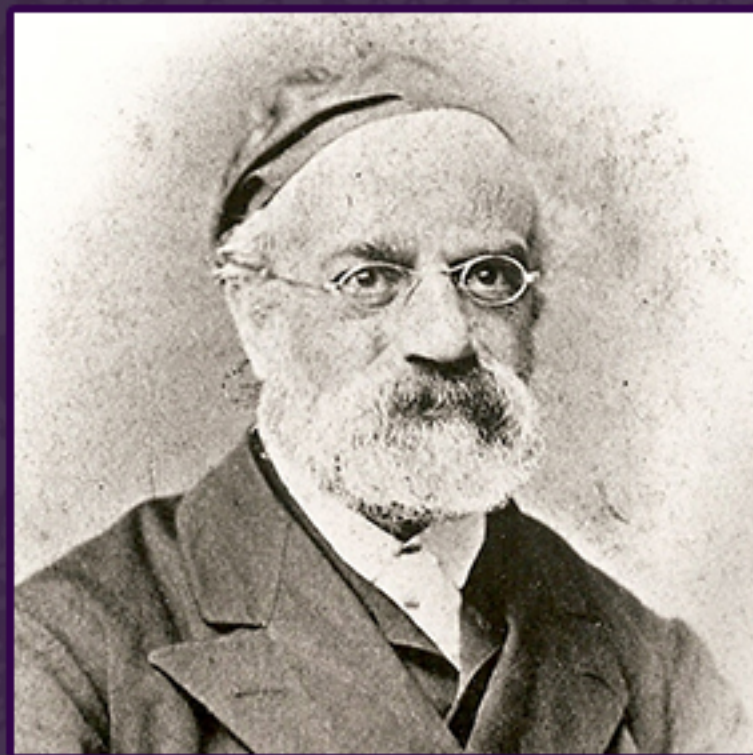


NOTES ON
RABBI SHIMSHON BEN RAPHAEL HIRSCH'S
PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM



ECLECTIC TORAH COMPILATIONS

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— TALMUDIC BOOKS —

NOTES ON

RABBI SHIMSHON
BEN RAPHAEL
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OF JUDAISM



Notes on Rav Hirsch's comprehensive understanding of Judaism, based on Rabbi Joseph Elias' commentary to Hirsch's The Nineteen Letters (Feldheim 1995). Most quotes are from Hirsch's works, including The Nineteen Letters, Horeb, his various Biblical commentaries and other writings, rearranged by topic. Interspersed are Rabbi Elias' comments and my paraphrasing of Rabbis Hirsch's and Elias' ideas.

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RABBI S. R. HIRSCH'S PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM

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RABBI S. R. HIRSCH'S PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM

1. ON THE NATURE OF G-D/ON THE STUDY OF NATURAL SCIENCES

- 1.1 The nature of G-d transcends our understanding. It is futile to try to speculate philosophically about Him. Man is unable to grasp the essence of Divinity.
- 1.2 We can only know G-d through His ways.
- 1.3 Although our experience of G-d's ways and our perception of design, order and purpose in the world around us point to the existence of a Creator, they do not *prove* it to him who refuses to accept it.
- 1.4 It is Man's ability to attain knowledge about the world that enables him to see in it the work of G-d's creating and ordering hand and, thereby, perceive His existence and rulership over the world.
- 1.5 Study of the heavens and earth alone will not lead one to recognize and praise the Creator.
- 1.6 It is G-d's *love* which provides the matter and energy for the world to function. This love sustains the world. G-d's *justice* sets limits, goals and boundaries.
- 1.7 G-d's Name יהוה means "the One Who kept, keeps and will keep everything in existence".
- 1.8 Science can describe the natural process; it cannot account for the ultimate forces that are responsible for their working. The Torah shows G-d the Creator sustaining the world by means of His Will and Blessing. Existence is the realization of a thought of G-d.
- 1.9 G-d's love, justice and omnipotence must find their echo in our love, awe and resulting trust in Him.
- 1.10 Our conclusions about the nature of all things must be derived from observation, experience, and from the Torah. The Torah must always be included with the given facts, for surely true speculation does not mean to construe worlds out of some inner notions, while keeping eyes and ears closed to the real world. True speculation takes nature, man and history as facts, investigating them in order to arrive at knowledge. To these, Judaism adds the Torah, for it is equally a fact, just like the heaven and earth.
- 1.11 All contending forces are harmonized by G-d. "G-d is One, and His Name is One" (Zechariah 14:9).
- 1.12 G-d did not "rest" or "refreshed" Himself on the Seventh day of Creation. Rather – **וַיִּנָּפֵשׁ** – G-d "hid" as is the soul (**נֶפֶשׁ**) hidden. G-d has the same relationship with the world as a soul (a Divine spark) does with a body. Nonetheless, G-d's essence is unknowable to us.

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- 1.13 Knowledge of G-d does not come from speculation and neither is study of the Law a theoretical exercise for the mind. Knowledge of G-d comes to those who apply and practice the fear of G-d and the wisdom of the Torah.
- 1.14 G-d is the “Lord (or Master) of Hosts” (ה' צבאות). He unites the infinite variety of things created to act and interact as parts of one single, unified world.
- 1.15 G-d's **מדת הרחמים** (Attribute of Mercy) enables man to continue despite his errors.
- 1.16 Beware of trying to measure the Creator with the yardstick of the creature.

2. ON WORSHIPPING G-D AND FULFILLING HIS WILL

- 2.1 Fulfilling G-d's Will only if it strikes us as being right, wise or good could hardly be called obedience to G-d's Will. Would that not, rather, be obedience to oneself?
- 2.2 An offering represents a dedication of the Earth (the world and all in it) to G-d. It is an upward striving of man toward G-d and compliance with His Will.
- 2.3 Avrohom was characterized by having **אהבה** (love) for G-d, **אמונה** (which is rock-like trust or confidence, and not just “faith”) which sees everything in life as sustained by Him alone and faith that He will fulfill His promises no matter how little the present may seem to warrant that and, finally, **יראה** (awe or fear) borne by surrender to His Will, without complaining. These he bequeathed to his son Yitzchok (particularly **יראה**) and grandson Yaacov (particularly **אמונה** - trust).
- 2.4 Real love for G-d is expressed by doing His Will, specifically by loving and helping His creatures – i.e. with lovingkindness. In doing **חסד**, we follow in Avrohom's footsteps.
- 2.5 Nowhere does the Torah expect “sacrifices”, the giving up of something for the sake of depriving ourselves of it or of giving it to G-d. We bring **קרבת** from **קרוב** to bring us close to G-d, to elevate ourselves to the needed level of sanctity and dedication to G-d and Torah.
- 2.6 Fulfillment of G-d's Will with our possessions and pleasure, with thought, word and deed – this is the substance of our lives.
- 2.7 There are three levels of human functioning: Thought (as expressed by **תפילה**), Word (**תורה**) and Deed (**גמילות חסדים**). All are to be involved in our service of G-d.
- 2.8 Abundance of blessing and happiness can be attained here on earth when the Will of G-d is taken as the sole measure for arranging all aspects of human life.

