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The Relevance of Secular Studies to Jewish Education

In our program booklet for last year we set down some thoughts about the role of Hebrew study in general education. The purpose of that essay* was to promote a better understanding of how Jewish studies, which set our school apart from other educational institutions, can contribute to general education and culture. We sought to give wider circles an insight into the close relationship that exists between training in the moral and spiritual values of the Jewish nation and the objectives of general secular and humanistic studies. We attempted to demonstrate how the study of the Hebrew language and of Jewish law can widen the student's intellectual horizon and enhance his training for practical life. We set out to refute the preconceived notions of those who might argue that the cultivation of this special field of study is bound to encroach upon the obligatory program of secular education that must be completed by students at our institution. We endeavored to show that, on the contrary, the introduction of our youth to the language and to the sacred texts of the literature of the Jewish nation, more than most other academic studies, will serve only to enrich the education of the young for the demands of adult life and citizenship.

In our previous essay we have already touched upon the other side of the question, namely, the relevance of the elements of general education to Jewish studies, and we reserved our discussion of this point for the present essay.

* *The Role of Hebrew Study in General Education* (Ed.)

At first glance, our answer to this question in the pages that follow might be of interest primarily to the Jewish circles closest to our own. There are proponents of Jewish studies who view any attempt to give our youth a secular education as a sacrifice of time and energy that should be devoted to things Jewish. They may sanction this sacrifice as a concession to the demands of the present day, but they will deplore it and will feel deeply concerned about the influence that an educational element they consider alien to Judaism will have on the future Jewish attitude and lifestyle of our youth. In view of the fact that our institution gives the same earnest and devoted attention to general education as it does to Jewish studies,* and, indeed, has explicitly stressed the study of both of these two elements as part of its educational outlook, it would be important to demonstrate to the Jewish friends of our institution the close connection between these two fields of education and the significant benefits which secular studies have to offer to the future philosophy and lifestyle of our Jewish youth.

However, in the interest of explaining our efforts to the broader community, it would seem desirable to demonstrate the close relationship between these two fields of study also to wider circles, so that they, too, may gain a better understanding of our objectives. The question whether a school embraces all its fields of study with equal enthusiasm out of a deep inner conviction, or because it is forced to do so by circumstances beyond its control, certainly cannot be a matter of indifference to those whose trust the school hopes to obtain for its endeavors. Only ideas rooted in genuine conviction will be received with enthusiasm. Products of compromise can expect no more than grudging acceptance forced by considerations of expediency.

On the very day our institution first opened its doors fourteen years ago, there were those who felt called upon to turn public opinion against our school by claiming that Orthodox Jews would never give sincere support to secular education. Today, fourteen years later, we can look back with gratification on those "good luck" wishes from our adversaries, all the more so since we can happily note how soon many of these skeptics came to jettison their prejudiced view to give full

* See for further study R. Hirsch's Commentary to Leviticus 18, 5 (Note by Dr. Naftali Hirsch, son of the author and editor of the original German edition of the *Collected Writings*).

credit to our institution for its accomplishments in the field of secular studies. As a result, our reflections today can be truly and calmly objective; thank God we no longer have any need for apologetics.

We should not be surprised to note that initially some sincere, inspired disciples of Jewish studies and Jewish life viewed the introduction of the young to the realm of secular education with a measure of alarm that has not subsided in certain circles to this very day. We are certain that these apprehensions are based only on preconceived notions. They take root wherever two supposedly antithetical elements of education are seen from a narrow, one-sided point of view, and neither can therefore be understood in terms of its true significance. Lack of understanding always breeds prejudice.

To understand the roots of the notion that Jewish studies and secular education conflict with one another, we must go back to the beginning of the present century, when the sons of the Jewish people emerged from centuries of enforced isolation, and, after hundreds of years, resumed contact once again with the elements of secular knowledge. (We say "resumed" and "once again" because this isolation and estrangement from the secular world was never a condition of Judaism. This can be amply demonstrated by the shining annals of Jewish culture and literature left to us from happier times.) When the Jews were free to leave the ghettos, they found that the elements of secular education were in conflict with their religious traditions, indeed with the views of religion in general. Even in our own day, when we have long passed the middle of our present century, this conflict still acts as a ferment, constantly exercising the minds of the Gentile world, with supporters rallying to either side of the struggle between faith and knowledge, between the Church and science.

Given the keen intelligence of that generation of Jews, should it come as a surprise to us that as soon as Jews made contact with the elements that had bred the notion of a struggle between religion and knowledge, the notion of this conflict should have spread throughout the Jewish camp? Should we be surprised to note that this development, of necessity, caused such a violent upheaval particularly in the Jewish camp, where "religion" does not concern itself only with one aspect of human life but embraces the totality of moral, spiritual and social existence? Should we really be surprised that the younger generation should have given themselves unquestioningly to what they per-

ceived as the spirit of a new age, heralding their liberation, at long last, from oppression and indignity and social prejudice? Should we be surprised that, as a consequence, they should have followed the lead of this new spirit also when it declared war on what it branded as out-dated religious notions? It was only natural that, under the spell of this perverted view of religion being in conflict with knowledge, the younger generation of Jews soon turned against the spirit of the religion of their fathers, regarding it as the spirit that had kept them in social enslavement.

Should we be surprised that the older generation, particularly the acknowledged guardians of our ancestral religious heritage, reacted with consternation to this onslaught of the new era? The younger generation of Jews were declaring war upon everything that, for thousands of years, had given their people the knowledge, the inspiration and the moral stamina that enabled them to survive, even in the face of oppression and degradation, and to triumph over the ordeals that marked their path through history. Should we blame that older generation for rejecting a new era which, by deliberately encouraging the neglect of Jewish studies, raised Jewish youth to despise the heritage of its ancestral religion, so that eventually this youth went so far as to denounce the literature of the Jewish religion to the governmental authorities as "inimical to culture"? Precisely this is what happened in our own city of Frankfurt. In response to denunciations from Jews, the city fathers, with the best intentions in the world, lent their authority to an effort to stifle the ancient religion of Judaism by restricting and even prohibiting the activities of Jewish educational, cultural and religious institutions. Almost 50 years of struggle had to pass before our *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* could emerge and re-establish the time-honored religious communal life that had been so wantonly destroyed.*

Should it surprise us, therefore, that the older generation perceived the spirit of the new culture, which had been used as a vehicle to attack their ancient heritage, as the cause of all their troubles? Was it surprising that the elders considered it their duty to keep away from the new culture and to make sure that their followers, too, should have nothing to do with it? Can we fault these elders and their disciples for their

* See the author's essay "Religion Allied with Progress" in Vol. VI of the *Collected Writings*. (Ed.)

refusal to trust the elements of a culture whose bearers were hostile to religion?

In light of all the foregoing, should we be surprised that these two tendencies became increasingly alienated from one another, to a point where they lived in complete ignorance and misapprehension of each other's character and objectives? The "educated" and "cultured" Jews simply ignored Jewish life and scholarship, while those who remained loyal to these Jewish values completely misjudged the true spirit of genuine culture. And so there developed that rift within Judaism, that spiritual wound from which our own contemporaries are still bleeding today.

True, we should not be surprised at what happened, but we must deplore the conditions that caused these developments. The social renaissance of the Jewish nation, ushered in by the beginning of the present century, came about under the impact of such unexpected, world-shaking events that when the Jews were plunged from their former isolation into the mainstream of modern European culture, they were thrown into a state of complete shock in both directions. It is sad to think that the Jewish leaders of that period allowed themselves to lose their awareness of the character and intellectual depth and clarity of Judaism in both theory and practice, which certainly cannot be viewed as contrary to the essence of anything genuinely good and true produced by human civilization through the ages. We should be filled with sadness at the thought that, because the political position of their people forced them to isolate themselves from the intellectual tendencies of the world outside, the giants of Jewish learning, of whom there certainly was no lack in those days, were prevented from examining these intellectual tendencies at first hand. Had they been in a position to do so, their broad vision surely would have enabled them to welcome everything good and true in general culture as eminently compatible with the views of Judaism. They would then have been the first to see to it that their disciples, too, became familiar with all that is good and true in genuine culture. It is sad to think that the idea of a conflict between faith and knowledge, which might have been justifiable in the case of some other creeds, was cavalierly applied also to Judaism without considering whether it was indeed applicable to Jewish thought and practice or whether, given the uniqueness of the Jewish faith, the notion of such a conflict would lose its relevance.

