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RECLAIMING TORAH U-MADDA: A SYMPOSIUM

The Lehrhaus Editors

Since its inception in September 2016, The Lehrhaus has become a center for conversations in the Modern Orthodox community and beyond. Over the past five years, we have served as a vibrant forum for a variety of issues, including the status of *gedolim*, the OU's statement on women's clergy, the religious implications of COVID, and other timely topics. This year, we are excited to announce the launch of "Reclaiming *Torah u-Madda*," an initiative that we hope will generate thoughtful reflection, dynamic discourse, and vibrant discussion.

The notion of *Torah u-Madda*—that Torah and secular studies can enrich each other—has been a byword in the Modern Orthodox community for decades. Its importance is self-evident. Nonetheless, we ought to give more thought to how we got here, the challenges that have arisen, and how the meaning of *Torah u-Madda* continues to evolve over time.

One cannot separate *Torah u-Madda* from its origins at Yeshiva University.[1] R. Dr. Bernard Revel, the founder of Yeshiva College, used the terms Torah and *Madda* in a 1915 letter to denote the Yeshiva's unique educational mission. R. Dr. Samuel Belkin, YU's second president, spoke of the need for synthesis and integration of the two halves of a YU student's educational experience. In 1946, *Torah u-Madda* was first featured on YU's seal. Throughout the decades, *Torah u-Madda*'s advocates tried to define its contours. R. Aharon Lichtenstein wrote a programmatic essay in 1961 in *The Commentator*, YU's student newspaper. In 1986, R. Dr. Norman Lamm, YU's third president, founded the *Torah u-Madda* project, a long-running campus lecture series, and he published his eponymous book *Torah Umadda* in 1990.

It's telling that the discussion about *Torah u-Madda* often centered around defending the legitimacy of such synthesis in the first place. R. Lamm's book explored several models for fruitful interaction between *kodesh* and *hol*, favoring an approach based on *hasidic* thought, but only after responding to traditional objections to the entire enterprise of *Torah u-Madda*. Several of the essays in the first issue of the *Torah U-Madda Journal*, founded as part of R. Lamm's project in 1989 and edited by R. Jacob J. Schacter (a consulting editor at the Lehrhaus), grappled with whether secular studies ought to be of more than mere instrumental value so that one could obtain a profession. Indeed, as a roadmap for the YU student, *Torah u-Madda* was never easy to implement. Students complained of compartmentalization from day one. It is one thing to wax poetic about synthesis in the abstract and quite another to experience it when struggling with a challenging dual curriculum.

Over time, difficulties with *Torah u-Madda* mounted as interest in the liberal arts diminished nationwide. In 2020, R. Lamm, *Torah u-Madda*'s most consistent champion, passed away. In the wake of his death, historian Lawrence Grossman published "The Rise and Fall of Torah U'Madda," the title of which speaks volumes about the

[1] The history of *Torah u-Madda* is recounted in Jacob J. Schacter, "Torah u-Madda Revisited: The Editor's Introduction," *Torah U-Madda Journal* 1 (1989), 1-22, and Lawrence Grossman, "The Rise and Fall of Torah U'Madda," *Modern Judaism* 41:1 (2021), 71-91.

perceived decline of the idea. In July, the *Torah U-Madda Journal* ceased publication.

Yet despite these challenges, *Torah u-Madda* has not disappeared. It remains as relevant as ever, continuing to animate contemporary discourse in the community. In the past couple of months, *Tradition Online* launched a new series grappling with the "Great Books" controversy, while the Shalom Hartman Institute ran an episode in their "Identity/Crisis" podcast reflecting on the legacy of R. Lamm (featuring the voices of several contributors who will appear in our symposium). *Torah u-Madda* may have begun at YU, but it has become much more than the programmatic ideology of a single school. It remains an instantly recognizable slogan in the Modern Orthodox community at large.

Furthermore, although it sounds trite, every religious Jew navigates the encounter between Torah and the modern world on a daily basis. Indeed, the debate over the legitimacy of receiving some secular education has all but evaporated, even in parts of the more right-wing Orthodox world. We Jews are more secure in our engagement with modernity than we were 30 years ago or perhaps ever in history. But such engagement brings new challenges. One today might not be reading Wordsworth's poetry to better appreciate the wonders of creation or studying human nature by way of Shakespeare—as R. Lichtenstein might have hoped[2]—but people are online all the time, imbibing or contributing to the best and worst of what our age has on offer. The ubiquity of the internet—from Twitter to TikTok—highlights our inability to disengage from modern trends, even if they can easily become detrimental to civil discourse and religious growth. Culture comes in the door whether we ask it to or not. Thus, the need for exploration and religious guidance is as stark as ever. Can everything be integrated into a Torah worldview?

For the challenges of synthesis remain. We learn Torah on a scale perhaps never before seen, with the Talmud at our fingertips. At the same time, we have risen to the pinnacles of worldly success; our careers take us from towering financial centers of steel and glass to the halls of Congress. And yet, perhaps these aspects of our lives are more bifurcated than ever before. If *Torah u-Madda* is to be reclaimed for the twenty-first century, we need to explore its role in today's complex, fractured world and the new avenues through which we can derive meaning from the relationship between the Torah's timeless wisdom and the best of what the culture around us can offer.

This symposium, which draws on the wisdom and talent of diverse voices within the community, explores the past, present, and future of *Torah u-Madda*. To highlight some of what is to come: what are the challenges unique to pursuing *Torah u-Madda* today? Have we as religious Jews gone too far in adopting the cultural consensus? Do women have the same opportunities to seek a *Torah u-Madda* synthesis as do men? Can *Torah u-Madda* justify the teaching of Torah ideas on the global stage? Can it sanction the study of Christianity? What can we learn, if anything, from science fiction and fantasy literature, games, and movies? What wisdom can we glean about Torah and modernity from the writings of the late Lord Jonathan Sacks? Are the boundaries between Torah and *Madda* more fluid than one might have supposed?

In addition to the solicited contributions, we welcome any submissions relevant to themes of *Torah u-Madda* broadly defined. You can write a full-length article or a response to one of our authors, or weigh in with a shorter letter to the editor (click here for our submission guidelines). Feel free as well to follow us and chime in on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram! Over the course of the next couple weeks, we will post installments in the symposium, so please check back frequently at this page. Each contribution will contain a link back to the main symposium page. Join us in reclaiming Torah u-Madda today!

Sincerely,
Yosef Lindell on behalf of The Lehrhaus Editors

[2] See Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?* ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), 242-50.

Torah u-Madda Thirty Years Later

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As a religious person who loves knowledge and is stimulated by study of all kinds, I owe a great debt to Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l. Thirty years ago, he set out to describe why study of general knowledge (Madda) alongside a Torah curriculum is religiously meaningful. As the chancellor of a university that offered such a dual curriculum, his goal was to describe how the individual student might understand and orient the study of secular knowledge as a Jewish pursuit. Dr. Lamm's own life's work reflected his belief that the mind is a primary, if not *the* primary way to inspire a connection to God.

In this essay, I summarize Dr. Lamm's original arguments on behalf of *Torah u-Madda* and then push us to articulate new avenues and questions about the relationship(s) between Torah and Madda that have emerged as central thirty years later.

In his writings, he articulates six models for the relationship between Madda and Torah:

His first model – called the rationalist model - is Maimonidean. According to this model, study of science, philosophy, and metaphysics brings one to greater knowledge of God and God's creation, and thus constitutes a religious obligation.

The second model, which he labels "cultural," is based on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's idea of *Torah im derekh Eretz*, or alternatively, *Denkgalubigkeit*, or enlightened Orthodoxy. His version seems to be more about not being too intellectually narrow-minded than about shaping an actual dialogue between secular studies and Torah. Moreover, he sees the value in secular studies being able to help explain and facilitate Torah, such as the use of chemistry to explain *ta'aruvot*.

Rav Kook serves as the exemplar of the third model, the mystical model, of *Torah u-Madda*. According to this model, when a religious person studies secular wisdom, the secular can become infused with holiness. Not only does the mundane not mar what is holy, there is no true realm of the secular because it becomes infused with holiness.

Rabbi Lamm distinguishes his final three models by describing them as emerging from Eastern European Jewish life, the first two related to Mitnaggedic thought and the final related to Hasidic thought.

The fourth model is the instrumentalist model which he attributes to the Vilna Gaon in which secular knowledge has no inherent value. Instead, it is valuable insofar as it helps students of Torah to understand Torah better. Thus, the study of Madda is a type of *hekhsher* (preparation for a) *mitzvah* rather than a *mitzvah* in its own right.

The fifth model combines R. Hayyim of Volozhin's hierarchical understanding of various Torah texts with the Rambam's inclusion of the study of metaphysics, science, and philosophy within the concept of Gemara. By this model, labeled "inclusionary," the study of Madda is equivalent to the study of "textless" Torah. In other words, it has value, but it does not have the same value as the text of Torah itself. It is valuable insofar as the world is an emanation or disguise of God, and thus, studying the world is an attempt to grow closer to God.

It is the final model which is both the most original and the one which Rabbi Lamm clearly espouses as his own, even as he recognizes the value of all six models. The final model is a creative appropriation of the theological paradigm shift of Divine immanence offered by Hasidic thought. While Dr. Lamm admits that the Hasidic masters negated the study of Madda as "alien studies" that undercut "pure faith," nonetheless, the ideology of Hasidism itself contains the potential for understanding the religious value of general studies. The Hasidic focus on Divine immanence and the resulting value of having a pervasive God consciousness in all aspects of life shaped the concept of *avodah be-gashmiut*, worship of the Divine through corporeality. Rabbi Lamm argues that this concept is ripe for application to the study of Madda: *all* of one's activities,

including all intellectual activities, can be oriented towards the service of God.

A colleague recently summarized Rabbi Lamm's argument for *Torah u-Madda* as follows: he wanted Orthodox Jews to be curious and confident – that is, curious about all forms of knowledge, but confident in their commitment to Torah. But his arguments are primarily directed over his right shoulder, towards those who are quite confident in Torah but are not curious about Madda: those who see "Torah only" as the way to live a truly religious life. Today we expand that category to include not necessarily "Torah only" stalwarts, but those religious people who show little to no interest in general society. For people who are confident but lacking in curiosity, Rabbi Lamm's arguments still stand thirty years later.

However, today there are also many in Orthodoxy who are not just curious but who value Madda deeply. And even those who do not value it deeply are nevertheless exposed to it all the time whether through books, the internet, or the arts. Moreover, many yeshiva day school students pursue degrees – both undergraduate and graduate – at secular universities, where they enjoy a sophisticated Madda education. What is more concerning for this subset is confidence: ensuring that Torah does not lose its vitality.

The *Torah u-Madda* inquiry for this group is not whether Madda is valuable; it is whether and how Madda should influence our understanding of Torah. This entails asking two separate questions:

- How should our understanding of Torah relate to *questions* posed by Madda disciplines?
- How should our understanding of Torah relate to *answers* offered by Madda disciplines?

Bringing the questions of Madda into the study of Torah.

Since time immemorial, people have asked themselves the most basic questions about what it means to be human, our place in the universe, what it means to have a relationship with God, what a good life looks like, how to construct a good society, and how we ought to respond to injustice. Within those broader questions follow more specific questions. For individuals, for example, how to deal with personal adversity, how to relate to God and to nature, how to balance commitments to others with one's own needs and autonomy. For communities and societies, how to deal with conflict and difference, the role of boundaries and rules, how to inculcate a sense of mutual responsibility, the role and value proposition of power, and balancing between the collective and the individual. By virtue of being human beings, we have some basic questions in common, even if some of our questions differ based on local circumstance.

Many forms of general knowledge – both the sciences and the humanities – address these more universal questions either explicitly or implicitly. The humanities – including psychology, literature, sociology and philosophy-- relate deeply to the human experience. They reflect quite clearly and in a familiar idiom many of the questions that preoccupy me as a person living in the 21st century.

Torah also addresses such questions, but sometimes it can be hard to detect how. Torah – and here I refer to Tanakh and Gemara specifically – do not speak in overtly philosophical categories even as they contain so much philosophy. Moreover, they are not organized based on the kinds of themes we might think about today as philosophical – such as epistemology, ontology, justice, or even theology. Instead, the organizing principles of Torah relate to Halakhah or narratives. It takes some work to pull out the broader themes in order to frame them in a way that is familiar to general discourse today, and especially to broader themes that respond to universal human experiences and questions.

I believe that bringing some of the framing questions of Madda into the *beit midrash* provides a fruitful way to relate Madda and Torah: doing so can help us access the implicit ways that Torah addresses these questions.

Permit the following illustration:

The opening *sugya* of *masekhet Hullin* is all about who may perform *shehitah* because of the opening words of the mishnah הכל שוחטין. The Gemara goes on for several

dapim trying to ascertain who is included in the *ha-kol* of *ha-kol shohatin*. When I first learned this *sugya*, my orientation[1] was primarily halakhic – at the end of the day, who may perform *shehitah*? While this orientation certainly helped me understand the bottom line of the discussion, it did not necessarily deepen my appreciation of the many options that were offered before the bottom line was proffered.

However, when I tried on a different framing after reading contemporary theory about the construction of communities and their boundaries, I observed an additional layer of the debate over *ha-kol shohatin*: this halakhic debate is also rabbinic case study in constructing community. The rabbis are responding to an age-old human question: what hard boundaries are necessary for the construction of a community, and what boundaries should remain porous? When do we look for affinity between ourselves and adjacent groups who may share some practices with us and not others? What actions can be done by "outsiders," and what actions are reserved for "insiders"? All of these questions are contained in asking who is permitted to slaughter our food - whether they need to be a fully bought-in member of the community who espouses the same belief system, or perhaps they might be part of a group that is distinct but shares some practices and beliefs with us. This orientation towards learning the *sugya* deepened my appreciation for the *shakla v'taria*, as the *sugya* negotiates when to narrow the boundaries and when to expand them.

To be clear, this orientation does not replace the halakhic orientation; rather it places the halakhic orientation within the context of ongoing universal questions. It makes Torah both normative in a legal sense but also formative in a philosophical sense, informed by and informing general human experience.[2] What I call a Madda orientation connects the halakhic discussions to questions that any person might have when they wake up in the morning and observe their own lived experience. It expresses the multi-layered relevance of Torah: how religion encompasses our beliefs and obligations, and in doing so it offers wisdom related to the ongoing questions of human life. Who may slaughter my food does not appear on its face to be an existential question but a halakhic one. But seen through the rabbis' philosophical lens, this halakhic question *IS* an existential question. Both the halakhic and philosophical orientations matter a great deal. The playfulness and debates of the *shakla v'taria* itself reflect this expansiveness. And I do not think I would have understood the universal layer alongside the particular layer without appreciating the kinds of questions that Madda often deals with.

