

Translator's Introduction, Haberman translation of Hirsch Chumash

The magnum opus of Rav Hirsch's teachings and writings is his *Translation and Commentary to the Torah* — the "Hirsch Chumash." The first edition of the Hirsch Chumash was published in five separate volumes between 1867 and 1878. A second edition of *Bereshis*, which Rav Hirsch himself edited, appeared in 1883. The entire Hirsch Chumash was subsequently reprinted many times in Germany.

The Hirsch Chumash contains a comprehensive commentary to the Torah, as well as an original interpretive translation of the Scriptural verse. The approach Rav Hirsch took to writing his Commentary was, in his words, "to derive the explanation of the text from out of itself." Following his dictum that Judaism "must be studied and understood out of itself," Rav Hirsch based his explanations on a critical analysis of the text. In his *Nineteen Letters*, Rav Hirsch writes:

We must read the Torah in Hebrew, i.e., according to the spirit of this language. It describes objects sparingly, but the multiplicity of meanings conveyed by its verbal roots is such that it graphically depicts the subject in one word. Predicate is joined to subject and sentence follows sentence, but the listening soul is expected to be so watchfully intent that, by its own effort, it will supplement what is not spelled out. It is, as it were, semi-symbolic writing. Accordingly, we must read with an alert eye and ear, with a mind aroused to full activity. Nothing is spun out for us at length so that we could, so to speak, absorb it while daydreaming. We must endeavor to recreate, in our mind, the speaker's ideas, and seek to follow his trend of thought, or else the meaning will escape us.

(Second Letter)

Thus Judaism must be studied and understood out of itself, and be elevated, all by itself, to a science of wise living. Let us begin with the Tanach. First of all, come to know its language, and elicit from the spirit of the language the spirit of its speaker.

(Eighteenth Letter)

Rav Hirsch's interpretations of the Torah are based on a precise understanding of the meaning of the words, the לשון הקרא. By analyzing carefully the root of a particular word and often relating it to other roots with similar sounding consonants, Rav Hirsch finds deeper mean-

ing in the expressions of the Torah. Rav Hirsch states in his preface to the Chumash:

The principle of phonetic relationships on which the system [of etymological investigation] rests is such a prominent feature of the Hebrew language, and the linguistic data from which all the author's etymological suppositions are derived are presented in such detail, that the system's justification should be obvious to any thinking reader.

Rav Hirsch outlined the principles of his use of phonetic relationships in his eight-part essay "Jewish *Weltanschauung*: An attempt to develop the Jewish outlook on the world and life from the Hebrew language and literature of the Jewish people" (*Collected Writings*, Vol. VIII, pp. 21–60). The centrality of language in understanding the teachings of the Torah is summarized in this article as follows:

The primary sources for a comprehensive study of a nation's culture and philosophy are its language and literature. Word and speech are the sole elements which bear the imprint of that nation's spirit and attitudes. Language and literature are the conscious and subconscious reflections of a people's philosophy. . . . But the language of the Jew is not a product of the Jewish national spirit. It did not come from the people but was given to them as a Divine creation designed to awaken and give life to its national spirit.

In his Commentary, Rav Hirsch stresses the unity of תורה שבכתב and תורה שבעל פה — the Written Law and the Oral Law. The relationship between these forms is that of notes to a lecture: the condensed words and sentences of the notes are often just hints, and only have meaning in the context of the verbal concepts presented and expressed at the lecture. The reader who is unaware of the verbal lecture will not find full meaning in the written words, and the notes, in turn, assure that the lecture is faithfully transmitted. Each method of transmission of the Law is essential and one needs the other. Hence, throughout his Commentary, Rav Hirsch strives to demonstrate the unity of the Written and Oral Law in two ways: how the Written Law can only be understood in terms of the Oral Law, and how the Oral Law can be deduced from the specific language of the Written Law. In particular, it is a unique aspect of the Hirsch Commentary that, when clarifying specific *mitzvos* in the Torah, he discusses all the

detailed *halachos* related to the subject that appear in the Oral Law and proceeds to show how the ideas expressed by this particular *mitzvah* are consistently represented by the details elaborated in the Oral Law.

