

Culture, a Foundation for Torah?

Rabbi Arie Folger

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Abstract

The desirability of incorporating secular cultural knowledge, such as sciences and humanities, in the curriculum of the well rounded talmid chakham or even of the tender student has been the subject of repeated discussions since the mid 18th century. However, those analyses were mostly relevant to intellectual elites. This paper aims to reappraise the question for more popular applications.

1. Theological Background

Civilization and culture are the processes through which peoples become acquainted with one another and exchange experiences and values, even influence one another. Through such exchange, the horizons of a people expand and it is able to assimilate ideas into its midst which will, in turn, bring about progress. As a general phenomenon, civilization is necessary and inevitable. As soon as Man appeared on the face of the earth, the Almighty decreed פְּרֹו וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבָּשׁוּהָ - “be fruitful and multiply, fill the land and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28) For Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch¹, this is not only a blessing, but a commandment to build civilization for the sake of fulfilling its Higher Purpose. Rav Soloveitchik² sees in this commandment particularly a call to emulate and further complete G”d’s creation through the application of creativity.

However, when civilizations come into contact with one another, the influences do not flow in only one direction, and the influences are not exclusively positive. Throughout our history, we have absorbed various foreign cultural patterns and ideas, not always to our betterment. We have also reacted against or even rejected such foreign elements, and here too, sometimes this had been wise, sometimes it hadn’t. When Elihayu haNavi fought the prophets of the Ba’al, there was barely anybody left that hadn’t worshipped Ba’al at all.³ The Torah indeed warned us וּבַחֲקֵיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ - “and in their ways do not go.” (Leviticus 18:3) More specifically, the Torah describes the acculturation and assimilation process and specifically rejects it: וְלֹא יִתְּחַתֵּן בְּכֶם בֶּתֶדָּה לֹא־תִתֵּן לְבָנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ לֹא־תִקַּח לְבָנָהּ: כִּי־יֹסִיר אֶת־בְּנֶךָ מֵאַחֲרַי - “And do not intermarry with them; your daughter do not give to his son, and his daughter do not take for your son, for he will cause your children to turn away from after Me ...” (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

What then is the appropriate relationship to culture in our modern day and age? In this paper, I would like to answer the following questions:

- Why and how does the Nation of Israel, on a fundamental level, benefit from foreign culture?

1 In his commentary to the Torah, ad. Loc.

2 For example, in “The Rav Speaks”, Brooklyn, 2002; pg. 124.

3 I Kings 19:18

- How was this symbiosis conceived of in the past?
- Are the 19th century models of Torah im Derekh Eretz et al. necessarily appropriate?
- Finally, I would like to suggest an appropriate relationship to foreign culture for our day and age, and to that end, will try to answer the question of “What is culture?”

2. Israel and the Nations

Unlike, G”d, mankind, even Jewish mankind, isn't perfect. We were created imperfect and put into this imperfect world, not because, G”d forbid, He couldn't make us and our world perfect, but because it is G”d's Will that we perfect ourselves and the world we inhabit. Adam was put into Gan Eden לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ - “to work it and guard it.” (Genesis 2:15) Not only are we, imperfect beings, to perfect ourselves, but our faculty for improvement and perfection of the self and of the polis resides in large part in our social existence. No man is knowledgeable enough to run all aspects of society. For society to exist, it needs farmers and lawyers, linguists and doctors, rabbis and bankers, teachers and engineers, etc., and it becomes all the richer for the cooperation of all these. Clearly, on the local level, our ability to forge societies depends on our ability to cooperate. However, this dependence might not supersede the local and ethnic level.

It is easy to see that, on the local level, civilization requires cooperation in order to compensate for the inability of any single person to possess all skills. We might call this the division-of-labor advantage. This advantage exists even in a hypothetical utopia where all possible knowledge was known, for while the city possesses all knowledge and skill, no single man can master it all.

However, might there also exist another advantage? Might there be something to gain from the collective experience of others? Considering that no city possesses all possible knowledge, and that no city could possibly possess all possible knowledge, could it be that our imperfect knowledge gains in perfection through encounters with other groups?

This matter is complex and not without controversy. For, while it is clear that, for example, anthropology – and thus anthropologists' knowledge – expands through encounters with other human beings, and while this holds for all sciences,⁴ there might be one notable exception: divinely granted Wisdom.

Having experienced the Revelation at Sinai during the formative moments of our people, we have become recipients of the ultimate Divine message to mankind. We are the guardians, entrusted with the safeguard of that message and its living meaning, the latter being transmitted through religious practice, the thoroughly contemplated Torah life.

4 I use the word science in a broad sense. I.e., not only the natural sciences, but everything that can be known or developed, except religion in a broad sense.