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3. ON THE CREATION

- 3.1 All Creation is from G-d; everything is subordinate to Him. All forces governing Creation are from G-d. Everything exists in G-d's service. Everything serves G-d.
- 3.2 Everything in Creation has a purpose. Although the host of creations differ one from another, they are harmoniously linked in one system. Each element supports the other and the whole. Nothing exists by itself for itself. Everything is united. Similarly, all existence cumulatively interact and are interdependent for which everyone must take full responsibility.
- 3.3 G-d a) created, formed and arranged the universe and then b) blessed it with continued preservation and continued development. He then c) concealed (withdrew) Himself. Nonetheless, He continues to guide His Creation.
- 3.4 G-d's lovingkindness is the basic motive and force characterizing the Creation. The entire process of Creation is a process of giving. Yet, giving (as expressed by חסד) is bound by limitations/boundaries (גבורה – justice).
- 3.5 G-d created the world in lovingkindness. The entire functioning of the world depends upon each creature giving to the other, rather than just taking.
- 3.6 In principle, one could accept the theory of evolution if understood not as a random process of natural selection, but as a Divinely-planned and instituted development.

4. ON MAN'S ROLE IN THE CREATION

- 4.1 Man is not isolated. He is one creature in a world of many creatures – all affecting one another.
- 4.2 Man's purpose and role in the Creation can only be learned from the Creator.
- 4.3 Man is to shape his free will in order to shape himself and the world according to G-d's Will and, thereby, attain the ultimate goal and good – closeness to G-d.
- 4.4 Man's mission is to be a servant of G-d. Everything, force, talent, creativity, etc. one has has been given for this purpose. Man is to be a צלם אלוקים – a likeness of G-d. As He is just and loving, so should you.
- 4.5 Man is unique among creations having a Divine soul. He is to be a partner in the work of Creation and freely direct the forces of the world to further G-d's Will and bring about the goal of Creation (חסד).
- 4.6 Man is to consciously and freely serve G-d and be the first and preeminent in the legion of G-d's servants.

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- 4.7 Our purpose in life is not the acquisition of possessions; by this we must not measure our achievement in life. Our life's mission is concerned with what we become, what we make of ourselves, and what we give, not what we get.
- 4.8 It is the essence of man's role to be G-d's representative on earth. Man was not only created **בצלמו** (in His Image), but **בדמותו** – G-dlike.
- 4.9 We see from Man's capabilities that he is meant to function creatively. His head turns to see, his hands can shape things, his mind can comprehend. Also, his heart has an infinite capacity to embrace all beings with respect and love.
- 4.10 What is Man's position within the Creation? He is neither god nor slave, but a brother and fellow worker. He is the firstborn and administrator of the Earth. His task is to attend to everything on it and further it in accordance with G-d's Will. It is only from G-d, the source of all power, that he has received the right to appropriate the world for his own use. With this privilege comes the duty to take only that which the Giver has permitted and use it according to His Will.
- 4.11 Man is expected to develop a civilization based on the cultural and social values of a religiously-inspired humanism which strives for human self-perfection.
- 4.12 The purpose of man's existence in this world is to serve G-d joyfully, through all one's actions, by devoting all earthly things to G-d, rather than retiring like a recluse into philosophical meditations or into ascetic denial of one's human nature.

5. ON THE NATURE OF MAN AND FREE WILL

- 5.1 Man's **יצר הרע** (Evil Inclination) distorts his clear vision of right and wrong. This **יצר** is a necessary condition for man's freedom of will and action and, therefore, his more meaningful service of G-d. Man has to have the ability to disobey.
- 5.2 One's conscience is the voice of the **יצר הטוב** (Good Inclination). The Torah is G-d's voice to us. Our conscience is G-d's voice within us. A person need only listen.
- 5.3 Man must be elevated by his soul, infused with Divine sanctity, to fulfill its function. Otherwise, it becomes a source of animalistic degeneracy.
- 5.4 It must be obvious that Man is a Divine creation, too. One's personality has an invisible Divine spark, controlling mind and body, and is an emanation of the Deity.
- 5.5 Whereas the Voice of G-d speaks in or through all other creatures, in the case of Man, it speaks to him, challenging him to accept it, voluntarily, as the impelling force directing his work in life.

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- 5.6 Man's free will places him above the angel, but if abused, he is worse than the devil.
- 5.7 Man's true natural state is his likeness to G-d. In his true natural condition, he is mentally awake and morally pure.
- 5.8 In contrast to the angels (עומדים) who (have one leg and) stand still, Man (with two legs) has free-will and can move ahead (מהלך) if he so wishes.
- 5.9 The uniqueness of human speech lies in the fact that it, more than anything else, reflects the link between body and soul. It is the essence of our humanity.
- 5.10 Man is to be judged by the one thing he really controls – the fear of G-d.
- 5.11 One's capabilities are mere tools given to him to use for blessing or curse. Outwardly, Man is judged by his deeds and whether they correspond with G-d's Will. Man's inner greatness, however, is judged if one best uses his abilities to do the Will of G-d.
- 5.12 The need to provide for our physical necessities take up most of our lives and caused Man to see what he had in common with the beasts. From this he sank into polytheism, becoming a slave to the forces from whom he thought he obtains possessions and pleasure.

