

The Guide

This Facilitator's Guide is meant to help use the 19 Letters as a text for Chavrusa learning with NCSYers, or presentation as a series of Shiurim. Each letter includes a summary of the content, discussion questions based around the content of the letter, and relevant quotes or explanations of some of the ideas. Of course, they cannot take the place of the letters themselves—each letter must be read and digested, with the summary serving as a reminder or restatement of the ideas presented.

The 19 Letters

Rav Hirsch wrote his magnum opus, known as Horeb, first. When he brought the huge manuscript to Jewish publishers, they refused the work—they assumed no one would be interested in a defense of Orthodox Judaism. Rav Hirsch brought it to a non-Jewish publisher, who suggested a smaller project to see if people were interested in what Rav Hirsch had to say. He accepted the suggestion, and wrote the 19 Letters of Ben Uziel under a pseudonym to see if people liked his writing. The Letters were meant to be a summary of Moriah and Horeb—philosophical underpinnings of the religion, followed by explanations and expositions of the practical מצוות. Published in 1836, it was enthusiastically accepted, even by the leaders of the Reform movement!

Like the Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim, the 19 Letters are directed at neither simple believers, who take religion as the way to withstand the pressures and pains of daily life, nor the nihilists, who believe that theology is but an 'exploded standpoint' (irrelevant and false), but to the perplexed, those who have considered the issues but aren't sure where to continue.

The Sefer follows a logical flow—God exists, humans were created to express God's potential for good, free will leads to some doing bad and therefore the creation of confusion, one nation is chosen to represent the Truth. That nation must be made distinct and separate so that they could be observed as the ideal and followed.

In its time, the 19 Letters was especially important as it reflected that Judaism was followed enthusiastically and strongly defended not only by the old, narrow-minded, and superstitious, but also by young members of the new generation, with full exposure to scientific developments and the changing times.

Editions of the Book:

There currently 2 English versions available. This guide was prepared with the older translation, done by Bernard Drachman and available as a PDF online as a Google Book. Feldheim recently published a new version, prepared by Joseph Elias, in which the translation was modernized, and notes were added to each letter explaining the concepts discussed and including quotes from the rest of Rav Hirsch's writings. Most NCSYers will have a much easier time with the Feldheim version due to the modernity of the language; personally, once I got used to the writing style, I felt I enjoyed the presentation much more in the older one; there may be NCSYers who can similarly appreciate that aspect of the Sefer.

A Biographical Sketch of R' SR Hirsch

1808-1888. Grew up as a young Rav in Germany, focused most of his attention as a community Rav on fighting the spread of Reform Judaism. Wealth of published material-begins with the 19 Letters, which leads into Horeb. He also has a commentary on Chumash, Tehillim, and the Siddur, plus years' worth of articles from his monthly newsletter, Yeshurun. His writings are extraordinary in that disparate sources represent different facets of the same ideas; his Commentary on Tehillim can be seamlessly applied to a section of Horeb, and a paragraph from the later years of Yeshurun are easily used to explain a concept mentioned in the Letters. Known for advancing the philosophy of Torah Im Derech Eretz, applying Torah to the relevant circumstances of society.

"Like all great men he had his faults. He was an extremist, but only extremists achieve success" – Drachman, Introduction to the 19 Letters, xxxii.

Letter 1: Benjamin's Questions

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What are your biggest problems with Judaism?
- ➔ If you could cut out one מצוה, which would it be?
- ➔ Does Judaism lead to happiness? Is it supposed to?

Pg 2: "Do you believe that you really understand the object which you are thus condemning?" Before throwing away that which has the potential to be the strongest source of holiness and guidance in your life, at least give it a chance to be fully explored and investigated-give it a chance, put in the time!

Pg 3: "Every religion, I believe, should bring man nearer to his ultimate end. This end, what else can it be than the attainment of happiness and perfection?" This is an assumption which may or may not be true. He also doesn't explain the definition of perfection; happiness, too, for that matter. "But if we take these principles as a criterion for Judaism, what utterly depressing results do we not obtain?" He goes on to rock Judaism, claiming that the תורה is mostly responsible for keeping us isolated and focused away from culture and the arts, so that we remain poor and uncultured while societies grow and develop around us. Due to our focus on the Law, we don't contribute to human achievement, either. It also messes with our individual personalities, encouraging submissiveness and forbidding open consideration new ideas. The תורה itself is too much focused on details instead of an overarching explanation of the meaning of life, also lacking a system of working through the big moral questions of the time.

Pg 6: "Life itself becomes a continuous monastic service, nothing but prayers and ceremonies; he the most praiseworthy Jew, who lives most secluded and knows least of the world, though he permits it to support him, but wastes his life in fasting and praying, and the perusal of senseless writings. Look yourself at the book which is put into our hands as the "Path of Life," and which contains the whole duty of the Jew, what else does it teach except praying and fasting and the keeping of holidays? Where is there one word of the active, busy life around us?" I wonder how much of his claims are motivated by the next line: "What limitation in traveling, what embarrassment in association with gentiles, what difficulties in every business!"

Summary of Claims: Adherence to the Jewish religion prevents happiness, contribution to cultural/human development, and breaks down the personality. The תורה is too dry-detail-oriented, and has no bearing on the big moral questions-only ideal is to fear God. Sneaking in is a strong consideration for how the גויים look at us, but not really explicated as a reason for his questions...

Pg. 7: We just present such a confused, non-unified face to the world-every Rabbi has his own opinions, and they are often at two opposite ends of the theological spectrum. How will anything get done that way?

Pg 8: "...Still I am confident that you have so much love left for me from former days, that you will, in answering me, forget your office [of Rabbi]; for what that teaches, I know sufficiently well." A clear, clear distrust of Rabbis, which will obviously impact his views on the things they say and try to teach.

Summary of letter 1: Why I'm not religious: Judaic Law is outdated and irrelevant. All it does is keep us low and depressed instead of bringing us to happiness, and restricts us from contributing to world advancement and perfection; as those two ideals, happiness and perfection, are the assumed goals of religion, Judaism is clearly a waste of time. Doesn't even provide a moral guide-too focused on irrelevant details to provide anything more than, fear God!