One is tempted to translate this guardianship, the possession of the text of the Divine message, into the possession of all absolute truths, i.e., that all knowledge. Indeed, a saying of Ben Bag Bag, recorded in the Mishnah, suggests at first sight, that all knowledge is contained within the Torah – a corollary of this interpretation is that no wisdom is to be learned from other cultures:

הַפּוֹךְ בָּהּ וְהַפֶּךְ בָּהּ, דְּכֻלָּא בָּהּ, וְכָה תִחְיֶינָי, וְסִיב וּבְלִי בָּהּ; וּמִינָהּ לֹא תִזְוַע, שְׂאִין לָךְ מִידָּהּ
טוֹבָה הִימְנָהּ.

*Ben Bag Bag says: Delve in it [the Torah] and delve in it [again and again], for everything is in it; look into it, grow old and worn with it, and do not budge from it, for there is no better measure than it.*⁵

According to the Machzor Vitri, דְּכֻלָּא בָּהּ means that the Torah contains all knowledge:

דְּכֻלָּהּ בָּהּ. שְׂכַל חֲכָמוֹת הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּלָהּ בָּהּ. ... שְׂכַל זְמַן שְׂאֵדָם עוֹסֵק בָּהּ מוֹצֵא טַעַם וְיִישׁ
לְלַמּוֹד מִתּוֹכָן דְּרַךְ אֶרֶץ וְחֲכָמָה.

*For all is in it – because all the sciences of the world are incorporated in [the Torah] ... For as long as someone engages in her [study], he finds depth in it and from it one can learn secular wisdom (derekh eretz) and science.*⁶

The Torah is the Word of G^d, in the words of Nachmanides, it “is a sequence of names of the Holy One, blessed be He”,⁷ “written with white fire over black fire.”⁸ As such, the Torah is perfect and complete. No other source of wisdom can complete the Word of G^d, for His Word must be Perfect and Complete, as is He.

Yet, we must not confuse the perfection of the Torah with our knowledge and understanding of it. Imperfect as we are, our understanding must perforce forever remain imperfect. The entire, full truth cannot be grasped by man – כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחָי – “for man cannot see Me and live.” (Exodus 33:20) It is therefore entirely conceivable that while the Torah is completely perfect, we can still benefit from other sources of wisdom, since the secrets by which the Torah would reveal to us other, secular branches of wisdom remain hidden from us.

Furthermore, Rashi offers two interpretations of Ben Bag Bag's statement, both of which, in contradistinction to Machzor Vitri, deemphasize the reason (“דְּכֻלָּא בָּהּ”) to the benefit of the process (“הַפּוֹךְ בָּהּ וְהַפֶּךְ בָּהּ”). Thus, Ben Bag Bag urges us to constantly study the Torah, for we will always find new meaning, until now unknown to us. A second interpretation pointedly connects the beginning of Ben Bag Bag's saying with its continuation: he urges to continuously interpret and apply the Torah to all aspects of our lives. Maimonides refines these ideas by explaining that the completeness of the Torah relates to its containing the Ultimate Truth, and our repeatedly turning to the Torah is meant to continuously draw us to her, so that we shall not leave her.⁹

Indeed, the notion that non Jews possess science is well accepted, and attested by the dictum חֲכָמָה בְּגוֹיִם תִּאֱמִין, תּוֹרָה בְּגוֹיִם אַל תִּאֱמִין – “Do believe that there is scientific wisdom among the nations, but do not believe that there is Torah among the nations.”¹⁰

5 Last Mishnah in Avot 5.

6 Machzor Vitri, commentary to tractate Avot 5:11. Rabbenu Yonah makes the same point ad. Loc.

7 Nachmanides' introduction to Genesis, in his commentary to the Torah.

8 Ibid.

9 Rashi and Maimonides ad. loc. in the Vilna edition of the Talmud.

10 Midrash Eikhah Rabbah 2:17

So far, we have seen how it is indeed entirely reasonable, and an accepted fact by our sages, that despite the Torah's perfection, there is much to learn from other nations. The knowledge, of which the nations of the world may at times be the possessors¹¹, is generally useful to civilization, and to that extent, all civilizations benefit from sharing this knowledge. Man's duty to build and continue to build civilization *in order for it to continuously strive for greater spiritual achievement*, coupled with his imperfection is the “why” foreign wisdom may need to be shared, even with the Nation of the Word of G”d, the Nation of the Torah. How, however, could and should foreign science and wisdom be incorporated in Jewish society?

On a deeper level, we need to ask the “why” question again, but differently. Is there a theological or historical reason for a state of affairs whereby the Nation of Israel is the guardian of the ultimate Truth, and yet needs to join in the society of global culture?

There are different answers to this question, and they are actually the two sides of the same coin. What should an individual Jew's role in the world be? The commandment to populate and civilize the world¹² was directed at the entire humanity. However, the Jewish people have a specific spiritual mission, and this mission is partly internal to the Jewish people. Most of the Torah's commandments apply to Jews only, and Jews are to be a nation apart. Bil'am recognized this and prophesied **וְהָיָה עָם לְבִדָּד יֹשֵׁב וּבְנוֹתָם לֹא יִתְחַשְּׁב** – “lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.” (Numbers 23:9)

Surely, there are practical advantages to be gained from local and global cultural exchange. These are forms of the division-of-labor-advantage described above. However, are there other, more spiritual advantages to cultural exchange, which befit the spiritual mission of the Nation of Israel? Put differently, we could ask the question as follows. Surely, the betterment of global society is a mitzvah, a mitzvah to all of humanity. However, given the greater significance of spiritual matters, can culture also serve the needs of learning and spreading Torah and her values?