More recently, I've been thinking about uncertainty, given how much uncertainty pervades during this pandemic. While we often group *sugyot* about *safek* by their respective legal arenas, I looked through an additional lens at the rabbinic material, one that is more overtly philosophical. Thinking about *rov, mi'ut* and *hazakah* through the prism of life's uncertainty underscored just how many big ideas are contained in the daily decision-making of halakhic life. Moreover, rather than narrowing my focus to the particular halakhic concepts, I was able to juxtapose rabbinic discussions related to *kashrut* with debates about certainty and uncertainty in the judicial system, and again with *aggadot* about giving people the

[1] I have used the term "orientation" here based on an article by Jon Levisohn charting ten orientations to teaching rabbinics. He explains that an orientation refers to what one is trying to extrapolate from the text. For instance, while learning a talmudic *sugya*, a person might focus on skill building – learning grammar, syntax, or vocabulary. Alternatively, a person might focus on learning the practical Halakhah. A third option: one might zoom in on the historical experience of ancient rabbinic culture through the study of a *sugya*. And there are many other options. While these are not mutually exclusive options, of course, they do each lead to a different focus and distribution of time spent on different aspects of one's learning/teaching. I believe that studying Madda – and particularly the humanities – has the potential to orient one's study of Torah towards a philosophical engagement with some of the most pressing human questions.

[2] See Moshe Halbertal's *People of the Book* for a distinction between normativity and formativity. I believe that Orthodox communities need both.

benefit of the doubt.[3] It is true that when I learn or teach these *sugyot*, I may include an excerpt from this or that philosopher. However, what I suggest here is not necessarily about citing a Madda passage alongside Torah. It is about bringing the philosophical questions framed by Madda about human life into the study of Torah – not to the exclusion of other orientations, but in addition to them. My study of the humanities and my study of Torah are in dialogue with one another.

There is of course a branch of study known as Jewish philosophy. However, we need not restrict our philosophical inquiry to that discipline alone: it belongs in the study of Tanakh, Gemara, and Halakhah as well.

What about the answers of Madda?

For those who already appreciate Madda, there is another dimension to consider in the relationship between Torah and Madda. How do the answers - not only the questions - offered by Madda impact the way we interpret Torah and shape a Torah-observant lifestyle? To be clear, by Madda I mean the conventional wisdom, ethics, and assumptions of the ambient cultures in which Torah is being understood and lived out.

In fact, one might say that *Torah u-Madda* is less of a prescription than a description. From the *Humash* itself, which references Mesopotamian law and myth to Hazal's engagement with Greco-Roman and Persian culture, to Saadia Gaon's exegetical and philosophical revolutions, to the tumult of modernity that yielded Ultra-Orthodoxy, Sarah Schenirer's Bais Yaakov movement, and religious Zionism, to 21st century neo-Hasidic movements today, Torah has generally been lived and/or expressed in negotiation with the intellectual and cultural trends of different times and places. Thus, just as the Gemara in *Menahot* pictures Moshe Rabbeinu not understanding the discussions of R. Akiva's *beit midrash*, Jews of other generations might likewise be confused if they found themselves today in any Orthodox community - be that community more conservative or more progressive. There would certainly be shared threads, but there would be profound differences.

However, the negotiation is not monochromatic. Jewish leaders and communities have always engaged in a process of determining (consciously and less so) what aspects of general culture to incorporate, what aspects to reject and what aspects to mediate through a push and pull. And today is no different. **It is this process of determining adoption, adaptation and/or rejection that poses a major question and perhaps a crisis for Modern Orthodox Jews in the 21st century who are rooted in Torah but see truth in Madda as well. How much should/can the understanding offered by 21st century Madda impact our interpretation of Torah and halakhic life?**

To be sure, there are plenty of ideas within Madda that can help reinforce ideals that are already found easily within Torah: where a beautiful poem can elucidate a Torah idea in our own vernacular or today's neo-Platonists can help us understand the Rambam better or ritual theory can reinforce the importance of performing *mitzvot*. But there is also Madda that challenges what we thought about the world and about the human condition, and that is where *Torah u-Madda* gets complicated. It is this tension that pushes some people towards Torah only and others towards Madda only. (And, of course, it is this tension that erupted into denominationalism in European Jewish life just a few centuries ago) One obvious site of tension about the questions of adoption/adaptation/rejection within Orthodoxy today relates to gender, but there are and will emerge other arenas as well.

Anyone who is reading this publication is likely familiar with - and may even personally experience - the strain between Torah and contemporary Madda. In fact, one can find debates about such clashes in the "pages" of *Lehrhaus* and other Orthodox publications. However, it is important to frame this specifically as a *Torah u-Madda* tension

[3] It is worth noting that Jewish studies in academia often follows this precise pattern: taking a question in general human thought and examining how it is reflected in Jewish texts. In the case of uncertainty, for example, I was aided by Chaya Halberstam's book *Law and Truth in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature* - which explores how the concept of "truth" was understood by Hazal - and Moshe Halbertal's book *The Birth of Doubt*, which examines different negotiations of *safek* in rabbinic literature.

because that is precisely what it is. Those who choose "Torah only" do not confront this issue in the same way because of the overt attempt to keep Torah life from intersecting with the trajectory of the broader human conversation. (This does not mean, however, that "Torah only" environments are not impacted by general culture. In fact, they too may even unconsciously adopt or adapt certain general cultural ideas; they likewise may be shaped precisely through their rejection of Madda's answers, which in itself is a form of influence.) But for those who have chosen the *Torah u-Madda* path, the where, when, and how of adoption, adaptation, or rejection will define Orthodox life in the 21st century. Sometimes these choices will be negotiated more subtly, at other times more explicitly; some choices will emerge from "facts on the ground," others from articulated arguments; some from leadership and others from the actions of community members themselves. But as we have already seen, people and institutions within the Orthodox world will continue to disagree about where to draw the boundaries, what influences are legitimate, and not only what is desirable but where authority lies in shaping Orthodox life.

In April 1990, Dr. Lamm said the following in an interview with the *The Jewish Review*:

> I should point out that all Torah-U-Madda is based upon the belief that the world of culture outside of Torah is not necessarily a friend *or* an enemy, and you must neither dismiss it with contempt and fight it, nor embrace it without reservation. But, on the contrary, you have to be both critical and respectful of it, and it is this sort of engagement which is what we stand for.

While Rabbi Lamm was very clear on which aspects of Madda he critiqued and which he respected, a (the?) major challenge of Modern Orthodox continuity in the twenty-first century will be determining its critique of and respect for the world of human inquiry outside of Torah. What conclusions of secular culture do we abstain from or reject, what do we embrace, and what does the messy in between look like?

And of course, the meta-question: can we stay together as a community if we answer this question differently from one another?

Torah u-Madda's Moment

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Lady Macbeth and Glückel of Hameln walk into a bar and immediately launch into an animated discussion on the concept of loyalty. They are soon followed by Maimonides, Nahmanides, and John Milton, chewing on apple chips while engaged in deep debate over the nature of Eden. Plato, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Menachem Begin are off to the side, munching on French pastries and hummus while swapping notes on statesmanship. King David, Rabbi Israel Salanter, and Martin Seligman stand nearby, chowing down on crudités while strategizing over how to cultivate true joy and strength of character. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and Rabbi Norman Lamm had already arrived early, pulled up chairs, and so swiftly jumped into a nuanced analysis of Maimonides's Aristotelianism that they each forgot to unbutton their suit jackets and loosen their ties. Sojourner Truth and Abraham Lincoln sit enraptured by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's impromptu lecture on the book of Esther while they wait for the proceedings to begin, while Rembrandt and Rashi choose to spend the time rendering biblical scenes in their notebooks. Finally, Alexander Hamilton, C. S. Lewis, Winston Churchill, and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook arrive, late of course, but with twinkles in their eyes and tea for everyone.

In Yeshiva University, this setup is no joke (though the bar—or rather, seminar room—serves only non-alcoholic beverages and tragically little tea).

Torah u-Madda is flourishing. As Rabbi Norman Lamm defined the term:

> Torah, faith, religious learning on one side, and Madda, science, worldly knowledge on the other, together offer

> us a more overarching and truer vision than either set alone. Each set gives one view of the Creator as well as His creation, and the other a different perspective that may not at all agree with the first ... Each alone is true, but only partially true; both together present the possibility of a larger truth...

As such, President Ari Berman's "Five *Torot*" of Truth, Life, Infinite Human Worth, Compassion, and Redemption provide a framework for an institution in which the business school offers classes on Jewish values in the workplace; there is a newly launched Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Center for Values and Leadership led by Dr. Erica Brown; students convene medical ethics conferences bridging Jewish and general moral reasoning; courses seek to design new venues of the intersection between data analytics and Jewish texts; and academic Jewish Studies classes utilize archeological, literary, and historical scholarship in the study of Torah. At YU's Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought (in which I serve as deputy director alongside the director, Rabbi Meir Soloveichik), the flagship Straus Scholars program seeks to train students intellectually, spiritually, and morally by bringing into dialogue the great thinkers and texts of both the Jewish and Western traditions. Its courses, public programs, op-eds, podcasts, and book projects are based upon the premise that such a conversation will not only enrich its participants but will also enrich the world at large.

In a 1990 interview prior to the publication of his book *Torah Umadda*, Rabbi Lamm expressed his aim to expose students to the cultural winds of modernity—not to be swept over by them, but to wrestle with them, critique them, and, when fitting, to allow them to dwell within and enhance a robust religious worldview. "It's worth taking that risk," he told his questioner, since, were we not to, we would be giving up on our commission to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). According to Rabbi Lamm, the dual focus is not a strictly intellectual exercise; rather, it is a means of improving one's character and reaching one's divinely given potential by drawing from the wisdom of the ancients:

> It is, to my mind, very clear that a person who engages in Torah and Madda is in no way compromising Torah by studying Madda. It is a compromise only if he studies Maddah [sic.] for *parnassah*, for a vocational reason. But if he does it for religious reasons, for Jewish reasons, because he wants to probe G-d's presence in all the universe, then this clearly is a part of his religious growth and a part of his *shelemut*, instead of something extraneous to it.

Ours is an age of social media hot takes in which once civil debate topics are transformed into verbal dunk contests. Questions about the tension between religious and civic identity, loyalty, freedom, family, and our moral obligations to others are ever present but often dominated by insulated partisan perspectives.

This, therefore, is *Torah u-Madda*'s moment.

It is crucial to train individuals who are equipped with the content, character, and confidence to bring knowledge of the best of the West—resting upon the foundation of our ancient tradition—into homes, communities, and the public square. It is also necessary to cultivate leaders who see truth not as emerging from having destroyed or "owned" the opposition but as emanating from the relationship between fields of knowledge alternatively conflicting, complementary, and complex. As the English writer and philosopher G. K. Chesterton noted, the most flourishing societies are those which draw—often and richly—from the wellsprings of knowledge gleaned over generations. While Chesterton was no friend of the Jews, his observation about how ancient voices can enlighten how we engage with our own era is reflective of a *Torah u-Madda* mentality. "Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors," he wrote. "It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to

the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about."

The power of timeless Jewish ideas to positively impact the global moral conversation is already manifesting in timely ways. The *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* urge readers frazzled by unceasing phone addiction to adopt a "tech Shabbat." David Brooks argues for the Exodus story—a story whose power and central theme of covenant are crucial for bridging political and social divides—as America's unifying national narrative. In various national magazines, biblical characters are viewed as sources of comfort and solace in times of social and medical upheaval. Christian pundits concerned with their own religious community's survival turn to Modern Orthodox Judaism as a model of success. In his *Happiness Hypothesis*, leading academic and public intellectual Jonathan Haidt develops the concept of "affective forecasting" (predicting our emotional reactions) by analyzing Ecclesiastes. Salman Rushdie has turned to Jonah to argue for the responsibility of writers to their era's political challenges. Practically all modern American presidents have cited the Bible in their inaugural addresses (with the Hebrew Bible cited more often than the New Testament). Leading thinkers from multiple faiths, including Muslims, Mormons, Protestants, and Catholics, lamented Rabbi Sacks's passing and wrote movingly of how they were inspired by his teachings. The list can go on. But it is not long enough.

The onus is on practitioners of *Torah u-Madda* to seize this opportunity.

We must devote increased financial and institutional resources to producing the next generation of Jewish leaders whose articulation of Jewish values, texts, and traditions can inspire individuals both within and beyond the Jewish community. Rabbis and educators must be trained in transmitting the depth of their Torah knowledge into accessible prose and widely consumed content. As William Kolbrenner has written, citing Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein: "*Madda* becomes a kind of prerequisite for communicating with those outside of the fold." For every book making the case for how Aristotle, Spinoza, Proust, Adam Smith, or William James can change/help/save your life, there should be one on Queen Esther, Rabbi Akiva, Judah HaLevi, Sarah Schenirer, and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein. For every development in artificial intelligence, there should be more articles on how Judaism defines the nature of personhood and how its ethical tradition might inform how we approach dilemmas from the trolley problem to robot-based medical decision-making. For every podcast on cultivating mindfulness, there should be one that mines the lessons of *Pirkei Avot*. The messages must be attuned to the ever-diversifying media landscape.

After all, it is not only Americans who look to Jewish ideas for modern inspiration. In recent years, Yeshiva University has engaged in conversation with faith leaders as diverse as educational and public policy experts from the United Arab Emirates, the head of the World Muslim League, the Archbishop of Paris, and rising young Chinese leaders who have looked to *Torah u-Madda* as a source of inspiration and a model worthy of imitation.

In the aforementioned interview, Rabbi Lamm cited the medieval poet Judah HaLevi's use of a Platonic idea. "When you have a city, you have garbage collectors and philosophers, physicians and lawyers, secretaries and artists: all kinds of people with all kinds of roles," Rabbi Lamm noted. "The ruler must see to it that all these various aspects of the community or collectivity mesh together, and that no one aspect displaces any other. Each individual has to have his role in the economy of an entire community." The same is true of *Torah u-Madda*, argued Rabbi Lamm. "The ideal should be that you lead the orchestra like the prince who sees that everything meshes together and that everything finds its proper place."

In our era of social, political, and spiritual displacement, those who identify with Torah u-Madda must orchestrate the global community's emergence from discordance. By drawing from the well of our rich tradition and its millennia-long conversation with the surrounding culture, by being powered by a sense of princely purpose, we just might power God's increased presence in all lives.

The "Judeo-Christian" Tradition at Yeshiva

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I would like to begin this essay by acknowledging what an honor and privilege it is to participate in this symposium—both as an editor and a writer—with so many diverse and distinguished voices. I am not an expert in Jewish theology, but the following reflection stems from living and intensely studying the Jewish tradition, as well as my disciplinary background of early American history. It is both scholarly and deeply personal, and it is thus tentative. My hope is that these words will resonate with people who seek to advance the next generation of Torah u-Madda.

In the early twentieth century, a curious phrase emerged, one that has recently drawn considerable favor from the right-wing Jewish community: "Judeo-Christian." In *The Right Side of History* (2019), conservative political pundit Ben Shapiro lauds Judeo-Christian values as founding principles of America and Western civilization. Similarly, books and projects sponsored by YU's Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought—some of which include my own contributions—cast the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as a shared tradition of Judaism and Christianity.[1] These efforts seek to highlight the commonalities between the two faiths to promote religious ideals in the public sphere. In this essay, I consider how such notions might fit into a *Torah u-Madda* framework. I argue that this trend reflects a significant departure from previous applications of the term and carries serious halakhic implications for Orthodox Jews. Nevertheless, I see value in carefully pursuing these avenues, and I propose a path forward that I consider faithful to the Jewish tradition.