Letter 2: Introduction to the Letters

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What role can the Torah play in leading a Jewish life?
- ➔ Which aspects/areas of Torah can facilitate this? Tanach/משנה/גמרא/Halacha/Hashkafa...

Rav Hirsch, as Naftali, challenges the original assumption made about religion, wondering how happiness and perfection would be defined. Happiness is purely subjective, allowing no restraints to be placed on criminals. Perfection, real perfection, is almost unattainable! But he chooses to not follow that path; instead, he proposes to start over, totally fresh, and investigate Judaism using the תורה as the primary source, attempting to understand what messages it intends to impart. Instead of looking at the religion as meaningless ceremonies, understand it as actions with deep symbolic significance. Once you've given it this chance, then you can decide if you want to drop it all.

Letter 3: God and the World

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ Assuming Hashem needs nothing, why did he create the world in the first place?
- ➔ Is man inherently better than anything else Hashem created?

Summary:

To learn about the Jews, we must learn about history, as the Jews are a historical phenomenon; to learn about history, we must learn about man-history is merely the way to track the fulfillment of man's destiny; to learn about man, we must learn about the world he inhabits, along with the rest of creation. All of them-Israel, history, man, and the world-need to be appreciated and understood from the perspective of their Creator, as art is only really understood by the one who conceived and created it. Therefore, we must use תורה to understand the world.

One God created an intensely interrelated system of nature where everything cooperates and everything depends on everything else-appreciate it! He created every single piece of every system individually, as each piece has its own important role to play in the overall scheme, and He declared the role that every piece should play. Each one “bears the All (reflects God’s role in its creation) and is born by the All (only works through the power drawn from Hashem). Everything He created, He also blessed with permanence-not only did He create, He is creating. After creating, forming, blessing, and ordering, VaYinafash-he withdrew from sight, only visible through the harmonious system He set in place.

“This world-what may it be? We tread upon holy soil...Every force is God’s messenger...Everything serves God, each in its place, in its time” (pg 26). It takes God to make the entire system work together, but every piece has a role to play. That’s why He created the world with 10 Maamarim, each new Maamar building on the previous one, instead of all at once, sourced only in Hashem. “None has power, or means, for itself; it receives in order to give; gives in order to receive, and finds therein the accomplishment of the purpose of its existence” (pg 29-30). This is the message of Love, declared by the world as set up by Hashem.

Letter 4: Man

Discussion Questions

- ➔ What is the mission of humanity-why did God deem them/us worthy of being created?
- ➔ Why is Tzelem Elokim an important component of the way humans were created?

After explaining the world as an interdependent system created by God to facilitate a creation where every aspect must give and receive in order to survive, we can now begin to understand man’s place in this system. At the most basic level, he’s just one more cog in the system-if everyone else gives in addition to taking, how could man not reciprocate? “Learn to deem yourself holy as creature of God and, while contemplating heaven and earth and the great chorus of servants of the Lord, claim yourself with mingled solemnity and joy, “Servant of God!” (pg. 31-32). As we are defined as Tzelem Elokim, both by our own consciousness as well as by the תורה, we must emulate God in that way-all that we possess, “spirit, body, human beings, wealth, every ability and every power, they are means of activity; L’Avda U’L’Shomra, to promote and preserve the world where they were given-love and righteousness.” This is why we identify with the pain and happiness of every creature-we understand that we’re all working together at some point. Our job is to help the rest of creation achieve their own purposes in being created. While all others work to accomplish this subconsciously, following their natures, humans are meant to choose this path, recognizing their role in creation.

Using this definition of our purpose in being created and our job in life, amassing wealth and personal accomplishment/gain is obviously not the way to determine how successful one has been over his lifetime. Instead, look at the results we were able to create compared to the tools given to us and how much service of Hashem we were able to facilitate. Every single thing given to us was meant to be used to further a specific means and reach a specific end-in the end of the day, we’ll be judged on how well we used them.

Deeds can be measured objectively-how well did they accomplish the will of God? Greatness of man, though, is measured on an internal scale-how well did I use my potential to accomplish what God wanted from me? That means that my life could be called an absolute failure, even though I tried as

hard as I could to do the will of God; but it could also be a wonderful success, even if there's very little to show for it-as long as I did what I had the potential to do. In this scheme, Happiness and Perfection, which had previously been suggested as the benchmarks of a successful life, become merely tools that need to be employed for the right purposes to yield success-to yield greatness. An angel brings a seed to Hashem and asks what it's lot in life will be-rich/poor, strong/weak, wise/simple. Only thing not determined is tzaddik/rasha. (Main idea is that all these things can be strongly influenced by things outside of my control, but I and only I choose to do the right or wrong thing). So why make the scale of a successful life something which I don't have control over? Instead, any person who uses his Kochos for the betterment of creation, to serve and benefit those around him to the best of his ability, is a success! (pg 37).

Every single thought, action, and deed, no matter how trivial, can and must be directed towards the ultimate purpose Hashem has in mind for His world. What makes man unique among all the other creations is that Hashem turns to him and requests that he make this his life goal; while the rest of creation has no choice in their expression of Hashem's glory, man is asked to play his role as well as he can.

Quoted Sources:

תהלים פרק קג

(א) לְדוֹד בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת יְקוֹק וְכָל קִרְבִּי אֶת שֵׁם קֹדֶשׁוֹ

(ב) בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת יְקוֹק וְאֵל תִּשְׁכַּחִי כָּל גְּמוּלוֹ

(ג) הַסֹּלֶחַ לְכָל עֲוֹנוֹי הַרְפֵּא לְכָל תַּחֲלָאִי

(ד) הַגּוֹאֵל מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּי הַמַּעֲטָרֵכִי חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים

(ה) הַמְּשַׁבֵּיעַ בְּטוֹב עֲדִיךָ תִּתְחַדֵּשׁ כַּנֶּשֶׁר נְעוּרָיִכִי

...