This question has been addressed numerous times in the past, though it generally took the form of “is it permissible to study or even teach secular studies to Torah students?” or “can secular knowledge, particularly science and humanities contribute to our understanding of Torah”. The proponents of the value of secular knowledge have generally called their approach Torah 'im Derekh Eretz (TIDE) or Torah uMadda'.¹³ The third section of this article will present an analysis of these various models and their relevance. Suffice it for now to say that according to the proponents above, cultural exchange can, under certain circumstances, serve the innerjewish spiritual growth mission.

There might, additionally, exist an additional benefit to culture, one that is not generally considered. On the verse **וַיִּפֶּת אֱלֹהִים לְיִפֶּת וַיֹּשֶׁב בְּאֶהֱלֵי-שֵׁם וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ** - “May the Almighty broaden the disposition Yefeth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem”, (Genesis 9:27¹⁴) Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch ponders the relationship between Shem, ancestor of the

11 I would caution against attributing “ownership” of all or most scientific knowledge, and thus progress, to the nations of the world. Numerous sages of Israel were also recognized scientist, and Jews continue to contribute disproportionately to mankind's scientific progress.

12 See above, regarding Genesis 1:28 and 2:15.

13 For some time, the terms Torah veChokhmah and Torah vaDa'at, the latter becoming the name of a well know Brookly yeshivah, were in use.

14 Translation according to Rabbi Hirsch.

Semites, and thus of the Nation of Israel, and Yefet, father of Yavan, ancestor of Hellas, and with it, European civilization.

Noach's three sons represent three quite different kinds of civilizations. Cham, whose son Kena'an became cursed because of his sin, represents pure sensuality, devoid of most spirituality. Shem, the possessor of the names (*shem* = name in Hebrew) of things, concepts and relationships, represents the spirit. Yefet represents the middle point between spiritually actualized society and its most primitive counterpart. These three components of human disposition are present in all people at all times, but each and every person lives his personal balance of these components and it is even possible to describe this balance for entire cultural entities.

In primitive and barbarian societies, the quality of Cham is predominant. Yefet and his descendants have mostly managed to overcome this primitive stage by restraining its animal instincts through art and aesthetic. The Yefetic cultural tradition has not reached the highest human actualization, but has at least managed to restrain the baser human behaviors. The Yefetic tradition can bring a feeling of narcicistic wellbeing, but doesn't provide any elevating destiny, outside of the human self; that is Shem's gift to the world.

R. Hirsch paints a picture where the cream of both Yefet and Shem are charged with elevating all of humanity. However, as primitive humanity cannot yet grasp the depth of the Torah – the tradition of Shem – it becomes Yefet's task to bring the quality of restraint and civilization to the world, which then becomes capable of assimilating the values of Shem. World history is thus nothing but the successive incorporation of societies within first Yefet's and then Shem's sphere of influence. Shem – and Yefet – are to become the world's educators.¹⁵

R. Hirsch's exposé on this matter is remarkable in many ways. First and foremost, it shows in what high regard he held European high culture. Of all times, R. Hirsch chose Channukah to address Hellas' contribution to humanity. For him, Channukah wasn't the struggle between Yefet and Shem, but rather Greece's misinterpretation and misapplication of its Yefetic tradition. Lastly, R. Hirsch sees both Shem (Judaism) and Yefet (Western culture) as fulfilling a mission in this world. Western culture forms the ferment upon which Torah can grow. Nations are able to absorb Torah values insofar as they have been prepared by their absorption of Yefetic ideals, and Yefet is to exist **בְּאֶהֱלֵי שֵׁם** – in the tents of Shem, in the shade of its holy places. Proper Yefetic tradition welcomes and accepts Shemite spirituality as supreme. It lives by the values of Noach and sees Avraham as its father.¹⁶

There is thus apparently a theological-historic reason to need global cultural contacts, for it is G"d's plan and Noach's subsequent prophetic blessing that designated both Shem *and* Yefet as teachers for all of humanity. Culture enables them to be succesful.

3. The Symbiosis Between Torah and Culture as Envisioned in the Past

We distinguish between cultural knowledge, such as science, humanities and secular wisdom, and cultural values, such as religion, morals and ethics.

15 Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch, Der Pentateuch, übersetzt und erklärt von Samson Raphael Hirsch, 6e Auflage, Frankfurt am Main, 1920, vol. I, pg. 156.; und Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch, Gesammelte Schriften, vol. VI, pg 24-26.

