief examples: "For this commandment...is not beyond your understanding... It is not in heaven..." (*Deuteronomy* 30:11-12). On this Rav Hirsch comments: "It contains no secret metaphysical

theless this is not part of our obligation as Jews." The statement of the Yerushalmi means that *Aggados* "are surely pertinent to the intention of the Torah's Giver ... Every scholar to whom God has given the ability should arise to draw from the well of Torah and *Mitzvos* in every generation ... And there can be no doubt that these free methods too are acceptable to God if they do not stray from the path of truth ... and are *accepted and intended by Him from the very giving of His Torah. He informed Moshe of these aspects, too, in a non-specific way, without specifying each specific statement that any scholar might at some time express publicly...*" (my italics)

2) "It is absolutely impossible to derive *halachah* from aggadic statements... [Quite apart from the fact that they are not transmitted from Sinai, the aggadic] statements of *Chazal* are not uniformly phrased. [Unlike halachic teachings] some were solely expressed in the form of analogies, parables and riddles. [Their] intent is not conveyed by their apparent meaning."

3) Thus, "in any such statement, whoever takes the speaker literally is misleading himself and others by attributing to the speaker ideas that never occurred to him."

4) Therefore "a person whose reason leads him to differ with the reasoning of *Chazal* on any aggadic topic is not considered a *min* or *kofer*."

5) Yet, "beyond any doubt, the wisdom and the *musar* that *Chazal* presented to us in their aggadic statements and in their *midrashim* are incalculably great and lofty ... There are no meaningless statements there, and if there seem to be any, that is our failure, for we have fallen short of understanding them."

Rabbi Danziger has, of course, the right to place full emphasis on the points that divide the two schools of thought. However, judging from Rav Hirsch's constant reiteration on *aggados* and *midrashim* as sources of our knowledge of Judaism, I believe it is important for us to realize — and emphasize — that, without conceding to them specific Sinaitic origin, he shared with other schools of thought the same deep respect for what our Sages taught in the way of *aggados*.

There are those who like to mock what is called the Orthodox "*Kabbalah-Angst*" (fear of *kabbalah*). Rav Hirsch, I think, would agree that overcoming *kabbalah*-fear (and *aggadah*-fear) is essential to help us grasp the spirit of Torah which he so fervently wanted us to rediscover. §

references to anything beyond the grasp of the ordinary human mind...The teachings and actions which it has in view do not move in the sphere of the supernatural or the heavens." Another example: *Collected Writings 1*, p. 212: "For I (Hashem) have not come in order to reveal supernatural secrets that can be glimpsed only in feverish dreams, nor to bring a new mystic 'faith' to mankind: I Hashem speak forth Righteousness, I proclaim the upright Path." The contrast is always between the extramundane, other-worldly regions and the human sphere of righteousness and upright service of God. With all due respect, in light of all the foregoing, Rabbi Elias' interpretation is patently forced and unreasonable.

Rabbi Elias cites Rav Hirsch's comments on "*Shemos* 15:6, about God's 'right hand' and 'left hand'" as a "good example of how the ethical teachings that Rav Hirsch draws from *kabbalah* are deeply rooted in its extramundane essence." Any objective reader who will take the time to look up Rav Hirsch's commentary there will not see what Rabbi Elias is trying to prove. The reader will see only that Rav Hirsch uses and reshapes kabbalistic ideas to construct rational concepts that relate to the human sphere. Thus, his rational interpretation of the Divine Right Hand and Left Hand is: "God shows His real power and greatness (i.e., Right Hand) in help and creation, in granting life and blessing, not in punishment and destruction. Punishment and destruction coming from Him is itself only a means towards happiness and blessing. His Left Hand (i.e., punishment) is merely an adjunct in service of His Right Hand (i.e., blessing)." This is a perfect example of how Rav Hirsch *divests* a kabbalistic concept of what others take as extramundane entities and understands it rationally as relating to the human sphere, i.e., that all of God's providential acts (reward and punishment) are meant for our happiness and blessing! Man's happiness is the *main* Divine purpose (=Right Hand), while punishment is merely an *auxiliary* adjunct (=Left Hand) to help accomplish that purpose!