(טו) אָנוּשׁ כְּחֹצִיר יָמָיו כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה כֵּן יִצִּיץ

(טז) כִּי רוּחַ עֲבָרָה בּוֹ וְאֵינּוֹ וְלֹא יִכְרַנּוּ עוֹד מְקוֹמוֹ

(יז) וְחֶסֶד יְקוֹק מֵעוֹלָם וְעַד עוֹלָם עַל יִרְאָיו וְצַדִּיקוֹתוֹ לְבָנָי בָּנִים

(יח) לְשִׁמְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְלִזְכָּרֵי פִקְדָיו לַעֲשׂוֹתָם

(יט) יְקוֹק בְּשָׁמַיִם הִכִּין כֶּסֶף וּמַלְכוּתוֹ בְּכָל מַשְׁלָה

(כ) בְּרַכּוֹ יְקוֹק מִלְּאֲקִיּוֹ גִבּוֹרֵי כַח עֲשֵׂי דְבָרוֹ לְשִׁמְעַע בְּקוֹל דְּבָרוֹ

(כא) בְּרַכּוֹ יְקוֹק כָּל צְבָאָיו מִשְׁרֵתָיו עֲשֵׂי רְצוֹנוֹ

(כב) בְּרַכּוֹ יְקוֹק כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו בְּכָל מְקוֹמוֹת מְמַשְׁלָתוֹ בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת יְקוֹק

Letter 5-Education (Man Cont.)

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ Who decides what's good and what's evil? Is that definition set, or can it fluctuate?
- ➔ What led to Hashem starting over-the flood? What does that teach us about the limits that Hashem has set for us?

Realizing our purpose in life is meant to motivate us to action and change our perspectives, understanding that our possessions are not ends in themselves but means to an exalted End. The more you have, the more is demanded of you (pg 42). This responsibility is evident in the way we were created-specifically formed with the abilities to accomplish that which is uniquely human. But what is the End we're working towards? God's will isn't a specific enough answer; we need more.

Good and evil, used to denote "that which is meant to be used" vs "that which is meant to be avoided," should only be defined by what Hashem has laid out for our use vs what He's decided should be off-limits. Clear as this may be, we were given freedom to become the administrator of the world; this brings with it the possibility of misuse. All other creations follow Hashem's will without choice; we opt in, but we may opt out.

What may lead us to opt out? Hashem did us a favor by allowing us to experience pleasure when taking care of our needs. Instead of focusing on the action, which is a means to the higher end of fulfilling the purpose set by Hashem, one might focus on the pleasure itself, as its own ends. Similarly, he may view his God-given ability to affect change in the world not as a charge to action, but as a sign of mastery, forgetting about the real Master. This gives him the idea that he is meant to control everything, as he was given the power to do;

the problem is that he's forgotten the purpose that control was given to him for. When our minds are pressed into service figuring out how to attain pleasure for the body, instead of the mind leading the body towards its ultimate goal, perversion results.

This system presupposes that Man is aware of God's will, that he can try to fulfill it. But how are we supposed to figure it out? When Hashem created the world, he gave **Adam HaRishon** full control of the Gan, except for one command-don't eat from the Eitz HaDaas. This gave man the chance to understand that he is meant to subordinate himself to God's will, even if he doesn't understand. If he only followed when he understood, he would be serving not Hashem, but himself. To obey the command and to understand it as unchangeable wisdom-God's will-would be success. Every single person is born into their own personal Gan Eden. The question is if they can keep the right perspective and keep their hands off the Eitz HaDaas.

2 factors try to make us turn away. First, pleasure acts as an irrational magnet away from what we know to be the better choice; we just can't resist the sweetness offered as the alternative. Second, our own intellect convinces us that we can decide good and evil for ourselves-we are smart enough to make our own decisions, and don't need God's will to decide for us. In other words, Taava and Gaava.

Following after either temptation and using the power Hashem gave us for the wrong things should mean an automatic forfeit of our lives-if we fail to use them according to the guidelines Hashem established, why should we keep them? Hashem-as-father, though, gives us more than one chance to make our way back to the path He proscribed for us. By limiting our access to pleasure, both temptations are handicapped-the focus on pleasure is dimmed, and being limited by God reminds us

that we are not the masters of our domains, that we are not free to do as we please and choose for ourselves right and wrong.

“But freedom delays the success of education” (pg 50). From Adam HaRishon, we move to **Kayin**-he worked the ground, and therefore felt that it was his, not God’s. Working to make a living allows man to redirect his focus onto the physical things in life, building towards a comfortable physical life. After too long, the human begins to sink into the animal part of the body-hence, the story of the **Nefilim**. Man is working for himself, not for God; therefore, instead of seeing the rest of the world as fellow servants in the overall creation-scheme, as he used to, he now sees individuals each working to satisfy their own unique desires and pleasures. Those which he needs to fulfill his own desires, he deifies-**Dor Enosh**. As every other creation is understood as working only for its own self-pleasure, that, instead of the service of the Creator, becomes the ideal. As the generation fell to pieces, 1 man led his family out of the rubble by keeping his internal animal in check-**Noach**.

Letter 6-History

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ Why learn History?
- ➔ Where are we at on the ‘historical arc’ described by Rav Hirsch?

Now that we understand Man, we can understand history. History begins post-flood, with a new direction for humanity-education rather than all-or-nothing destruction. In this version, Hashem spreads humanity around the world, so that the deviation of one family doesn’t infect the rest of humanity. As time goes on and the ruling culture begins to go through the stages of forgetting God and the associated negative behaviors, they are weakened and die out, allowing the next culture to take their place and give it a try.

Dispersion itself was meant to be a lesson to man-the effect of the environment on each subculture showed that man wasn’t as all-powerful as they may have thought, evidenced by the deep-reaching influences of the geographical surroundings. History progresses by a nation taking the stage, showcasing its unique talent or new addition the world, and using their position as rulers of the world to amass as much material wealth as possible. When this nation demonstrates their lack of understanding as to the ideal role of money as means instead of end, Hashem ends their reign and allows another to give it a try. This will only end when humanity realizes that the question that must be asked is not, “What should we do in order to be happy and blessed,” but, “When we are happy and blessed, what should we do with this blessing?”