On its face, the term is perplexing: what exactly is "Judeo-Christian"? The term, although it correctly alludes to overlapping goals of Jews and Christians, belies deep differences between the two religious traditions: Judaism has a straightforwardly monotheistic and incorporeal divinity, believes in an Oral Law beyond the Written Law, and from a halakhic perspective, generally views Christianity as idolatry. Christianity, on the other hand, believes in a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; follows a New Testament that supersedes the Old; and rejects the rabbinic Oral Law. Thus, Christians do not believe in the Hebrew Bible but rather the Old Testament; even when the King James translation at times does not differ substantially from ArtScroll, the overarching lens and framework of interpretations remain alien to Judaism.

Nevertheless, the line between Jews and Christians was blurry in antiquity,[2] and various people throughout history have implausibly bridged these two faiths through conversion or syncretism. Scholars such as Mark Silk and K. Healan Gaston point out that the earliest usages of the term "Judeo-Christian" referred to such hybrid models of identity, or simply as an adjective to describe relations between practitioners of the two faiths. The meaning of a discrete Judeo-Christian "Western" tradition or shared value system emerged in the late nineteenth century, but it often conveyed a supersessionist agenda in which Christianity bested Judaism. In the 1920s, Jews and Catholics used the term to ally with Protestants against nativism. By World War II, as separation of church and state began to spread in the United States, the term reflected the perceived threat of secularism. During the Cold War, "Judeo-Christian" promoted the notion of exceptionalist American democracy versus the totalitarian and godless USSR. The contemporary iteration of the term with its focus on promoting shared religious values in the public sphere stems from the conservative revolution of the 80s. Thus, "Judeo-Christian" not only effaces substantive theological differences, but it is a relic of olden-day polemics.[3]

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[1] See, e.g., my review of *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land* (2019); see also the Bible 365 podcast series by Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik and Jennifer Caplan's review of *Esther in America* (2020).

[2] For a provocative yet insightful exploration of the contiguity of rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, see the editorial apparatuses and essays in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[3] Mark Silk, "Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1984), 65-85 (see also his follow-up piece from 2019 here); K. Healan

Issues of terminology aside, it is worth grappling with the larger implications of the Judeo-Christian project. Traditionally, *madda* (lit. "knowledge") referred to the natural sciences, such as biology, physics, and astronomy, which many *rishonim* (medieval Jewish authorities) valued. The *Torah U-Madda Journal*, however, implicitly reflected a broader understanding of the term that includes the humanities: literature, philosophy, history, and other disciplines of the liberal arts. More recently, as Moshe Kurtz will explore later in this symposium, pop culture has increasingly emerged as part of this framework as well. The institutional ethos of the Straus Center, and by extension YU, seems to now acknowledge yet another dimension to *madda*. Under this framework, a broader appreciation for Christianity as a source of Scriptural interpretation and a general repository of religious values adds intellectual breadth to the ideal Yeshiva student.

At first glance, the value of Christianity seems to hold a somewhat dubious place in the Jewish tradition. Maimonides prohibited reading idolatrous literature and explicitly deemed Christianity as idolatry.[4] Modern Orthodox Jews, however, tend to find solace in the more liberal views that have appeared throughout Jewish intellectual history. Menachem Meiri (a thirteenth-century talmudist) famously insisted that the Talmudic laws regarding interactions with idolaters do not apply to Christians.[5] Similarly, R. Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) expressed surprisingly positive sentiments toward Christianity.[6] Nevertheless, these examples seem to remain outlying minority perspectives; a cursory study of the *rishonim* on the opening discussion in the Talmudic tractate *Avodah Zarah* (lit. "foreign worship") yields a normative view of Christianity as legally equivalent to paganism. At most, Jewish tradition seems to sanction such study solely for polemical purposes, along the lines of *le-havin u-le-horot* (understanding in order to determine the law) and *da mah she-tashiv le-apikoros* (knowing how to respond to a heretic).[7] These sources might explain why Maimonides seems to have familiarized himself with idolatrous literature despite prohibiting others from reading such works.

The early volumes of the *Torah U-Madda Journal* contain a spirited debate regarding the scope of Maimonides's prohibition, which applies to our question at hand. R. Yehuda Parnes argued that *Torah u-Madda* "can only be viable if it imposes strict limits on freedom of inquiry in areas that may undermine [Maimonides's thirteen *ikarei emunah* (principles of faith)]." This claim prompted a response by Drs. Lawrence Kaplan and David Berger, who argued that Maimonides did not prohibit freedom of inquiry in theological matters for students who have undergone sufficient religious and intellectual preparation. However, they qualify that "what constitutes such preparation is, without doubt, a difficult and complex practical and educational problem." Similarly, my mentor R. Shalom Carmy related that R. Soloveitchik "had no inhibitions about recommending broad intellectual exposure" for undergraduate students and resisted suggestions to implement strict guidelines for navigating a liberal arts curriculum. In his closing response, R. Parnes retreated to his reading of Maimonides, insisting that regardless of R. Soloveitchik's position, the scope of the prohibition on inquiry at odds with the *ikarei emunah* remains a fundamentally halakhic question and must be adjudicated accordingly.[8]

Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); see also recent popular critiques here and here.

[4] *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah* 2:2, 9:4.

[5] See, e.g., *Beit Ha-Behirah*, *Avodah Zarah* 2a, s.v. *amar*; 20a, s.v. *kevar*.

[6] See, e.g., *Lehem Shamayim*, *Pirkei Avot* 4:11. Another curious example worth noting is R. Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik (Elias Soloweyczyk, 1805-1881), a Brisker scion who sought to synthesize Judaism with Christianity; see *The Bible, the Talmud, and the New Testament: Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik's Commentary to the Gospels*, ed. Shaul Magid, trans. Jordan Gayle Levy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[7] See, e.g., *Sanhedrin* 68a and *Pirkei Avot* 2:14.

[8] R. Carmy also cites R. Kook's *Mussar Avikha* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1985), 58 (par. 10), who maintained that *ahavat ha-beri'ot* "must extend to all mankind, despite all variations of opinions, religions and faiths, and despite all distinctions of race and climate… It is right to get to the

Yeshiva University, my alma mater, seems to implicitly follow the approach of R. Parnes's respondents. I first encountered the New Testament, oddly enough, at Yeshiva, in a course on medieval Jewish history. The professor assigned a reading from Matthew to help us understand the source of Christians' historical hatred toward Jews for their deicide. I dutifully asked and received permission from my *posek* (decisor) to read it. He justified doing so for educational purposes, to better understand Jewish history. That view resonates with me: as an aspiring academic, I strongly support the pursuit of knowledge and the unbridled encounter with diverse texts and sources, even when they may disturb or challenge us. Nevertheless, the permitting rationale remained limited in scope; would *Halakhah* sanction (read: does God want me) studying Christianity for the broader goal of understanding Western thought, or contributing to the academic field of church history? My brain says yes, but my heart also sympathizes with R. Parnes's instincts; the weight of Jewish tradition continues to make reading the New Testament a deeply unsettling and uncomfortable experience for me.

When applying to graduate school, I consciously avoided academic Jewish studies for fear of mixing the personal and the professional. To my mind at the time, it would have been extremely difficult to reconcile the irreverent approach of the academy with the faithful traditionalism of the yeshiva. Yet my background in Jewish studies drew me to the Puritans, who sought to create a biblical society in Old and New England. These research interests have consistently led me back into Jewish studies in various meaningful ways. It is telling that my dissertation focuses on Puritan political uses of the Old Testament, rather than the whole Christian Bible—partially because scholarship has neglected this phenomenon, but also because I could not stomach devoting years of my life to something that my ancestors deemed idolatrous. That same *posek* also advised that each time I read the New Testament for my research, I should say a *kapitl Tehillim* (chapter of Psalms) to counteract the *tum'ah* (impurity) of Christianity. The Jewish guilt, of course, never goes away.

Despite all the above, I nevertheless believe that Modern Orthodox Jews stand to benefit from studying Christianity. It is typical to portray the goal of *Torah u-Madda* as a "synthesis," an embrace of the contributions of secular knowledge. Yet it is more accurate to characterize Judaism's encounter with non-Jewish wisdom as an oscillation between "conflict and confluence," as R. Aharon Lichtenstein put it.[9] *Torah u-Madda* encompasses both an acceptance and rejection of the outside world.

There are two ways of reaching the truth: a positive search for wisdom, and a negative rejection of falsehood. Kabbalistic sources offer a helpful analogy: just as light cannot exist without darkness, nor can truth exist without falsehood.[10] Encountering external wisdom, whether it is theologically neutral or not, can add to our understanding of Torah either by offering new scenarios or ideas not considered in the classical Jewish literature, or sharpening the Torah's view by way of contrast. Christian interpretations of Scripture—such as the reception history of the Old Testament in early America—can generate new Jewish perspectives on the biblical text, while Christian theology can create novel insights for Jewish thinkers to ponder. Conversely, an encounter with the Trinity necessitates a clearer understanding of Jewish divinity. More broadly, though, Christianity constitutes part of the broad nexus of Western thought that we encapsulate within the term *madda*.

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bottom of the views of the different peoples and groups, to learn, as much as possible, their characters and qualities… The narrowness that causes one to see whatever is outside the border of the special nation, even outside the border of Israel, as ugly and defiled (*tamei*), is a terrible darkness that brings general destruction upon all the building of spiritual good." For another response to R. Parnes, see Marc Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003).

[9] Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?* ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale: Aronson, 1997), 217-92.

[10] See, e.g., *Zohar* 2:184a, 187a, 3:47b; R. Yosef Karo, *Maggid Meisharim, Parshat Lekh Lekha*.

Navigating the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity requires great caution. We must be careful to ensure the "dignity of difference" between our faiths. That does not mean that it should entail a wholly dogmatic approach that solely seeks to show students what Christianity has gotten wrong, nor should it involve a selective appropriation of elements of Christianity or early American history to support latter-day polemical agendas. "Judeo" and "Christian" should remain separate, albeit at times intersecting, adjectives. In today's culture wars, right-wing Jews and Christians now find themselves allies against governments increasingly hostile toward religion.11[11] Yet we must be willing to engage with the breadth of available scholarship, even the parts that make us uncomfortable. We must also be willing to learn from the Christian tradition while remaining wholly faithful to our own.

One Life to Live: Torah u-Madda Today

Sarah Rindner is a writer and educator. She taught literature at Lander College in New York City before moving to Israel and regularly writes on Jewish and literary topics. She was one of the founding editors of The Lehrhaus.

In Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story "Something is There," Rabbi Nechemia of Bechev, the ineffectual leader of a failing Hasidic court, becomes a heretic due to the theological problem of suffering in this world. He has high hopes for secular life, but they are dashed when he encounters even more misery on the streets of cosmopolitan Warsaw than he saw in Bechev. He realizes, moreover, that a neutral pursuit of truth may very well be impossible:

> It seemed that the world was full of faith. If you didn't believe in one God, you must believe in another. The Cossacks sacrificed themselves for the czar. Those who wanted to dethrone the czar sacrificed themselves for the revolution. But where were the real heretics, those who believed in nothing? He had not come to Warsaw to barter one faith for another.

Rabbi Nechemia in this story, and perhaps Singer himself, struggles with a question that may be familiar to Orthodox Jews who look to Western culture as a source of enlightenment. A broad worldview is important, arguably essential, for appreciating the fullness of the Jewish tradition and its message for the world. Yet when we place "*madda*" on a pedestal that is parallel with Torah, we risk reifying it, looking to it for answers that it cannot provide or glossing over its inadequacies in a shallow pursuit of synthesis.

Indeed, what Reb Nechemia realizes over the course of the story, through his experience in Warsaw and also extensive reading and study, is that "there are no heretics." Even the greatest secular scientists and philosophers possess their own belief systems and idols. It is doubtful that worshiping these phantoms leads to more happiness and greater goodness than serving the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Reb Nechemia thus questions the ability of science and the humanities to address the core questions that Judaism answers:

> "All books had one thing in common: they avoided the essential, spoke vaguely, and gave different names to the same object. They knew neither how grass grew nor what light was, how heredity worked, the stomach digested, the brain though, how weak nations grew strong, nor how the strong perished. Even though these scholars wrote thick books about the distant galaxies, they hadn't yet discovered what went on a mile beneath the crust of the earth."

While Singer was hardly a religious writer, the thrust of his story is a simple, spiritual one. While Reb Nechemia seeks to find something fascinating over the fence separating Torah Judaism from the rest of the world, he

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[11] For recent advances in Jewish-Christian relations, see From Confrontation to Covenantal Partnership, ed. Jehoschua Ahrens, Irving Greenberg, and Eugene Korn (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2021).

ultimately realizes there is no fence and all books are grasping at the same core mysteries, some more successfully than others. His interest in dialectics, in black and white, in good and evil, transitions into a kind of holistic realization that "something is there." Beyond this, he doesn't make any claims to know the truth.

Torah u-Madda, the tagline of Yeshiva University, describes the encounter between Jewish wisdom and Western culture. It is often used as a confident slogan of the centrist Orthodox world. For years I have taught English literature in Jewish environments and continue to be amazed by the ability of such texts to make some of our deepest Jewish values come to life. Now as a parent, I preface the bedtime *Shema* each night by reading to my children novels, stories, and folk legends from around the world. It is axiomatic for me that religious Judaism has nothing to fear from the best of these narratives, and that they give us helpful tools to make sense of our lives and experiences.

At the same time, I am also sympathetic to R. Nechemia and his discoveries about the limits of general culture, science, philosophy, and literature to produce the kind of goodness and meaning that is the natural by-product of the Jewish religious tradition. These past few years have been ones of great disappointment for me in the American Modern Orthodox community in which I was reared. I cannot identify the precise inflection point. Perhaps it was during the partisan frenzy of the Trump presidency, when mainstream Modern Orthodox voices allowed a media-driven party line to overshadow appreciation for basic policy gifts to our community, which were gratefully and unselfconsciously acknowledged in Haredi and Israeli circles. Perhaps it occured as I gained a greater personal familiarity with various Modern Orthodox educational institutions. These schools are wonderful in many ways, but they also exhibit deep confusion about their priorities and allegiances, whether it be to the Jewish souls of our children and financial security of their families, or to their success in an ever-competitive race to demonstrate elite superiority and admittance to universities that are obviously spiritually bankrupt. Within the past two years, we've seen four- and five-year-old students obligated to wear masks all day in Modern Orthodox schools, despite a dearth of conclusive data as to their efficacy, while students in Haredi schools did no such thing and seemed to suffer no consequences. This situation, though thankfully over in most educational settings, is to me still a source of embarrassment. Was the belief that these interventions protected our children well founded? Was its attendant policy based on thoughtful consideration of benefits versus costs? Or, by falling into line with surrounding cultural consensus, itself in flux and riddled with inconsistencies, did we go further than we should?