Rabbi Elias' citation from *Tehillim* 104:1 is really the acid test that tells the whole story: ("Thou hast clothed Thyself with majesty and glory of might"). Rav Hirsch comments: "All of creation is Thy garment in which the majesty of Thy being and the glory of Thy might are revealed (cf. *Psalms* 102:27)." Rabbi Elias implies that Rav Hirsch was using the term "garment" in its usual kabbalistic sense. But let us examine *Psalms* 102:27, to which Rav Hirsch refers us: "They (i.e., heaven and earth) may perish, but Thou wilt endure, even when they all are outworn like a garment." Rav Hirsch's comment that "garment" is a reference to the created, impermanent natural phenomena that declare the existence and power of their Creator is classically Maimonidean: "And even as Thou didst exist before all else came to be,...so Thou wilt endure, though all else perish. Thine own existence is not subject to that of any other thing or force. [Straight out of Rambam's *Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1-3.] Heaven and earth, all the universe, are but Thy 'garment.' [i.e.] They are merely *the phenomena* through which Thou dost reveal Thyself. Heaven and earth, *subject to change and decay* like a piece of clothing can grow old and outworn like any garment..."

Rabbi Elias also cites *Tehillim* 145:5-6, that deal, with *kevod hodecha*, "the glory of Thy majesty." In his commentary Rav Hirsch refers us to his Commentary

to *Exodus* 16:7. The brilliant way that *kevod Hashem* is explained there leaves no doubt that what Rav Hirsch is offering is not mystical kabbalism, but rational Rambam, pure and simple! It is well worth looking up.

In a tactical departure from objective discussion, Rabbi Elias appeals to emotion and writes that "Rabbi Danziger...accuses such eminent Hirschian interpreters as Dayan Grunfeld and Yaakov Rosenheim (and by implication Rav Schwab, who shared their views on this subject) of falsifying Rav Hirsch's teachings 'in the interest of ideological correctness.'"

To say in a *machlokes leshem shamayim* as ours that one side is "apologetic," is not the same as using the pejorative "falsifying." One may sincerely believe it to be his religious duty to harmonize what are seemingly divergent statements of two authorities. This cannot, and should not, be labeled "falsifying," nor impugning the eminence of those mentioned. Let me add that Rav Schwab, *z"l*, and I discussed various fundamental issues over the years. We knew that our opinions sometimes differed; yet between us there was mutual regard, and even affection. I should hope that the mutual regard that has hitherto prevailed between Rabbi Elias and myself will also continue despite this *machlokes leshem shamayim*. Rabbi Elias urges overcoming "fear of *kabbalah*". We call upon him to overcome his "fear of rationalism" — Hirschian rationalism.

Rabbi Elias finds it "incomprehensible" that I assert a number of times that he "advocates isolation from this world and forsaking Israel's mission to the nations." He replies that, while he does indeed "list...a number of 'intrinsic problems in the *application* of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*; [he] respond[s] point by point...and states clearly what Rav Hirsch would have answered: that today's Jews, even if they wanted to, are just as unable to isolate themselves as were Jews of his day."

An objective listing of "intrinsic *problems* in the application of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*," need not have included such sentences as: "Is there any way to meet this challenge other than by isolating oneself?... Can *Torah Im Derech Eretz* have any relevance today? Would it not be more appropriate to forget about any mission to the nations...?" This is not a listing of objective problems. These are subjective suggestions in the form of questions. I did not write that Rabbi Elias "advocates" isolation, but that he "suggests" isolation.

It is true that Rabbi Elias *does* present Hirschian responses to the "intrinsic problems," but the entire debate is tilted away from the *Torah Im Derech Eretz* view. Rabbi Elias writes in his reply to my review that his "own conclusion about *Torah Im Derech Eretz*...can be summed up in [his] quotation (pp. 326-7) from Rabbi Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg, surely a staunch champion of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*: 'more Torah and less *Derech Eretz*.'" That Rabbi Elias' opinion is similar to that of Rabbi Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg quoted in pp. 326-7 is certainly a welcome and necessary clarification.

To reiterate, Rabbi Elias' annotated *Nineteen Letters* is the most useful, most enlightening edition to date. In his own words, it is "a scholarly commentary." It is not an outright advocacy of Hirschianism. One who seeks the Hirschian inspiration of the *Nineteen Letters* must make allowance for this.

May the approaching new year bring both camps the purity of heart and mind to serve Hashem in truth, and usher in "*shalom alenu ve-al kol Yisrael, Amen*." §