

**RABBI S. R. HIRSCH: THE NINETEEN
LETTERS: LETTER 18**

In this eighteenth letter, Hirsch advises the perplexed university student regarding the proper path to take to discover religious truth.

And what is our present state? Today, two opposing parties confront each other. The one party has inherited uncomprehended Judaism as a mechanical habit, *mitzvot anashim melumodoh* without its spirit. They bear it in their hands as a sacred relic, as a revered mummy, and fear to awaken its spirit. Some of the others are indeed filled with noble enthusiasm for the welfare of the Jews, but they look upon Judaism as a lifeless framework, as something which should be interred in the grave of a past long since dead and buried. They seek its spirit and find it not, and are in danger, with all their efforts to help the Jew, of severing the last life-nerve of Judaism out of sheer ignorance. And today, when, despite a thousand shades and variations of difference, these two opposing elements are alike in the one great respect, that they are both in the wrong—what shall be done? What is the way to salvation? Does it suffice for the salvation of Judaism to establish our schools upon such a two-fold basis, and to reform our mode of worship? This spirit, the inner harmonious principle of life, is lacking, and that you cannot supply by polishing the outer frame.

There is one way to salvation—atonement must begin where the sin was committed. That one way is to forget the inherited views and prejudices concerning Judaism; to go back to the true sources of Judaism, to the Bible, Talmud and Midrash; to read, study and comprehend them in order to live by them; to draw from them the teachings of Judaism concerning God, the world, mankind and Israel, according to history and precept; to know Judaism out of itself; to learn from its own utterances its wisdom of life. The beginning should be made with the Bible. Its language should first be understood, and then, out of the spirit of the language, the spirit of the speakers therein should be inferred. The Bible should not be studied as an interesting object of philosophical or antiquarian research, or as a basis for theories of taste, or for amusement. It should be studied as the foundation of a new science. Nature should be contemplated with the spirit of David; history should be perceived with the ear of an Isaiah, and then, with the eye thus aroused, with the ear thus opened, the doctrine of God, world, man, Israel and Torah should be drawn from the Bible and should become an idea, or system of ideas, fully comprehended. It is in this spirit that the Talmud should be studied. We should search in the Halachah only for further elucidation and amplification of those ideas we already know from the Bible, and in the Aggadah only for the figuratively disguised manifestation of the same spirit.

This is the path you should pursue, unconcerned as to the opinion which others may hold in reference to your methods of study. You are studying in order to know the light, the truth, the warmth and the sublimity of life, and when you have attained this end you will understand Israel's history and Israel's Law, and that life, in its true sense, is the reflection of that Law, permeated with that

spirit. One spirit lives in all, from the construction of the Holy Tongue to the construction of the universe and the plan of life; one spirit, the spirit of the All-One!

Ah, what a task for the disciples of science! But the results of such study must be carried over into life, transplanted by the schools. Schools for Jews! The young saplings of your people should be reared as Jews, trained to become sons and daughters of Judaism, as you have recognized and understood and learned to respect and love it as the law of your life. They should be as familiar with the language of the Bible as they are with the language of the country in which they live. They should be taught to think in both. Their hearts should be taught to feel, their minds to think. The Scriptures should be their book of law for life, and they should be able to understand life through the word of that Law.

Their eye should be open to recognize the world around them as God's world and themselves in God's world as His servants. Their ear should be open to perceive in history the narrative of the education of all men for this service. The wise precepts of the Torah and Talmud should be made clear to them as designed to spiritualize their lives for such sublime service to God. They should be taught to understand, to respect and to love them, in order that they may rejoice in the name of "Jew" despite all which that name implies of scorn and hardship. Together with this type of instruction they should be trained for breadwinning, but they should be taught that breadwinning is only a means for living, but not the purpose of life, and that the value of life is not to be judged according to rank, wealth, or brilliance, but solely in terms of the amount of good and of service to God with which that life is filled. They should be taught not to subordinate the demands of their spiritual mission to those of physical pleasure and comfort, but the reverse. While this training goes on, and until such time as Israel's house will be built up of such sons and daughters, the parents should be implored and entreated not to interfere with the work of the school, not to crush tender shoots of Jewish sentiment in the breasts of their children with a cold unsympathetic attitude. The school should also endeavor to awaken within the hearts of the parents the nobler impulses latent there. If this should prove impossible, at least they should be brought to respect the sentiments which they cannot themselves understand. If an earnest effort were made to attain these ends, things would be different in Israel.