Letter 7: Yisrael

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ Why are we (the Jews) here?
- ➔ Why did we need to begin as a nation of slaves?
- ➔ How does this impact our understanding of anti-Semitism?

Now that we understand Man and History, we can understand Yisrael. Referring back to Yeshaya Perek 2 about the גוים coming to the Beis HaMikdash for instruction, Ki MiTzion Teitzei תורה, and beating swords

into plowshares, our mission is clear: we facilitate the rest of the world finding God, which is the only way they can be directed towards their ultimate purpose-taking their place in the overall framework of creation as servants of God and facilitating the development of the rest of the world.

Since Hashem saw humanity as a whole getting distracted by the pursuit of pleasure and materialism, instead of using them as the means to their original end, he introduced Yisrael-a nation whose sole focus and self-proclaimed goal was following the explicated will of God. We would act as a “warning, model, and instruction” (pg 69). What kind of nation can facilitate this? It must be successful, but that success can't be attributable to the same factors that the rest of the world sees as causes of success. God's involvement must be clear, more clear than His involvement in the world. This means that everything that happens to the nation, both positive and negative, should reflect His involvement. Important-everything we're trying to teach could have been figured out by Mankind indirectly-the difference is we're expressing it directly.

[For example-Our mission statement is Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad. This proclaims our acceptance of Hashem as one, unified God. This is basically the concept mankind was charged to realize by looking into the development of creation as an interrelated web of dependencies, just we declare it explicitly.]

Pg. 75-76: Mamleches Kohanim V'Goi Kadosh-like the priests among a single nation, so should we be among universal mankind.

If this is our sole purpose, facilitating the rest of the world's realization of Hashem's existence, role in creation, and responsibilities that behooves, then if we aren't facilitating that, we are like the non-Jews who focus on material wealth. We are both missing the point of our being in the world.

To ensure we can accomplish our mission, we must be separated and isolated from the rest of humanity, both spiritually and ethically. We will only grow in our mission and reach the level where we can act as the model we are meant to be if we keep apart from those who get lost in the never-ending battle for more and more wealth, more and more pleasure. Once we hit the top, we can turn ourselves outward and act as the 'light unto the nations' we were brought in to be.

“Af Choveiv Amim-Truly, He loved the nations, but-Kol K'doshav B'Yadecha-His holy ones were implements in your hand.” Slightly unclear, but seems to be designating Bnei Yisrael as the tools for Hashem bringing about the planned end-goal for the גוים.

Letter 8: The Founding of the Jewish People

Discussion Questions:

- What can we learn from Avraham about the ideal role of the nation?
- Describe the תורה in 2 words

Avraham was chosen to start off the nation because he demonstrated the qualities Hashem was looking for from His model nation. He, alone among the rest of the world, recognized the necessary existence of God. In response to Hashem's call, he abandoned his roots and security and followed the demand to go to an unknown place. Expressed his AHavas Hashem by loving Hashem's creations-cared for them, prayed for them. AHavas Hashem was joined with Emuna BaHAsheM-Lech Lecha. Finally, joined by Yira-

ability to abandon everything with no questions asked. Avraham most excelled at AHava-Avraham Ohavai. Yitzchak received mainly the trait of Yira, and Yaakov exemplified Emuna.

Once the family grew to 70, it was time to begin the formulation of God's nation. For them to be recognized as such, they could not become a nation in the natural way, naturally strong or blessed with some resource that gives them the boost they need to become a player among the rest of the nations. Otherwise, it wouldn't be clear that they were fully dependent on their relationship with Hashem as the source for their strength, which is part of what they were supposed to be demonstrating. To accomplish this, Hashem brought us into Shibud Mitzrayim, taking away everything which would potentially allow us to become a nation until Hashem did it himself, taking down the host power while we were brought up. Watching the most powerful nation crumble after deifying themselves and therefore those things which give them possessions (the Nile-could also be Pshat in sheep being a god for the Egyptians-source of material possessions, so therefore deified!) was a powerful message to the nation-to-be.

Hashem revealed Himself as Creator and Lord of Nature, and simultaneously the Lord of Nations and Judge of all People. Directly from the exodus, Hashem gave His people the תורה-the Book codifying exactly how they were meant to act in order to best demonstrate the ideals He demanded of them. Wandering the Midbar was meant to instill Emuna in the entire nation. Without a land to call our own, normally a prerequisite to nationhood, we received the תורה and the title of Mamleches Kohanim VGoy Kadosh-a nation dedicated to the service of the rest of the world as the Kohen serves his people, but at the same time remaining Kadosh-separate and distinct from the nations we were serving so that we could preserve the impact of our own influence.

As part of demonstrating the specific ideals we were called on to show to the other nations, we were given a state and a land-these were means to the above-stated end, though, not goals unto themselves. When we failed at using them as they were meant to be used, we lost them-Galus/Exile.

Letter 9: Exile

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What's the purpose of Galus?
- ➔ Isn't Hashem kicking us out of Israel a sign that we've been 'fired' from the role we used to play?

As beneficial as it was to have EY, it was only ever meant to be a means to the end of Avodas Hashem. Once we got distracted by self-focus and pleasure, it was no longer fulfilling its purpose, so we were sent away. This way, the only thing keeping us alive and connected was the תורה. Being spiritual, as long as we held onto it, nothing could happen to us. While this distraction is the same issue plaguing the non-Jews, we are held to a higher standard, as we have more potential as the representatives of Shem Hashem BaOlam. Through Galus, we'd act as the Or LaGoyim in a more individualistic way, instead of as a nation. To facilitate this, before being sent out into the world we were brought back to EY for some Chizuk. During that period, Christianity (and later, Islam) were introduced to pave the road for what we'd be teaching (but only the rejection of wealth as the goal-not its dedication to Avodas Hashem).