6. ON MODERN MAN, HUMANISM AND CULTURE

- 6.1 The spirit of the modern age is Man-centered. Man is the judge entitled to evaluate all that exists. Man judges truth and morality and is competent to pass judgement on whether or not religion serves his purposes – as he defines them.
- 6.2 Man's duties have been replaced by Man's rights.
- 6.3 Humanism, (even) in its highest form, is but a stepping-stone toward the higher conception of Man as G-d's servant.
- 6.4 Where culture and civilization are used in the service of sensuality, the degeneration only becomes all the greater.
- 6.5 Humanism deifies Man, replacing G-d with faith in human reason.
- 6.6 Modern secular humanism is inadequate and a profound disappointment due to its untrammelled pursuit of possessions and enjoyment.

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7. ON RELIGION AND IDOLATRY

- 7.1 Religion has become utilitarian. Does it benefit me? Does it get in the way of my selfish pursuit of my happiness and pleasure (or perfection)?
- 7.2 We are unlike other religions where G-d is found in temples and churches. With us, G-d has an entire nation. Around G-d are we to form our entire national life.
- 7.3 The worship of Man is the last idolatry before the advent of the **משיח**, i.e. Man's reason and judgement become the supreme arbiter and authority in the world¹. Secularism, naturalism and scientism², etc. replace mankind's seeking of G-d's guidance. The "worship of Man" is disastrous because Man's insight cannot arrive at a clear knowledge of moral law. "Every day will find a different right and different truth", and so will every individual.
- 7.4 Only a small fraction of the teachings of Shem³ was brought to mankind by the Christian church. Influenced by Hellenistic ideas, Christianity dimmed the belief in One G-d by introducing a deified human personality. Moreover, it totally rejected G-d's Law. Christianity appealed to the masses by emphasizing that a good heart and good intentions are sufficient and that there is no need to take on the burden of **מצוה** observance. In fact, the observance of **מצוות** was ridiculed and belittled. Yet it is only through the guidance and discipline of the **מצוות** that Man can mold his life to G-d's Will.
- 7.5 Recognizing (its) failure, the Church declared the world to be incurably evil and preached ideals of abstinence and celibacy⁴.
- 7.6 It has been said that paganism deified this world and totally denied a higher world; classical Christianity preached otherworldliness and rejected this world; and only the Jew was taught by the Torah how to link the two, in order to lift this world to the level of the spiritual. That goal is impossible to achieve without Torah guidance.
- 7.7 We are to raise up to G-d, rather than bring the Divine down to earth, as Christianity would view it.

¹ This idea is as per the Vilna Gaon.

² Belief that science can provide all the answers.

³ The son of Noah who proclaimed the doctrine of One G-d.

⁴ Dayan Grunfield points out that Christianity necessarily focuses on Man's weakness and impotence, the futility of his works, and salvation exclusively through faith in its founder. In contrast, Judaism calls on Man freely to be G-d's agent and servant in bringing the world to perfection. We affirm life and see death as bringing **טומאה** (impurity), paralyzing our ability to act.

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8. REGARDING THE REVELATION AT SINAI

- 8.1 Although select individuals in history (e.g. Adam, Avrohom) were at the level that they could hear G-d's Voice, mankind needed a public, communal Revelation to prove, by evidence of our own senses and by actual experience, factually, the Truths of the Law.
- 8.2 Since Sinai, we do not believe in the existence of G-d, we know it. This knowledge is not based on philosophical speculation nor the observance of nature and history nor the inner voice of our conscience, but a historical experience.
- 8.3 The Truth of the Torah requires neither logical proof or blind faith. It is rooted in the empirical historical experience at Mount Sinai, as experienced by an entire people and not just a lone demagogue. We do not have to prove Torah, but to learn from it.
- 8.4 Moses was a normal human being. G-d did not speak in him or through him, but to him.

9. ON THE NATURE OF JUDAISM

- 9.1 Judaism is not a set of beliefs to be accepted as the price of entry into the future world. Rather, Judaism is based on our firm knowledge of the Creator. It remains for us to develop trust, love and awe for Him as we study His works and His Torah.
- 9.2 Five key ideas:
 - 1) Unlike other religions, Judaism is not Man-made and therefore, not flawed and limited due to Man's flawed and limited insight.
 - 2) Since Man cannot divine G-d's Will, Judaism is based on Divine revelation.
 - 3) Since the Torah represents the revelation of G-d's Will, it cannot be judged, evaluated or changed according to human insight. It must be accepted and obeyed irrespective of whether or not we grasp its meaning.
 - 4) However, we should seek to learn the Torah's messages and study it "from within", that is, understood from its own sources, as a spiritually self-contained and self-sufficient system.
 - 5) The purpose of the מצוות and their various categories is to enable man to attain closeness to G-d through furthering His objectives in creating the world.
- 9.3 Judaism knows of 613 duties, but no commandments of faith.

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- 9.4 Our forefathers simply worshipped G-d as the creator of Man. The modern age glorifies Man as the creator of G-d. Judaism is not religion borne *from within* man's soul. It seeks to *implant* religion into Man's emotions and intellect.
- 9.5 **אלקינו** does not mean "our G-d" in a possessive sense, as if G-d were exclusively ours, but, rather, that He alone is accepted by us as G-d.
- 9.6 Jews (surely) did not invent the Torah, since we see that they resisted it.
- 9.7 Judaism never remained aloof from true civilization and progress. The reason is simple: the Torah was given to us as the tool for molding the world, in all its aspects, in accordance with the Will of G-d.
- 9.8 Judaism affirms life and rejects seclusion. It emphasizes action rather than pure speculation or mystical meditation.

10. ON REFORMING JUDAISM

- 10.1 The "reform" that is needed is not a reform of Judaism, but a reform of the Jew.
- 10.2 We have to educate and elevate our generation toward the heights of Torah, but not lower the Torah to the level of the times and reduce its lofty peaks to the shallowness of our life.
- 10.3 The Reformers who considered Judaism in need of improvement were not at all guided by their own vision of Judaism, but by their desire to make it conform with the ideas of the time. Judaism is destined to teach the age. It will not let itself be taught by the age.

11. ON THE ESSENCE OF TORAH

- 11.1 The Written and Oral Torahs are inseparable and authoritative. The Torah is fixed and immutable.
- 11.2 Only the Torah can shape Man's individual and communal life in accordance with G-d's Will.
- 11.3 The Torah is the blueprint of the world. Application of Its Teachings lifts Man, and the world as a whole, to the highest possible level of sanctity, perfection and closeness with G-d.
- 11.5 Torah more accurately should be translated as "A Body of Teachings (or Instructions)" and not "Law". Still, the concept of a Divinely-commanded Law is central to Judaism. The key word in Judaism is not doctrine or faith, but law – and, with it, man's duty to obey. But, Judaism is not purely law and mechanical observance of laws, to the exclusion of ideas.

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11.6 This Law is G-d's eternal Will. We are to be Torah-true, i.e. loyal to the Law revealed by G-d.

12. ON THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING TORAH

12.1 The Torah is our authentic source for studying Judaism. To understand Judaism, we must study the Torah.

12.2 The Torah is the way G-d views Man. Other religions are human efforts to understand G-d. The Torah is G-d's teachings about Man. The Torah is anthropology, not theology.

12.3 The Torah is G-d's Teaching and cannot be measured by Man's limited and ever-changing insight.

12.4 The Torah teaches Man how to view history and nature, and his own destiny.

12.5 The Torah, too, discloses to you only what the created world is to you, and you to it, and what G-d is and ought to be for you. Do not seek, therefore, to investigate with your reason what the Torah does not disclose to you. G-d's work and His Word, nature, history, Torah, are open before you...so you may school yourself to be the active performer of the Divine Will, the servant of G-d. Our Sages have already noted that Scripture begins with a **ב** in order to warn you at the very beginning that what is before this world, above it, or below it, is beyond the bounds of your inquiry⁵.

12.6 The goal of Talmud study is the concrete, practical implementation of the basic ideas gained from the **תנ"ך**. While the **תנ"ך** defines the meaning of life and Man's task, the Oral Law provides the specific Halachic and philosophical guidance needed. There is an inner unity of the Written and Oral Torah. Talmud study completes the Torah. It is the crown in the Jew's Torah learning. The Gemoroh represents the deeper penetration into the knowledge of Torah.

12.7 Even the most loyal and active performance of the precepts of the Torah cannot replace the study of the Torah. Only through **תלמוד תורה** can loyalty to duty in practical life be permanently assured.

13. ON HOW TO PROPERLY STUDY TORAH

13.1 The text of the Torah can only be understood from within – in accordance with the unique spirit of the sacred language, guided by the Oral Tradition⁶.

⁵ The **ב** is closed on three sides and open in the forward direction only.

⁶ R' Hirsch's theory of Hebrew and its etymology is based on a two-letter root, and that like-sounding words have related meanings or affinity.

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- 13.2 What is it to learn **תורה לשמה**, with a “pure purpose”? It is to occupy oneself and study Torah for only one purpose: to discern from the Torah the Will of G-d and to do G-d's Will by fulfilling it himself and teaching it to others.
- 13.3 It is a profound error not to learn **תנ"ך**. Efforts must be made to teach it in the way it should be taught.
- 13.4 Torah study should provide guidance to correct action, rather than being an end in itself.

14. **תורה עם דרך ארץ**

- 14.1 The term **דרך ארץ** (Derech Eretz) includes all situations arising from the circumstance that the Earth is the place where the individual must live, fulfill his destiny, and dwell together with others, and that he must use the resources and conditions provided on Earth in order to accomplish his purpose⁷.
- 14.2 Correctly understood, **תורה עם דרך ארץ** means that the eternal values and teachings of the Torah should be applied to the changing conditions of a given society and civilization; these conditions should be used as the matrix within which the Torah's full realization is to be brought.
- 14.3 The goal of **תורה עם דרך ארץ** is to achieve closeness to G-d by being aware of Him and being faithful to Him, in every endeavor of ours within our world.
- 14.4 The Torah rejects the separation of what is termed the religious and secular aspects of life. Instead it calls for the union of soul and body, spirit and action, Man and the world.
- 14.5 **דרך ארץ** preceded the giving of the Torah by 26 generations.
- 14.6 All professions or businesses are equally worthy, provided they are honest and honorable. A career must not endanger one's morality or Jewishness. One's vocation should be viewed only as a means to a full life of service to G-d, and should be evaluated by whether it contributes to or, G-d forbid, detracts from it.

15. **ON DEVELOPING AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

- 15.1 An Educational Program should join religious knowledge and striving with true education for life in the community. It should link the eternal religious with the temporal human. It should cultivate, in a unified educational program, that which is specifically Jewish together with general humanism, evaluating the

⁷ Hence, the term **דרך ארץ** is used in different senses, depending on the context: the ways by which society lives, rules of decency, propriety and civic responsibility, ways of earning a living, and worldly life and affairs in general.

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findings of general scholarship from the viewpoint of the truth taught by Judaism and, in turn, using them from the fuller and clearer understanding of Jewish teachings.

15.2 An Educational Program should be built on the following principles:

- a) Torah study is to be preeminent. Thorough study of Torah and Nach. Intensive study of Mishnah. Mastery of the Halochic subjects dealt with in the Mishnah. Understanding of the governing principles of the Oral Law. Talmud without cultivating Pilpul, but a clear knowledge and understanding of Shas. Attention to the Rishonim, such as the Rashboh and the Ran.
- b) General instruction and knowledge concerning nature, history, man and society, as well as practical and vocational skills should be pursued. Preparation for shaping our world in accordance with G-d's Will, pursuing **דן ארץ**, understanding subjects such as astronomy needed for Halochic purposes, subjects needed for a livelihood, subjects to prepare us to deal with the ideological challenges we have to confront.

15.3 The goal of a Jewish school is to provide a basic education up to the level where the pupil is able to learn Gemoroh by himself, with Rashi, Tosfos and Rishonim by the age of sixteen, after ten years of schooling. For students unable to master Gemoroh, they should study Chayei Odom, Menoras HaMaor and, above all, Mishnayos.

15.4 Torah study is the first concern of a Rov. Every Kehilloh must support a group of young men who will study with the Rov – i.e. in a Yeshiva.

15.5 Secular studies must only be viewed and used as tools for our Torah life. They are not to be considered equal in importance to Torah studies. They are auxiliary fields of study.

16. ON (JEWISH) HISTORY

16.1 (Jewish) history and the fate of mankind has been shaped by man's compliance or non-compliance with G-d's Will.