**RABBI S. R. HIRSCH: JUDAISM
ETERNAL**

In this selection, Hirsch offers his opinion regarding the value of studying world history.

It shows us all this in order that, in the midst of a world seeking its salvation in the pursuit of self-interest and power, one people might be introduced which, as the direct creation of a Divine revelation, should adopt an outlook contrary to that of all the other peoples; which without land or material power, should find its existence in God and its strength only in the fulfillment of His Law; which should be a constant reminder of God and of the mission of mankind, and consequently an instrument for the eventual assembling of the peoples in the service of God and the Law of God for the performance of man's function. It goes on to tell us how to this people was to be entrusted the legacy of God to humanity; how it was to be allowed to perish as a state in the conflicts with the Assyrian-Babylonian, Persian-Median, Macedonian-Syrian and Roman monarchies, and with its Divine legacy to humanity to be scattered among the nations as the "Divine seed" in order that its redemption might prefigure the redemption of the whole of humanity. To guide it in its course through the centuries and among the nations it was to be provided with men with the "open eye" who should foretell to it the fate of these great powers in their rise and fall and its own course over their graves, and who should arm it with the Divine promises in order that in its periods of deepest darkness it might march on full of confidence to meet its own dawn and that of the whole of humanity.

The Jewish people is a product of the progressive development of humanity. It has been sent into the midst of the nations to further that development, and for this end the whole course of history has been mapped out before it. Should not then an acquaintance with world history be for its children not only not superfluous but actually indispensable? Can they even dimly comprehend the old prophetic saying about the three different missions of the peoples without some knowledge of the Japhetic-Hellenistic influence on the development of culture up to this day? They will no doubt hear a story about the "sending of Moses," which tries to make of this "Moses" a disciple of Egyptian priests and of the Mosaic legislation a product of Egyptian wisdom. If they are to dismiss this story as the pitiable invention which it is, must they not first see clearly the boundless contrast between the Egyptian wisdom which founded its caste system on the annihilation of the freedom of the individual and the Sinaitic legislation which founded its state on Justice? Will they not find fresh evidence for the Divine origin of the Law given to them by Moses in studying the life and politics of the time in which this Law was given to their ancestors, when through this study they realize how, in contrast to Egyptian tyranny and Syrian depravity, they were given a Law which in its insistence on justice, humanity and morality far surpassed not only all the systems then existing on the earth but all which have since appeared, and which still represents for humanity the

ultimate goal of moral progress? Will they not properly understand the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Nahum, Obadiah and Habakkuk about Tyre and Babylon, Egypt and Nineveh, etc., and the "Mene Tekel" warning of Jewish men of God to kings feasting on their plunder, only when they have learnt about the history of these peoples, their culture, their battles and wars, etc., from the chronicles of the times? Will they understand the past of their people, its tasks in the present and its hopes, along with those of all mankind, for the future, without some instruction in world history?

In teaching them the languages of the civilized nations and introducing them to their literature we give them the key with which, when they are grown up, they can gain entrance to the intellectual creations of the peoples and feed and enrich their minds with all that is good and noble and true in the contributions of the noblest spirits to the realm of knowledge. In doing this we do not at the same time prepare them for realizing how, since the time when seeds of light from the divine flame on Sinai were sown in the bosom of the peoples, the old night has faded more and more from the earth, how the living thought of God, the conception of the world and of man as sprung

from God, the idea of the unity of God and of the human race, of man's task in life to cultivate truth and goodness, justice and morality, of the Divine and eternal significance of every fleeting moment on earth spent in the fulfillment of duty, of the establishment of a kingdom of God on earth to which all men must give their noblest labours—how these seeds of light from the Divine fire on Sinai have won for themselves an ever larger place in the minds of men, and are continuing to work for the improvement and happiness of mankind? Do we not with all this at the same time help them to understand that their fathers did not strive and hope in vain, that their prophets communicated to them no dreams and fairy tales, that the intellectual and moral dawn of which they were the heralds at midnight is already announcing its approach, and that the vision placed thousands of years ago by the Divine spirit in the mouths of Jewish prophets has already been realized by numbers of gifted youths who—consciously and unconsciously—are working for its fulfillment, namely, the redemption of humanity through the obedience of all to the Divine moral law? And is this knowledge of no benefit for giving our youth a Jewish outlook on life?