Dinner Marks Completion of Publication Of English Edition of Hirsch Chumash

By Dr. Yitzchok Levine

On Sunday, December 14, 2008, the Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation, with the participation of the descendants of Harav Samson Raphael Hirsch, zt"l, held a siyum and dinner to mark the completion of the publication of the new English edition of the Hirsch Chumash.

Even those who do not subscribe to Rav Hirsch’s philosophy of Torah im derech eretz can benefit from his approach. Harav Eliyahu Meir Klagman, a Rosh Yeshivah and moreh horaah in Verushalusayim and the author of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: Architect of Torah Judaism for the Modern World (ArtScroll, 1966), points out, “Clear knowledge and understanding of Rav Hirsch’s views, insights, and formulations can help one respond intelligent to most issues in Orthodox Jewish life. From Benz Brak and Lakewood to Teaneck and Woodmere, from FFB to baal teshuva, 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.

Therefore, each 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, it makes his insights accessible to all of us. It has taken twelve long years to complete this new translation. 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. 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.

The siyum was attended by more than 400 people, most of whom were descendants of Rav Hirsch’s ten children, including Roshe Yeshivah, distinguished Rabbis, accomplished professionals and businessmen, along with many notable guests. Dr. Elliott Bondi, a grandson of Rav Breuer, welcomed the participants. Rabbi Moshe Katzenstein offered remarks on behalf of Rav Hirsch’s descendants. Afterward, a visual presentation was shown in which diverse brachot were given by Harav Yaakov Perlow, zt”l, the Novominsker Rebbe.

Rabbi Nosson Scherman, one of the founders and General Editor of ArtScroll and the Menorah Heritage Foundation, then introduced the keynote speaker, Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., a psychiatrist known worldwide, and a prolific writer who has authored many books and whose columns appear in a number of publications, including Hamodia.

Rabbi Twerski spoke about the relevance of Rav Hirsch’s philosophy. He pointed out that although his background is chassidic (his mother was the sister of the third Bobover Rebbe, Harav Shlomo Halberstam, zt”l), he considers himself a “chassid” of Rav Hirsch. “Hardly a day goes by when I do not read from Rav Hirsch’s From the Wisdom of Midrash,” he said, holding up a well-worn copy of the age “Rav Hirsch changed the way I say Shema.”

Dr. Twerski described Rav Hirsch as a man who knew how to confront and solve the complex problems faced by German Jewry during the 19th century, and that his brilliance had saved German Orthodoxy. “We also face overwhelming problems today. Where is Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch today? We need him today also!”

The final speaker of the evening, Rabbi Yaakov Feldheim of Feldheim Publishers, had come from Eretz Yisrael to attend the dinner. “It is worthwhile to have come all the way from Eretz Yisrael just to witness this illustrious assemblage,” he said. He pointed out that his father, Phillip Feldheim, zt”l, enjoyed a close relationship with Rav Breuer, on whose suggestion he had begun publishing translations of Rav Hirsch’s works in the late 1940s.

The publication of the new translation of Rav Hirsch’s commentary on the Chumash is an important milestone, and the dinner was a fitting way to mark the completion of a work that will be a valuable Torah resource in the coming years.

Yaakov Feldheim also announced the Hirsch Chumash Library Distribution Project, whereby Feldheim will offer a set of the new Hirsch Chumashim to yeshivos, schools, and shuls at a special subsidized rate. Please contact Feldheim Publishers at (800) 237-7149 for details.

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2. The first translation of Rav Hirsch’s commentary on the original German by English was done by Dr. Isaac Levy, zt”l, of London, a grandson of Rav Hirsch. The first edition of this translation was published as individual volumes between 1950 and 1962.