16.2 The goal of Jewish history is not our disappearance among the nations, but the resurrection of state and Sanctuary on our own soil, with the coming of the **משיח**.

17. ON JEWISH NATIONHOOD

17.1 The only bond of Jewish national unity is G-d's Law, the Torah. Land and statehood are obtained from G-d only to show how a nation is to live in accordance with His Will. Israel will lose them if it does not fulfill His Will.

17.2 Indeed, land, prosperity and the institutions of statehood were put at Israel's disposal not as goals in themselves, but as means for the fulfillment of the Torah.

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- 17.3 Israel as the Chosen People is not a rejection of the other nations but, on the contrary, a crucial service to them. Israel is meant to preserve and demonstrate to the world the verities that ultimately are to be upheld by all humanity.
- 17.4 Israel is linked with the nations and mankind at large. We are meant to be a kingdom of priests, meaning that each and every Jew, by word and example, is to spread the knowledge of G-d and loyalty to Him – to teach the human race to call upon G-d and serve Him in unity.
- 17.5 Three Key Points:
- 1) G-d is the sole source of life of the Jewish people – our miraculous survival through history constantly demonstrates that our national life is totally dependant upon G-d;
 - 2) The entire purpose of the life of the Jewish people is the fulfillment of G-d's Will; and
 - 3) The expression of G-d's Will, the Torah, is the exclusive bond (cohesion) of the Jewish people – no other factor (race, history, language, self-identification or beliefs) is a basis of for our existence. Our entire life, activity and significance is to have no basis for existence other than the Torah.
- 17.6 The Jewish people had to undergo the suffering of the Egyptian exile in order to perceive the emptiness of Egyptian culture and the impotence of even the strongest (and most technologically advanced) empire before G-d's power, and to realize that it owed everything to G-d.
- 17.7 The Torah was given in the wilderness making us a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” before entering the Land. This underscores the fact that the Jews became a nation purely by virtue of the Torah, and not by virtue of its possessing or inhabiting a land. Our “common territory” is the Torah.
- 17.8 Israel's full completeness in its material, spiritual and intellectual life are bound by the soil of the Holy Land. Israel's Torah is not.
- 17.9 As a **ממלכת כהנים** (Kingdom of Priests) we are to serve as the guardians of G-d's Word in the midst of humanity. As a **גוי קדוש** (Holy Nation) we are to set ourselves apart in holiness never entering into the activities and aspirations of the other nations, but demonstrating human sanctity by our Torah way of life.
- 17.10 Israel's unity and strength lay in the Torah and G-d's protection. When the Jewish people began to rely on the power and wealth of its state, it lost its statehood and land. Its survival in exile was to demonstrate once again that it existed solely through G-d's providence.

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17.11 The nation, like the community (קהילה), must see its bond in its loyalty to the Torah. Its laws, institutions and leadership must accord with and be governed by the Torah. Its leaders must be committed to the Torah.

18. ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GENTILE WORLD

18.1 Israel must remain separate from the other nations so as not to be misled by them, and to teach them – until the day when all of Mankind recognizes G-d as the Ruler.

18.2 Separation from the Gentiles is a matter of practical necessity. Jews must live apart from their neighbors to avoid assimilation. The fences the nations forcefully raised against us to keep us isolated served to protect us from being infected by their barbarity and demoralization.

18.3 We have every right to strive for our civil rights and to live as loyal citizens of our host nations. We should not think of our own welfare as being independent from that of the state. We will be most effective with our duty to demonstrate to the nations how to live a life of Divine service if we show that we are loyal servants of G-d while enjoying all the benefits of citizenship. However, there must be no slackening in our religious loyalty.

18.4 It is forbidden to spread Judaism among the nations, only pure humanitarianism.

18.5 The Jew rejoices whenever and wherever culture elevates people to a perception of the true values and nurtures goodness.

19. THE COMMANDMENTS

19.1 The Commandments can be divided into six groups:

1) **תּוֹרָה**. These are historically revealed concepts about G-d, the character of Man and of Israel, and their implications, not as maxims of faith or philosophy, but as actual principles of living to be acknowledged and absorbed by the heart and soul. **תּוֹרָה** call upon us to take to heart, as principles that should govern our lives, the truths revealed by history:

- G-d is *your* G-d. He guides everything in our lives.
- He is One. All our thoughts and feelings must be united and directed to Him
- All His creatures are His servants. You too. You must serve Him.
- His Will was revealed to you for this purpose, and for all times.
- Recognize G-d's greatness. Perceive His kindness. Love Him. Recognize His faithfulness. Trust in Him.

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- Ennoble your inner life. Cleanse it of detractions from your holy mission. Divest yourself of pride and lust.

- Empathize with and love all beings because they are G-d's children.

תורות are not dry doctrines, but teachings that are to motivate us to live the right kind of life.

- 2) **משפטים**. These are expressions of justice toward beings equal to yourself, based on the principle of this equality, i.e. justice towards humans. All principles are only of value if you truly live as an Israelite in G-d's world. First, practice justice:

- Respect every being and yourself as a creation of G-d.
- Respect what is theirs. Do not be a source of harm to others.
- Respect every human being as your equal. Respect his life and property.
- Respect his right to know the truth. Respect his right to freedom, happiness, peace of mind, honor and a peaceful existence.
- Never abuse the frailty of his body, mind or heart. Never misuse your legal power over him.

משפטים are laws representing justice, not based on social consensus or convenience, but on the application of G-d's Wisdom to the society of Men.

- 3) **חוקים**. These are expressions of justice toward subordinate beings, based on the principle that all things exist in G-d's service; i.e. justice toward the earth and plants and animals, as well as toward your property, your body and your mind and heart, which together make up your self.

- Respect all that exists as G-d's property. Do not destroy anything. Do not misuse it. Do not waste. Use everything wisely.
- Respect the species and their order. Do not intermingle them. Respect the feelings and instincts of animals. Respect the human body (including your own), even after the soul has departed. Maintain your body, as it is the repository of the spirit.
- Limit your instincts and animal-like actions. subordinate them to G-d's Law. Conceal and sublimate the animal in you.
- Respect your soul. Feed and nourish its tool, the body, accordingly.
- Respect your own person in its purest expression – your power of speech.

חוקים deal with how we relate to our physical and material environment. They are primarily tools for controlling and ennobling our physical desires and activities, refining our character and sanctifying our lives.

- 4) **מצוות**. These are precepts of love toward all beings, even when they have no claim to it, purely because of G-d's bidding and the meaning of your

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mission as Man and Israelite. מצוות are designed to develop in a person the spirit of blessing so that he will then give to others, and the community, in that spirit. Become a blessing for yourself, and for others. Garner goodness and nobility, give yourself to the world around you by serving G-d.

- Revere you parents. They are G-d's emissaries to you.
- Revere wisdom, age and virtue. Let them serve as models for you.
- Seek enlightenment through the Torah's teachings.
- Flee from evil. Attach yourself to good, and you'll become good yourself.
- Constantly endeavor to perfect your inner self. Elevate yourself through devotion and dedication to G-d.
- Strive to make the earth a fit home for man.
- Choose a wife and bring her into your home.
- Educate your children in the proper spirit. Raise them so that you live on in them.
- With all your strength, capabilities and possessions help to save other peoples' lives, property and happiness, etc.; prevent the suffering of animals, and promote your fellowman's endeavors.
- Help the poor, clothe the naked and feed the hungry, console the despondent, heal the sick, provide for the neglected, advise those in need of counsel, teach the ignorant, make peace between adversaries. Be a blessing by any and all means and whenever the opportunity arises.
- Preserve the Torah.
- Join forces with your community, congregation and the state which takes you in and protects you.
- By example, enlighten and inspire your brethren and your non-Jewish neighbors to venerate and love the One and Only G-d.
- Live a life of justice and love according to His Will.

Justice means not hurting anybody or anything. Love, in contrast, means to bring blessing upon others.

5) **עדות**. These are precepts that, by word or symbolic action, serve the individual, for Israel and for the world beyond as reminders of all the truths that form the basis of the mission of Man and Israelite.

- **ביכורים** and **בכור**, **חלה**, **עורלה**, **חדש**, **שבת**, **יובל**, **שמיטה**, **תרומה** symbolize that G-d is the Creator of the universe and everything in it belongs to Him. Man is the custodian of the world and is meant to act in accordance with His Will.
- **פורים** and **פסח**, **שבועות**, **סוכות**, **שמיני עצרת**, **חנוכה** symbolize the idea that G-d is the Creator and Guardian of Israel's national body and spirit, even in exile.

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- **ספירת העומר** teaches that physical existence acquires meaning only through the spiritual and freedom is attained only through law.
 - The **תעניות** reminds us of the causes and purposes of the Exile and warn us against the transgressions that exile is apt to bring about.
 - **מילה** expresses sanctification of the body and warns us against animal-like behavior.
 - **תפילין** teaches that we must rally all the powers of our mind, heart and body in the service of G-d.
 - **ציצית** brings awareness of G-d and his self-revelation in the past, as well as reminding us that human reason provides only limited protection in the battle against sensuality.
 - **מזוזה** symbolizes that our homes are to be a sanctuary of G-d and of our lives in it as a service to G-d.
 - **מצה** and the **גיד הנשה** acknowledge the “Yaacov aspect” of Israel’s mission, that is, we are meant to be poor in self-acquired power and independence to be able to discharge our spiritual tasks. Only Divine providence keeps us alive for the purpose of fulfilling our spiritual mission.
 - **לולב, סוכה** and **מעשרות** demonstrate the wise use of possessions.
 - **ראש חודש** and **ראש השנה, יום הכיפורים, שופר** teach us self-scrutiny.
- 6) **עבודה**. Exaltation and sanctification of our inner, spiritual life – to help us accomplish our mission in the world – by refining our thinking through word and symbolic action. These commandments prepare us for a life of action. Formerly, we had the **בית המקדש** for this purpose, today we only have prayers and blessings; the **שמונה עשרה** is, for example, a translation into words of the sacrificial actions.

In the **בית המקדש**:

- The **ארון** represents the concept that the Torah is G-d-given.
- The **מנורה** and the **שולחן** represent the concept that the physical and mental faculties needed for implementation of the Torah are G-d-given, too.
- **הקטרת הכבד והכליות** represent divesting ourselves of sensuality.
- **הקטרת החלב** represents divesting ourselves of selfishness.
- **זריקת הדם** consecrates our lives to G-d.
- **הקטורת** consecrates our sentiments.
- **עולה** consecrates our entire personality through the fulfillment of the Torah.
- **אשם** and **חטאת** help us regain the forfeited purity of our lives by divesting ourselves of sensuality and selfishness.
- **שלמים** and **תודה** acknowledge G-d-granted blessings and benefits

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תפילה represents the endeavor to arrive at an accurate assessment of ourselves in relation to G-d, the world and man. Prayer is to be a cleansing of the thoughts and of the heart. **עבודה שבלב** is the realization of the Divine Will in our inner selves – self-elevation and self-purification.

The components of prayer are:

- **תהילות** words of praise expressing the perception of G-d as revealed in nature, in the world of Man and in Israel.
- **תפילות** devotional prayers for evaluating our own selves and tasks.
- **בקשות** and **תודות** are supplications and thanks acknowledging that the entire future lies in G-d's hands, as was the past.
- **תחינות** are humble appeals

To attain all these we have:

- **קריאת התורה** as the source of all concepts about life and of all its wisdom.

Everything culminates with:

- **ברכות**, blessings expressing our resolve to implement G-d's Will in the midst of everyday life.

The symbolic **מצוות**, particularly the **עדות**, have as their particular aim the sanctification of the individual and the nation.

- 19.2 Any “explanation” of a **מצוה** must be guided by the fine Halochic details of the **מצוה** which will enable us to test the validity of our speculations.
- 19.3 On the one hand, **עדות**, the duties which are meant to educate us, are well known, but all too often they are seen only as thoughtless mechanical practices or almost as magical charms to ward off physical evils or to construe mystical worlds. The precepts for practicing justice and lovingkindness, on the other hand, are considered to be in a category of their own, separate from Judaism itself, rather than inherent in it.
- 19.4 We should not ask why a **מצוה** has to be done (since it is a Divine commandment), rather we do have to ask what the **מצוה** is, i.e. pay attention to the reasons for the Mitzvohs (as with the **עדות**).
- 19.5 Observance of the **מצוות** is not a formalistic duty, but a means of coming close to G-d through loving obedience of His Will.
- 19.6 Inquiries into the **טעמי מצוות** (the reasons, or purposes, of the **מצוות**) represent one's own speculations, necessarily tentative and uncertain in nature.