Galus was meant to teach us the lesson we failed to learn in Israel. We were shown clearly that without any wealth and possessions, no state to call our own, we survived solely through our connection to Hashem through the תורה. We had first-row seats to the fall of the surrounding nations who idolized

the same things that had led to our own downfall. We have solidified this understanding in practice: “On every page of history, Yisrael has inscribed with its lifeblood that it venerates and loves only One God and that there are human values more sublime than possessions and the gratification of one’s desires.” That sacrifice alone is the clearest lesson to the גוים. As hard as it was for us during the hard times, we have such a better opportunity now, when we’re accepted into society-while morals crumble around us, for us to uphold pure values is an undeniable beacon to the rest of the world.

Letter 10-Classification of the מצוות

At this point, Rav Hirsch switches from ‘Moriah’ to ‘Horeb,’ from explaining the basics of Jewish Hashkafa/life-perspective to his system of מצוות and the ideas behind them.

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ How do the מצוות relate to the grand philosophy we explained as the idea behind the Jewish people?
- ➔ I’ve been Jewish and keeping מצוות my whole life. Why haven’t I heard about any of the ideals and goals mentioned previously?

Based on various elements of Jewish History, the elements of Jewish Hashkafa that were supposed to be reinforced by the מצוות were lost; instead, מצוות became mere mechanical actions that lost all deeper significance. Number of reasons: Lack of autonomy needed to practice, fear of Enlightenment that precluded any deep analysis of the מצוות, suffering yielded focus on prayer and endurance instead of action and vitality, method of study that advanced ‘the magical building of cosmic worlds.’

“Forget what you know about Judaism, listen as if you had never heard about it...”

What we should expect from the מצוות/תורה: Instruction as to how to use everything available to you the way Hashem wants you to, and for the fulfillment of Ratzon Hashem: “how to practice justice and love through everything and to everything.” Add in mission of the Jewish people-educating oneself and mankind in the ideals of Avodas Hashem. Finally, that which relates to our ‘home base’ but no longer applies to us.

(1) תורות. Instructions or doctrines. The historically revealed ideas concerning God, the world, the mission of humanity and of Israel, not as mere doctrines of faith or science, but as principles to be acknowledged by mind and heart, and realized in life.

(2) משפטים. Judgments. Statements of justice towards creatures similar and equal to yourself, by reason of this resemblance and equality, that is, of justice towards human beings.

(3) חקים. Arbitrary statutes. Statements of justice towards subordinate creatures by reason of the obedience due to God; that is, justice towards the earth, plants, and animals, or, if they have become assimilated with your personality, towards your own body and soul.

(4) מצוות. Commandments. Precepts of love towards all beings without distinction, purely because of the bidding of God and in consideration of our duty as men and Israelites.

(5) עֲדוּת. Symbolic observances. Monuments or testimonies to truths essential to the concept of the mission of man and of Israel. These testimonies are symbolic words or actions which bear a lesson for the individual Jew, collective Israel, or mankind in general.

(6) עֲבוּדָה. Service or worship. Exaltation and sanctification of the inner powers by word-or-deed symbols to the end that our conception of our task be rendered clearer, and we be better fitted to fulfill our mission on earth.

As basal principles to these grand divisions of religion we have three concepts, justice, love, and education.

(1) Justice, that is, consideration for every being as creature of God, for all possessions as arrangements willed by God, of all governments and systems as ordained by God and fulfillment of all duties towards them incumbent upon us.

(2) Love, that is, kindly acceptance of all beings as children of God, as brethren; promotion of their welfare, and the endeavor to bring them to the goal set for them by God, without motive or benefit, but simply to fulfill the Divine will and command.

(3) Education, that is, the training of oneself and others to such work by taking to heart these truths as life-principles, by holding them fast and preserving them for oneself and for others, and by endeavoring to regain them whenever the influences of worldly life have torn them from our possession.

Letter 11: Toros, Mishpatim, Chukim

Discussion Questions

➔ Pick one מצוה from each section and try to explain why it belongs in the category it's in

Toros: Statements concerning how we're meant to relate to Hashem/interact with the world, set out in ways we can understand and apply practically:

Anochi, Lo Yihye, us as Hashem's 'inheritance,' Ahavas/Yiras, Emuna BaHashem (Trust rather than Faith), V'Ahavta L'Rayacha Kamocha, Lo Sisna Es Achicha Bilvavecha. Gaava/Anava. Lashon HaRa. Conditioning through Suffering, Tamim Tihye Im Hashem Elokecha, Remember Har Sinai. Kedoshim Tihyu.

Mishpatim: Justice: Respect all other people, their property, and life. Right to truth, happiness, peace of mind, freedom, honor, and a peaceful existence. Don't abuse legal power.

Respect for Human Body: Prohibition against Murder, Beating, Injury

Respect for Human Property: Prohibition of Stealing, Robbery, Withholding Possessions

Falsehood, Lying, Flattery, Hypocrisy

Chukkim: Justice to those below humans, or to self: Unlike Mishpatim, which is based on equality of mankind before God, Chukkim are based on the fact that everything belongs to Hashem. Harder for us to understand because we can't empathize as well with non-humans.

Bal Tashchis, Klayim, Kavod HaMeis, Kosher (respect for the soul through respect for the body), Kisui Erva in order to subdue the animal inside, controlled speech (Nedarim). Tzniut!

Shiluach HaKein, Oso V'Es Bno, Tzaar Baalei Chayim

Recognizing the Body as the instrument of the Soul, dedicated to Hashem

Letter 12: מצוות

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What's studying תורה doing here? Where should it be, instead?
- ➔ What does including Yishuv HaAretz here tell you about Rav Hirsch's view as to the purpose of society/community?

After Justice, Love. More than Sur MeiRa, must strive for Asei Tov. "First, equip yourself with all possible capabilities and resources, garner goodness and nobility; and then give yourself to the world around you, serving God by bestowing your blessing upon it." Honoring parents, elders, Dibuk L'Talmidei חכמים, Yishuv Haaretz, marriage as a way of preparing to teach children דרך Hashem. Once providing for self, start providing for others-most importantly, sacrificing self to raise children. In addition, taking care of others, both property and person. Tzedaka, Gmilus Chasadim. Preserve the תורה as the source of all of these teachings-Ksivas Sefer Torah. Kiddush Hashem!