16 Genesis 17:4: **וַיְהִי יֵת לְאָב הַמְּנוֹן גוֹיִם** - the father of a multitude of nations.

Science has long been held in high regard in Jewish circles. Theologically, nature is nothing but G”d's imprimatur on the world, and science is His way to allow us to benefit from and understand His creation.¹⁷ The highest laudate to science is found in Rabbi Barukh of Shklov's quote of the Vilna Gaon, in the former's Hebrew translation of Euclides, commissioned by the latter:

כפי מה שיחסר לאדם ידיעות משאר החכמות, לעומת זה יחסר לו מאה ידות בחכמת התורה.

To the extent that a person lacks knowledge in other “wisdoms” will he be lacking one-hundred fold in his knowledge of Torah.¹⁸

However, in spite of a high esteem for science, sciences and humanities were generally not incorporated in the Talmud Torah and Cheder curricula. Until the Emancipation, education was largely a private affair. Kehillot were content to set standards for religious instruction alone, and were generally only more actively involved in the education of orphans and children of the poor. The Talmudic injunction for a father to teach his son a profession was considered a sufficient motivation for fathers to accept their responsibilities and any subsequent acquisition of advanced scientific knowledge resulted from private initiative. During this period, science and religion were neither seen as colliding, nor as needing reconciliation.¹⁹

With the Emancipation coming on the foot of the Enlightenment, pressure was mounting for *and against* popular educational reforms. Some rabbis pushed early on for such reforms that would provide the advantages of modern scientific and cultural progress within a favorable religious environment. In this spirit, schools like Hasharat Zvi (Halberstadt, 1796) and the beit midrash for boys (Hamburg, 1805). Beginning in 1822, Chacham Isaac Bernays, the then newly elected rav of Hamburg, intensified secular instruction in the *Israelitische Armenschule der Talmud Tora* (the abovementioned beit midrash for boys). His student, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who also founded a bicurricular school, is credited with systematizing the weltanschauung behind the systematic acceptance of Western – foreign – culture into Jewish education, of course, insofar as it did not conflict with higher, religious values. The weltanschauung was termed Neo-Orthodoxy and its battle call was TIDE.

Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer, a younger contemporary of R. Hirsch, founded two successive yeshivot²⁰ based on this philosophy, and was even willing to utilize some humanities hostile to Torah values, in order to prepare his students to deal with and respond to religiously hostile intellectual trends. In that matter, R. Hirsch battled against his esteemed friend²¹ while R. Hildesheimer held fast onto his pedagogical convictions.

17 See Responsa Chacham Tzvi #18 for references. However, Rav Dessler develops this notion of G”d's imprint on creation to the opposite conclusion: a denigration of science. Yet, numerous authorities presented science favorably. See R. Yedaiah ben Avraham Bedersi ha-Penini (Quoted in Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, “Torah u-Madda Revisited” in “The Torah U-Madda Journal” vol. I, 1989, pg. 2) and Rabbi Shimon Schwab, “Selected Essays” (New Jersey, 1994, pg 130), for a small list of prominent authorities of ages past who themselves engaged in science.

18 *Sefer Uklides* (The Hague 1780), cited by Rabbi Walter Wurzbürger ז”ל, in the first volume of The Torah U-Madda Journal (New York, 1989), p. 108.

19 Schacter, Jacob J., “Torah u-Madda Revisited”, The Torah U-Madda Journal (New York, 1989), p. 2-3.

20 First in Halberstadt, in 1851, then the Rabbinerseminar für das Orthodoxe Judentum in Berlin in 1873.

21 See R. Hirsch in Shemesh Marpé (Hebrew; New York, 1992) pgs. 341 & 347, and in Der Israelit (1872, nos. 16-18 and 22)(the latter cited by David Ellenson in “Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy”, Tuscaloosa, AL, 1990, pg. 143)

A desired synthesis of Torah with secular intellectual achievements manifested itself outside Germany, as well. The phrase Torah uMada' was coined in the 1940s and appeared on the emblem of Yeshiva University starting in 1946, when the institution was transformed from a college into a university. It was meant to convey the unity of its traditional yeshiva and its secular curriculum; the secular studies would enhance one's ability to apply, and even understand Torah.²² Subsequently, the phrase has become common usage in Israel, as well.

R. Hirsch had high expectations of Jews' incorporation of high European culture. In an essay entitled "The Relevance of Secular Studies", he argues that:

*[Judaism] 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.*²³

The benefits of such "human, spiritual or ethical advance" extends even to the People of the Book:

*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, ... 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.*²⁴

*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. ... Any knowledge that serves to enrich the intellect in any manner will also enhance our insights into the philosophy of Judaism.*²⁵

*Anyone even superficially acquainted with, say, Rabbinic literature ... will therefore not underestimate the extent to which disciples of Talmudic learning can benefit from familiarity with these fields of knowledge.*²⁶

The climax of R. Hirsch's love of culture is perhaps most expressed in deed, not in word. On November 9th, 1859, a commemoration of the 100th anniversary since the birth of Friedrich Phillip von Schiller was held throughout Germany, and also at the Realschule of the IRG-Frankfurt. On that occasion, R. Hirsch held a speech, a Schillerrede, where he granted that Schiller

*stood for all that we call virtuous: lofty ideas about the Almighty, righteousness, goodness, justice, honesty, beauty, free will, man above beast, family life, the dignity of women, virtue and truth... Because of such people, continued Rav Hirsch, the Jews of 1859 were experiencing a renaissance.*²⁷

Here we see that R. Hirsch's love of what he viewed as true Yefetic culture extended into a love of the human messengers that spread this culture.