The truth is that the attitude of Judaism toward all other religious

faiths and all human intellectual pursuits differs basically from the attitude of other religions. Judaism is probably the only religion that does not declare *extra me nulla salus* [there is no salvation outside myself], that happily welcomes any intellectual or moral advance, no matter what its origin. Indeed, the timeless words of the Jewish prophets look with firm assurance to the ever-growing, ever-spreading spiritual and moral ennoblement not only of the Jews but of all mankind. Judaism is probably the only religion that teaches its followers to view not only the early light of dawn, the blossoms of springtime, the darkness of thunder, the flashes of lightning, not only the sight of anything beautiful, sublime, powerful or beneficial in nature, but also the sight of any human being great in wisdom or knowledge, no matter what his nationality or religion, as a revelation of the Divine. Whenever Jews behold such an individual, they must pronounce a blessing in praise of God Who has "given of His wisdom to mortals."

In the view of Judaism, truth is one and indivisible, just like its original Source, the one God. Therefore the perception of truth, too, must be one and indivisible. Judaism addresses all its beliefs, including its most basic tenets, to the spirit of men striving after knowledge. All the fundamental beliefs of Judaism concerning the existence of God, His almighty intervention in the developments of nature and history and His sovereign rule that educates both men and nations to meet the lofty standards set by His moral law, have been confirmed by momentous happenings that the Jewish nation has experienced in its own history. These are happenings that should enable even the remotest posterity to understand the origins of the Jewish people and its survival as a nation through the ages.

Judaism believes that these momentous national experiences, events that are generally described as "miracles," which have revealed to all mankind the role of God in nature and history, are not random events. They are the most rational consequences of God's sovereignty with which He educates all mankind. Man would actually be unaware of this postulate of Divine sovereignty if it were not set down in the history of God's Kingdom on earth. In fact, Judaism believes that nature and history can be properly understood only in the context of these national experiences, which attest to the role of God in nature and history. Nay, more, the rational view of nature and history could take shape only after this Jewish concept of God, revealed in various

ways, had taught the spirit of man, knowingly or unknowingly, to view all of nature as the work of one, sole Creator and all of history as the plan of one, sole Ruler of the Universe. Judaism knows that even a natural scientist who denies the existence of God actually confirms His existence with every new insight he gains from an idea, a mechanism, or a law of nature he observes in the course of his research. He may insist that there is no God, but his own discoveries attest to the existence of one God Who embodied His thoughts in the particular phenomena observed by the scientist, and Who has made the substances and forces operative in these phenomena subject to His Law. Truly, a scientist who denies the existence of God actually confirms His existence whenever he sets out to study particular phenomena in order to abstract from them the concepts and laws that govern nature and history. The teachings of Judaism have nothing to fear from science.

Now what about the attitude of Judaism toward other religious faiths? Again, Judaism is probably the only religion that does not presume to reign supreme over all other religions. Judaism perceives itself as an instrument working for all mankind but not as a dictate to be obeyed by all men on earth. It welcomes any human, spiritual or ethical advance brought about by other religious faiths; indeed, it hails every such triumph of truth and goodness as a triumph of its own mission on earth. The attitude of Judaism toward other religions may be compared to that of a true mother toward her daughters. A truly good mother will never look with envy upon the accomplishments of her daughters but will consider all the good her daughters have done as proof that her educational work with her daughters has been a success. She rejoices in the reward assured her by every seed of goodness and nobility that her daughters have taken from her hands to scatter blessings upon the rest of the world. Similarly, Judaism rejoices, and has a right to rejoice, in the harvest of light and goodness produced by its daughter religions in the civilized world for the benefit of universal human happiness and culture, just as if the accomplishment had come directly from Judaism. Judaism regards these advances as triumphs of the concepts that are to be brought to the rest of mankind by the Divinely-selected Jewish people.

Now if the Judaism for which we are educating our young need not shrink from contact with the intellectual elements of any other true culture, it is essential for the future of our youth as citizens, and there-

fore it is a true religious duty, for us to give them a secular education. A secular education is a most beneficial help to our young in understanding the times in which they live and the conditions under which they will have to practice their life's vocation; hence it is most desirable also from the Jewish religious viewpoint and consequently deserving of warm support. But at the same time, and even more important, a good secular education can give our young people substantial new insights, added dimensions that will enrich their religious training. For this reason, too, secular education deserves the support of the religious educator.

There is no need to cite specific evidence that most of the secular studies taught at higher educational institutions, including our own, are essential to the future vocational careers of the students. There seem to be no differences of opinion in this respect. However, any supporter of education and culture should deplore the fact that when these secular studies are evaluated in terms of their usefulness to the young, too much stress is often placed on so-called practical utility and necessity. Under such circumstances, the young are in danger of losing the pure joy of acquiring knowledge for its own sake, so that they will no longer take pleasure in the moral and spiritual benefits to be obtained from study.

There is only one point we believe we must mention in support of the utilitarian view of secular education: the training of the young in skills that will earn them a respectable livelihood as adults is a sacred duty also from the Jewish religious point of view. According to Jewish tradition, a father who fails to give his child such training himself, or fails to provide for such training, is to be considered as one who teaches his child to become a dishonest adult. Thus, the general education of our youth should be conducted with religious punctiliousness even from the viewpoint of his future vocation.

But it seems to us that no thinking Jew, aware of his mission as a Jew, should deny that, quite aside from considerations of vocational and professional education, it is also essential that young Jews, particularly those of our own times, should learn about the factors that influence the life of modern nations; in other words, that they should be introduced to those branches of study that will enable them to acquire this knowledge. This would hold true even if we were not so

fortunate as to be living at the dawn of an era,* at the beginning of a new humaneness, signified, first of all, by a purer sense of justice, inviting also the sons of the Jewish people to join actively in all the humane, social and political endeavors of the nations. Even if our present-day contacts with general culture were merely passive, as they were in the days of our parents, it would be of vital religious importance for us to see that our young people should be guided toward that high level of insight which would enable them to evaluate, from the vantage point of truth and justice, all the personal, social, political and religious conditions under which they would have to discharge their duties as Jews and as citizens. But now that our young people will be given an opportunity to participate in the public affairs of the land in which we live, how much more important is it that they should receive the education they will need in order that they may enthusiastically embrace all that is good and noble in the European culture of our day, within whose context they will have to perform also their own mission as Jews. Only knowledge, the ability to realize when we have erred in judging our fellow men, can guard us from prejudice. Lack of knowledge always breeds illusion and prejudice.

If only non-Jewish schools were to acquaint their students with Jewish knowledge, with Jewish life and with the conditions under which Jews live and work, to a degree even remotely approaching the diligence with which students at Jewish schools are taught about the spirit and the aspirations of the non-Jewish world! If only non-Jewish youth were taught about the spiritual and practical life of the Jewish world with the same respect and appreciation as the Jewish youth, in their schools, learn to respect the non-Jewish world, past and present, by studying the literature and history of that world and its outstanding figures! If this wish were to come true, then all that is most human and Divine within man would unite to build a bridge of love and respect between man and man; one spirit would learn to respect the other, one

* The author refers to the Emancipation of his time during which the political, social and economic conditions for Jews were far easier than during the Middle Ages. He felt that this was the beginning of a new era in terms of goodness and kindness in human relationships. (Ed.)

heart would learn to love the other, and the radiant, warming light of knowledge would gradually dispel the darkness of prejudice that still envelops so much of the world today.

In light of what has just been said, it is clear, even from the religious point of view, that if our young people are to cope successfully with the practical aspects of their mission as Jews, everything possible must be done to introduce them to various areas of general studies. But there is also a spiritual harvest that can be won from secular studies, even for those who seek to grow in the theoretical knowledge of the Jewish religion. Our understanding of the philosophy of life and the *Weltanschauung* taught in the sacred writings of the Jewish religion is dependent in no small measure on our insights into the character and the development of nature and society. Any knowledge that serves to enrich the intellect in any manner will also enhance our insights into the philosophy of Judaism.

In our previous essay we attempted to demonstrate the importance of Jewish education, both theoretical and practical, as a factor in general culture. As we indicated in that essay, the ability of Hebrew studies to enhance general education rests primarily on the fact that the sacred writings of Judaism are not so much dogmatic or theological in content as they are legal and anthropological in substance, so that their teachings are directly related to general human knowledge. We noted that, accordingly, Jewish studies are very clearly relevant to secular learning. We should therefore have at least some idea how and why, conversely, the quest for general knowledge can have a beneficial effect also in the acquisition of Jewish religious learning.

In the present essay we will not go into detailed explanations to demonstrate that a serious study of Jewish scholarship requires familiarity with many areas of general human knowledge. Anyone even superficially acquainted with, say, Rabbinic literature knows about the significance of mathematics and astronomy, botany and zoology, anatomy and medicine, jurisprudence and ethics in the deliberations of our Sages. He will therefore not underestimate the extent to which disciples of Talmudic learning can benefit from familiarity with these fields of general knowledge.

In this essay, we are concerned not with in-depth Jewish scholarship but only with that amount of Jewish learning that is basic to Jewish education and that represents a fundamental component of the

instruction given to the students entrusted to our school. Our purpose is to show how greatly even these Jewish studies can be enhanced and supplemented by the elements of general education, which our institution cultivates with the same devoted attention as it does its program of Jewish studies.

We believe there is no need to demonstrate the benefits which formal instruction in any subject will yield for any other field of study, and which the study of general, secular subjects will likewise yield in the case of specific Jewish studies. In this essay we will confine ourselves to examining, in closer detail, the manner in which the specific subjects of Jewish studies offered at our school are enriched by the secular subjects we teach. We will attempt to illustrate the significance of this exchange of intellectual gifts by describing the contribution which the mathematics, science, history and literature taught to young people can make to Jewish studies.

In our previous essay we attempted to show the significant contribution of Hebrew studies to the general secular education of our young people. Our essay made a point of stressing the intellectual exercise provided by instruction in the Hebrew language and by the acquisition of a Hebrew vocabulary. We cited numerous examples showing how the Hebrew language names things and phenomena in terms of direct objectivity, and that Hebrew words reflect not the sensory impression created by the object but the character of the object. We can see immediately how the deliberate and scientific contemplation of an object aids in the correct understanding of this particular language. Only after our students have acquired practice in distinguishing the essential characteristics of things from their nonessential qualities, in using the essential characteristics to construct generic terms and in recognizing these characteristics in the generic forms will we be able to make them understand, for instance, why the Hebrew for "kind" and "portion" (מין and מנה, respectively) are derived from the same root, and why the verb נכר, "to recognize," is derived from the same root as נָכַר (strangeness), so that "to recognize" an object is defined as rendering the object strange [i.e., identifying the features that make the object "different" or "alien to all others"]. Only after our students have learned, in plant physiology, the functions of roots, stems, leaves and blossoms, and how a fruit develops, will they understand why a root (שרש) is defined as an "agent that acquires plant nutrients"

(שרת—to serve), why the vessels of the plant stem are described as “intermediates in attaining the goal” (צמח—shoots, growths), and why leaves, blossoms and fruits are described as parts of the plant that “strive after more and more freedom” (עלה—leaf, ascend; פרח—blossom and פרי—fruit, from פרא—freedom). And only once they have learned, in animal physiology, the functions of the blood, the muscles and the nervous system will they understand why blood (דם) is described as an assimilated nutrient (דמה—similar), and the muscles and nerves (בשר—flesh) are described as “messengers” (בשר—to bring news) that carry messages from the brain to the world outside and from the world outside to the brain. Only if our students know that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points will they understand the reason for the phonetic affinities that link the Hebrew words ישר (straight), קשר (connection) and קצר (short), and only if they know the geometric properties of a circle will they understand why a circular line is described as “fleeing” from the tangent (סהר, from סר—flee). Once their studies in physical geography have shown them the effect of woodlands on the humidity of surrounding areas, our students will better understand why the Hebrew language calls a forest יער (lit., “gatherer of water”), phonetically related to יאר (river) and קערה (bowl). And only once they know from their physics how rays of light can be broken up into distinct color prisms forming a spectrum from red to violet, will they understand why the Hebrew language refers to the three primary colors, red, green and violet, as “the nearest” (red, אדם, related to דמה, similar), “removed,” (green, ירק, throw off) and “end,” (violet, תכלה, related to תכלית, goal).

Thus, we see that everything new that the student learns about the nature and structure of things is an aid to his understanding of the Hebrew language. These few examples should be enough to show us how the teaching of the Hebrew language stands to gain from the various areas of secular studies.

This relationship becomes even more apparent if we now introduce our young people to the sacred literature written in the Hebrew language and read the “Book of Books” with them in its original Hebrew text. The purpose of this instruction is not (at least not in the upper grades) merely to hone their linguistic skills but to promote its original purpose, i.e., to be a light unto our spirit and a staff to support us as we pursue our God-ordained moral path on earth.

Consider the very first pages of the Pentateuch. Think how much more readily the light from the wisdom reflected in these pages and the moral strength nurtured by them will find their way into the hearts and minds of our young students if, before reading the Bible, they have already learned to perceive the world as an abundance of forces operating in accordance with certain laws and if they already know something of the history of men and nations. They will then be in a better position to picture the context of time and space upon which this Book of Books seeks to shed light with the rays of the concept of God. The purpose of this light is to help mankind as a whole, and Jews in particular, find their proper place in the world order arranged by God.

Reflect upon the difference which a background in the natural sciences can make in the student's understanding of the Biblical statements that describe the creation of the universe in terms of the existence of God: "God created heaven and earth;" "And God said: Let there be light!" It was God Who "divided" and "called." It was He Who created that universe full of contrasts: heaven and earth, light and darkness, waters above and waters below, oceans and continents, and all the forms of life whose development is subject to His own omnipotent "law of species" (Genesis 1, 11–12, 21, 24–25). It was He Who created divisions between these contrasts and differences, and at the same time united them all into one harmonious unity by assigning to each its sphere of life and work as part of His universal plan. Consider the impact these words can have on the minds of our young students if, before reading them, they have already learned something about the laws revealed in the great universe, in worlds and atoms, seedlings and mature lives, in the "twofold there," (this is the literal meaning of שמים, from שם) and in the abundance of living things on earth (ארץ, related to רץ, "run," showing how these living things "run" through the course of their lives on earth).

Consider how much more profound our childrens' understanding of the rest of the Biblical text will be if, by the time they read it, their knowledge of natural sciences and learning of Genesis will have made them aware that the whole world, down to the minutest form of matter, down to each fiber of every living thing and every component of that fiber, represents the realization of one single thought, the product of one single command. And think of the impact all this knowledge will have upon our students when the Book of Books then teaches

them to perceive and to worship God as the Thinker of all these thoughts, the Deviser of this plan, the Giver of these laws, and to regard every creature and every phenomenon on earth as a מלאך, a “messenger” of God, as מלאכה, one of God’s created works, each a servant assisting in the fulfillment of God’s purpose! Consider the emotion with which our students will then look to God for the Law that is meant to govern their own lives. Picture them, now amidst the chorus of the whole universe, worshipping God in accordance with His Law, and later, from hearts quiet but radiant before God, pledging Him their personal Hallelujah by obeying the Law He gave them to observe in their lives.

Consider the new understanding with which the students who have a background in natural sciences will read such reflections on nature as the one uttered by Job (26, 7), whose praise of God’s almighty power so long ago bears such an uncanny resemblance to a Newtonian thought thousands of years later: תולה ארץ על בלימה, literally, “He keeps the earth suspended by forces that act to limit one another” (בלם—restrict). Think of the new understanding with which they will hear the Psalms of David, which make man, as he contemplates the starry skies, realize how small but yet how great he is (Psalm 8), which proclaim that even as the word of God is revealed in nature, so, too, the Law of God has been revealed to man (Psalm 19), and which extol all of nature and history as one single chorus “reflecting” the glory of the one, sole God (this is the meaning of הִלֵּל, related to הִלָּל—to shine, to radiate) (Psalm 148). Consider the new understanding with which they will then hear the Psalmist proclaim: “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; His dominion rules over all things! Bless the Lord, O His messengers, armed with strength that fulfill His word, to obey the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all His hosts, His servants that do His Will. Bless Him, all His creatures, in all the places of His dominion; and you also, O my soul, bless the Lord!” (Psalms 103, 19–22).

However, the ultimate purpose of God’s Scripture is not to orient us in the realm of nature, not to have us recognize only the phenomena and effects of the physical universe as revelations of God, the Creator, Arranger and Lawgiver of heaven and earth. Rather, after its first chapter, Scripture closes the book of nature in order to open for us the book of the history of mankind, teaching us to behold the workings of God and God’s nearness not only in the eternal harmony of all that is

great and glorious in physical existence but also, indeed even more so, in the history of men and nations. It means to show us that God's work of physical creation has come to an end but that His work for the moral education of mankind, the training of men and nations to obey God's moral law of their own free will (while all other creatures were given physical laws to obey blindly, without a will of their own) has barely begun and will continue until the end of time.

Scripture sets before us the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" as representing the point of departure, and at the same time the basic problem, for the entire history of human civilization. The course of history can be described in simple terms as one long series of free-willed decisions by men and nations that continues to this very day. Man has the freedom to choose. He can behave like a beast, judging "good" or "evil" in terms of what will best satisfy his physical appetites. Or, he can conduct himself in a manner worthy of a human being, electing to obey God, to do that which is morally good even though it may run counter to his momentary physical or material desires, and to shun evil though it may tempt his senses with promises of pleasure and personal gain.

Scripture tells us how an entire generation of mankind perished because they allowed their physical appetites to enslave them, but that the new world and the new generation of men emerging after the destruction were given to see the seven-colored rainbow of reconciliation, the symbol of God's educational covenant with mankind. The colors of the rainbow bear a symbolic message of profound significance: The newly-restored generation of mankind will break up into many different shadings and nuances. But even as the last, darkest shade in the broken ray of light is still a product of light, not of darkness, so, too, the ray of the Divine in man will never be lost. The spark of Godliness will continue to function even within the most alienated, broken, "darkest" son of mankind, and the educating hand of Him Who is the Father of all mankind will not abandon His children until they will band together once more to form one single, pure ray of light, one united whole under His dominion.

Scripture has preserved for us the oldest prophecy in the history of the world that still guides us like the beacon of a lighthouse upon the banks of a turbulent sea, amidst the confusion and instability produced by the history of nations. These prophetic words (Genesis 9, 27) speak of three distinct features that would characterize the future

nations of the world after the Flood: לפת אלקים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם ויהי: כנען עבד למו “God will open the spirits [of men] to Yapheth, but He will dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan will bow to [both of] them in homage.”

In this characterization of the three sons of Noah and their posterity, Scripture portrays both active and passive ethnic prototypes in the history of world civilization: The Yapheth-type nations that will seek to have men worship beauty; the Shem-type that will endeavor to bring the kingdom of God to earth by winning the allegiance of the human spirit for goodness and truth; and the sensuous Hamite-type that will bow to the spiritual and emotional influences of the two others, increasingly permitting itself to be shaped by them.

Next, Scripture takes us to that day of historic arrogance on which men declared געשה לנו שם, “Let us make a name for ourselves” (Genesis 11, 4). In joining to build the Tower of Babel, mankind chained itself for thousands of years to the chariots of rulers who transformed the history of men into a history of empires, rulers who, instead of encouraging their subjects to continue building humble, quiet homes for the greater glory of God, exploited them to keep on building towers dedicated to the glory of conquest, towers that could never become quite tall enough. And so the annals of history came to be filled with bloodstained pages, a sign of the events of ages to come.

Scripture shows us all this in order to introduce to us, in the midst of a world seeking to build its power and prosperity by force and ruthlessness, one people that was to reveal the hand of God at work in the course of history. Unlike all the other nations, this people was to possess neither land nor power of its own. It was to base its existence solely on the Will of God and to find its strength in the observance of His Law. Put into the world as a reminder of God and of man’s place in history, this people was to become an instrument for the ultimate gathering of all the nations around God and around the Law He gave so that man might properly perform his Divinely-ordained mission in the world. In order that it could be entrusted with the legacy of God on behalf of all mankind, this people was to be deprived of its political independence as a result of wars with the empires of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Media, Macedonia and Syria, and finally with Rome. With the legacy of God to all mankind still firmly in its hands, this people was then to be dispersed among the nations as “God’s own seed” (זרעאל). The promise that this people would eventually be

delivered was to indicate to the other nations that redemption would ultimately dawn for the rest of mankind as well. In order that this one people might be able to persevere in its march among the nations through centuries of history to come, God appointed men of "keen vision" (חז"ים) to interpret for this people the significance of the rise and fall of the other nations and of its own march over the mausoleums of history. These men were also to communicate to their people the promises of God for its future so that this people might walk with confidence amidst the nights of the centuries toward the dawn that awaits it and the rest of mankind.

Here, then, we have a people that emerged from the course of world history, that was placed into the midst of the nations to advance the goals of world history, and that was endowed with historical vision. Should not the sons of such a people understand that historical studies of the development of nations are truly not superfluous, but that they are, in fact, virtually indispensable? Will the sons of the Jewish people even begin to understand that ancient vision defining the missions of the three basic national prototypes of mankind if they know nothing about the influence of the Yaphetic-Hellenic spirit on the civilization of other nations, an influence that endures to this day? Or consider the myths about the "mission of Moses" in which Moses is presented as a disciple of Egyptian priests and according to which the "Mosaic code" is merely an elaboration on the priestly wisdom of ancient Egypt. Would not the utter falsehood of this notion become much more obvious if young Jews could compare the philosophy built on a caste system and founded on the total destruction of personal freedom with the system of justice and righteousness based on the Law given on Mount Sinai, and note for themselves the immense gap that separates the two? Should not young Jews study the political life of the other nations at the time the Children of Israel first received the Law, a law that still shines forth as the sublime goal of perfection for both men and nations? If they were to consider how, amidst the degeneration of ancient societies, the people of Israel had been given a law whose standards of justice, humanity and morality were so infinitely superior not only to the political systems existing at that time but also to those that have arisen since then, would such comparative studies not afford added documentary proof that this Law is indeed of Divine origin? Will young Jews not gain a better understanding of the prophecies uttered by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Nahum,

Obadiah and Habakkuk concerning Tyre and Babylon, Egypt and Nineveh, and will they not appreciate the meaning of the *מנה תקל* (Daniel 5, 20) uttered by Jewish men of God at the sight of doomed nations carousing at wild banquets, if they are given access to contemporary chronicles that will bring them closer to the history, the culture and the wars of these nations? If they have no opportunity to study the history of the world, will they be in a position to understand the past of their own forefathers, the tasks of their own lives that await them in the present, and the hopes for the future which they share with the rest of mankind?

If, in addition, we teach our students the languages and literatures of the civilized nations, we hand them the key which, when they are grown, will open to them the intellectual products of the nations. In this manner they will be able to nourish and enrich their own intellect with the creations of goodness and truth which the noblest minds of those nations have added to the wealth of human knowledge. By acquainting our students with these splendid attainments of the human mind, do we not, at the same time, lead our students to the realization that, ever since seeds of light from the flame of God were scattered from Mount Sinai into the midst of the nations, the age-old darkness that once surrounded the world has begun to clear? Do we not show them how these seeds of light from God's own flame at Mount Sinai—the concept of God, the God-oriented view of the world and mankind, the idea of one, sole God and the unity of mankind as descended from Adam, the importance of man's vocation to practice goodness and truth, the eternal significance of even a fleeting moment on earth spent in the free-willed performance of duty, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth to which all men should devote the best of their energies—have increasingly won room for themselves in the hearts of men, where they work for the ennoblement of man and the promotion of human happiness? By introducing our youth to such knowledge, are we not also helping them understand that their fathers did not live and suffer in vain, that their struggles and hopes were not futile? Are we not making it clear to them that the Prophets were not mouthing dreams and wild tales? As the result of such guidance from us, will our youth not come to the realization that the dawn of a new spiritual and moral era, whose coming our Prophets had foretold while it was yet midnight, is slowly but surely nearing? Will our youth,

then, not see that the teachings which the spirit of God placed upon the lips of Jewish men thousands of years ago have already won multitudes of present-day disciples who, whether they know it or not, are helping to translate the words of the ancient Jewish Prophets into reality by promoting universal allegiance to the moral law of God? Does this awareness, too, not represent a clear gain for the future Jewish *Weltanschauung* of our youth?

These beliefs and motivations inspired the establishment of the educational institutions of the *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft*, whose program of study is based on the firm conviction that secular education should receive the same earnest care and attention as our program of specifically Jewish studies. Indeed, this devoted attention to general education is a sacred duty also from the strictly religious point of view because it can make important contributions to our Jewish studies. These convictions are the philosophical bases on which our *Religionsgesellschaft* was founded. The time-honored traditions of Judaism, upheld over centuries by the Jewish sacred writings and traditions, are not in conflict with anything good and true produced by human endeavor through the ages. Therefore, no age, not even our own era of moral and spiritual achievements, can demand that Judaism discard or change any part of its God-given substance. Judaism must enter the rich mainstream of European cultural life with its own theoretical and practical contents intact and undiminished, without losing its own identity. The more completely and sincerely Judaism enters the present era with its own heritage intact, the greater will be the moral and spiritual contribution it can make to the future now being built by a society that has welcomed the Jews as brothers and equals. Conversely, the more devotedly Judaism, without abandoning its own unique characteristics, weds itself to all that is good and true in European culture, the better will it be able to perform its uniquely Jewish mission.

These are the ideals that gave rise to the founding of our *Religionsgesellschaft*, and it is the spirit of these ideals that inspired the establishment of our school. Our school believes that the more generously it gives its students to drink from the wellsprings of Jewish studies, the better will it be able to raise them to become good and true citizens of our country. Conversely, it believes that the more it makes the treasures of secular culture available to the young people entrusted to its

care, the better will it be able to raise them to become good and true sons of our Judaism. To give wider circles an insight into the convictions at the heart of these two closely intertwined ideals that form the basic principles of our school—that is the task which both last year's essay and the present discussion have set out to accomplish.