Studying תורה, Inter-marriage, Chukas Akum, Teshuva

Lo Saamod Al Dam Reyecha, Hashavas Aveida, Eidus

Supporting friends and Neighbors-Prika U'T'Ina, Halva'a, Ribis, Mashkon

Duties toward the Community, Duties towards Society (Yirmiyahu 29)

Letter 13: Edos

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ Is there any significance to an Eda done without understanding the symbolism behind it?
- ➔ Pick one and try to understand, with as many details as possible, the symbolism of the מצוה

The section known as Edos is comprised of most מצוות involved in daily practice. Rav Hirsch dedicated an entire volume of his Collected Writings to explaining the Jewish system of symbolism as expressed through מצוות. Understanding the significance of the many details involved in performing a מצוה, as well as appreciating the overall concept the מצוה is meant to stress, can revolutionize commitment. It is well worth cross-referencing each מצוה with Horeb and Rav Hirsch's Commentary on the Torah for more details.

Symbolic Observances/Declarations of Truths. In order to act out a life of Justice and Love, they must be solidly based on real foundations. Concepts to be actualized: Hashem is the Borei, Ribon Olamim;

everything belongs to Him, man is meant to be the custodian of Creation, making sure everything does what it's supposed to do; בני ישראל are meant to concretize that mission for the rest of the world. Bechor, **Challa**, Orlah, Chadash, **שבת**, Shmitta/Yovel, Teruma, Bikurim. **Chagim**-Creator and Guardian of national Body and Spirit, both in EY and exile. **Taanios** teach us about Galus and what leads to it. **Mila** teaches us to sanctify the physical. **Tefillin** directs heart, body, and mind to Avodas Hashem. **Tzitzis** act as a guard against animal-ness. **Mezuza** dedicates our houses to Hashem. **Matza** and **Gid HaNashe** symbolize our weak physical power, in order to highlight our reality of living with Hashem and under his protection. **Lulav**, **Sukka**, and Maasros-using our possessions correctly. **Rosh Hashana** and **Yom Kippur**, **Rosh Chodesh**-reflection on the past in order to rededicate towards the future.

Instead of putting concepts into words, they were packaged into actions to express an entire idea all at once. It then needs to be unpacked and understood. At the same time, having an entire community practicing the same action is a powerful expression of the commitment demanded by the תורה. Every detail of the Edos is important for the overall idea being symbolized, so to cut one thing out is to jeopardize the idea at the core. Take שבת as an example-on the day that we were presented with the completed World and told to oversee its development through our own creation, we give it back to Hashem in recognition of our role as mere Shomrim, not rulers. We return that which was deposited in our hands. Therefore, any sort of creative activity, no matter how simple, is to deny that fact and declare ourselves as the unopposed masters of the world!

Letter 14-Avoda

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ How does Tefilla act as self-assessment?
- ➔ Why is Ivrit-Hebrew Language-included as a מצוה?

Self-Assessment in order to make sure that our ideals and priorities are in the right places, in relation to Hashem, the world, and man. That used to be the symbolic purpose of sacrifices and the Beis HaMikdash: Represented the abode of תורה, with the Aron representing תורה Min HaShamayim, Menora and Shulchan the mental and physical capacities needed for Avodas Hashem. Different parts offered from each Korban dedicated different parts of ourselves to Hashem, culminating in the Olah being the entire personality. Every symbolic offering was accompanied with a Dibur making the idea explicit. Tefilla takes the place of these symbols: Tehillos, Tefillos, Bakashos, Techinos, Todos (and Vidui); made possible by Krias HaTorah, and culminating in the common Berachos.

Dvarim SheB'Kedusha, Kriyas HaTorah, Birchah Kohanim, Ivrit, Yira for the Beis HaMikdash

With this understanding of the מצוות, as directing all of our actions towards a deeper understanding of what Hashem wants from us and who He wants us to be, it cannot be that their observance deadens the mind and restricts life. On the contrary, its sole purpose is to take life and dedicate it to something higher!

Letter 15: Reply

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What are the effects of living a God-centered life instead of a man-centered life?

- ➔ How does the role of a Jew differ from the role of a non-Jew: different, more, same?
- ➔ Do we need to be so separate and distinct? Why/Why not?

Rav Hirsch goes back to the first letter and responds to Benjamin's points. Armed with his framework of the philosophy of Judaism, 'Naftali' is able to show how each point falls away or was based on a mistaken assumption.

A conception of the purpose of human life as meant to lead only to material wealth and physical pleasure will obviously not be fulfilled by adherence to Judaism; the two systems are almost opposites. Judaism presents the entire world as means to a higher end, not as the end unto itself. Hashem created a world not to be ignored, for if so, why bother creating it, but instead for it to be dedicated towards serving Hashem. When we fail to hit this standard, we're punished, bringing us back to the תורה so that we can try again. Instead of denying us pleasure, the תורה imposes limits on the amounts and types of pleasures we enjoy, thus ennobling them with directed purpose.

When it comes to contributing to the world, we are undeniably noticeable. Who else gave the world the values, morals, and ideals which have the ability to rescue a morally degenerate society rich with culture and science? How else would the world understand that these things are meant to be utilized and directed towards Avodas Hashem?

The תורה isolates us. Yes! It needs to, for otherwise, how would we fight the degenerative influence of the very world we're trying to affect? But that doesn't make us better than anyone else-our role as an Am Segula means we're dedicated to Hashem as opposed to another god, as opposed to Hashem dedicated only to us instead of any other nation or people. All of humanity, though, is meant to be working with us towards the goal that Hashem has for all mankind.

Are we made weaker by submission to the תורה? Or is the ability to submit oneself really the sign of the stronger person, as opposed to the physically strong one who can't control himself enough to avoid hurting another human being.

Creativity is not impeded by Judaism, except when we're concerned that it will lead to AZ. In that case, we put truth before beauty/artistic creation and forbid the creative expression that defies creativity for its own sake.

