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*An Advocate of Integration
Without Assimilation*

Intelligent modern Jews who cherish their heritage and want to understand it better owe it to themselves to become acquainted with the writings of Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the ablest exponents of our faith in the last two centuries. Fortunately, much of what he wrote is available in English. Moreover, Yeshiva University, Bar-Ilan University, London's Jews' College and other institutions of learning will hold this year conferences which will deal with many aspects of his philosophy and teachings. My brief tribute will deal principally with his place in Jewish history.

When the walls of the ghetto crumbled in Central and Western Europe and Jews had to cope with the challenge of a new culture into which they wanted to be integrated, there were many different responses. One of the most important and most enduring was that of Hirsch, the rabbi of Frankfurt-am-Main and founder of a movement which made possible profound commitment to the beliefs and practices of Judaism, coupled with involvement with the general, preponderantly, non-Jewish society, and its economic, political, philosophical and aesthetic enterprise.

His approach was given the name *Torah Im Derech Eretz* - which means "Judaism combined with the way of the world." The least that the approach suggested and recommended was intercultural activity between Jews and their neighbors, at the same time that Jewish tradition was to be conserved and enriched. One can readily see why modern Orthodoxy deems Hirsch one of its spiritual giants, even though it also espouses approaches other than his.

Historians often refer to Hirsch as the founder of neo-Orthodoxy. I am not so sure that I like that designation for him. Neo-Or-

thodoxy conveys the impression that he did something new - something his predecessors did not do. Of course, he was creative. He interpreted Judaism with a view of the intellectual climate of his day. But great Jews always did this.

Saadia and Maimonides did it with a view of the philosophical doctrines that were current in their time. So did Yehuda Halevi and Nachmanides. There always were intercultural reactions between the Jewish people and the people among whom they lived. And the reaction was different in Christian countries than in Moslem countries.

Hirsch is to be credited with the fact that he was able to cope with the state of Western culture in the 19th century just as Rab-
bis Kook and Soloveitchik cope with it in the 20th. Judaism is a religion of life, and to be alive means that one continues to cope with one's environment, physical and cultural - even in the face of change.

Yet what always impressed me is that the way in which our spiritual giants reacted to the challenges of their time always added something to the Jewish tradition which endured. Much of what they said and wrote was timeless. It had meaning for generations thereafter, despite the fact that originally it was a reaction to a contemporary challenge or cultural phenomenon that did not last.

On the other hand, their contemporary situation stimulated them to discover insights in the eternal Torah which remained eternal. The philosophical doctrines of Hirsch's period may no longer be in vogue, but they helped him to reveal insights of the Torah which in another culture might not have been detected. And these new insights are not dated because of their linkage to the intellectual scene or period in which they were written. This was true of his predecessors and his successors as well.

Soloveitchik may write in a world in which philosophical existentialism enjoys great popularity, but his encounter with existentialism has evolved the revelation of insights which will outlive the particular philosophy to which it was a response. I am sanguine enough to believe that the responses of some Orthodox rabbis today to the American philosophies of naturalism and pragmatism will also outlive the outlooks that presently dominate the American horizon.

In any event, every Jew owes it to himself to become familiar with Hirsch. Two more points I must make about him have special significance for some issues confronting us at present.

Hirsch helped Jews see that not every practice of East European Jews was necessarily irreversible. This applied to educational methods and content, as it did to daily habits and personal appearance.

In our day there is a tendency among many Orthodox Jews to sanctify much that has little or no basis in tradition, only because it was part of life in the shtetl.

Hirsch even created a stir when he walked beside his wife instead of having her walk behind him as was the case with most rabbis of Eastern Europe. Thus he helped Jews to see where there might be acculturation which would not result in assimilation. And those who were raised in his movement were more consistently traditional than those East European Jews who resisted acculturation and found that their offspring rejected Jewish tradition altogether.

Furthermore, Hirsch is usually regarded as the man who espoused Jewish separatism. Because he broke with the *Gemeinde*, the established community of his day, his example is cited to prove that Orthodox Jews should not become involved in mixed groups like the Synagogue Council of America in which Orthodox and non-Orthodox participate.

Perhaps I err but my reading of the case prompts me to believe that he broke with his Gemeinde because it was moving toward Reform. This is understandable. But it is no precedent whatever for our contemporary scene, which calls only for cooperation between totally independent groups for the common good.