
IS TORAH IM DEREKH ERETZ RELEVANT IN OUR TIME?

By Rabbi Shelomoh Danziger

In the winter of 1985-86 a series of lectures were held under the auspices of K'hal Adath Jeshurun and the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation discussing various aspects of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's life and teachings. The following is an excerpt from the last of those talks delivered by Rabbi Shelomoh Danziger. Rabbi Danziger, formerly Rosh Mesivta of Beth Hamedrash al Shem Horav Shlomo Breuer and Rav of Congregation Beth Medrash Horeb, Riverdale, New York, has written widely on the teachings of Rav Hirsch. What is here presented is a response to one of six questions which Rabbi Danziger raised concerning the Hirschian approach. The question and the all encompassing way it is dealt with cut through to the core of Rav Hirsch and his derekh. A complete transcript of the lecture may be found in *Moreshet Zvi: The Living Hirschian Legacy* (Feldheim: 1988). This excerpt is reprinted with the permission of K'hal Adath Jeshurun, Washington Heights, New York, and of Feldheim Publishers. The reader is reminded that what we have here is the transcript of an oral lecture containing the style particular to its form.

What is the source for *Torah Im Derekh Eretz*?* The usual sources that are given are doubtful, and certainly debatable. *Yafeh Talmud Torah Im Derekh Eretz*—the study of Torah is good with Derekh Eretz refers primarily to the ways of earning a living, not to an educational approach. Rav Hirsch himself was, of course, fully aware of this. Thus in a letter to his great opponent, the Wuerzburger Rav, Rav Seligmann Baer Bamberger, Rav Hirsch himself wrote that the concept *Derekh Eretz* in the saying *Yafeh Talmud Torah Im Derekh Eretz* as “a principle of education” (“Bildungsprinzip”) was open to question and even dispute. Obviously, if one is convinced of the *T.I.D.E.* principle, then one sees the means of earning a living as simply one aspect among many, as Rav Hirsch does in his commentary to *Pirkei Avos* on this *Mishnah*. But it seems fair to say that the different uses of the term *Derekh Eretz* found in *Chazal* are not really the initial source of Rav Hirsch's *T.I.D.E.* conception. They are explained and expanded by him to coincide with his *T.I.D.E.* principle only because he recognizes that principle in the first place. But if so, we still have not discovered the real source of the *T.I.D.E.* principle.

Editor's Note: * Hereafter written as *T.I.D.E.*

In order to give a basic definition of *T.I.D.E.*, we must begin with the word “Hirsch”; we must realize who Rav Hirsch was. This is a preface to and a part of the answer.

Rav Hirsch was a Gaon in Talmud and in *Mikra*. Rav Hirsch was a warrior. But there is still another aspect of Rav Hirsch which is essential to an understanding of what he really meant by *T.I.D.E.* In addition to being a *Gaon*, in addition to being a fighter, he was clearly a *tzaddik*, a man on fire, on fire with the flame of the *Aish Das* of Hashem's Torah. And do you know what the *Aish Das* of Hashem's Torah is meant to accomplish, in the view of *Rabbeinu Ha'tzaddik*? Only one thing: the nearness of the *Shechinah*, an awareness that we are always in the Presence of God, *Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid*, we are always in the House of our Father, *Shivti b'veis Hashem kol yemai chayai*, not only in the *Beis Hamikdash* not only in the *beis hakeneses*, not only in the *beis ha'medrash*, but from there the awareness overflows into the world of business, into the world of professions, into the street, into the dining-room, into the bedroom, into the places of work and into the places of relaxation—into all aspects of normal living! In all the vicissitudes of life, in sorrow and in joy—*Shivti b'veis Hashem kol yemai chayai*—always in our Father's house, always in His Presence, always aware of His nearness! This is the goal of Hashem's Torah! This is the goal of *T.I.D.E.*! This is what *T.I.D.E.* meant to Rav Hirsch!

“ONCE WE UNDERSTAND THE BASIC SOURCE AND THE BASIC DEFINITION OF TORAH IM DEREKH ERETZ IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT AS LONG AS THERE IS A WORLD, A GENERATION OF MEN, A CIVILIZATION—AND AS LONG AS THERE IS A TORAH, THERE IS TORAH IM DEREKH ERETZ.”