These details are then the basis of his brilliant exposition of the underlying reasons for the commandments, the טעמי המצוות. Nevertheless, Rav Hirsch took great pains to clarify that, as the commands are of Divine origin, our observance of each *mitzvah* is independent of whether we understand its meaning:

The commandments of the Torah are law even if we have not uncovered the cause and interrelationships of even a single one, and our fulfillment of the commandments in no way depends on the results of our investigation.

(*Nineteen Letters*, Eighteenth Letter)

Rav Hirsch deliberately wrote his Commentary in the vernacular of his time, the German language:

Our Sages in the days of the Talmud wrote down the substance of their debates in what was then the most widely-used vernacular. . . . The giants of our Spanish-Arabic era wrote most of their works in Arabic, thereby making them accessible to everyone in their circle. And so, too, in our own day, when, unfortunately, the knowledge of Hebrew and Rabbinics has been relegated to the scholar's study, our people have the right to demand that those problems affecting their life and knowledge should be discussed in a language that they understand.

(*Collected Writings*, Vol. V, p. 325)

פ' בא

ספר שמות פרק יא

(ו) והיתה צעקה גדלה בכל ארץ מצרים אשר כמוהו לא נהיתה וכמוהו לא תסוף:

תרגום יונתן שם

ותהי צווחתא רבתא בכל ארעא דמצרים דדכוותיה ליליא לא הות ביה מחתא כדא ודכוותיה ליליא לא תוסיף למהוי מחתא כדא:

אבן עזרא שם

והיתה - לא ראינו כזאת בכל המקרא לומר כמוהו לא נהיתה וכמוהו לא תוסיף ותחסר מלת על וככה הוא אשר כמוהו לא נהיתה ועל כמוהו לא תוסיף צעקה: וטעם כמוהו - שוד או שבר או מות והדומה להם:

ספורנו שם

(ו) אשר כמוהו לא נהיתה. אשר בלילה כמוהו לא נהיתה צעקה כזאת, וזה כי לא היה ליל מלחמת חיל אויבים, כי אמנם אז תרבה הצעקה בעיר, כענין קול צעקה משער הדגים, ויללה מן המשנה, ושבר גדול מהגבעות אבל בלילה כזה שהיה ליל שלום במצרים לא נהיתה ולא תוסיף צעקה כזאת:

מכילתא פרשת בא פרשה ז

ובכל אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ה'. שפטי' משוני' זה מזה צלם של אבן היה נימוח ושל עץ היה נרקב ושל מתכת היה נעשה חררה שנא' (במדבר ל"ג) ומצרים מקברים. וי"א של אבן נרקבת ושל עץ נמסית. ר' נתן אומר שפטים שפוט שופטי שפטים נרקבים, נבקקים נגדעים נשרפים. נמצינו למדין שע"ז לוקה בארבעה דרכים ועובדיה בשלשה במכה בהשחתה ובמגפה:

העמק דבר שם

אשר כמוהו לא נהיתה וכמוהו לא תסוף. ידוע הזרות שבזה לשון שעירבב ל"ז עם ל"נ. וע' ת"י וראב"ע והספורנו. והנראה דלא קאי על הצעקה שתהי' גדולה כ"כ. אלא שכך תהיה הצעקה אשר כמוהו וגו'. היינו שיצעקו כי מכה כזו לא נהיתה. והנה תניא במכילתא בא פ"ז למדנו שע"ז לוקה בארבעה דרכים ועובדיה בשלשה במכה ובהשחתה ובמגפה. למדנו שלא מתו כל הבכורים בב"א כעין מכת סנחריב וחילו. אלא הוכו בתחלואים רעים ונשחתה צורתם עדי שמתו במיתה משונה. ומעתה יובן שמש"ה עירבב המקרא ל"ז עם ל"נ. ללמדנו שהמכה היתה באה כעין דבר ממש שהוא בל"ז וגם מחלה משונה המכונה בל"נ: