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## **TEH MEANING OF DEREKH ERETZ**

by

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THE idea of *Talmud Torah im Derekh Erets* as a synthesis of Jewish and general studies was no longer new at the time of Joseph Carlebach. In humility and admiration he mentioned on various occasions the name of Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>1</sup>, as having launched and put into practice the idea, and extolled his merit of having been the first, the creator in the field.

Because Hirsch wanted to educate integral human beings and integral Jews, he had to illuminate and infuse West-European culture with the light of Torah. This culture became

\* (All references are to writings of Joseph Carlebach unless stated otherwise).

1. Der Issur gegen die Schulen in Palästina, in *Jüdische Presse* (Berlin), 20.9.1907; Den Manen S.R. Hirschs, *Golah and Ge'ullah* no. 8, Supplement to *Israelit* (Frankfurt), 21.9.34; *Das gesetzestreue Judentum* (1936), p. 33.

willy nilly the heritage of the Jews by the fact of compulsory education (in Germany). Hirsch intended to anticipate any possible danger by turning this culture into a support of Jewish *Weltanschauung*. "He did not ask: what does the age demand from the Jew? but: what does Torah demand from the age?"; thus emphasizing the superiority of Torah over contemporary culture... It was Hirsch who conceived of a messianic Jewish science and literature, it was Hirsch who dared to transform the public school (of German Jews) into a Jewish school". Carlebach stressed the fact that in this confrontation with secular culture Hirsch was inspired by his belief in the truth of Torah and his trust in the Jewry of the day.

2. Den Manen..., *ibid.*

Joseph Carlebach himself had been educated in his parents' home according to the principle of *Torah-im-Derekh-Erets*, and had completed his studies in the same spirit: through rabbinic studies on the one hand, and science studies on the other; by undergoing a Jewish communal experience on one side and a university one on the other<sup>3</sup>. It appears that he identified with the idea in his own special way and, without for a moment ignoring the basic influence of S.R. Hirsch, tried to widen it beyond the treatment of a specific problem and beyond the boundaries of the period. "It was his (Hirsch's) aim to permeate the world in its totality with Torah, to unify religion and world, to build just modern life in the spirit of Torah... Without this (ideal) we would be left with the terrible alternative of Eastern Jewry: or Torah or a godless secularity..."<sup>4</sup>

3. At the time (1908—1914) J. C., while studying at the Berlin **Rabbinerseminar** taught mathematics, physics and geography at a (non-Jewish) high school for girls, and Jewish subjects at the **Religionsschule** of the Adass Yisroel congregation; and in an article in the **Jüdische Presse** (11.10.1910) on the occasion of the 75th Semester of the Seminary he writes: "Each period has its own laws... he who does not understand this fact, forgoes his influence on his time..."

4. "The end remains, only the means change". Den Manen... *ibid.*

The idea of *T.i.D.E.* must, therefore, be flexible. It is not a final, absolute formula or version of a limited, well-defined meaning, but it is a changeable and changing concept, not one solution but a number of possible ones, "all according to the years, all according to the places, all according to the time" (*Ta'anith* 14b). The determining element, the strong and permanent basis of the idea is Torah, whereas the changeable, adaptable element, which is characterized by its being time-bound and therefore secondary from a value point-of-view, is *Derekh Erets*. This has to be constantly reviewed.

Joseph Carlebach dealt with the idea of *T.i.D.E.* in various contexts: in relation to general culture and education; in relation to the individual's occupation and livelihood; and in relation to the development of Erets Israel<sup>5</sup>. The common denominator of these various aspects he calls "reality", a reality which he wants to fashion in the spirit of Torah and her commandments — "which men shall do and live by them" (*Leviticus* 18:5).

5. Die Umgestaltung der Chalukah, **Jüdische Presse**, 29.10.1909; Der Issur... *ibid.*, 20.9.1907.

*Derekh Eretz as General Culture*

The idea of *T.i.D.E.* assumed particular importance when and where it met with doubt and opposition: against the background of the proclamation of a ban (*cherem, issur*) against modern schools in Jerusalem<sup>6</sup>. Just there it was necessary to open wide the spiritual ghetto, closed by extremism, and to infuse it with *Derekh Erets* as one of the urgent, true needs of the school. Many among the Torah-faithful, in East and West, were still bound "by a timid traditionalism... feeling themselves too weak for a confrontation between Judaism and the World<sup>7</sup>, and therefore oppose a widening of the Jewish horizons". More than that: they negate in their extremism the place of *Derekh Erets* in the fulfilment of *Mitsvoth*, that they almost ignore the verse "This is my God and I shall serve him in beauty" (Exodus 15:2), beautify yourself through *mitsvoth*: make before Him a beautiful

6. On this J.C. wrote a series of articles in the *Jüdische Presse*, 1907, nos. 38—54. The "ban" was first proclaimed in 1856 by a considerable number of Ashkenazi rabbis of the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem, directed in the first place against the Lemel School. In the course of time additional *issurim* were issued; see Y. Peres, *History of the Lemel School*, Jerusalem (Hebrew), 1936.

