

Marking a Milestone



By Dr. Yitzchok Levine
Department of Mathematical Sciences
Stevens Institute of Technology
Hoboken, NJ
llevine@stevens.edu

BACKGROUND

“In 1995, the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation undertook the publication of a new English version of the Hirsch *Chumash*. Rav Breuer *zt”l* had urged that a new English edition of the Hirsch *Chumash* be prepared to accommodate modern English usage. It was felt that, despite the enormous contribution of the Levy edition to the world of Torah learning, the style of English used was a demanding one for current and future generations. As Dr. Levy wrote in his introduction, his work was intended as a literal translation of the German. Rav Hirsch’s style of writing presents a formidable challenge for translation into an English format that is easily read... In the current edition, the Foundation has sought to present to the English-speaking public a new work that is a faithful rendering of the Hirsch *Chumash*.”¹

It has taken twelve long years to complete this new translation.² Each and every one of us should be gratified to know that the new translation of Rav Hirsch’s commentary on the *Chumash* is now complete. As a result, the insights of Rav Hirsch are now accessible to all of us - scholar and layman.

Some reading this may think, “Very nice, but what does this have to do with me? I am not a follower of Rav Hirsch’s *Torah Im Derech Eretz* philosophy.” However, Rav Eliyahu Meir Klugman, a *rosh yeshiva* and *morah hora’ah* in Yerushalayim and the author of *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch - Architect of Torah Judaism for the Modern World*, published by ArtScroll, points out the following:

“Clear knowledge and understanding of Rav Hirsch’s views, insights and formulations can help one respond intelligently to most issues in Orthodox Jewish life. From Bnei Brak and Lakewood to Teaneck and Woodmere, from FFB to *baal teshuvah*, from *Chazon Ish* devotee to modern Orthodox Jew, Rav Hirsch’s teachings form an integral part of the worldview of the Torah Jew in the modern world, regardless of whether one takes an active role in that world or not.”³

THE EVENT

On Sunday, 18 *Kislev*/December 14, the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation, with the participation of the descendents of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch, held a *siyum*/dinner to mark the completion of the new English edition of the Hirsch *Chumash*.

This *siyum*/dinner was attended by more than 400 people. Most were descendents of Rav Hirsch’s ten children. I am sure that Rav Hirsch would have been most gratified to see that his descendents include *roshei yeshiva*, distinguished *rabbanim*, accomplished professionals and businessmen together with their wives and families. It was truly an impressive site to behold.

Dr. Elliott Bondi, a grandson of Rav Breuer, welcomed the participants. Rabbi

Moshe Katzenstein then delivered some remarks on behalf of the descendents of Rav Hirsch. Shortly thereafter, a DVD recording was shown in which the assembled received *divrei bracha* from Rav Yaakov Perlow, the Novominsker Rebbe. Rav Nosson Scherman, General Editor of ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, then introduced the keynote speaker, Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD. Dr. Twerski is a psychiatrist who is known worldwide for his expertise in treating substance abusers. He is also a prolific writer who has authored many books and whose columns appear in a number of publications.

Rabbi Twerski spoke about “The Timeliness of Rav S. R. Hirsch.” He began by pointing out

that despite the fact that his background is Chassidic (his mother was a sister of the third Bobover Rebbe, Rav Shlomo Halberstam *zt”l*), he considers himself a “*chossid*” of Rav Hirsch. “Hardly a day goes by when I do not read from Rav Hirsch’s *From the Wisdom of Mishlei*,” he said, holding up a well-worn copy of this *sefer*. “Rav Hirsch changed the way I say *Shema*,” he told the audience. He then went on to summarize Rav Hirsch’s explanation of *Shema* that he wrote on *Devorim* 6:4.

Dr. Twerski pointed out that Rav Hirsch was a man who knew how to confront and solve the very difficult problems faced by German Jewry during the 19th century. He told us that Rabbiner Hirsch had dealt with these complexities with brilliance and had saved German Orthodoxy. “We also face overwhelming problems today. Where is Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch today? We need him today as well!”

The final speaker of the evening was Rabbi Yaakov Feldheim of Feldheim Publishers, who had come from Eretz Yisroel to attend this event. “It is worthwhile to have come all the way from Eretz Yisroel just to witness this illustrious assemblage,” he said. He then pointed out that his father, Phillip Feldheim *z”l*, enjoyed a close relationship with Rav Breuer and, at the suggestion of Rav Breuer, had begun publishing translations of the works of Rav Hirsch in the late ‘40s.

The completion of the publication of the new translation of Rav Hirsch’s commentary to the *Chumash* is indeed an important milestone for Jewry.

(Endnotes)

1 Editors’ Forward to *The Hirsch Chumash, Sefer Bereishis*, English translation by Daniel Haberman, Feldheim Publishers and Judaica Press, Jerusalem - New York, 2002, page X.

2 The first translation of Rav Hirsch’s commentary from the original German into English was done by Dr. Isaac Levy *z”l* of London, a grandson of Rav Hirsch. The first edition of this translation was published as individual volumes between 1956 and 1962.

3 *The Hirsch Chumash - Listening to the Dvar Hashem*, The World of Hirschian Teachings, An Anthology on the Hirsch *Chumash* and the *Hashkafa* of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, Published for the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation, Feldheim, 2008, page 71.