Our collective failure to establish limits to the encroachment of popular but potentially destructive trends from the surrounding society is a failure of *Torah u-Madda*—if not in theory, then in practice. I suppose the examples I shared are a laundry list of my own grievances. It is certainly possible to have respectably different takes on these and other issues. But overall, one might still agree that *Torah u-Madda* can often function as less of a lofty spiritual directive and more as a kind of cover. It enables otherwise traditional Jews to maintain an unreflective allegiance with trends within liberal society that, if left unchecked, will harm us or even be the end of our religious community.

Early on in his seminal work *Torah Umadda*, Rabbi Norman Lamm anticipates this very potential misunderstanding:

> Torah Umadda does not, of course, imply the acceptance of all that goes by the name of modernity. Who, after all, is willing to swallow whole the bait of a triumphant modernism that reeks of the burnt corpses of millions of victims of Nazi gas chambers? Torah Umadda… does not assume that all that is new is good or bad. It holds that the potential spiritual havoc wrought by confronting the insights and values of contemporary Western culture is far less pernicious to the truth of Torah than that caused by ignoring the whole of man's cultural

> heritage and thus not knowing how to deal with it at all.

For Rabbi Lamm, *Torah u-Madda* is a framework in which we engage with Western culture, even if only to reveal its limits. In Singer's story, Reb Nechemia's journey away from home turns into a journey toward home once he throws himself into the study of science and Western philosophy. This is not because these texts inspire him per se but rather because they teach him the limits of a godless framework in enabling access to the truth he desperately seeks.

As an undergraduate at Stern College, I wrote a piece called "A Consideration of Synthesis from a Student Point of View," where I grappled with Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's influential essay, "A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point View." In the original essay, Rav Lichtenstein offers a compelling framework for the ideal relationship between religious and secular studies. His essay is brilliant in both form and function—its eloquence is clearly the product of a profound engagement with Western literature, and its subject aims to make a case for the proper integration of such culture within a Torah framework. To be honest, in reflecting upon the exchange, it's hard to believe I had the nerve to take issue with such a magnificent essay.

At the time, my objection was more of a practical one. I wrote, "Students who find literature interesting enough to read and care about tend to find themselves to a certain extent 'lost' in the worlds they encounter, temporarily losing sight of the relationship between a novel they are immersed in to Torah values they've inherited." I wrote from a place of confusion. I identified with the reader St. Augustine criticizes as "weeping the death of Dido for love of Aeneas, but weeping not his own death for want of love to Thee [i.e., God]." My sense was that ideological defenses of *Torah u-Madda* are not adequate for the student who is still on a religious journey and is seeking to uncover truth for themself. My conclusion: "'intellectual schizophrenia' is alive and well here at Yeshiva University, and we would benefit to recognize it as such."

Yet in the process of articulating this confusion, perhaps I did not pay enough attention to the end of Rav Lichtenstein's essay. There he rejects the dualism of sacred and profane and states that "life is basically one…while *kodesh* and *hol* are neither identical nor coextensive, they are contiguous and continuous." Rav Lichtenstein concludes, "The Torah is neither world-accepting nor world-rejecting. It is world-redeeming."

This is the spirit of Rabbi Lamm's treatise as well. A great scholar of Hasidut, he opens with a quote by Rabbi Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin: "I heard it said that God wrote a book—the world; and He wrote a commentary on that book—the Torah." For both Rabbis Lamm and Lichtenstein, there is one world and we have one life to live. *Torah u-Madda* is not a philosophical truth about the dualistic nature of the universe but rather a practical means of furthering a holistic and unified Jewish religious end goal.

This, I believe, is what *Torah u-Madda* should look like today. Perhaps it does not even need to be identified as such with a tagline. Rather, it is simply demonstrated by living a full and broad Jewish life, one in which we seek truth wherever we can find it and feel no insecurity rejecting commonly held societal beliefs when they conflict with the eternal values of Judaism as expressed in the Torah and interpreted by religious communities throughout history. Of course, this is easier said than done. As with Reb Nechemia of Bechev, who can't understand or appreciate his Jewish life until he traverses through the dark underbelly of Warsaw, this vision of *Torah u-Madda* does not work when delivered in a prescriptive, top-down fashion. A little exploration, a little agitation, a little confusion—these are necessary steps to sort through the complicated bounty of Western culture and discover how our Torah heritage can uplift it. In the spirit of *Torah u-Madda*, perhaps the words of the great and problematic poet T.S. Eliot may be invoked here:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

Madda or Hokhmah? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on the Integration of Torah and General Wisdom

Erica Brown is the Vice Provost for Values and Leadership at Yeshiva University and the founding director of its Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks/Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks first met Rabbi Norman Lamm when the former was an undergraduate. R. Sacks described himself at the time as "religiously perplexed" and in need of a guide.[1] The two spoke about the conundrum of the two separate worldviews presented by *Torah u-Madda* and the disciplines that enliven each, but R. Sacks left without clarity on the relationship between them. In his lengthy review of R. Lamm's book on the subject several decades later, R. Sacks traveled through the six models of *Torah u-Madda* as they were presented in the book and some of the problems associated with each. He acknowledged R. Lamm's contribution to the discussion but stated that a defining question remained: where is the case for the Torah? When it comes to general studies, knowledge, and culture, these the "vast majority of today's Jews already have in superabundance. What they do not have is Torah."[2] This, he writes, requires "persuasive advocacy." And then R. Sacks issued a challenge to R. Lamm, one that R. Lamm never took R. Sacks up on: the writing of a book to make the case for Torah in a world saturated with values and behaviors that challenge the primacy of Torah at every turn.[3]

One might argue that in throwing down the gauntlet, R. Sacks was actually confirming the work that he himself sought to accomplish in his public lectures both outside the confines of the Jewish community and within it. He used his position and the platform of the Chief Rabbi to promote this kind of constant integration, and, of course, it is evident on virtually every page of his many books and in his *sedrah* commentaries. R. Sacks often began his talks, essays, and book chapters with the latest of worldly wisdom—sociological trends, demographic reports, newspaper headlines—or a broad sweep of history or philosophy only then to explain how, in fact, the Torah actually addressed these very same issues and provided a solution or alternate perspective. He was doing what he challenged R. Lamm to do, which arguably R. Lamm did do—not in book form, but in the day-to-day work of running Yeshiva University, in the giving of his sermons, and in selecting the topics he addressed in his writings.

R. Sacks's perspective on *Torah u-Madda* went far beyond a defense of general studies. This seemed, in ways, perhaps too small an objective or too obvious to defend, given his own educational background and commitments. Instead, he tried to present an integrated worldview not about what to study, but about how to live an integrated life, especially given modernity's confrontation with tradition. He was the great defender of the faith and the faithful, according them not only a place of honor and dignity, but, in some measure, a position of moral advantage. They already had, within their tradition, the keys to an enviable life of meaning and purpose. That which to others may look and sound old-fashioned—like Sabbath observance, traditional family structures, prayer, a life of covenant and community—were, to him, remarkable contributions to Western civilization that spoke freshly to contemporary life's trials and torments. If only everyone else knew more about and appreciated Judaism's great contributions, there may be a lessening of the terrible loneliness and surrounding ennui of a society ethically adrift.

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[1] Jonathan Sacks, "Torah Umadda: The Unwritten Chapter," reprinted in Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda* (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2010), 204. The original review appeared in Jews' College journal of Jewish Studies, *L'eylah* 30 (Sept. 1990): 10-15.

[2] Ibid., 218.

[3] I do not believe this challenge was a rhetorical device to make his point. Rabbi Sacks writes explicitly of Rabbi Lamm that "no one could write it better" (ibid., 218).

R. Sacks described this conversation across the ages in his review of R. Lamm's book, where he described *Torah u-Madda* not so much as an educational philosophy as an intellectual and spiritual edifying activity of give-and-take:

> *Torah Umadda* is a process rather than an ideology. It is the ongoing dialogue in which Jews reflect on the meeting between Torah, experienced as timeless command, and the time- and place-specific culture in which they have been set. That meeting has usually enriched both sides. Jews have taken and given in return.[4]

Wherever Jews have existed, they have participated in the dialogue that culture has presented, contributed to its enrichment, and gained in the process. They must do so, however, by first being well versed in their own tradition and proud of it. Only then will they gain the respect of others: "I discovered that non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. Non-Jews are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism."[5]

Just as R. Sacks visited R. Lamm, he also approached R. Soloveitchik to ponder the very same issues and to understand the Rav's rich use of philosophy:

> Rabbi Soloveitchik challenged me to think. At that time I was studying philosophy, and soon discovered that he was a master in the field. His approach to Jewish philosophy was unlike any I had encountered before. Already in that first meeting he outlined for me the method he had made his own. Jewish philosophy, he said, had to emerge from Halakhah, Jewish law. Jewish thought and Jewish practice were not two different things but the same thing seen from different perspectives. Halakhah was a way of living a way of thinking about the world—taking abstract ideas and making them real in everyday life.
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> These were immensely inspiring figures, but what struck me most about them was the depth of their commitment to real engagement with the world. Rabbi Soloveitchik had no fears about the intellectual challenges posed by modern thought. He had studied it widely and deeply and felt no ultimate conflict between the worlds of the yeshiva and the university. The very institution in which he taught—Yeshiva University—defined itself simultaneously as both.[6]

His trip to Yeshiva University had certainly inspired him, but, with the exception of his review of R. Lamm's work,

[4] Sacks, "The Unwritten Chapter," 216.

[5] Jonathan Sacks, *A Judaism Engaged with the World* (self pub., 2013), 23.

[6] Ibid., 11. I am grateful to both R. Johnny Solomon and Dan Sacker for directing me to this digital monograph that R. Sacks penned as he was completing his years as the Chief Rabbi. At the end of the publication, he wrote that he was stepping down after 22 years of service "feeling younger and more energized" than when he started (28). It is interesting to note that while this may be R. Sacks's most compelling defense of Judaism's engagement with the world, he used neither "*Torah u-Madda*" nor "Torah and *hokhmah*" anywhere in the essay, despite using and translating other Hebrew words. Perhaps he felt that these phrases actually limited the vision he was trying to put forth or sounded too particularistic for his audience.

R. Sacks clearly preferred the expression "Torah and *Hokhmah*"[7]—Judaism and wisdom—rather than *Torah u-Madda*.[8] Where "*madda*" implies the realm of science, or more generally, secular disciplines, "*hokhmah*" encompasses all forms of wisdom that can benefit from the Torah's enduring relevance. In discrete places, R. Sacks substantiates this approach without ever presenting a full-throated defense. That he deemed this integration essential is apparent in the R. Lamm review, where he asks the question simply, "What is, or should be, the relationship between Judaism and secular culture?" and then deems it "*The* question of Jewish modernity [italics his]."[9] He also opined on this in his book *Future Tense*, a book he wrote because he feared that Judaism was in danger of losing its place as a critical voice and force to shape humankind. On some level, this may have been the book he wished R. Lamm had written.

In *Future Tense*, R. Sacks describes the difference between Torah and *hokhmah* and the importance of consilience:

> *Chokhmah* is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. *Chokhmah* is the shared heritage of mankind; Torah is the particular heritage of the Jewish people. *Chokhmah* is the world of 'is,' of fact; Torah is the world of 'ought,' of command. *Chokhmah* is where we encounter God through creation; Torah is how we hear God through revelation. The two are not equal in their significance to Jews—Torah is holy in a way *chokhmah* cannot be—yet both are significant, for if we are to apply Torah to the world, we must understand the world to which it applies. Because the God of creation is also the God of revelation, there is ultimate harmony between them, even though, given the imperfections in our understanding of both, it may not be evident at any given moment. There must, I believe, be an ongoing conversation between them, for otherwise Torah will remain a closed system with no grip, no purchase, no influence, on the world outside its walls.[10]

[7] One of the distinct advantages of the term *madda* is its ease of pronunciation and spelling, especially for a non-Hebrew speaker and reader. *Hokhmah* can be written in a variety of ways; the difference in spellings used in the citations in this essay reflect the original citations and were kept for the sake of accuracy. R. Sacks himself spells *hokhmah* (or *chokhmah*) differently in different places. When not in a direct quote, the spelling follows the Lehrhaus style guide.

[8] In correspondence (January 18, 2020), R. Johnny Solomon posits that R. Sacks preferred the term *hokhmah* because it is biblical "and thus its use conveyed greater authenticity." Solomon also suggests that R. Sacks used *hokhmah* because *madda* is often used as a synonym for general studies, making it, as I have contended in this essay, too limiting. Solomon notes that in R. Sacks's book, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, it would be an anachronism to equate *hokhmah* with secular knowledge because, as R. Sacks wrote, "The concept of secular knowledge hardly existed before Sir Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). *Chokhmah* has many meanings in classical Hebrew, but in its primary sense I define it as the knowledge of the natural universe as the creation of God, and of the human being as the image of God" (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2003), 34.

[9] Sacks, "Torah Umadda: The Unwritten Chapter," 203.

[10] Jonathan Sacks, *The Chief Rabbi's Haggadah* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 6-7. In *Future Tense*, R. Sacks uses almost identical language: "*Chokhmah* is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. *Chokhmah* is the universal heritage of humankind; Torah is the specific heritage of Israel. *Chokhmah* is what we attain by being in the image of God; Torah is what guides Jews as the people of God. *Chokhmah* is acquired by seeing and reasoning; Torah is received by listening and responding. *Chokhmah* tells us what is; Torah tells us what ought to be. *Chokhmah* is about facts; Torah is about commands. *Chokhmah* yields descriptive,

Beneath the rhetorical flourish lie the stark realities that these worlds, indeed mindsets, cannot always fit together comfortably. The Torah is inherited, particularistic, and aspirational. It is holy. *Hokhmah*, in contrast, must be explored and discovered rather than assumed. It is universalistic and descriptive. In this, R. Sacks shares the gifts of *hokhmah* and also its perceived limitations.[11] The two domains must remain in constant dialogue, if only—as R. Sacks mentions here—so that Torah can have the purchase it deserves. Leave it out of the conversation, and it can neither inform nor influence.

R. Sacks was also clearly concerned that those who represent the Torah were becoming increasingly inward and narrow, and that this constriction may betray, in part, the Torah's very essence and purpose in generating light and wisdom for the world:

> A Judaism divorced from society will be a Judaism unable to influence society. It will live and thrive and flourish behind high walls within its own defensive space, but it will not speak to those who wrestle with the very realities—poverty, disease, injustice, inequality and other assaults on human dignity—to which Torah was directed in the first place.[12]

This place that Torah is to occupy comes from the Torah itself, in a verse used by many Jewish thinkers, including Maimonides, to justify this endeavor: "Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, 'Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people'" (Deuteronomy 4:6). Rashi, *ad loc,* comments, "Through this (wisdom) you will be deemed wise and understanding people in the eyes of the nations." Rashi then asks and answers his own question: "What wisdom and understanding is there in the Torah that is in the eyes of the nations? You must say: This is the calculation of astronomical seasons and the movement of constellations, as the calculation of experts is witnessed by all."[13] If we are to be a wise and discerning nation, it will be because we have a shared language with all of humanity, a language in the medieval world that Maimonides occupied, of physics and metaphysics.[14]

This desideratum is hardly achievable if we are not sufficiently educated in intellectual disciplines to share this language with the broader community. To this, R. Sacks wrote in *Future Tense*: "If we are to apply Torah to the world, we must understand the world. We need a new

scientific laws; Torah yields prescriptive, behavioural laws. *Chokhmah* is about creation; Torah is about revelation" (214). Repetition of a sentiment he expresses elsewhere seems to be a reasonable indicator of how strongly he held a particular view and what the view was.

[11] R. Dr. Rafi Zarum pointed out in correspondence (January 20, 2022) that when R. Sacks referred to *Torah u-Madda* as a process rather than an ideology, R. Sacks may have been "referring to the changing face of *madda*, and thus the relationship to Torah, in different historical periods and contexts." Zarum also notes that *Torah u-Madda* may evolve for us as a concept and life framework as we go through different psychological stages. The binary way in which *Torah u-Madda* is so often assumed and discussed is almost too simplistic: "The ideal perspective is to have a unified view, which comes in the act of living a life." In considering these ideas, Zarum directs readers to James Fowler's *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper One, 1995).

[12] Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 2012), 227.

[13] Rashi on *Shabbat* 75a.

[14] Much has been written on this. For a helpful framework, see Dov Schwartz, "The Passion for Metaphysics in Maimonides' Thought" [Hebrew], *Daʿat* 81 (2016): 162–206; see also Joel L. Kraemer, "Maimonides on Aristotle and Scientific Method," in *Moses Maimonides and His Time*, ed. Eric L. Ormsby (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 53–88.

generation of Jews committed to the dialogue between sacred and secular if Judaism is to engage with the world and its challenges."[15] Where in his review of *Torah Umadda* he questioned if Jews knew enough about Torah, in *Future Tense*, his concern is that the Jews of his day were not sufficiently tutored in general studies to participate in this ongoing dialogue, let alone contribute to it.

This gentle nudge to enjoy the process of discovery without finding one's faith commitments threatened or compromised was not, in any way, to place Torah and *madda* on the same footing. Perhaps anticipating criticism or concern, R. Sacks advanced his position in the Lamm review:

> Torah and *madda* are not equal partners… If we understand Judaism, we are led to explore the world we are called on to change. But if we understand the world, we are not led by that fact alone to explore Torah. The defence of Torah is intrinsically more difficult than the defence of *madda*.[16]

Here, R. Sacks believed that *madda* has the capacity to swallow the interests and energies of its proponents, who might then never turn to the Torah for guidance. This is why R. Sacks believed that advocating a life of Torah rather than merely assuming its values was one of the chief responsibilities of Jewish leaders.

Being well-educated in Torah and general studies, having the capacity to balance one's time and one's priorities, and representing Judaism well to the world—this is an arduous challenge. This difficulty was brought to bear at R. Sacks's commencement address to Yeshiva University in 1997, where he singled out Yeshiva University graduates to take up the mantle of the Torah's defense and the heady responsibility of integration:

> I believe today the Jewish people [are] suffering from a lesion which has broken the connection between the left and right hemispheres of the Jewish people. And there is only one group of people who can help to heal that fracture, and that is you—the graduates of Yeshiva University—because you, almost alone in today's Jewish world, have learned to combine Torah and *chochma* ['wisdom'], to integrate Yeshiva and University.[17]

This address was, in essence, a continuation of the mandate he gave to R. Lamm.[18] But R. Sacks did not

[15] Sacks, *Future Tense*, 211.

[16] Sacks, "The Unwritten Chapter," 218.

[17] This was the 66th commencement address at Yeshiva University. The full address is available here.

[18] I thank R. Johnny Solomon for reminding me of an important passage on *Torah u-Madda* in Rabbi Sacks's *Traditional Alternatives* (printed in North America under the title *Arguments for the Sake of Heaven*): "Speaking at its fiftieth anniversary, he [R. Norman Lamm] recalled that as a student he had complained to the then President, 'Why don't you tell me how to combine the two worlds?' He was told, 'Our job is to give you the materials, your job is to let them interact within you.' Rabbi Lamm added: 'I disagreed then. But I agree now.' The synthesis, in other words, could not be made programmatic. It was personal. It did not take place in the curriculum. It took place in the mind of the student." Solomon wisely observes that when R. Sacks was young, he thought Rabbi Lamm should write a book to explain how to do this work of synthesis but that as he aged, he understood that no such book could be written and that there is something perhaps disingenuous in the attempt, as Solomon writes in personal correspondence with the author: "Ultimately, rather than writing a book about 'how' to achieve this, Rabbi Sacks became the living '*Sefer Torah V'Chokhmah*' for our generation, and in doing so, modelled to us that—though admittedly challenging—this is the ideal way

reference this integration as *Torah u-Madda*, even in the setting of a Yeshiva University event! He still called it *hokhmah*. This persistent use of terminology may be his simple and ultimate reframing of *Torah u-Madda* as a much more expansive enterprise encompassing all of life, not merely its cerebral aspects. For this synthesis to work, it has to be far more engaging than an intellectual approach; instead, it must embrace and inform all of life's decisions and activities. R. Sacks's appeal to R. Lamm and to Yeshiva University graduates to join him in the promotion of Torah values as a well-educated exemplar of this synthesis may have also been a thinly disguised request for more company.

R. Sacks also hoped that his own broad congregation in the United Kingdom and across the Commonwealth would also join him in this campaign as evident by the charge he set forth in his last formal publication as the Chief Rabbi. There he offers a call and a mandate to operationalize synthesis by being both proud and unapologetic as Jews and, from this noble perch, engage with the world and make Judaism profoundly relevant as a solution to a host of contemporary problems. I cite the three paragraphs together because they seem to represent a fulcrum of his thinking on this issue:

> The challenge of our time is to go out to Jews with a Judaism that relates to the world—their world—with intellectual integrity, ethical passion and spiritual power, a Judaism neither intimidated by the world nor dismissive of it, a Judaism fully expressive of the broad horizons and high ideals of our heritage. There is no contradiction, not even a conflict, between contributing to humanity and affirming our distinctive identity. *To the contrary: by being what only we are, we contribute to the world what only we can give [italics his].*
>
> We have much to teach the world—and the world has much to teach us. It is essential that we do so with generosity and humility. I have called Judaism the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind. Our ability to survive some of the worst tragedies any people has known without losing our faith in life itself; to suffer and yet rebuild; to lose and yet recreate; to honour the past without being held captive by the past—all of which are embodied today in the State of Israel, living symbol of the power of hope—are vitally important not just to ourselves but to the world.
>
> *In the twenty-first century, Jews will need the world, and the world will need the Jews* [italics his]. We will not win the respect of the world if we ourselves do not respect the world: if we look down on non-Jews and on Jews less religious than ourselves. Nor will we win the respect of the world if we do not respect ourselves and our own distinctive identity. Now more than ever the time has come for us to engage with the world as Jews, and we will find that our own world of mind and spirit will be enlarged.[19]

Whether or not he succeeded in convincing others of the merits of a fully integrated life, R. Sacks lived and modeled one himself. That, in every sense, is more worthy of

to live one's life as a Jew." I am grateful to him, to Dan Sacker, R. Dr. Stu Halpern, and R. Dr. Rafi Zarum for their helpful comments on this essay.

[19] Sacks, *A Judaism Engaged with the World*, 24-25.

emulation than whatever he wrote to convince us. And we, the inheritors of his phenomenally rich legacy, will remain forever grateful.

Serpentine Psychology and Booming Babel

Shalom Carmy teaches philosophy and Jewish studies at Yeshiva University, and he is Editor Emeritus of Tradition.

Editors' note: we are honored to include in our symposium the voice of Shalom Carmy, a leading thinker in Modern Orthodoxy whose career has long embodied the values of Torah u-Madda. *This essay updates R. Lichtenstein's famous serpentine metaphor for general studies. The need for* Torah u-Madda *is more urgent than ever before, but the challenge is different today; Babel-like confusion, rather than heresy, now pervades modern life.*

> There is an *Apikoros* within, a serpent potentially lurking within the finest of Edens, and we must be ready to reply to *his* proffer of the bittersweet apple. But we must first read a treatise on serpentine psychology.
>
> (R. Aharon Lichtenstein)[1]

> Art, nowadays, must be the mouthpiece of misery, for misery is the keynote of modern life.
>
> (George Gissing)[2]

I

Let me end the suspense right away. I hold now what I have held for the past 50 years about the importance of liberal arts study.[3] Below I will comment on aspects of the subject that I consider especially pertinent, and why the need is more acute right now.

Let me clear away a few of the subjects I will not discuss here. One is the widespread worry that once a person learns anything about what people outside our Orthodox cocoons think or know, they will be swept away just like Native Americans centuries ago succumbed when introduced to imported European diseases. There is some truth to this fear: the social atmosphere in the Orthodox community combined with the inadequacies of its educational machinery do provide sufficient explanation for its graduates' limited ability to withstand pressure. More importantly, unless we are exceptionally insulated against "outside" ideas, the heretical enemy is already within the gates. Those who cannot think critically and broadly, especially those who believe they have no need to do so, are usually in thrall to popular ideas they do not understand and may have difficulty identifying. I submit that we need general literacy and critical thinking now even more than we did half a century ago. This urgency should intensify concern about the present crisis of general education.

Nor will I discuss here the value of general education for specific "professional" tasks. Yes, those who study *Zeraim* ought to know about botany and agricultural technology; doctors and those who provide them with halakhic guidance should know biology; people in the business world should understand something of economics. Likewise, those not involved in these fields have less need for familiarity, and even those who are engaged in them may respectably rely on the judgment of experts as opposed to working out everything on their own.

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[1] Aharon Lichtenstein, "A Consideration of General Studies from a Torah Point of View," in *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning, Volume 1* (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing, 2003), 89-103 (quotation p. 93). An earlier version of the essay appeared under a different title in *The Commentator*, April 27, 1961 (Volume 26 Issue 10).

[2] George Gissing, *The Unclassed* (New York: R.F. Fenno, 1896), 165.

[3] Among my recent writings, see "As We Are Now Is Not the Only Way to Be: On the Place of the Humanities in Contemporary Religious Culture," *Tradition* 45:2 (Summer 2012); also in *Developing a Jewish Perspective on Culture*, ed. Yehuda Sarna (Hoboken: 2013). Expanded version of one part of this paper appeared in *First Things*, November 2011 as "On Literature and the Life of Torah." See also "The Proper Business of Mankind," *First Things* (November 2018).

Another widespread objection I have heard is that any time devoted to general education is stolen from Torah. Regarding this, I defer to the judgment of my revered teachers. To begin with, serious religious individuals who benefit from such studies will reap the dividends of their application by achieving greater clarity and insight in their Torah study, self-knowledge, and understanding of their fellow human beings. As R. Aharon Lichtenstein liked to say, the fact that bread is essential for life, while jam is not, does not imply that, when given the choice between more bread and a bit of jam, we must always opt for the bread. Additionally, as *maran* ha-Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, people who really think they won't benefit from the supposed assistance or are afraid of its potential harm are free to do without it. And, to immediately echo R. Lichtenstein once more, if our communal attainments in Torah study fall short, it is not because our students are dedicating their free time to Plato and Wittgenstein.

Elsewhere I have categorized the possible benefits to be gained from a variety of such pursuits.[4] Among them are knowing truth about the world, truth that contributes to our knowledge of the Creator, albeit at a lower level than the truth of the Torah God gave us. Among these benefits also are the potential spiritual elevation that results from sanctification of the mundane, an attitude much favored by R. Lamm, drawing on hasidic sources.[5]

Most urgent, however, in my opinion, is the need for self-knowledge and human understanding. R. Lichtenstein has written of "the serpent potentially lurking within the finest of Edens."[6] The finest of Edens includes our Orthodox institutions and the individuals and groups that comprise them. These are also not exempt from corruption, both of their own doing and through the infiltration of ideas uncritically adopted from the surrounding cultures. Studying history teaches that prevalent ways of living in our society are not the only ones possible; philosophy shows us that the beliefs and attitudes influential among intellectuals, assumed by the media, and parroted in our shuls and schools, are not the only ones available; literature helps us develop a way of speaking and imagining outside the language dominant in our culture.

The profound quarrel between the beliefs and obligations of Orthodoxy and what is acceptable and even normative in the culture that surrounds us has grown; the conflict has become harsher in the sixty years since R. Lichtenstein warned against the *Apikoros* in Eden. Therefore, the need for critical thinking and broad imagination is more urgent. The problem, however, is more than the widening gap dividing God-fearing Jews and the dominant culture. It may be easier for me to explain by looking at a late Victorian English novel.

II

George Gissing was a significant writer of his time, though not ranked among the giants. Gissing is known as a voice for the struggling lower classes, and *The Odd Women* (1893) plays a role in women's studies. The book depicts three sisters, whose middle-class physician-father was expected to provide for them before his sudden death left them dependent on a small annuity supplemented by their own wages as unskilled workers. One ekes out a marginal living in teaching; another is paid to keep wealthier

[4] R. Lichtenstein's primary articles on the subject are the *Commentator* article noted above and its iteration in *Leaves of Faith*; "*Tovah Hokhmah Im Nahalah*": On Torah and Wisdom," in *Mamlekhet Kohanim Ve-Goy Kadosh* (Jerusalem: 1989), 25-43; and, most extensively, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?* ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1997), 217-92. For discussion of these works, plus R. Lichtenstein's *Henry More: the Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist* and some unpublished discourse, see my "Music of the Left Hand: Personal Notes on the Place of Liberal Arts Education in the Teachings of R. Aharon Lichtenstein," *Tradition* 47:4 (Winter 2014): 223-239, which is part of the biographical essay on which I collaborated with Shlomo Zuckier in *Torah and Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits of Orthodoxy and Modernity*, eds. Meir Y. Soloveichik, Stuart W. Halpern, Shlomo Zuckier (New York: 2016).

[5] See his *Torah Umadda*.

[6] Lichtenstein, "Consideration of General Studies," 93.

women company, both subsisting with neither success nor enjoyment. The third works in a shop; her looks attract a much older husband, with adequate means, but a man too set in his ways not to be a disaster. If they were brought up to read serious books, they are too worn down by the struggle for existence to keep it up. An intersecting plot involves two well-off women who offer salvation to the "odd women" in straitened circumstances, who are unlikely to find themselves a suitable mate, by teaching them how to type.

From one perspective the situation described and debated in this book is distant from us. We expect women to be gainfully employed before marriage and most married women continue to earn, preferably doing something both of use to others and fulfilling, or at least agreeable, to them. Our society would heartily agree with one of Gissing's women who says, "There should be no such thing as a class of females vulgarized by the necessity of finding daily amusement," and with her male cousin's friendly amendment: "nor of males either."[7]

For all the anxiety about money and material possessions that plagues our upper middle-class milieu, we can barely conceive the endless penny-pinching dreariness that characterizes Gissing's lower middle-class women, women for whom the comfort provided by a glass of gin, for example, is purchased at the cost of food.

At the ideological level, the feminist voices in the book are uncertain as to whether marriage ought to be the norm for those women able to achieve married life with dignity. In the Orthodox community, by contrast, marriage remains the ideal. At the same time, the issues raised by Gissing's novel continue to reverberate here and now. We support women working, yet we are unhappy about women putting the job ahead of the home. We do not possess a comfortable and feasible formula that silences our uneasiness. We preach marriage even as we strain to justify the sacrifices that are often seen as a weight on modern family domesticity. And we cannot repress our awareness of widespread misery; we know that most of our fellow human beings live in quiet desperation and physical want.

Two points to keep in mind: first, the temptation to "outsource" these questions, to kick them upstairs to some rabbinic authority who will supply the "correct" answers and enable us to keep going without thinking about them. If all that matters is external behavior this might work. However, we cannot separate our responses to these questions about women's roles, family structure, social ills, and the like from our inner world of reflection and feeling. Our inner life, alas, cannot be outsourced.

Secondly, and related to the previous point, the questions such literature raises do not lend themselves to unambiguous cut-and-dried answers. It is not as if we can recognize one side of the discussion as evil and the other as good, and then simply fortify our "good instinct" against the evil one. When we consider *The Odd Women*, and other works of literature, philosophy, or history, we are confronted by insights from a different era and a different background that do not yield a straightforward final resolution. God gave us two eyes, enabling us to combine perspectives, and thus to see the world in greater depth. We study the liberal arts, in part, to see with that second eye, to free ourselves from the prison of one-dimensional thinking. If we have no permanent "solutions" to our questions about the role of women, the place of the family, or poverty, it is not because we have failed to press the right button or to summon the optimal expert; it is because these are questions that demand ongoing attention rather than difficulties to be disposed of.

When we encounter R. Lichtenstein's evil enemy within, the *Apikoros* in Eden, the treatise of serpentine psychology ought to mobilize intellectual and psychological resources against evil. That *Apikoros* is still very much with us, yet today confusion more than conflict presides over the uncertain, fearful battlefield of modern life. Every metropolis, one might say, is darkened by the shadow of its own Tower of Babel, and the task of thinking religious individuals is not only to resist its temptations but no less, perhaps even more so, to overcome the cacophony of its "ignorant armies."

[7] George Gissing, The Odd Women (New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 131.

III

Supporters of a genuine general education conjoined with the primacy of Torah have heard the objection that theirs is a noble but unrealistic program, and even more horrible, that it is elitist. Too many lack the intellectual capaciousness and commitment to do the work, and not many develop the sensitivity required to translate nominal educational breadth into spiritual depth.

Is this indeed a damning criticism of the "Torah u-Madda" program? Perhaps, its defenders will parry, little is lost by the masses who go through the motions of getting an education that is largely wasted on them. Only this morning I successfully used my refrigerator, turned on the stove, and operated the microwave without understanding the technology involved. Physicians may prefer active patients who are curious and intelligent about their condition, yet familiarity with biochemistry and physiology is not a prerequisite for receiving advanced cancer treatment. Insofar, then, as cultural literacy and critical acumen are viewed as a particular kind of intellectual competence or technical skill, the experts must have them; the rest of us do not.

One may therefore accuse me of overdramatizing. The issues mentioned earlier in connection with Gissing's novel may be bothersome and unresolved, but most people, including *benei* and *benot Torah,* manage to muddle through: they do what everyone else does and think what everyone else thinks. It is neither feasible nor desirable for them to undertake the time-consuming drudgery of convening and presiding over their private think tanks. We compartmentalize our lives, behaving like other Orthodox Jews when advisable or necessary, otherwise "dimming the lights" and avoiding questions that require hard and sometimes distressing thought. "Outsourcing" may be a mediocre, shallow way of living, but it is a *modus vivendi* for the multitudes. From their perspective, nothing is seriously wrong with conformism that cannot be remedied by more conformism.

Indeed, this is nothing new, for the greatest minds have always handled mixed audiences, seeking to address the best while attempting to offer something true and edifying to the general. With respect to the cultivation of inwardness and self-examination, let us keep R. Soloveitchik's words in mind: "Knowledge in general and self-knowledge in particular are gained not only from discovering logical answers but also from formulating logical, even though unanswerable, questions."[8] When we contemplate living role models like Rambam and the Rav, one question we sometimes ask ourselves is what we can learn from how they dealt with this aspect of their teaching vocation. For their part, responsible rabbis, teachers, and parents carefully ponder the capacities and motivations of those whom they would influence. And in our predicament, we may be forced to make peace with our community's limitations.

Why is that not quite good enough for us? If the primary goal of liberal arts education is specialized expertise or amassing a storehouse of information, compartmentalization and conformity might be adequate. Education would be a bonus conferred on the especially gifted or a luxury item for the cultured classes. The problem, however, if you follow the account I have just given, is that daily spiritual and moral activity requires all of us to draw upon the self-knowledge, human understanding, and critical facility gained through education. If the challenges we face, as religious individuals, are increasing, then engaging those outside the "magic circle" becomes more necessary but also more daunting.

Am I exaggerating the need? In recent years, there is more, not less, polarization in our society and community regarding a plethora of public issues: crime, social and economic inequality, the nature and value of democracy, and so forth. What would you have said only a few years ago about an America, and conspicuously the Orthodox inhabitants thereof, bitterly divided over the observance of such health precautions as vaccination and public masking?

[8] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (1965; Doubleday ed., 2006), 8.

Can these conflicts, and so many others like them be settled from the top down, by marshaling the best halakhic decision-making? Outward behavior can be controlled, to a limited degree. But whether we admit it or not, we know in our hearts that such conflicts are inextricably intertwined with a host of personal attitudes, informational, philosophical, and spiritual. To anyone familiar with history, philosophy, or literature the existence and stubborn persistence of the conflicts should not be surprising. We know that people will disagree about anything worth disagreeing about for all sorts of logical, ideological, and self-interested reasons. This is but one reason that trying to examine, understand, and appreciate critically how we and others contend with such complexities cannot be outsourced or overcome through authoritative pronouncements alone; we, as thinking individuals, must participate in the reflective work. Doing so may help create consensus or set the stage for compromise, though we must beware the tendency of those who seek shelter in homogeneous intellectual environments to misread the impediments to success. Precisely because modern people are so narrow, they underestimate the depth of disagreement and the incommensurability of diverse ways of thinking. Understanding why we differ from others, and why they differ from us may, at the very least, help raise the level of civility among the combatants.

Instead, we seem condemned to the steady deterioration of intellectual articulateness, along with the accelerating ideological Balkanization of society. Compartmentalization kept conflicts from becoming intolerable by masking the reality of contradictions among groups and within individuals. As the contradictions multiply and deepen, obliviousness to them is harder to feign. Conflicts in one area spill over into others, regardless of whether this expansion is justified logically or ideologically. What one high school principal is said to have told his teachers, that COVID would pass, but the ill-will in the community that COVID brought out, would not disappear so quickly, is a terrifying warning.

Intellectual breadth and self-discipline are now more crucial for everyone. But the exigency of our situation, which makes the need greater, also makes it infinitely harder to attain. Once upon a time the "Torah u-Madda" slogan advertised harmony and tolerance among Jews: compartmentalization helped one ignore or minimize fundamental quarrels. As reality breaks in, one fears that serious liberal arts education in our contemporary Babel may make communication more difficult, as people belonging to different educational subgroups no longer understand one another's tongue.

IV

Our subject until now has been the potential value and challenges of serious liberal arts study. Let us now look at another related element. The effect of breadth, articulateness, cohesive reasoning, and the like are not confined to cultural analysis, social dialogue, and self-examination. Internalized educational virtues influence our study of Torah and Judaism as well, whether we are speaking of Gemara, Tanakh, or Jewish thought or history. We all carry with us a tacit or explicit standard of what counts as a good question, well-formulated and perspicuous, and what is a far-fetched substitute for serious learning; correspondingly, we have our models of what constitutes a satisfactory answer. To be sure, many *talmidei hakhamim* without formal education or wide and deep reading explain themselves with exemplary lucidity, penetrating insight, and disciplined creativity; similarly, the acquisition of diplomas cannot disguise the intellectual mediocrity of others. Nonetheless, especially at the lower and middle levels, the discipline and perspective that ought to come with general education are somewhat correlated to our intellectual expectations and horizons in Torah as well.

Consider a disturbing but not unrepresentative example: a sincere, intelligent young man, not blessed with stellar yeshiva training, has chosen to devote as much of his discretionary time as possible to Torah study. When he studies Gemara or Tanakh, he raises noteworthy points and seeks to analyze them carefully and respectfully. To some extent, his seriousness owes something to his "secular" background and his academic and professional training. What he gets in return, at his local *Beit Midrash*,

when he raises questions and explores possible insights, is a fanfaronade of cheerleading for Torah, varied with lame, half-hearted attempts at real discussion that veer off into self-celebratory proclamations about the superiority of the yeshivish lifestyle. After a while, the young man is disappointed; he will not go "off the *derekh"* whatever that means, but his appetite has been blunted.

There are ample remedies for the situation I have just sketched. Books are available; you can educate yourself. Recordings and Zoom sessions have brought high-quality *shiurim* into our living rooms. The internet allows us to prepare and review Torah at the highest level we are capable of. Many quality educators are happy to respond to e-mail or over the phone. If being part of the *frum* community obligates me, at times, to nod my head at tepid "discoveries," to smile weakly at sugared, tiresome homilies and refrain from laughing at earnest, egregious *non sequiturs*, I am willing to pay the price of admission, just as my interlocutor is willing to look thoughtful and try to stay awake when he must attend my discourse. In Torah study, too, it is increasingly important for us to work with all the intellectual aptitude and integrity we can achieve. At the same time, it is disturbing to realize the danger of Babel invading our forums of Torah as well.

V

Lastly, we cannot forgo turning the tools of analysis and self-criticism at the putative fortress of liberal arts study: the academy. This is not the place to descant on the decline of the humanities in today's university. Suffice it to say that academic scholarship and advancement in these fields has become progressively tied to supposedly scientific methods, meaning an over-reliance on quantitative data and specialized jargon; rejection, in the name of egalitarianism, of the idea that some books are more valuable than others in some significant way (morally, aesthetically, etc.), and the pressures of political correctness and secularism. Some of this scholarship is worth reading, although it does not pursue the traditional personal and cultural goals of humanistic learning. Much valuable work, more in the spirit of traditional humanism, continues to be produced. As a rule, however, professors of liberal arts are not distinguished by unusually intelligent thinking outside their area of expertise, nor are they paragons of self-insight or moral sensitivity.

R. Lichtenstein, in one of his last lectures on the subject, recognized that today's universities may not provide the opportunities he took advantage of with Douglas Bush at Harvard. As I recall, he concluded that if the institutions of higher learning are no longer up to it, students would simply have to read and think on their own. In practical terms, because it is important to think critically and not to blindly follow the outlook prevalent in our society, or the ideas trumpeted by influential cliques, it is necessary to recognize that academics are also prone to huddle together in herds. Precisely because liberal arts research and success requires the approbation of the gatekeepers who have already "made it," the pressure to conform in choice of subject matter, social attitudes, and other areas can be enormous. R. Lichtenstein, almost seventy years ago, and anyway not intending to make a career as an English professor, aggressively put his theological convictions on display in at least two crucial passages of his thesis on seventeenth-century Anglican writing. Would that be prudent today?

It would be attempting too much here to discuss in detail "academic Jewish studies."[9] To the extent that utilizing the methods and insights of liberal arts disciplines to plumb the depths of Torah is appropriate, one can refer to much of what we said above. But insofar as the Torah is *sui generis*, different in kind from other disciplines, we cannot uncritically treat the Torah as we would any other ancient document. What standards to apply, when to incorporate "secular" insights and arguments, and when to refuse such interplay, requires substantial knowledge, long experience, and a strong sense of one's identity and religious priorities.

[9] I have sketched some aspects of the methodological and substantial tensions in two programmatic articles: "To Get the Better of Words: an Apology for Yirat Shamayim in Academic Jewish Studies," The Torah U-Madda Journal 2 (1990), and, respecting Tanakh, "A Room with a View but a Room of Our Own" in Modern Scholarship in the Study of Torah: Contributions and Limitations, ed. Shalom Carmy (1996), which also appeared in Tradition 28:3 (Spring 1994).

The threat of adapting and assimilating what should be overriding convictions in order to blend into the professional landscape is especially acute in Jewish studies, precisely because they overlap with the subject matter of Torah, our beliefs about *Torah she-bi-Ktav* and *Torah she-be-al Peh* and the reverence that should go with them. *Yirat Shamayim* is liable to be corroded as the academic wannabe checks his or her *emunot ve-deot* at the door of the seminar room, adopts, perhaps unconsciously, the dispassionate tone of ironic sophistication that seems appropriate to the setting, and later discovers that the compromise initially done *she-lo lishmah* has at some point turned into *lishmah*. Students who consider choosing academic life as a refuge from the inbred rhetoric and the political claustrophobia they associate with institutional Orthodoxy should know that their new Eden may have its own rigidities and not always anticipated constraints.

VI

Earlier I quoted from the Rav's *Lonely Man of Faith*. The intellectual path that I chose and continue to commend is a lonely one. It was never a popular one. In today's world, it is lonelier than before. In the same section, early in the essay, the Rav acknowledges that loneliness engenders "sharp enervating pain as well as a stimulating cathartic feeling."[10] Solitude can be splendid when it "presses everything in me into the service of God." At the same time, as we noted above, loneliness also means the threat of isolation and desolation, when our supposed gains in self-knowledge and knowledge of human reality erect a barrier between us and the rest of society.

I also referred to a remark by one of Gissing's characters lamenting the fact that well-off people may be condemned to the vulgarizing task of seeking out a daily quota of amusement, for lack of anything better to do. Despite the frenetic pace of most modern lives, we have more time at our disposal than our ancestors; surely, we have many more years of schooling. How sad it would be if all that enormous expenditure of time and effort did not help us to press everything in us into the service of God.

[10] Soloveitchik, *Lonely Man of Faith*, 3.

Torah u-Madda for All?

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> The "Torah" in such *Torah Umadda* must be real, intensive, and rooted in the Jewish sources. It dare not be superficial, lest it suffer by comparison with the high level of secular learning attained by most Jews today. Such Jewish learning should not be confused with preparation for specifically Jewish vocations. It is the pride of Jewry that its religion has obligated study for all its communicants, not reserving it for a special professional class of priests or scholars alone. *Torah Umadda* requires that the Torah be studied at least as seriously as *Madda*. (Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, 3rd ed. [Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2010], 171)[1]

When Rabbi Norman Lamm ztz"l wrote about "obligated study for **all**" of Judaism's "communicants," the reader is left to wonder: did Rabbi Lamm truly believe that women and men have equally pressing obligation in Torah study? The possibility is certainly tempting.

Unfortunately, this dream of *Torah u-Madda* for all is far from fulfilled today.

For the first quarter century of my life, I would have insisted that with a certain level of commitment, women too can fulfill the lofty *Torah u-Madda* goal. This was certainly the message I received loud and clear at the Maimonides School. There, I learned that biology class led perfectly to Talmud *shiur* and then back to history or literature followed by a class in Rav Soloveitchik's thought. The perfected life of the Jewish mind was to be fully engaged in conversation with the heights of Torah and the best of science and culture, for the two brought out the greatest depths in each other.

[1] Italics added for consistency with the rest of the piece.