7. *Den Manen*,... *ibid.*

Sukkah, a beautiful Lulav..." (Mekhilta ad. loc.; Shabbat 133b a. fr.); they demonstrate their negative attitude to *Derekh Erets* in all areas of life, "and this can be recognized in the neglected residential neighbourhoods (of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem), in the formless style of building, in dirty streets, in their unrefined language (jargon), in muddled untutored thinking... and in neglect of dress, posture and movement.... the lack of nobility and beauty which should accompany every religious act, what our sages call: *hiddur mitsvah*"<sup>8</sup>.

In this criticism of the absolute lack of *Derekh Erets* one can perceive the echoes of J.C.'s demand for hygienic and aesthetic living conditions in general and within the school in particular. This demand returns with him several years afterwards when it is the question of raising the standards of that venerable and important educational institution: the Cheder<sup>9</sup>, extending at the same time the concept of general culture to well-organized pedagogical and psychological training and its application to educational-professional super-

8. *Der Issur*..., *ibid.*, 7.11.1907; 10.10.1907.

9. *Der Prozess gegen den Cheder im Stadttheater zu Witebsk*, 1942, p. 42.

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vision and guidance, as is the accepted practice in modern countries, in the interest of the healthy development of a Torah institution of long standing (like the Cheder).

The principle of *T.i.D.E.* should operate in two directions: 1) towards the group inspired by a "timid traditionalism", so that it should enlarge its horizons by absorbing general culture from a particular Jewish view-point; 2) and also towards that section of the Jewish community which is anchored solely in general culture — to make it realize that there need be no contradiction between general culture and Torah life. "Wherever one meets people in Palestine or elsewhere, who have become estranged from Judaism, Liberal rabbis or laymen who cultivate some specious religious experience, one finds the dogmatic assumption that... Torah, the ancient tradition cannot be reconciled with the realities of (modern) life. With the help of an organic synthesis of the aims of a Jewish education with those of a general one (thus J.C. understood Hirsch) and by emphasizing the Jewish aspects of general culture, these groups too will become aware of the perennial strength of our Torah. In other words: *T.i.D.E.* (the latter

as general culture and its usages) will serve as an open bridge between two opposing camps, so that even those estranged may be drawn into the Torah orbit. "Hirsch had the courage to turn a German school into a Jewish one; now it is our task to turn the Hebrew school (in Erets Israel) into a Jewish one..."<sup>10</sup>

#### *Derekh Eretz as Man's Profession and His Livelihood*

Joseph Carlebach saw in the Jewish school the key to the realisation of the *T.i.D.E.* idea<sup>11</sup>. Such a school will prepare the young generation for a new approach which will place the pupil, the Jew of tomorrow, in the very centre of real life. One should therefore lay stress not only on theoretical subjects but should include into the curriculum practical subjects so as to equip the pupils with a basis for a trade and livelihood and preparation for a practical, active life<sup>12</sup>. One should understand J.C.'s intention correctly: he does not want to *substitute* practical for theoretical training

10. Den Manen..., *ibid.*

11. At the jubilee celebration of the Lemel School the son of the then Chacham Bashi praised the school, on behalf of his father, and **T. i. D. E.** education; *Der Issur...*, *ibid.*, 7.11.1907.

12. *ibid.*, 24.10.1907; *Die Umgestaltung...*, *ibid.*

but to be additional to it and this with a twofold aim: 1) to educate the pupil to a positive attitude to manual work; 2) to awaken in him an awareness of the need to choose a trade<sup>13</sup>.

"No Jew is free from working six days a week and doing all his work, wordly and heavenly, theoretically and practical, cultural and religious"<sup>13a</sup>. Thus J.C. explains, following Rashi, the term *T.i.D.E.*: "For if you will become dependent on charity, you will eventually neglect your Torah" (Rashi, Berakhoth 35b)<sup>14</sup>. Which is to say: avoid economic dependence which will be your ruin, for in the end you will have to live according to the views and orders of your benefactor. "*Wes Brot ich ess, des Lied ich sing*"<sup>14a</sup>, and only by economic independence will the Jew retrieve his honour and self-respect. One has to understand J.C.'s train of thought especially against the background of his experience in Erets Israel (1905-7), in Jerusalem in particular: the poverty, the neglect, the disease, and, above all, the dependence on *Chalukah*. All these led to the

neglect of Torah study and its degradation, to the humiliation of all those dependent on the good graces of the *Chalukah*. It was therefore doubly important to develop a positive attitude to work amongst the young, and he held that "every Jew anywhere, whether he is a peddler who spends the week away from home and returns there for the Sabbath only, or whether he earns a living from any sort of work or profession, makes *T.i.D.E.* a reality"<sup>15</sup>, but only if he does not become a slave to his work in pursuit of luxuries and externals. The Jew should make a living by the toil of his hands in order to maintain himself (honourably) but not to gain prominence and wealth. He will attain his personal freedom only by the growth of his spiritual and intellectual powers. "Torah can be acquired only by a "limitation of *Derekh Erets*" (Pirke Avoth VI, 6), here in the sense of working for a livelihood, by economic self-restraint". "...Religion without economic activity is a chimera, a dream; economy without religion ... is a gruesome process of self-destruction..."<sup>16</sup>.