What was all this on the part of Rav Hirsch? Artistic license? Literary style? High-sounding, pious platitudes, meant to “kasher” the inherent compromise of *T.I.D.E.*? *Chas V'Shalom*. Perhaps some of the distorters of *T.I.D.E.* take it as literary style, but by *Heaven, Rabbeinu ha'tzaddik meant it !! Literally, in every fiber of his being!* If it is true, as Dayan Grunfeld wrote, that “the certainty and absolute-ness of (Rav Hirsch’s) religious convictions are awe-inspiring,” then especially awe-inspiring is his sense of holiness, his awareness of *Shechina*-nearness, which is a constantly recurrent theme throughout his writings. No man was ever so consistent in everything he wrote. No one who has read all this will believe it to be a *Horaas sha'ah* of compromise for certain conditions. It is the sincere understanding of a *Gaon* and a warrior and a *tzaddik* of the true, undistorted meaning of the Torah in its original, pristine glory, as he saw it. In a letter addressed to Rabbi Lowenstein of Mosbach, dated January 1, 1839, Rav Hirsch wrote: “I have not set out to create a new Judaism; instead I want to grasp and describe—as far as is possible—the ideas of Judaism *as it is.*”

Let me document what I have said about the recurrent theme of *Shechina*-nearness in Rav Hirsch’s writings. In *Parshas Bereishis*, on the *pasuk: Vayishmeu es kol Hashem Elokim mishalech bagan l'ruach bayyom . . .*, Rav Hirsch comments:

“On this verse our Sages remark: *Ikkar Shechinah b'tachtonim*, that originally and essentially the principal nearness of God was to rest down here on earth . . . To open the gates of Paradise once again, . . . and to bring (the *Shechina*), the Glory of God back to earth—that is what is proclaimed on every page of the Word of God as the result and aim of the Torah.”

In *Parshas Noach*, on the *pasuk: VYishkon b'ohalai shem*, Rav Hirsch, commenting on the word *VYishkon*, from which root we get *Shechinah* and *shachen*, writes:

“The Divine is the *shachen* of Man, and Man of the Divine, but neither becomes completely absorbed by the other. . . . While Judaism does teach the most intimate nearness of God to Man, it wants to keep us to the clearest, most comprehensible, we would say sober, way of contemplating it. Not by a fanatic gushing over into the Divine, not by a so-called absorption into God . . . do we become servants of God.” And now the words are italicized: “Only in using the mind and the freedom of will which God had given us *in the earthly sphere to which He has appointed us*, in the most complete faithfulness to God, with the

deliberation and the clearest human insight, do we ourselves attain the height of human perfection, and our earthly management of life *gains the holiness that makes it worthy of the nearness of God.*”

In *Parshas VaYikra*:

Korban shelamim seeks to get nearer to God on account of feeling completely satisfied with life, feeling that there is nothing lacking in one’s circumstances, the only thing that is still necessary is the *crowning feeling that one is near to God . . . shelamim* is the very summit of the Jewish ‘lebensanschauung.’ Not trouble, joy is to be the eternal bridge up to God, and *to enjoy this life on earth in the Presence of God is the highest service of God.*”

In *Parshas Kedoshim*:

“Realizing (the significance of the ineffable Name), we pay attention to all our feelings, think all our thoughts, speak all our words, do all our actions *before Him, conscious of His Presence. . . . which is to render our whole existence becoming a holy one.*”

In *Parshas Emor*:

“For *Kirvas Elokim*, bringing the nearness of God into earthly material life and existence is the purpose which is aimed at with all *korbanos*, all *taharah* and *kedusha*, all *moaday Hashem*.”