When it came time to plan a future outside of the structures of day school, I would have told you that I sought admission to Yale University specifically to pursue the best possible *Torah u-Madda* education. While there, I crammed in deep Torah study between the cracks of my coursework as well as summer and winter breaks of full-time learning. To balance out my four years of university, I spent five years studying Talmud and Halakhah full-time in *batei midrash* before and after. I studied Torah as seriously as I studied *madda*—maybe even more so.

Torah u-Madda isn't just about bringing *madda* into conversation with Torah; it's also about exposing the world around us to the Torah's most beautiful and important ideas. There is a class taught at Yale every year called "The Life Worth Living." The course asks its students to consider basic questions about the lives they want to lead: what will make them worthwhile? I took the course in 2014, in its very first iteration. From my years of Torah education, I knew that the most orienting question of all is one of *hiyyuv*: obligation and responsibility. In its first year, the shapers of the course, including world-renowned theologians, overlooked this facet. I brought it to the seminar table so relentlessly that responsibility is now a permanent cornerstone of the course. It is not only the case that culture enriches Torah—Torah enriches culture too. Indeed, Rabbi Sacks's life work shows this to be the case, but it can be true on a much smaller, more individual level as well. Learned Jews engaged with culture can bring insights from Torah to improve the world around us in our neighborhoods, classrooms, and workplaces. This is the *Torah u-Madda* promise.

But then my education was over. After five years in American and Israeli *batei midrash*, there was nowhere I could continue to learn. I watched as men my age carried on in various kollels, paid by our community to learn areas of Halakhah not taught to women anywhere. I, hungry for that same learning, found nowhere left to go but the workforce. I am among the fortunate few to have found work that is wonderfully fulfilling. Like anyone who is paid to teach Torah, I am also paid to study Torah, but the learning is different—it is rushed, and it is lonely. It is pressured by the demands and interests of the marketplace. While my *madda* education could still find extensive possibilities of time and irrelevance, I would never again find the perfect balance that, at the age of 25, I had so lovingly achieved. If I continued on with my *madda* education, it would be impossible to fulfill the requirement quoted above: "that the Torah be studied at least as seriously as *Madda*."

This is not a unique story. *Torah u-Madda* has a gender problem with regard to both professionals and lay people.

Before I continue, I must say that this essay has been hard to write. Some of the greatest lights of *Torah u-Madda* have also been the champions of Torah education for women: Rav Soloveitchik, Rav Lichtenstein, Rabbi Lamm *zikhronam le-vrakhah*—just to begin the list. But when it comes down to it, all three luminaries primarily spent their days teaching men. Their main students (to the minute exception of their own daughters and granddaughters) are men. These great figures were foundational in women's Torah education, but upon those foundations, the buildings were left to be constructed by others.

The champions of *Torah u-Madda* crafted and nurtured institutions that modeled a lifestyle most suitable for men. As a student, devote at least as many hours to Torah as you do to the rest of your coursework, easily accomplished at Yeshiva College. If you pursue the rabbinate, make sure to continue reading or even pursue higher education in a field outside of Torah. Weave it into the Torah that you teach, modeling for your congregants how the two can enrich each other. For laymen: carve out time from your professional pursuits to learn Torah. Learn with your (likely YU-trained) community rabbi, learn at a nearby kollel, learn during your lunch break, learn before daily *minyan*, learn with your children, and learn on Sundays before you visit a museum. Read the newspaper, read a great work of literature or philosophy, watch a high-quality movie, and learn Torah.

They did not do the same for women after high school. Even at the undergraduate level, Stern College does not hold up. Students at Stern do not share in the Torah study

requirements of their Yeshiva College peers—and in fact, many of them are required to forgo Talmud classes altogether in order simply to complete the demands of their major. Such a setup would never fly in a world that required "that the Torah be studied at least as seriously as *Madda*." As I pointed out earlier, the situation only gets worse after college, when the structures that encourage Torah study for working people are so often geared toward men only—or when they do exist for women, they are either taught by men or non-expert women.

These issues are obvious, and they are pressing. I have the great privilege of serving as director of an intensive summer *beit midrash* experience for young women in high school run by Drisha. One of my students from last summer asked to speak with me a few weeks ago. She is still a student in a yeshiva high school where she studies Talmud in school, learns the *daf* daily, and studies with her parents on weekends. During the call she asked: "How are we supposed to do it in the real world? At Drisha, my Torah learning was supported and celebrated. Where I live, I see opportunity after opportunity for boys and men who are in school and who work to learn Torah on the side in a deep way. *Torah u-Madda* is truly available to them. But what about me? How are you even supposed to be a Torah-learning woman in the world?"

She knows it already, and she's a teenager in yeshiva day school. She hasn't even gotten to the hard part yet.

If *Torah u-Madda* were honestly meant to be for everybody, then no Modern Orthodox leaders or lay people would let this stand. Our community must rally urgently around advanced, serious Torah education for all women, modeled and inspired by women Torah leaders who have achieved the highest levels of learning and whose lifelong scholarship and teaching are supported by communal funds.

This hasn't happened yet, though there are a tiny number of organizations like my own, Drisha, that are doing their part to make sure that Rabbi Lamm's picture of *Torah u-Madda* can be the reality for everybody.

To illustrate the possibilities of what can be done, I want to share a little bit about my work. As I mentioned previously, I now direct the Dr. Beth Samuels Drisha Summer High School Program. Due to covid, in 2021 our program could not safely happen in New York City where it had run since 1988. Instead, we rented out a lodge in the backwoods of New Jersey and then turned to a big programmatic question: how do we replace the cultural opportunities of New York City? Previously, program participants spent Sundays, afternoons, and weekends immersing in the city's tremendous offerings of museums and plays and culture. This had been integral to the vision of Dr. Beth Samuels z"l, one of the program's previous directors and a true paragon herself of *Torah u-Madda*. The city provided a *madda* component to a mostly Torah program.

Upon reflection, the answer became clear to us: instead of stressing about the *madda*, we could add more Torah. Because for women, the *madda* part is easy: it's the Torah that we have to fight for. Our summer program serves as an identity-building boot camp for young women, where they could experience a bubbled, alternative universe where nobody doubts that the Torah is theirs to learn and master. Ideally, it will sink deep into their bones that Torah study is an essential part of the Jewish good life, that they need Torah and Torah needs them, that they will always return to each other again and again because they developed an identity as a *yoshevet beit ha-midrash* in their most formative years. Although the world will try to close doors to them and tell them that their learning comes second—support your husband, this class is only for men, etc.—nobody will ever truly dissuade them from the knowledge that the Torah is truly theirs and that their learning is crucial. The 2021 program was so massively successful that this summer, in 2022, we are keeping the program at camp and—with the support of Micah Philanthropies—we are expanding to middle school, because this identity formation must begin right when Talmud education does.

By intention, the Drisha pipeline continues through middle school, to high school, to yeshiva in Israel. Yeshivat Drisha is led by women *talmidot hakhamot* of the highest

caliber, and the *beit midrash* is packed not only with eighteen-year-olds but also with full-time adult women learners who stay as long as they can to continue their learning without boundaries or ceilings. This is a place where women can train to become *rashei yeshiva* and achieve true expertise, not only by sitting alone—perhaps listening to recordings of *shiurim* delivered live in male-only yeshivot—but in a buzzing *beit midrash* with peers. And for those who choose not to stay in the yeshiva on a full-time basis? Drisha's collegiate kollels provide Torah balance during summer and winter breaks, and once you enter the workforce, our top-level online *shiurim* can fill lunch breaks and evenings. I am proud that Drisha offers a vision of *Torah u-Madda* for everybody, at all stages of life.

Many elements of our programming have peer institutions: our Shana Alef program at Yeshivat Drisha recruits alongside other excellent programs at Migdal Oz, Lindenbaum, and Nishmat. College students looking to learn deep Torah over the summer can choose to learn in our Kollel, or they can spend their summers at either Rabbi Aryeh Klapper's Center for Modern Torah Leadership Summer Beit Midrash or at some of the coed *beit midrash* programs at Moshava camps. Yeshivat Drisha's advanced learning program places at the heart of its program Talmud study, similar in ways to Yeshiva University's Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies or the Migdal Oz Advanced Program. In other ways, Yeshivat Drisha's orientation toward creating *talmidot hakhamot* is similar to the *semikhah* programs at Midreshet Lindenbaum, Yeshivat Maharat, Matan's advanced Halakhah program, or Nishmat's Yoatzot Halakhah. Drisha's adult-education online *shiurim* find parallels in the Toronto-based Torah In Motion, in addition of course to learning opportunities offered locally by left-leaning synagogues whose adult education is coed. Many of these institutions have opened their doors only in the past fifteen years: a wonderful, perhaps miraculous signal of well-directed communal energies.

But we can do more, and we can do better, because at the end of the day no one institution or another will create the deep cultural change that a true, universal vision of *Torah u-Madda* demands. It will begin with each family refusing to offer their daughters any lesser of a Torah education than their sons. This refusal must begin at the earliest ages and continue throughout their children's educations, expecting their daughters to learn Torah from ages three through 23 in the same ways as their sons. When an opportunity only exists for boys, create an identical parallel track or organize communal pressure until the learning session is coed. How often do we see a "*mishmar*" for boys and cooking or arts projects for girls? There's nothing wrong with cooking or arts, but those should be for boys too, and *mishmar* must be offered to girls equally. Parents need to model lifelong learning by mothers matching the learning hours of fathers minute for minute—while the kids are awake, so that they see it. "Where is *Imma*?" "She is learning Torah" should be a regular refrain in every Jewish household so that all Jewish children learn by example that Torah study is for everybody.

And who teaches that Torah? Qualified, talented female and male Torah educators who teach complex, beautiful, and exciting Torah to all Jews of all ages, modeling through their lives and beings that the Torah is for everyone, that it is infinitely interesting and important. And of course, who pays for it? Everybody. Because if people are going to fight for their daughters' Torah educations, then they are going to fight for those daughters to have high-level Torah role models, and that means investing in higher Torah education for women and then creating jobs for graduates of those institutions in every Jewish community around the globe. Then, and only then, will we have a world where "the Torah [can] be studied at least as seriously as Madda" for women too.

The Utilitarian Case for Torah u-Madda

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It has become fashionable to say that *Torah u-Madda* has fallen out of fashion. In this environment, Lawrence Grossman's recent essay title "The Rise and Fall of *Torah U'Madda*"[1] comes as no surprise; after all, decades earlier, R. Jonathan Sacks had already noted that "*Torah im derekh eretz* is in a state of eclipse."[2] Among other critiques, *Torah u-Madda* is denigrated as irrelevant to our truly pressing concerns or lamented as a victim of the rise of utilitarianism[3] and the steep decline of liberal arts. Yet this commonplace critique misses the mark. While its significance transcends practical application, *Torah u-Madda*, broadly conceived, is profoundly relevant to our daily concerns in ways that often have been overlooked even in the well-rehearsed polemics of the past half-century.

Of course, the legitimacy of an idea does not rise or fall on its popularity. As R. Mosheh Lichtenstein once quipped when asked why he remains *dati le'umi* even as the overwhelming majority of Orthodoxy is *Haredi*, "*Rov ha-olam Notzri*," "Most of the world is Christian." (I assume he didn't mean this literally - Christians comprise roughly 31% of the world population - but his point was well taken). In any case, *Torah u-Madda* is inherently compelling and profoundly religious. We can debate the boundaries of legitimate intellectual inquiry and the best balance between our limited time allotments. But only the hardened soul can fail to be elevated by the soaring spiritual sweep of R. Lamm's peroration to *Torah u-Madda*:

> Grasping a differential equation or a concept in quantum mechanics can let us perceive and reveal Godliness in the abstract governance of the universe. An insight into molecular biology or depth psychology or the dynamics of society can inspire in us a fascination with God's creation that Maimonides identifies as the love of God. A new appreciation of a Beethoven symphony or a Cezanne painting or the poetry of Wordsworth can move us to a greater sensitivity to the infinite possibilities of the creative imagination with which the Creator endowed His human creatures, all created in the divine Image.[4]

This vision is compelling and true. It is self-defeating to raise a white flag of surrender acknowledging that the battle for *Torah u-Madda* has been lost. Trading in *Torah u-Madda* for *Torah u-Parnassah* is an insult not only to Torah, broadly conceived, but also to those infinite possibilities with which the Creator endowed humanity.

Still, from an educational vantage point, abstract arguments are not enough. A pragmatic age requires a pragmatic case for *Torah u-Madda*. For a variety of reasons, practical arguments did not figure very prominently in twentieth-century debates over *Torah u-Madda*. More often, depending on the time, place, and audience, *Torah u-Madda* was cited to validate the desires of acculturated Jews who wished to remain true to their tradition while engaging in broader American society, or as an intrinsic act of divine worship. These were often contrasted with a purely utilitarian, vocational approach to acquiring an education. But this dichotomy overstates the case. We will cite a set of hypothetical scenarios which amply demonstrate that the practical case for *Torah u-Madda* is exceedingly potent and extends far beyond earning a livelihood. Quite the opposite: an abiding appreciation of the value of a broad liberal education equips us with the knowledge and skills to tackle everyday problems with actionable insights that are anything but theoretical.

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[1] *Modern Judaism* 41:1 (Feb. 2021): 71-91.

[2] *Torah Umadda*, Afterword: "*Torah Umadda*: The Unwritten Chapter," 209.

[3] Here and throughout the essay, I use the term utilitarianism to refer not to the philosophical school widely associated with thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, but simply to one motivated to acquire knowledge that has practical application in everyday life.

[4] *Torah Umadda*, 189.

For example: parents of young adolescent children often struggle with the scenario of a child who asks for a device of one sort or another. Many such parents find themselves in a bind: they don't want to place devices with internet access in their children's hands, but they also recognize that their refusal would effectively be tantamount to socially ostracizing their children. The conundrum is real, painful, and lonely.

Now imagine that instead of feeling trapped, the parent doggedly determines that the best path forward lies in finding a way to create a like-minded coalition among other parents in the class. So he begins reading some of the salient works on how to effect social change. He reads authors such as Atul Gawande, whose book *Better* does an excellent job distilling this literature, and reaches out to a well-read friend who works in public health and has been engaged in efforts to get more people to adopt safety measures before and during the pandemic.

After learning and thinking critically about the problem, he devises a plan to partner with other parents in the class to shift expectations around device usage. After some successes and missteps along the way, he manages to collaborate with other parents and lead a meeting that results in the creation of an active parent Whatsapp group on this topic. Within just a few weeks, nearly all the children in the class receive child-friendly devices that do not permit access to the internet, including social media, but still allow children opportunities for online social interactions with peers. It is not perfect - a few of the kids in the grade already had smartphones, and their parents ultimately decide against taking them away - but his child now finds himself in the class norm, not the exception, and the torrent of complaints has subsided. The father lets parents of children in other grades know about his experience, offers them some informal coaching, and mentions the story to the school's principal. The principal shares the ideas with a number of colleagues, and reviews the story of the father's success while introducing a parent lecture dedicated to the topic of children's device usage at home and in school.

This case seems fairly benign, which is precisely the point. Drawing on rigorous social science research to develop creative solutions to practical problems, instead of simply despairing or relying exclusively on intuition, is a compelling, real-world example of *Torah u-Madda*.