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20. REGARDING GOOD AND EVIL

- 20.1 Good and evil are directly related to life and death, and to love and justice. All interact for the functioning of the world.
- 20.2 A “good” deed is one that accords with G-d’s Will; a “bad” deed is one that conflicts with it. Man’s freedom to obey implies his freedom to disobey. His intellectual powers can lead him to pride, his bodily nature can lead him to lust. These are the roots of sin.
- 20.3 Good or evil is not what appeals to a person or repels him, what agrees or disagrees with his desires or what suits or runs counter to some arbitrary goal set by himself without taking G-d’s Will into consideration. Self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-aggrandizement and following the whims of one’s heart are not Man’s purpose in life. His task is, rather, to ennoble everything, including his urges and physical needs by putting them to the service of G-d’s Will, seeing them only as the means to the fulfillment of his mission.
- 20.4 Morality is the subordination of the dictates of our senses to the expressed Will of G-d.
- 20.5 Man’s error is to judge good and evil by what he deems sweet or bitter; after all “the world belongs to us!” This is the story of all sins!

21. ON SANCTIFICATION

- 21.1 Sanctification of the world is the highest goal.
- 21.2 **קדושה** is attained not by isolation, but by sanctifying the body through the **מצוות**.
- 21.2 The greatest height that Man can achieve is **קדושה** – the absolute readiness for goodness through the elimination of all evil in oneself.

22. ON BLESSING G-D

- 22.1 How does one *bless* G-d? By freely fulfilling His Will. Thus, **ברוך** is not only acknowledgement of G-d as the source of blessing, as commonly thought.

23. ON SUFFERING AND PUNISHMENT

- 23.1 Suffering reminds man of his limitations, elevates and tests him to turn to G-d to seek help.
- 23.2 G-d’s punishments are designed to educate Man through his experiences. Punishments humble pride. G-d’s punishments are (often) educational and not

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punitive, and try to wean Man away from his wrongdoing – away from his pride and lust.

- 23.3 Suffering reminds us that everything (family, friends, wealth, possessions, body and mind) are given to us, put at our disposal by G-d, but they are not us, ourselves. They have been lent to us as a means to better strive for the fulfillment of G-d's Will.

24. ON THE EXILE

- 24.1 Indeed, in Exile Israel accomplished its task better than during prosperity. גלות was meant, first and foremost, to perfect Israel. In Exile, we were sustained by loyalty to the One Alone. Israel, devoid of might and majesty, lived on through its loyalty to G-d and His Law.
- 24.2 The entire history of גלות constitutes one gigantic altar on which Israel sacrificed everything that men desire and love for the sake of acknowledging G-d and His Laws.
- 24.3 גלות a) made Jews fully aware of their dependence on G-d for their existence, and b) enabled the Nations to learn from our (holy) ways and help reveal G-d's glory among them. The latter, positive aspect of גלות imposed special obligations on every Jew within the non-Jewish world regarding his behavior among the Gentiles. We are to be role models (and not expected to go out and preach).
- 24.4 גלות and the dispersion, however, are not ideals or goals, and do not replace longing for a return to Zion and the coming of the משיח with the utopian concept of world fraternization (as did the Reform movement).
- 24.5 Through the long years of oppression those Torah laws that apply in exile have been steadfastly observed, but their spirit has largely been lost sight of. It is, therefore, necessary to go back to the sources, תנ"ך, Talmud and Midrash, in order to clarify, the inner meaning of the various parts of the Law.
- 24.6 Our exile can be brought to an end only by the proper discharge of our duties as Jews. Thereby, we will prove ourselves worthy of redemption and, at the same time, will demonstrate to the nations what it means to serve G-d.
- 24.7 Sin leads to expulsion.

25. ON THE REDEMPTION

- 25.1 Collective redemption can be expected only after we all will have returned to His Law and His faithful service, so as to be deserving of forgiveness. Any claim that deliverance can be obtained by other means is nothing but dangerous folly.

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Redemption depends upon spiritual rather than physical and material reconstruction.

- 25.2 The way to גאולה is to follow in the well-trodden path of our ancestors and early leaders. They never imposed upon us an obligation to clear the way for the גאולה by strengthening and repairing the Holy Land, but rather by strengthening and repairing our hearts and deeds.
- 25.3 The Jew sees the ultimate redemption not in the world coming to an end (as some other religions do) but in its perfection – “preparation of the world for the kingship of G-d.”

26. ON ERETZ YISROEL

- 26.1 The fate of ארץ ישראל depends upon our obedience to G-d, rather than on political power and military might. We were exiled because of our sins. We failed to keep שמיטה and יובל, thus failing the test of trust in G-d and our loyalty to Him and His Torah.
- 26.2 ארץ ישראל is forever the center of the Jewish people, the Land of Promise, where the שכינה once dwelt and to where it will return.
- 26.3 Our eagerness for the return to Zion has never been due to a desire for political independence and material prosperity as ends in themselves, but to our longing to regain the closeness to G-d's Presence and the Temple “the sanctuary of the Torah, the seat of G-d and the Divine Word”.
- 26.4 Although there is no problem in efforts to make the soil of the Holy Land bloom anew even during our exile, the idea of that the establishment of a Jewish state and settlement will not solve the “Jewish problem.”
- 26.5 Regarding settling ארץ ישראל: “I cannot rest from the worry that by so doing we will just increase the ruin of the Holy Land with the desecration of שבת and with transgression of מצוות התלויות בארץ.” Efforts to create a Jewish state before all Jews have returned to Torah would be marked by spiritual failure and the unremitting hostility of the nations.

27. ON HAPPINESS

- 27.1 All efforts to secure lasting happiness through wealth and self-gratification will fail. All structures built upon brute force and scheming for materialistic gain and sensuous indulgence will collapse. Only that which men built through G-d-revering efforts on behalf of justice and love will endure for eternity.
- 27.2 Happiness and bliss are not goals, but means to the true ends of life.

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28. ON JUSTICE, LOVE AND EDUCATION

28.1 Justice is the essence of the Law.

28.2 These basic concepts are defined as follows:

- 1) **Justice.** Justice means consideration for every being as a creation of G-d, for all possessions as having a purpose before G-d, and for the natural order as being ordained by G-d; and, therefore, compliance with the claims that they make on us.
- 2) **Love.** Love means acceptance of all beings as children of G-d and as our brethren, and promotion of their welfare and of their fulfillment of their G-d-given mission – all this without their having any claim on us, but purely because it is the Will of G-d, the fulfillment of the Divine command.
- 3) **Education.** Educating oneself and others to such a way of life by taking these truths to heart as one's moving principles, giving expression to them for himself and for others, and – if through life's vicissitudes he has lost sight of them – struggling to re-instill them in his heart.

29. ON PRAYER

29.1 The primary effect of prayer is on the individual rather than the universe at large. This is learned from the word **להתפלל** (in the reflective form) which means “to judge and evaluate oneself”.

30. ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

30.1 The righteous among the nations, who exemplified unselfish justice and genuine human dignity, lived up to the ultimate goal of the universal acceptance of the brotherhood of man. The enlightened among them labored for it when they lifted up their brethren by word and deed to the One Alone to respect justice, thus elevating man above the level of beasts.

30.2 The true **חסיד** is the one who totally gives himself in love and lives for others, through acts of lovingkindness.

31. GENERAL CONCEPTS AND A SUMMARY

31.1 **Basic premises:**

- 1) G-d created a world based on the loving interaction of creatures. This is to lead to the perfection of the world.
- 2) Man is to be G-d's partner, so to speak, in bringing about this goal, by imitating G-d's ways.

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- 3) In this way, by acting in accordance with G-d's Will, Man can achieve closeness to G-d.
- 4) Closeness to G-d cannot be attained by philosophical speculation, for man is necessarily limited in this respect.
- 5) Unlike religions in the common sense of the word, the Torah does not aim to help Man "to see G-d, but, rather, to see the earth and earthly conditions...from G-d's pinnacle", and act in accordance with His Will. Action here means, in the first place, מצוות.
- 6) The commandments have been given to the Jew to guide his actions and to enable him to become the epitome of Man and the role model for Mankind.
- 7) Man's service of G-d is to be carried out not by asceticism and self-denial, but by the use of all the gifts granted to him.

31.2 Summary of Rav Hirsch's understanding of Man, his relationship with G-d, his obligations and purpose in this world:

- 1) Man attains closeness to G-d by discharging his unique task in G-d's world, choosing freely to further G-d's goal for the world by actions of love and justice. The Jew is guided to appropriate actions by the Mitzvoths prescribed by the Torah.
- 2) It follows that the Mitzvoths are not mere religious ceremonials, but are concerned with the full range of life, for man is supposed to use all his gifts and all the circumstances he encounters to service G-d through love and righteousness.
- 3) It further follows that man must be educated for such a life primarily through knowledge of the Torah's teachings and, secondarily, through whatever other knowledge and skills will enable him to live this kind of life.

31.3 A Jewish heart is totally inadequate if there is no obedience to the Law⁸.

32. RAV HIRSCH'S CRITIQUE OF THE RAMBAM AND HIS PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO JUDAISM

32.1 Although he calls him "a man of spirit" and "a great man" to whom alone we owe the preservation of practical Judaism until the present day, Rav Hirsch says that the Rambam attempted to reconcile the dichotomy between Arab scholarship (stressing speculation and meditation) and which drew upon the concepts of Greek (specifically Aristotelian) philosophy which was aimed at perfecting oneself in the perception of truth, and Judaism. Rav Hirsch says that the Rambam's effort to do this was from "without", rather than creatively developing a reconciliation from "within". "His trend of thought was Arab-Greek, as was his concept of life...To him, the highest aim was self-perfection through recognition of the truth. Practical concrete deeds became subordinate

⁸ From R' Yaacov Ettlinger, author of Oruch L'Ner: What is demanded of the Jew is *belief* in Torah and מצוות, the *will* to observe them, and *action* in carrying them out.

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to this end. Knowledge of G-d was considered an end to itself, not a means toward an end.”

Mitzvohs, to the Rambam, were merely “indispensable” guides leading to a better understanding, and as protections against errors. Indeed, they only arose, at one time or another in connection with polytheism. **משפטים** became rules of prudent behavior, as did the **מצוות חוקים**. **מצוות** became rules of health. **עדות** promote philosophical purposes, etc. No Mitzvoh was conceived as rooted in “the eternal essence of things, as resulting from an everlasting demand on me and from my immutable destiny. The Commandments were not understood as symbolic actions through which ideas were forever to be perpetuated.”

The Rambam's approach could lead to the forming opinions from the “outside” and of attempts to adapt Judaism to people's viewpoints and preconceived notions of the meanings of the Mitzvohs. People would presume that Mitzvohs are mere stepping-stones toward some idea. They would become less inclined to study the Mitzvohs which, to them, had lost all spiritual significance.

There is no doubt that although Rav Hirsch venerated the Rambam as guardian, codifier and decider of Torah Law, he was critical of the Rambam's philosophical approach. Specifically, Rav Hirsch said that there is no need to speculate about the nature of G-d which is unnecessary and futile, if not dangerous, and that the Rambam's Principles of Faith were chosen in accordance with “Man's understanding”. Rather, everything in the Torah is essential. The rejection of even one Mitzvoh makes one an unbeliever, not just any of the Thirteen Articles of Faith. Further, Rav Hirsch relates, people came incorrectly to believe that observance of Mitzvohs is not in and of itself man's goal, but merely a means to a higher end - the knowledge of G-d. Finally, the interpretations of the Mitzvohs in the Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim are faulty, unrelated to the details of Halochic observance and cannot move the uninspired to a more punctilious observance of the minutiae of the Law.

33. ON THE KABBALAH

33.1 The Kabbalah is the repository of the spirit of Judaism.

34. MISCELLANEOUS

34.1 The Egyptians' ingratitude to the descendents of Yosef, the man who saved the Egyptian empire, was not their worst crime, but it highlighted their total lack of moral sensitivity.

34.2 It is not the longing for the world beyond which is the essence of Jewish piety. It is rather the joy of life, of active service to G-d, in our shorter or longer span of existence. **לתקן עולם במלכות שד-י**, this is the aim, the striving for which make us into pious souls.