In *Parshas Naso*:

“*Yissa Hashem (panav elecha v'yasem lecha shalom)* expresses the highest final result of blessing . . . *It is the most intimate, personal nearness to God.* It is attained when all the material and spiritual possessions and gifts . . . are used . . . entirely for the realization of the godly purposes revealed by God. The nearness of God is not to be desired for receiving in it and through it material and intellectual blessings. *But all material and spiritual blessing is only desirable for using it in the ways indicated by God to become worthy of the nearness of God.* *Kirvas Elokim, nearness of God is tov in itself, is the absolute good (Psalms 73,28 vaani kirvas Elokim lee tov).*”

In *Parshas Va'eschanan*:

“Love is the most intimate bond between two beings . . . Accordingly, *V'ahavata es Hashem Elokecha b'chol levavcha uvchol nafshecha uvchol m'odecha*” means: ‘Seek to get near to God by devoting . . . the whole of your heart, the whole of your soul and the whole of your fortune. Everything that you think and feel, everything that you strive for and desire, and everything that you possess, shall be unto you only the means, only have value to you, for getting near to God, for bringing God near to you. But not the other way around. Do not seek God to obtain and

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keep what you think of, wish for, and have, or would like to have. The nearness to God is to be for you the greatest ‘good, the good in itself.’ As David expresses the Love of God (in *Psalms* 73:28): *Vaani kirvas Elokim lee tov*, ‘But for me the nearness of God is what is good. ‘Whom shall I have in heaven one day, and besides Thee I have no other desire on earth.’ ”(*Psalms* 73:25)

I could go on and on. Because of the limitation of time, I have eliminated many quotations from the Chumash commentary. And, of course, especially in the commentary to the *Psalms* do we find the same recurrent theme of the love of God and the constant awareness of His nearness, of His Presence, in all our earthly endeavors as the only source of true happiness.

Let us begin our answer. What is really the *mekor*, the source for *T.I.D.E.*, and why have only some flimsy, questionable and debatable sources been offered? Let me give a simple, “lomdische” *teyrutz* (answer). You may say that it is oxymoronic. If it is simple, it is not “lomdisch” and if it is “lomdisch,” it is not simple. But an astute colleague of mine once said, “Real *lomdis* is putting your finger on the *pashtus*, on the simple explanation, which often eludes us.”

So, to the point. What is the *mekor*, the source, for *T.I.D.E.*? Our simple “lomdische” *teyrutz* is: *There is no such source!* And do you know why? Because the basis of *T.I.D.E.* is *axiomatic, self-evident*, and therefore *no source is necessary!* The *first*, the most *primary* fact of our existence is not that we are Jews, who have been given the Torah. The *first*, the most *primary* fact of our existence is that we have been given life, and have been placed in *this* world, in *this* century, in *this* living generation of fellow human beings who comprise the society, culture and civilization of our allotted time on earth. This is fact number one, chronologically and logically. Fact number two is that Hashem gave us the Torah to teach us how to live in this world, in this century, in this living generation of fellow human beings who comprise the society, culture and civilization of our allotted time on earth. These are the do’s and don’ts of the Torah, the *mitzvas asey* and the *mitzvas lo t’ause* and the *hashkafos* (the outlooks), which guide us in the use of the physical, social and cultural raw material which comprises the world in which we live. First there is life—*chayyim*—the physical, social and cultural raw material—that is the great given!—And then there is the Torah—*Toras Chayyim*—which shapes this given life,

this physical, social and cultural raw material, and tells us what to use of it and how, and what to reject. In the process, the raw material of life becomes “Toraized” (to coin a word)—it becomes Torah. But there must be a raw material for the Torah to work on. The Torah is not the raw material. The raw material is supplied by the life around us, into which we were born.

No man understood Rav Hirsch better than Rav Yaakov Yechiel Weinberg, the Lithuanian *Gaon, Posek, Rosh Yeshiva*, and academic scholar, the *Mechabber of Sh’elos U’Teshuvos S’ridei Aish*. Let me quote from an article he wrote in the Hebrew anthology, *Harav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch Mishnas v’Shittaso*:

“The Torah, then, is according to Rav Hirsch, the force that gives *form*; and *form*, in the Aristotelian sense, means: the essential nature of a thing (as distinguished from the matter in which it is embodied). *Derekh Eretz* is simply the matter on which the Torah works.”

