



Photo courtesy of Rabbi Shimon Hirsch

Harav Samson Raphael Hirsch, *zt"l*

## Reformed and Redeemed

*File under*  
SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Every event that occurs in the world is guided by Divine Providence and happens for a specific purpose. The recent initiative of the Reform movement to make inroads in Eretz Yisrael through the framework of the Israeli political/religious system is no exception. Regardless of their chances for success in changing the current arrangement, which is principally based on *Halachah*, they are acting with great determination and using every avenue available to them to achieve this goal.

How to deal with this challenge directly falls upon the shoulders of the political leadership, but, for us, it would seem to bear a message that reflects on our own level of *emunah*.

To appreciate this perspective, one must look back and reflect on the historical events that occurred around two centuries ago at the birth of the "Enlightenment." At that time, a spiritual *churban* wiped out *kehillos* in Western Europe in the span of only a few decades. Long before Hitler decimated European Jewry, the vast majority of Western European Jews had lost their attachment to Torah and *mitzvos* and had become victims of spiritual devastation.

What were the principal causes for this downfall? In contrast to their brethren in Eastern Europe, where people lived in dismal physical conditions and suffered from extreme poverty and government persecution, Jews in the West lived quite comfortably. The French Revolution was the catalyst for a wave of emancipation that swept the continent and restructured the social and political system. This movement created the opportunity for everyone's equal participation in society, including Jews. It was against this backdrop that the Reform movement was initially born.

To paraphrase *Chazal*, they created the hole for the mouse, but it was the mouse that was willing and ready to go through that opening. In other words, it was the inner decay that already existed within Western European Jewry that made this downfall possible. The leaders of Reform had ready and willing masses who embraced an ideology of assimilation and discarded a *mesorah* of belief in Torah MiSinai.

Harav Yosef Breuer, *zt"l*, who led the

Khal Adas Jeshurun *kehillah* in Washington Heights, used to say that two tragic episodes played a major role in this phenomenon. The first was the well-known controversy surrounding Harav Yonason Eibenschutz, *zt"l*, who was falsely suspected of being a follower of the infamous false moshiach, Shabsai Tzvi. The second was a halachic dispute over the validity of a *get*, known as the "get of Kliva." In both instances the *Gedolei Torah* of the generation were involved on both sides of these issues that rocked many communities. There is not a shred of doubt that their involvement in these matters was totally *l'shem Shamayim*. Anyone who takes the time to read the responsive literature on both topics will notice the tremendous dedication of the authors to clarify the *emes*, the simple truth, without any possible taint of self-interest.

Nevertheless, the effect was a devastating blow to *kvod haTorah* among the general public. *Machlokes*, even *l'shem Shamayim*, is notorious for wreaking havoc.

In addition, it is evident that those generations lacked the inner commitment and enthusiasm to live according to the ideas of the Torah. It was this state of spiritual stagnation upon which the reformers in all their forms were able to exploit, quickly turning the situation from precarious to nearly hopeless.

It would only be through the extraordinary skills and dedication of Harav Samson Raphael Hirsch, *zt"l*, that the pendulum swung back at least for a small but dedicated core of German Jews. The fundamental topic in his legendary work, *Nineteen Letters*, is the commitment to *live Torah* in all aspects of one's life. This masterfully crafted message would rekindle a desire in the generation, or at least part of it, to remain loyal to the traditions of their ancestors. This concept of *b'chol drachecha da'eihu*, to acknowledge His presence in all that we do and in everything that surrounds us, would form the motto of "*Torah im Derech Eretz*" and is the common theme of all of Rav Hirsch's writings. Without acknowledging this elementary factor, it is impossible to ensure the existence of the Torah community.

The refusal of "liberal Judaism" to accept the reality of the *giluy haShechinah* at *Yetzias*

*Mitzrayim* and *Maamad Har Sinai* is precisely for this reason. Those events challenge their perception that man has the freedom to choose a way of life that accommodates his personal preferences.

The attempts that we see from the modern-day incarnations of this movement must serve as a wakeup call to all of us, no matter how distanced we feel our lives are from their sphere of influence. As said, it certainly should be responded to in the political arena, but their efforts to preserve the status quo will only succeed if our lives are a sincere reflection of the principles they claim to be defending.

It is imperative that we do everything in our power to create an atmosphere in which our youth can attain the great heights that Hashem demands of His people. We live in the midst of a tsunami of impurity of all imaginable forms. The details of this are all too well known to all of us. For all practical purposes, *taharah*, resisting indulgence, separates *Klal Yisrael* from the rest of nations. It is not a matter of zealotry or "*frumkeit*" that we resist the blur of moral standards and the tools that serve as its conduit, but rather the core of our spiritual survival. Only within an atmosphere of *taharah* can our youth be receptive to learning and internalizing the fundamentals of *emunah*.

It is imperative that our educational system be able to focus on implanting the necessary information to understand the principles of our *emunah*. Only with these tools will the next generation be able to internalize the precepts of the Torah as the highest ideal.

Spiritual vibrancy and health are contagious elements. Its ultimate effects can be felt far from the camps that possess the virtues of authentic *Yiddishkeit*. The final bonus of this process will be the inevitable effect on those who subscribed to a hollow shell of counterfeit Judaism, to engage in *Toras emes*.

If our efforts are properly directed, *we* will be reformed and redeemed. *Toras emes* unites people and is the best tool to create unity within *Klal Yisrael*. In the merit of our *emunah* and sincere efforts to bring ourselves closer to the *emes*, may Hashem permanently redeem us from our spiritual and physical slavery.

*Chag kasher v'same'ach.* ■