#### *The Religious Chalutz*

An example of a positive approach to *Derekh Erets* as

13. cp. *Moderne Paedagogische Bestrebungen...*, 1925, p. 12.

13a. *Die Umgestaltung...*, *ibid.*

14. *Der Issur...*, *ibid.*

14a. *Ein jüdisches Lehrerseminar, Jüdische Rundschau* (Berlin), 10.1.1908, pp. 17—18.

15. *Den Manen...*, *ibid.*

16. *Gesetzestreuues Judentum*, p. 51.

manual work J.C. saw in the phenomenon of the "religious *Chaluts*", as of a Jew who studies Torah, observes the *mitsvoth* and who lives by the toil of his hands. But he warns against a one-sided, narrow understanding of the *D.E.* concept and the *T.i.D.E.* idea, and he recalls the various interpretations of *D.E.* in the sources: general morality; professional activity; good manners...<sup>17</sup>

All the same, J.C. felt a special, quiet affection for these men and women who translated *T.i.D.E.* into reality, — perhaps for their active involvement in the rebuilding of Erets Israel; perhaps too, for their being pioneers, an *avant-garde* of the religious, Torah-loyal camp in their relationship to Erets Israel, thus raising the prestige of Torah among the rest;<sup>18</sup> but above all on account of their simple, frugal lives. They had grasped the educative, restraining value of *D.E.* and its aims:

1) in their positive attitude to work, in their very readiness to undertake physical work, inspite of the hardships which generally accompany all beginnings, all pioneering efforts.

2) by choosing their (physical) work, fully conscious of its importance, in the desire to take

their share in the realisation of an ideal: the re-building of the Land in the spirit of the Torah. In this they found inner satisfaction for the individual on one side and served the interest of society, the needs of the Community, on the other. These were the two aspects that should motivate man in the choice of a profession or type of work from which to make a living. And the teaching program of the school, which directs the youngster in the choice of his future occupation, should be attuned to this twofold aim<sup>19</sup>.

#### *Derekh Eretz as Eretz Israel's Economy and Rebuilding*

Such a program would be doubly important in the development of Erets Israel. Above the problem was the economic independence of the individual, now it was the infinitely more important economic independence of the Yishuv as a whole. This aspect of *D.E.* too should be reflected in the teaching program of schools, and the training subjects must be in keeping with the development needs of the country: trade and industry, agriculture and crafts, medicine and (even) tourism<sup>20</sup>. As the rebuilding of E.I. is the

17. Den Manen..., *ibid.*

18. Gesetzestreuus Judentum, p. 51.

19. Moderne Paedagogische Bestrebungen..., p. 12—13.

20. Der Issur..., *ibid.*

greatest event of present-day Jewish history, it is the rabbi's duty to foster in his (Diaspora) congregation an inner participation in these tremendous happenings<sup>21</sup>. As regards this aspect of *D.E.*, i.e. the rebuilding of *E.I.*, a different, higher dimension emerges. *D.E.* no longer means economic restraint and limitation to the needs of minimal subsistence, but a flourishing, dynamic development in all the areas of the economy and of culture. This

is the *D.E.* that must lead towards economic independence, to an independent life of Torah and observance, reborn and flourishing<sup>22</sup>.

In the Grace-after-meals the prayer "do not let us be in need... of the gift of flesh and blood nor of their ioans" precedes the blessing of Him "who buildeth Jerusalem". Only if and when *E.I.* will be freed from its economic dependence, Torah study will expand to its fullest extent<sup>23</sup>.

21. Stellung und Leistung der gesetzes-treuen Rabbiner, *Israelit*, 30.1.1936.

22. Das Heilige Land, 1909, p. 100.

23. Ein jüdisches Lehrerseminar, *ibid.*

#### RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Samson Raphael Hirsch refused to recognise an unbridgeable gulf between religion and science, between faith and knowledge. Again and again he pointed out in his writings that in the conception of Judaism, truth, like its Divine source, is one and indivisible — and, therefore, knowledge and the search for truth must have the same aim whether the mind is occupied with religious or so-called secular science... "Know the Lord in all your ways" (Prov. 3:6), and, therefore, also in all your thoughts. The arguments against the pursuit of secular knowledge which were put forward within the orthodox camp Samson Paphael Hirsch refuted in a brilliant halachic exposition contained in his commentary on Leviticus 18,4. For the rest, Hirsch emphatically denied that the secular education of the Jew was a concession made by him under pressure from the fashion of the day. No, the combination of Jewish and general knowledge was not a compromise but an intergral part of the Jewish world concept. If anything had been forced on the Jew, it was not his adherence to, but his exclusion from general culture and education.

I. Grunfeld, Introduction to S.R. Hirsch, *Judaism Eternal*, Vol. I, p. XXI.