So is *T.I.D.E.* still relevant today? It’s a silly question! Once we understand the basic source and the basic definition of *T.I.D.E.* it becomes clear that as long as there is a world, a generation of men, a civilization—and as long as there is a Torah, there is *T.I.D.E.* *T.I.D.E.* is as relevant today as it always has been and always will be—*Kimay HaShamayim al Ha’aretz!* Because it is the plan of the Creator of the world, Who is the *Nosain HaTorah*. You realize of course that in the process of answering the question, “What is really the source for *T.I.D.E.*?” we have automatically answered the objection that *Toras Hashem Temimah* should not need to be supplemented by some external culture. Not supplementation but “Toraization”—of the given raw material which it molds and transforms into Torah!

If we still insist on some source, the closest would be the statement of the Sages “*Derekh Eretz* preceded the Torah by 26 generations.” (See Rav Hirsch’s commentary to *Genesis* 3:24).

And what is the basic definition of *T.I.D.E.* in the light of all this? Does it mean going to college? Does it mean becoming a professional? Does it mean becoming an artist, a novelist, a journalist, a musician, a physician, a scientist, a T.V. actor, etc.? Not so fast! Maybe yes and maybe no! The irreducible definition of *T.I.D.E.* is Torah in relation to, and in the context of, the world, the civilization, the raw material as it exists in time, in *our* time, in *this* time. Not as it existed in the sixteen hundreds, or the seventeen hundreds, or even the eighteen hundreds of Rav Hirsch’s day in Germany, or in Poland, or in Lithuania. *But in relation to the raw material as it exists today.* What that relation should be, however, what form it should take,

“DEREKH ERETZ IS SIMPLY THE MATTER ON WHICH THE TORAH WORKS.”

what must be rejected and what may be accepted, must be decided, as any other question, according to the *halachic* factors and the values of the Torah.

In writing of *Kiddush Hashem* in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, the Rambam speaks of the *Gadol b'Torah* who is perceived by his community as always *occupied with Torah, wrapped in tzitzis, crowned with tefillin, and all of whose actions exceed the letter of the law* as generating a *kiddush Hashem*. But he adds the significant phrase: *v'hu sheloh yisracheck harbeh v'lo yishtomaim*; the *Gadol b'Torah* must not go to extremes and must not become a recluse. Indeed, too many budding *talmudai chachomim* slowly abandon effective ways of speaking, abandon dignified manners and behavior patterns and dress, abandon conversance in general affairs, as though the *batlanus* of a recluse were a Torah virtue, *Chas V'shalom*."

We should go our own way, convinced of the correctness and relevance of *T.I.D.E.* as the ideal Torah

system, as the *lechatchila*. We should promote it as such *vigorously*, no less aggressively than the non-Hirschian Yeshiva world and Chassidic groups, who see themselves as *l'chatchila* and others as *b'de'evad*. We may respectfully grant the usefulness, and indeed, the hidden blessing of the non-Hirschian approach as a *horaas sha'ah*.

Perhaps, too, as communal ties are loosened, we should talk of *T.I.D.E.* less in terms of community, and more in terms of a movement in Torah Judaism, to be promoted and fostered wherever possible.

In the *zechus* of *Rabbeinu haGaon halochaim v'hatzaddik*, and through our own sincere efforts, both spiritual and material, may we succeed to bring the *Shechina*-nearness of *T.I.D.E.* in all areas of living to more and more of our brethren, and may we restore Torah life to its original glory — *l'hachazir atarah l'yosnrah* and *l'kaddeish Shem Shamayim baRabbim*. It is a challenge worthy of a mature *T.I.D.E.* approach.

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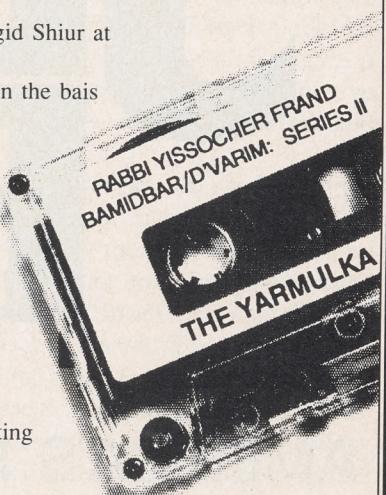
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