There are no dogmas of Judaism, per say. We have מצוות, all of which are meant to include some sort of required action or expression. There are also clearly declared truths which act as the foundation to everything we do; these must be observed and integrated. While most people draw these truths from History, Nature, and Man, the Jew adds in the תורה to his survey of the facts on the ground. Based on what he extrapolates from these 4 sources, he looks to the world and understands events in this context.

When looking at the world with this perspective, important to remember that we are here to be active-to impact the world- ולעשות וללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות. Definition of a Chasid is one who has totally absorbed this perspective-works on behalf of the klal, even at his own expense. Highest/most important type of Tefilla is Brachos, "expressing our commitment to a Divinely guided life of action."

Following הלכה limits our business opportunities-with a clear understanding of where our money comes from and what we're supposed to be doing with it, it becomes comical to say that we need to work on שבת in order to make more money. Is extra work going to make a difference? Will we turn around and use the money earned ב'איסור doing what we suppose is the Ratzon Hashem? Understanding that money is simply a means to an end instead of an end unto itself means no reason to break הלכה to get more-you'll get what you need by following the rules Hashem set for you, along with demonstrating your understanding of your role in the world. "You would understand that the hardships you complained about do not cause a person to cease being Jewish, but, rather, that one whose mouth can utter complaints must have ceased being a true Jew" (pg. 155-156).

We stick out among the גוים-Of course we do! That's how we accomplish our purpose on this world, by acting as a recognizable positive example! Be proud of who you are, instead of being ashamed for sticking out. "Seek to command respect because of your Jewishness, not in spite of it" (pg. 156). We're not looking to become so close as to join their families- that would constitute a denial of our own special role.

Sixteenth Letter: Emancipation

Emancipation: Recognition as equal members of society

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What does emancipation really represent?
- ➔ What is the Jewish perspective on our role in a Galus society?

5. Build houses and dwell [therein], and plant gardens and eat their produce.

ה בְּנוּ בָתִּים וְשָׁבוּ וְנָטְעוּ גִּבְנוֹת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת פְּרִיָן:

6. Take wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to men, and they shall bear sons and daughters, and multiply there and be not diminished.

ו קָחוּ נָשִׁים וְהוֹלִידוּ בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת וּקְחוּ לְבָנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֶת בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם תִּנּוּ לְאִנָּשִׁים וְתִלְדְּנָה בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת וּרְבוּ שָׁם וְאַל תִּמְעָטוּ:

7. And seek the peace of the city where I have exiled you and pray for it to the Lord, for in its peace you shall have peace.

ז וּדְרָשׁוּ אֶת שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְּעֵדָה אֵל יְהוָה כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָה יְהִי לְכֶם שְׁלוֹם:

This is the main source, coming from Yirmiyahu prophesizing as the Jews were being led into Galus Bavel, that Rav Hirsch uses to support his claim that a Jew must contribute positively to his surrounding society. There is always the concern, though, that getting too involved with non-Jews, in whatever context, will negatively impact our unique character and ideals. So what is the balance?

First, it is important to recognize that identifying with the host society doesn't infringe on our identity as a Jewish nation. Even when we had ארץ ישראל as an independent state, we were bound together by the תורה. Currently, in Galus, the bonds of the תורה are just as strong, which allows for the possibility of joining a political/social group without compromising that which identifies us as Jewish. However, like

everything else in life, it must be recognized that the purpose of such a move would be not as an end unto itself, but as a means towards Avodas Hashem-bringing humanity towards the ultimate goal of recognizing Hashem as the creator and through that their place in creation.

Once we're already in Galus for self-perfection, we're also afforded the opportunity to work closer with the nations of the world, making it easier to show them the ideal form of an Eved Hashem and what pure humanity is meant to be. That is most easily accomplished, though, when we're respected as equal members of society. Being persecuted means we have much less influence, and also makes it harder for individual Jews to keep the standards they would otherwise be hitting. Emancipation would mean that we can enter society as full participants, allowing us to interact with the non-Jews in a way which would allow for real impact and influence. "I bless emancipation, when I see how the excess of oppression drove Israel away from human intercourse, prevented the cultivation of the mind, limited the free development of the noble sides of character, and compelled many individuals to enter, for the sake of self-support, upon paths which, to be sure, men filled with the true spirit of Judaism would have shunned even in the most extreme necessity, but the temptation to enter upon which they were too weak to withstand."

Rav Hirsch continues to say that while this is an important step in the realization of Hashem's goal for the גוים, as it signifies the recognition of a human's intrinsic value as a Tzelem Elokim, it needs to be taken differently by the Jews. For us, the first thought needs to be how emancipation will contribute to our realizing our mission as Hashem's representatives in the world. "But for Israel I only bless it if at the same time there awakes in Israel the true spirit, which, independent of emancipation or non-emancipation, strives to fulfill the Israel-mission" (pg. 166).

Letter 17-Reform; Or, What Judaism Should Be

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What parts of Rav Hirsch's outline of Judaism do you feel is missing in current society?
- ➔ How can an entire society/community be changed/reformed?

Based on the conceptions of Judaism as set forth in the previous letters, it's clear that we're not realizing the full potential Judaism has to offer. Two main problems: ignorance/misunderstandings about the main ideas of Judaism, and a focus on pleasure as the goal of life. Until those two obstacles are surmounted, we have no chance. By recalibrating Judaism, we have the ability to utilize the תורה raise us up to the heights of morality/pure humanity it was given to us for, instead of us dragging it down to our level (why we don't adapt the תורה fit modern times- CW Sivan I).

Basic foundations that need to be laid-who are we, what are we doing here, and how are we supposed to accomplish our mission? Related to that is an understanding of the מצוות, Edos most fundamentally-their whole purpose is to reflect and symbolize certain ideas. Without this understanding, what value does Judaism contain which gives it a fighting chance against the shallower but more alluring draw of fun and physical enjoyment?