22 Though the exact meaning of this synthesis was never clearly defined, as Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter showed. (See note 19.)

23 Hirsch, Rabbiner Samson Raphael, Collected Writings, vol. VII, pg. 87

24 Ibid. pg. 88

25 Ibid. pg. 90

26 Ibid.

27 Rabbi Simon Schwab, "Torah im Derech Eretz – A Second View" in "Selected Speeches" (New Jersey, 1991), pgs. 236-252.

Hearkening back to R. Hirsch's romanticism, his love of European high culture, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Gush Etzion, beautifully affirms that the secular humanities, too, can contribute to our understanding of Torah. He writes:

And yet at bottom, the notion that Shakespeare is less meaningful than Boyle, Racine irrelevant but Lavoisier invaluable, remains very strange doctrine indeed. ...To those who extol chemistry because it bespeaks the glory of the Ribbono Shel Olam but dismiss Shakespeare because he only ushers us into the Globe Theater, one must answer, first, that great literature often offers us a truer and richer view of the essence--the "inscape," to use Hopkins' word--of even physical reality....Can anyone doubt that appreciation of God's flora is enhanced by Wordsworth's description of "a crowd/ A host, of golden daffodils;/ Beside the lake, beneath the trees,/ Fluttering and dancing in the breeze?"

...Whether impelled by demonic force or incandescent aspiration, great literature, from the fairy tale to the epic, plumbs uncharted existential and experiential depths which are both its wellsprings and its subjects.... Hence, far from diverting attention from the contemplation of God's majestic cosmos, the study of great literature focuses upon a manifestation, albeit indirect, of His wondrous creation at its apex....To the extent that the humanities focus upon man, they deal not only with a segment of divine creation, but with its pinnacle.... In reading great writers, we can confront the human spirit doubly, as creation and as creator."²⁸

What all the above thinkers have in common, is that they consider science and culture to be non-Jewish goods to be brought into the Jewish consciousness from without. In this worldview, culture is something which is created by the non-Jewish surroundings, and the Jew chooses what to consume in order to enhance his appreciation of G"d's world, in order to increase his understanding of G"d's Torah, in order to effectively lead the Jewish people to greater closeness to Torah and mitzvot or in order to simply live a life of dignity, having a well-rounded education, perhaps coupled with a radiance of kidush HaShem. In this spirit, note indeed how R. Hirsch emphasizes the role of Yefet in spreading culture, and how R. Lichtenstein, in the quote above, cites non-Jewish authors exclusively.

It is also noteworthy that there is a strict wall separating science and culture from Torah and Judaism. The former two may support our engagement in the latter two, but culture is not to be found in religion. Remarkably, in this regard, and in considering that the Jew lacks culture, the staunch defenders of Orthodoxy share a point of view with their Reform foes.

4. Are 19th C. Models of Torah 'im Derekh Eretz Necessarily Appropriate?

Up until World War I, TIDE was the unquestioned way of life of the German Orthodox Jews. However, progressively, especially with increasing antisemitism, a malaise set in. This new, changing consciousness is aptly expressed by Rabbi Simon Schwab. In his youth, he argued that R. Hirsch considered TIDE a difficult, barely permissible, **בְּדִעְבָּר**, solution to an acute problem,²⁹ and proceeded to write to many Torah leaders of his generation. Eventually, he came to recognize that his interpretation of R. Hirsch was wrong, and that the latter instead considered TIDE a kind of romantic Torah ideal, the perfect fusion between Shem and Yefet.³⁰

28 Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Culture", in Jacob J. Schacter, "Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration" (New Jersey, 1997)

29 Rabbi Simon Schwab, "Heimkehr ins Judentum" (Frankfurt a.M., 1934)

30 See Rabbi Simon Schwab in note 27. R. Hirsch's conviction of the correctness and importance of Torah im Derekh Eretz is obvious from his essay "The Importance of Secular Studies" cited in notes 23-26.

However, R. Schwab, pondering the contrast between the high esteem in which Jews held German culture and the German barbarity during the Nazi period, concludes that, after the Holocaust:

Let us admit it. Our grandparents subscribed to an illusion – an imaginary faith in the civilizing result of a liberal education encompassing art, poetry, music, and theater. It was thought that man's inhumanity to man was a matter of the deep, dark past. Some still did not awaken from this vision until the smoke began to rise from the burning shuls and sefarim, and until this illusory silence was broken by the shattering of windows [during Kristalnacht -- AF] and the screaming of frightened children in the night. ... Should someone tell you of knowledge, of science, of wisdom among the nations – believe him. But if he tells you of Torah among them – don't believe him.

True – there is science, technology, law, medicine, political science, history, languages, psychology et al. Our tradition of Torah 'im Derekh Eretz applies to that too ... we respect the accomplishments of science and most areas of human knowledge. ... We do not extend Torah 'im Derekh Eretz to include philosophy, ethics, morality and humanism. The teaching of what is right and wrong, what is noble and ignoble, what is decent and indecent, this is not in the realm of the umot ha'olam (nations of the world). ... No longer are we going to seek our Schiller to teach us about humanity. It no longer interests us.³¹

While R. Schwab presents one powerful, convincing reason why the 19th century models may no longer be appropriate, R. Lichtenstein evidently does not fully share R. Schwab's disillusionment and continues to appreciate the cultural corpus alongside the scientific one. There are additional remarkable similarities among the proponents of TIDE and its offshoots. The greatest benefits of TIDE comes to the scholar. Who else, but the scholar trained both in Torah and humanities, can authoritatively write the words of R. Lichtenstein? Does everybody think of the greater understanding of King David's holy poetry when reading a sonnet by Shakespeare? Are we all aroused to recite Shema' with greater fervor when listening to Mozart's Kleine Nachtmusik? Or are most of the select few who enjoy these works of art and understand them at all, more concerned with the auditory and intellectual pleasure than with seeking the intersection of Chopin with Bava Bathra?

In fact, the same argument goes for fields more easily associated with TIDE, such as philosophy and the sciences. It is undoubtedly a great kiddush haShem for a faithful Jew to dedicate his life to the betterment of the human condition through the practice of law or medicine, but how many laymen will read law books to contrast the local civil law with Shulchan Arukh Choshen Mishpat³² to gain greater understanding and appreciation of the latter? How many medical or legal practitioners will consider their daily routine ipso facto a spiritual experience?

Another remarkable point is that much of the TIDE literature, especially that which isn't elitist, focusses on formal education. R. Hirsch's seminal essays on this subject matter were relating to the IRG's school in Frankfurt. Rav Schwab consistently mentions TIDE in relation to his community's yeshivah, and much of the talk surrounding Torah uMadda' is either for specialists or relates to the student's experience at Yeshiva University and related institutions.

Insofar as TIDE is meant to be an avenue to allow the scientist and the artist – i.e. the intellectual elite – to discover greater depths in Torah, TIDE is, in its various incarnations, appropriate. To a certain extent, the Hirschian TIDE is even ideal for educational institutions

31 R. Shimon Schwab, "Kristalnacht: A Historical Perspective" in "Selected Writings" (New Jersey, 1988), pgs. 81-87.

32 The section dealing with halakhic civil law.

were secular studies must be part of the curriculum. But as a philosophy that aims to accompany the Jew and Jewess throughout their lives, it may fall short for most of us. It was perhaps different in the 19th century, when bourgeoisie was what the upwardly mobile Jew was aiming for, and the liberal education rooted in classics was a popular ideal. Nowadays, this is less clear.

Perhaps we should think out loud what TIDE ultimately aims to achieve, and whether it should and how it could appeal to the masses. As explained above, TIDE aims to enhance the Jew's appreciation of G'd's world, increase his understanding of G'd's Torah, effectively lead the Jewish people to greater closeness to Torah and mitzvot, and help the Jew live a life of dignity, having a well-rounded education, perhaps coupled with a radiance of kidush HaShem. Whether these aims require the absorption of European high culture depends on the question of what culture is.

5. What is Culture?

European culture awakened in R. Hirsch a tremendous optimism. He felt he was living “*at the dawn of a new 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 nation.*”³³ However, a notion of culture restricted to that which was discussed in the salons of 19th century Berlin, Paris and Vienna is too narrow! Culture includes also that which plays itself out outside of these salons of that particular epoch.

R. Hirsch and subsequent proponents of TIDE were well aware that European high culture wasn't always in consonance with the Torah's values.³⁴ In such cases, they all rejected the undesirable cultural element. Thus existed a belief that the Jew could selectively “cherry pick” the best of Yefet's culture, while being immune to its negative expressions. Furthermore, any discussion of low culture seems absent altogether. Only the finest works of art were taken into consideration by TIDE adherents. Clearly, absorption of culture was seen as resulting from a conscious process. However, some of the axioms deserve reevaluation.

Are we uniquely consumers of higher cultures? Do we perhaps consume another kind of culture, one which we subject ourselves to to a much greater extent? Low culture influences in a very different manner than does high culture. High culture promotes an intellectually intensive consumption, such that the incorporation of foreign high culture into our Jewish life may seem like a wonderful confirmation of the compatibility of Judaism and European culture. Low culture is mindlessly consumed. Should low culture be considered culture? Is there something else that is considered culture? What is it and why should we care?

The truth is, that culture isn't merely the domain the elites, but rather includes everything that allows us to function as a society. It includes our common values, government, primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, humanitarian institutions and values, law, and habits that regulate our interpersonal exchanges, such as when to smile, when it becomes appropriate to call one's colleague by his first name, as well as our leisure habits and institutions. If we consider the totality of that, which we can call culture, it becomes obvious that it includes both more desirable and undesirable elements.³⁵

33 R. Hirsch, *Collected Writings*, Vol. VII, pgs. 88-89

34 See, for example, R. Hirsch's commentary to Leviticus 18:5 (pg. 368 in the Frankfurt 1920 edition). Likewise, R. Shimon Schwab, “Mensch-Yisrael” in “*Selected Essays*” (New Jersey 1994, pgs. 127-131).

35 For an overview of contemporary understandings of culture and how it relates to Torah uMadda', see R. Alan

An example: this author once took a negotiations course where particular attention was paid to intercultural gaps. Once, the professor asked that the foreign students, just about half the class, talk about surprising cultural misunderstanding they had experienced. One Frenchman spoke up and said: “Americans smile a lot. In France, smiling signifies a certain acceptance and a feeling of increasing closeness, whereas in the USA, it means nothing in particular, being a simple act of politeness.” He then elaborated that he had duped himself for having interpreted an American smile as a sign of friendship. Which cultural pattern rather matches Jewish cultural sensibilities? The Mishnah teaches us **הָיוּ מְקַבְּלִים אֶת כָּל אָדָם בְּסִכּוֹר פָּנִים יְפוֹת** - “always welcome all with a pleasant countenance”. We cannot state that it is a mitzvah to smile all over the place, but it would seem that culturally, our own Jewish culture has historically freely encouraged smiling and even expressing emotions of warmth, that which is so unfashionable north of the Pyrenees and the Alps.

One might argue that the “too narrow” definition of culture has enabled Western Jews to benefit from the best that culture has to offer, all within the framework of a Torah life and its values. The generations that were educated in TIDE since R. Hirsch founded his school, and subsequently influenced many, even such that pretend otherwise, testify to the success of classic TIDE. Thus, why broaden the notion of culture?

However, by limiting ourselves to an outdated, narrow conception of culture, we may fail to sufficiently appreciate the world we live in. We may perpetuate the illusion of a selective conscious exposure to desirable culture, claiming that we are neither influenced by low culture, nor do we need it. This argument is analogous to that which rappers and video game producers make when fending off warning against their wares. Against the contention that they incite violence and other aberrant behavior, they state with conviction that nobody takes the music and the games seriously, everybody knows they are just entertainment and hence nobody is seriously influenced by them. Many behavioral scientists disagree, however.

Indeed, the truth of the matter is that we are thoroughly and subliminally influenced by the culture, which we live by, just like we are influenced by the performance of mitzvot. If mitzvot had but an intellectual educational purpose, why bother performing them, studying them would suffice. Why bother setting up a sukkah, if it suffices to study the philosophical ideas embedded in that mitzvah. Perhaps imagining a sukkah would do? Why make annual Pessach sederim, if dreaming about Egypt and the Exodus would do? Mitzvot, however, are to be performed in the real world, for practical observance can grant us that, which intellectual study cannot: not only should mitzvot ennoble our thoughts, but also our lives. Not only to know that God exists, but also ... sense Him with our spiritual instinct, as a fulfillment of the verse **שׁוּיִתִּי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד** - “I put God-Eternal before me at all times”.

Let's briefly return to the smile story. Psychologists distinguish between cultures with high and low emotive expression. Low emotive expression cultures discourage intense emotional displays, whether of mourning or of joy. Therefore, in such cultures, funerals are held with flowers and music, while crying and sorrow is kept to a minimum. Weddings are dignified affairs, where the guest will act with reserve, shrieks of happiness will not be appreciated. After either of such events will be over, the participants will be expected to rejoin their normal lives as soon as possible. In high emotive expression cultures, however, crying and jubilation are expected. Funerals are heard several blocks away. Marriages are celebrated for days on

end. Which kind of culture will sooner understand and accept Jewish traditions? Which kind of culture do you imagine, when thinking of a shiv'ah – the traditional week of intense mourning, or, preferably, when thinking of sheva' berakhot – the seven consecutive days of wedding celebrations?

6. *Derekh Eretz in Today's Western World*

The Jew today does not experience a conflict forcing him to choose between the Torah and the values of Hellas (Yfet's descendant Yavan). Instead, today's Jew is a consumer of a culture that influences him, and he didn't even define the boundaries of that culture, yet. Those who understand the reach of culture best are the Charedim, who reject it outright, choosing instead their own insular subculture.³⁶ However, as we have seen, culture has great value and potential. Whether considering high culture, literature, poetry, philosophy, and much more, it all has potential and value. Its value derives from its powerfulness. Art has the power to touch us there, where intellectual analysis, logic leaves cold. Even low culture, with its various forms of leisure, has value, again, because it is powerful.

Consider the following homework exercise. Make a short list of cultural influences you imagine you are subject to. The reader will readily see that the world we live in influences us in a very powerful way, far beyond that, which we generally imagine. Some of these influences are positive while others are negative. The ways in which we are subject to the surrounding culture betrays a worrying fact. While our Jewish practice is – hopefully – strong, we practically have no genuine Jewish culture that can support this kind of observance. As a result, our religious practice is often devoid of meaning. We do that which the halakhah specifies – that, which the Torah demands of us – but are not invested in it, for we lack the cultural baggage that will let us intuitively understand the rituals of Judaism.