Therefore, the current version of Reform Judaism is attempting to fix a problem we very much identify with, and trying honestly, not maliciously. We cannot fault them for trying. But their plan is to try and adapt Judaism into outside society, instead of revitalizing the ever-meaningful 'soul' of Judaism by uncovering the deeper messages contained in the תורה. How will that work? It corrupts the very

thing which gives a chance, the nature of the תורה as Hashem's guide for our lives! Therefore, what we need is Education. While much attention is paid to secular, livelihood education, "...the culture of the heart, the inculcation of Judaism, its emphatic presentation by the school resulting in its consequent infiltration through life, the rearing of human beings who will comprehend themselves as beings living in a Divine world and endowed with Divine powers, which they shall dedicate to the fulfillment of the Divine will; human beings who shall rejoice in their mission and be filled with fiery love for the name "Jew," which summons them to such a life, to fulfill the Divine law amidst perils, sufferings, and privations; human beings who comprehend the world, the past and the present and themselves as corner-stones in the edifice of the future — if we seek such, we find a vacuum" (pg. 175). So the way to fix Judaism can only be to focus on proper Jewish Education!

Letter 18: Reform Cont. (An Early Form of 'Torah Im Derech Eretz')

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ How do we fix the mistakes of the past?
- ➔ Where is True Judaism found?

This letter seems to be the start of what would become one of Rav Hirsch's legacies, the philosophy of Torah Im Derech Eretz: The application of the eternal Torah, representing Daas Hashem, to the current societal norms and assumptions.

The תורה is the repository and source of our life philosophy-it was written as a guidebook for our life on Earth. This was meant to be accomplished by learning the text of the Written תורה together with the additions, details, background, and clarification of the Oral תורה. Not only was the technical aspects of הלכה, Jewish Law, meant to be passed down, but also how the Law developed one into a better self. Throughout the Galus, it became necessary to write down first the barest framework of the Oral תורה, creating the משנה, followed by an elaboration of that text, the גמרא. What was left in hidden form, though, was the Aggadta-those pieces which dealt with the fundamental questions of our purpose on Earth and the role of Jews and Judaism in the world. It was left in veiled form to preserve the need for a teacher-student relationship, ensuring the correct transmission of every detail of the Jewish tradition.

With students being trained in Greek philosophy, but not being properly exposed to Judaism's own answers to philosophy's question, Judaism was in danger of being rejected for not facilitating the quest for truth through self-knowledge. The רמבם found himself bothered by such a contradiction, and dedicated himself towards showing how congruent Greek philosophy is with the Jewish sources. Coming with an understanding that Knowledge of Hashem is the highest goal, the practical מצוות became only a means to that end. In the third section of Moreh Nevuchim, he suggests reasons for מצוות, but they're weak. He doesn't take details into account, nor the additions of תורה She'Baal Peh-things which, if left out, would render the action not a מצוה at all!

This approach had two effects: for those who felt they already had acquired sufficient knowledge of God, they no longer felt a need to study the תורה and practice מצוות, as they had already reached the goal that practice was meant to lead to. Those who were more study-oriented rejected the רמבם's approach of trying to find a logical basis for the מצוות, insisting that the מצוות must be approached as unknowable pronouncements of a Divine God which must be followed blindly. Even the Edoth, whose

whole practice is valuable only because of the symbolism they're meant to represent, were treated as 'talismanic jugglery.'

This latter approach to Judaism became more and more prevalent, particularly in Germany. Moses Mendelssohn rose to fame, defending Judaism against Christianity and modern science, while remaining an orthodox Jew. But the approach adopted by his followers favored Bible study as a means of understanding the poetry and literature found inside, instead of yielding an understanding of the Jewish nation's role in the world. Talmud, i.e. practical Judaism, was ignored. According to this approach, if knowledge of God is the goal, why bother with the innumerable and exhausting details of how a can can be opened on **שבת**? Sabbath is a day of rest; what more do you need?!

For Judaism to be properly understood, it must be examined from the inside—each **מצוה** inspected in its totality, the original sources read and understood as they were meant to be. "There is one way to salvation; — where the sin was committed the atonement must begin, — and this one way is, to forget the inherited prejudices and opinions concerning Judaism; to go back to the sources of Judaism, to Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash; to read, study, and comprehend them in order to live them; to draw from them the teachings of Judaism concerning God, the world, mankind, and Israel, according to history and precept; to know Judaism out of itself; to learn from its own utterances its science of life" (pg. 197). Ignore both of the mistaken schools of Judaism, that of reform and that of blind, non-understood, obedience, and return to the sources to understand what Hashem really wants from you—as a human, in His world, following His laws. Answer the questions, "What is a Jew? Why do we do what we do?" But do not turn outside of our sources for the answers; everything is found within. Mashal of the dusty crown, preserved by years of fighting but left dirty. Do you throw out the crown, or refocus your attention on it, notice the jewels beneath the dirt and dust, and put in the time to fix it? [This may be referencing the **רמבם's** Hilchos Talmud Torah 3-1-Keser Torah is Munach V'Omed Umachan L'Kol Yisrael... Kol Mi SheYirtze Yavo V'Yitol].

Letter 19: The Essays

Discussion Questions:

- ➔ What made Rav Hirsch publish Horeb before Moriah? Was that the right call?
- ➔ How do you understand his Mashal of the child enveloped in flames?

Technically, there are only 18 letters. In the 19th letter, written as a postscript/follow-up to Benjamin on the day of his wedding, Rav Hirsch explains his decision to publish his writings, hoping to impact the Jewish population with the ideas discussed.

Rav Hirsch explains his vision in writing Moriah and Horeb and why he feels it right to publish Horeb first, attempting to preserve religious practice among those still observant before reaching out to the already unobservant. Most stirring is the following paragraph, describing how he understands his duty to publish his ideas, as weak as they may be:

"Then there is the question of duty. I see a child enveloped in flames; the bystanders are timidly inactive, or seek only to save the building. I see the child, — I rush in; — need I ask first my neighbor whether he, too, sees the child; have I the right to consider whether, in my hasty rush, I may not knock some neighbor bloody; may I even ask whether, in my haste to save the child, I am not hindering the task of saving the building or producing a draught, which may start the fire to fresh activity? "But

suppose you see the child too late, and before you reach it the building falls with hiss and crash upon its poor head?"

Even if it should bury me, too, in its ruins, I would but have done my duty" (pg. 216-217).