The heroes of our leisure literature are strangers, the lullabies we sing to our young children are foreign, and we consume that which the media offer, without pondering whether the values hidden in the spoken word and the moving image are indeed our values.

The arts, high and low culture and the media are successful because they address the profound human need to represent our human condition not only intellectually, but also emotionally. Drama and poetry allow us to express and explore our inner conflicts, and to talk about our desires and hopes. All these forms of expression embed within them both universal human values and values belonging to a particular culture. Take family, for example. How can the ideal Jewish marital life become a reality, if our cultural reference frame is the image of conjugal life devoid of privacy, oversexed, where the depth of nonsexual emotions that also bind us seems like a myth from a different planet and a different era?

On the other hand, which brief description of the Exodus or of the future king David's conflict between his own future and his friendship to Jonathan can be as powerful as an image, whether painted, filmed or described in a poem? How will we sooner feel comfortable in a

36 “By choosing to eschew totally all manifestations of the contemporary world, [the Chassam] Sofer was not simply being obdurate; he was displaying, from one point of view, a great deal of sociological acumen”. (David Ellenson, pg. 19 – see note 21)

“The Hatam Sofer's sectarian rejection of Western culture through forbidding the changing of names, the speaking of the vernacular, and the changing from Jewish garb may have shown a better understanding of the issues. His rejection of sitting in cafes, sports, and most forms of middle class leisure offers a greater realization of the role of culture within Judaism. (Alan Brill, note 26 on pg. 11 – see note 35 in this essay)

synagogue, by reading a technical halakhic treatise on the various duties discharged in there, or by attending a theatrical performance that explores the emotions of the praying faithful, without sarcasm, while emphasizing the serious character of this activity? The faithful will always need halakhic guides, those who are less observant should nonetheless remind all the others that the halakhic compendium alone does not suffice. Much more is needed to live prayer, rather than dryly read it.

7. Proposal and Conclusion

This author calls for raising the quantity and quality of Jewish cultural works. Jewish means not that it was produced by a Jew, for such an association is too tenuous to suffice for a work to be considered Jewish. Many a Jewish artist has gone out of his way to produce gentile culture and proudly said so. Their works are by Jews, but not Jewish per se. Instead, Jewish culture means culture informed by the Jewish utopia, the inner-Jewish hopes and expectations. This should be a culture for Jews, supportive of Judaism.

Both high, inspiring culture and low culture for mass consumption should be produced. The purpose of such Jewish cultural works would not be to isolate the Jew, it would not aim to save him from contact with non-Jewish culture. Such an effort isn't necessarily desirable and is bound to fail. Instead, these works should inspire and inform emotionally, as well as arouse people to think and to feel.

Currently, such cultural works are already being produced in the USA, in Israel and even elsewhere. But the quality of such works, while rising, still needs to be boosted. Generally, such efforts are supported merely by the limited Orthodox marketplace, for they are purely private initiatives. Instead and in addition, communal funds and efforts should be put behind initiatives that will return us our Jewish cultural sensitivity.

The creation of works of art and works of cultural consumption raises a number of halakhic questions that should be the topic of serious research and discussion. Not all kinds and forms of art are compatible with Jewish values. Comedy often makes fun of other people, a dubious value. But comedy can also highlight the comical in unusual situations, and there seems nothing wrong with that. Drama may lend itself particularly to religious expression, but thrillers portray their heroes in questionable circumstances, not always making the right choices. Plastic arts are particularly problematic, as three dimensional representations may run afoul of the prohibition on statues. Then again, abstract plastic art may be particularly suitable. Generally, we do not worship the body, while Western culture does, and does it using a great variety of artistic forms. What attitude should we maintain vis-a-vis glorifications of the human body? With the conclusion of any halakhic research, we must also ponder whether, under given halakhic constraints, a particular form of expression can still reasonably yield works of artistic value, or whether artists will find themselves working in straightjackets. The answer will differ from art form to art form, and oftentimes, the answer will not be obvious. We will have to encourage some experimentation, too.

It is this author's sincere hope that the numerous questions such an advocacy for the creation of art brings up will become the feeding grounds for many fruitful discussions and, eventually, broad support for a genuine Jewish culture, for the gentile world has no monopoly on that.

TIDE as proposed by R. Hirsch hasn't lost its importance, but has limited applicability. Even with a thriving innerjewish culture, scholars and students will continue to explore the greatest

that world culture in general, and European culture in particular, has to offer. Laymen will also continue to appreciate aspects of those culture. Science will also remain high on the agenda of the Torah scholar and student alike. However, most of the time and for most people, such TIDE is an extremely intellectually demanding exercise. It is an exercise we might desire, but it cannot alone satisfy our need for culture. That need can rather, at least partially, be satisfied by artistic creation emanating from within our midst.