Next, take the case of a student in yeshiva or seminary who is set on "gaining a *kinyan*," an acquisition of his or her learning. What is the most effective way to commit knowledge of, say, a Talmudic tractate to memory? Numerous books propose systematic approaches to learning retention, *yeshivot* emphasize *hazarah* particularly at the end of the *zeman*, and programs such as *ve-Ha'arev Na* offer their own methods for acquiring a *kinyan ha-Torah*.

But what if, instead of using a "*heimish*" approach, the student (or *rebbeim* designing a new *bekiut* night *Seder* initiative) were to utilize the cutting-edge neuroscientific research on memory retention? Or take our elementary school principals, *rebbeim*, and *morot*, who often acknowledge that they struggle to produce graduating students who possess sufficiently broad basic Torah knowledge. What if they were to use this literature to craft a new approach that they find to be far more effective than *yediot kelaliyot* or similar tests with which they have been unsatisfied for years? Classics such as *The Art of Memory*, *Make it Stick*, and *Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning* summarize the history and current state of scientific research in sophisticated, accessible ways. Why reinvent the wheel when data-driven solutions might help us master Torah more effectively?

Some may resist introducing these amendments, insisting that we already have excellent methods in place, and that the yeshiva system has a *mesorah* (tradition) of effective approaches to Talmud review. But I suspect that if that a yeshiva were to begin utilizing this research as a basis for a new *hazarah* system, the results would speak for themselves. Students would likely demonstrate far higher levels of retention, and, I suspect, if introduced in a non-threatening manner, such objections would largely fall away.

What might such a course of study look like? Following the findings, throughout the *zeman*, students take strategically-spaced, interleaved quizzes that build upon one another. The teacher intentionally utilizes a spiral curriculum that reintroduces key principles from time to time, challenging students to expend significant mental effort in order to retrieve the information (struggling to remember is often a harbinger of stronger, not weaker, long-term retention) and creatively apply the knowledge to new domains, using higher-order cognitive abilities to deepen their understanding. Toward the end of the *zeman*, instead of rereading their notes or attending *hazarah shiurim* and taking a second set of notes, or even highlighting key points in their notes, students transfer the key information from the Gemara and their notes to color-coded index cards (or online equivalents), and then drill themselves on the distilled knowledge with increasing levels of difficulty. Finally, each student compiles a *haburah* culling the major themes and sources covered throughout the *zeman*.

As a final example, take the commonplace annual tragi-comedy of *sinat hinam*, popularly translated as baseless hatred. Each year around the time of *Tishah be-Av* - and often during the *Omer* mourning period as well - we bemoan the fact that the Second Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred, which the Talmud equates in severity to the violation of all three cardinal sins (*Yoma* 9b). We recommit ourselves to Jewish unity. Invariably, nothing changes, and the *Tishah be-Av mussar schmoozen* bring us no closer to eradicating *sinat hinam*. But what if, instead of waking up to Groundhog Days for three weeks each year, we were to use *Torah u-Madda* as a roadmap toward making meaningful progress?

Following Socrates as presented in Plato's early Dialogues, we might begin by defining our terms. *Sinat hinam*, as has been widely noted, is nearly meaningless. A useful working definition of *sinat hinam* might be something akin to hatred without sufficient basis (as opposed to hatred without any basis) or, better, following R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin's remarks in his introduction to Genesis, a tendency to view Jews with whom I have fundamental disagreements as enemies. Defining the term allows us to better identify the problem we seek to address.

Next, we might inquire as to why it might be natural to expect internal tensions within communities. Recent research on evolution has brought to light some extremely important and potent ideas with immense explanatory power. One common theory maintains that humans achieved an evolutionary advantage over animals by using our superior intelligence to build large, interdependent communities whose common identification went beyond physical proximity or familial kinship. What if, along similar lines, instead of decrying *sinat hinam*, we gained a deeper understanding of the situations in which we might be motivated to conceive of our survival as inextricably bound up with that of our fellow Jews, thereby replicating evolutionary circumstances and increasing our motivation to collaborate constructively? Understanding and utilizing this evolutionary definition of an "in-group" may stand a better chance of effecting real change than even the most inspirational *Tishah be-Av* video. An understanding of evolution, it turns out, is not just relevant to questions of science and Torah, or Rav Kook's theology, but may have profound implications for combating the internal scourge of *sinat hinam* and external threat of anti-semitism.

Similar exercises can be repeated for a host of other burning issues in our community: Why does anti-semitism appear to be on the rise? How likely is U.S. Jewry to become existentially endangered by growing anti-semitism in the way that much of Europe already is? Why have traditional attitudes toward Zionism fallen out of favor in so many Jewish circles? Can liberal Zionists carve out a middle space between conservative Zionism on one hand and anti-Zionism on the other? What are the effects of wealth and consumption on our community? Why are we so politically polarized? Why is adolescence such a difficult stage? Why is modesty back in style, and what are the implications for Jewish education? Will #metoo and rape culture mean a return in society to more traditional mores? Most immediately, how might the literature on group trauma, habit formation, and loneliness help inform the efforts of rabbis and shul leaders to bring people back to the pews in a post-pandemic world?

These examples not only more compellingly demonstrate that *Torah u-Madda* is invaluable, but they also resolve many of the classical objections raised against *Torah u-Madda*. It is difficult to imagine that using social science research to help ensure that my child is shielded from some of the pernicious effects of social media at too young an age is a form of *bittul zeman*. Unless one makes the *mesorah* or self-sufficiency argument, it is equally difficult, if not more so, to claim that it is *bittul Torah* to research the best way for one to retain his or her learning. And the argument that we are not as great as those in the past who did study sophisticated secular wisdom, which R. Lamm discusses at length,[5] misses the point if I am a rabbi trying to understand anti-semitism, particularly if it is my job to opine and provide guidance on burning issues confronting the community.

Beyond these cases, there may be an even more profound, penetrating sense in which *Torah u-Madda* can be actionable: it is an indispensable tool toward achieving self-understanding. It is, after all, difficult to accomplish much of anything as an *oved Hashem* or otherwise without self-understanding. Similarly, it is difficult to succeed as a parent, educator, or leader without first developing a keen understanding of one's student or child. This point was certainly clear to *Hazal*,[6] Rashi,[7] R. Hirsch,[8] and the Piazescner Rebbe.[9]

What is more, certain basic features of the human condition, as well as central elements of our culture, are essential components of our identity. For this reason, we can't begin to fully understand ourselves and those around us without first acquiring some basic notion as to what it means to be human, and at least a rudimentary understanding of the current zeitgeist. Of course, understanding the zeitgeist entails understanding its intellectual and social roots, including thousands of years of the West, as well as the series of upheavals since the dawn of the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

And while some can arrive at this depth of understanding through intuition, most can only manage this by way of a deeper dive into culture and society. As R. Lichtenstein put it in A Consideration of Synthesis:

> Secular knowledge is invaluable for the understanding of the environment in which we all, willy-nilly, find ourselves. We cannot combat worldliness until we know what it stands for; we cannot refute the secularist unless we have mastered his arguments. Furthermore, if we wish not merely to react to our environment, but to act upon it, we must be thoroughly familiar with its mores and its values. If *bnei Torah* are to exert some positive religious influence upon modern society, they must clearly maintain some contact with it. To this end, secular study is virtually indispensable.[10]

To put the same point in terms of intellectual history, one need not hold a PhD in philosophy to see that massively influential thinkers such as Kant, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud set the foundations for the intellectual skepticism rampant today.

Indeed, a deeper understanding of ourselves and our society provides not only a general framework in which to make sense of the world we live in, but also has the potential to be transformative in a more practical sense.

To take a concrete example along these lines, this time of a more controversial variety, consider conversations about gender between students and teachers in almost any Jewish Day School. Such conversations often highlight a

[5] *Torah Umadda*, 75-90.

[6] *Numbers Rabbah* 21:2; *Yalkut Shimoni* Numbers 776.

[7] Numbers 27:16, s.v. *Elokei*.

[8] See his *Commentary to Genesis* 25:27 in regard to the rearing of Jacob and Esau.

[9] Introduction, *Hovat ha-Talmidim*.

[10] For a compelling presentation of this idea, see too R. Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter With Other Cultures*, ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Maggid, 2017), 297-299.

generational gap. When asked, many of our adolescent students opine that sex and gender are fundamentally unrelated categories, the former biological and the latter culturally constructed. Yet others insist that sex is a fluid category, and that there really is no such thing as a pure male or female, only different points along a spectrum of personal identity. Those of us who grew up in peer groups for whom sex and gender were widely assumed to be interchangeable, might respond with not a small dose of perplexity.

But what if we committed ourselves to understanding the intellectual context in which these ideas have arisen? What if we were willing to think deeply as to why the ideas of third-wave feminism and poststructuralism, which respectively pose radical critiques to "traditional" forms of liberal feminism and the foundations of Western epistemology, so deeply permeated the curricula and ideological orthodoxies of universities throughout the West?

One need not go as far as I and study gender and masculinity in depth. And I would not recommend it for most. But this I know: there is no substitute if you want to understand the air our students breathe. Reading Judith Butler's inestimably influential, jargon-laden *Gender Trouble*, which argues that sex is performative - meaning that it is not intrinsically tied to biology, but merely a function of the meanings particular societies assign to individuals' outward behaviors - is slow-going for most, and hair-raising for many traditionally-minded readers. But once you've read her, you can detect her fingerprints everywhere. Michel Foucault, whose works often recast claims to epistemic certainty as tools wielded by those in power to maintain their positions in society - is equally troubling. But like it or not, you can't go very far in today's climate without encountering his colossal influence, especially in the United States - including in daily discussions in Jewish Day Schools across the globe. An inside understanding of these and other thinkers helps us better understand where our students are coming from, and the kinds of ideas they are likely to encounter online and on college campuses. Most importantly, they can help us begin to formulate a response that we believe in and that will simultaneously resonate with our students - no mean feat, but a process that I believe we are obligated to undertake.

Of course, the charge of studying heretical ideas is a serious one, and one that must be confronted particularly in matters of gender studies and poststructuralism. Certainly, at the very least, one must first fill one's stomach with the meat and potatoes of Torah study before diving in. And there are ideas out there that are certainly very much antithetical to any serious construal of Torah Judaism. But it seems self-evident that helping our students navigate the dizzying world around them qualifies for Meiri's concept of *le-havin u-lehorot*, which encompasses heretical ideas in general and not just idolatry,[11] or *da mah she-tashiv la-apikores*.

In fact, many outstanding contemporary figures we associate with *Torah u-Madda* exemplified precisely this wider approach that utilizes broad study to arrive at greater self-understanding.

R. Soloveitchik, for instance, understood that as a product of Western culture, he inevitably struggled with many of the same characteristics that animated other Western thinkers. R. Soloveitchik exemplified this brilliantly in *The Lonely Man of Faith*. in which he demonstrated a profound grasp not just of the condition of modern man, but also his own condition as a modern, as one haunted by a pervasive sense of self-alienation. We might imagine that R. Soloveitchik intuited this on his own, but his footnotes[12] tell us otherwise: through a combination of keen psychological insight and wide, profound philosophical reading and reflection, R. Soloveitchik understood that, as it were, he had become estranged from himself. Without this broad grounding in Western literature and thereby self-understanding, a book of the caliber of *The Lonely Man of Faith* would never have been written.

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[11] *Beit ha-Behirah Sanhedrin* 90a, s.v. *ve'elu*. See Lawrence Kaplan and David Berger, "On Freedom of Inquiry in the Rambam—And Today," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* Vol. 2 (1990): 38.

[12] See, for example, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition* 7:2 (Summer 1965): 6, 46, 48, 57-59, 61-62.

R. Lichtenstein similarly drew on literature and Victorian thinkers to uncover timeless truths of human nature, such as its tragic dimension and, above all, its complexity. And R. Lamm argued for and personified the notion that the synthesis of *Torah u-Madda* can help modern man, torn internally asunder, recover a sense of inner unity or *sheleimut*.[13]

R. Sacks's greatest intellectual and moral insights were also built on a piercing understanding of the human condition and the intellectual and cultural context of the world he inhabited. R. Sacks's earlier work framed Judaism today in context of the series of seismic shifts that ushered in the period of modernity. By situating us in that context, R. Sacks was better positioned to frame Jewish life today. Next, R. Sacks turned to the intellectual foundations of the West, and its contemporary ills, including multiculturalism, overcoming differences, religious violence, science and religion, consumerism,[14] morality, hope, the fracturing of society, and more. R. Sacks drew on a deeply literate and comprehensive understanding of the West before identifying its ills and offering Torah-based solutions.

Another example of a thinker whose philosophy was rooted in a profound understanding of our cultural moment–albeit one who encountered a very different culture than R. Soloveitchik and adopted a far more sanguine response–is R. Shagar. R. Shagar's greatness lay in his fusion of profound empathy for and understanding of his students, with a return to the immediate historical circumstances, as well as textual and philosophical influences, that had shaped a new generation.[15] Of course, his autodidactic approach led him to certain presentations of postmodern thinkers that have been questioned. And for those less sympathetic to what R. Shagar terms "soft postmodernism,"[16] it is also not hard to see the importance of being steeped in this material in order to argue against it (R. Carmy, an esteemed participant in this symposium, is an excellent exemplar of this approach). But whether or not one finds herself inclined toward R. Shagar's theological-education positions, there is no disputing R. Carmy's observation that the former "is a master diagnostician of the human soul under postmodernism" (ibid.). The common denominator between all these thinkers, then, is that they demonstrate that we cannot begin to understand our world, our students, or ourselves, without understanding the very air we breathe.

If these outstanding thinkers are any indication, *Torah u-Madda* is anything but outdated. It may be countercultural today, but so was Abraham in his time. First and foremost, it represents an authentic and rich approach to connecting with God. For those looking for more, *Torah u-Madda* can help us to address myriad challenges in our everyday lives. *Torah u-Madda*'s insights come from more than just pure research in areas such as biology, history, philosophy, the social sciences, and literature. *Applied* research of the varieties we have sampled is a relatively untapped and underappreciated resource for *Torah u-Madda* whose findings can prove immensely impactful in our everyday lives. For anyone mired in the mindset that *Torah u-Madda* is an impractical, overly intellectualized exercise relevant only to those who spend most of their waking moments in rarified ivory towers, it might be time to think again.

Bringing Back Torah u-Madda

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I deeply believe that *Torah u-Madda* should continue to be of interest to contemporary Jews. However, this particular intellectual approach, which assumes an ongoing commitment to the mastering of Torah and at least one area of secular knowledge, appears to be receding from the consciousness of even institutions and individuals formally

[13] *Torah Umadda*, 181-191.

[14] "Through constant creation of dissatisfaction, the consumer society is in fact a highly sophisticated mechanism for the production and distribution of unhappiness." *Covenant and Conversation, Exodus: The Book of Redemption*, 262.

[15] All his work is permeated with this theme, perhaps none more so than *Luhot ve-Shivrei Luhot*.

[16] *Luhot ve-Shivrei Luhot*, 45-52.

associated with Modern Orthodoxy. Instead of synagogue Rabbis boldly embodying and promoting the value of general secular knowledge by regularly incorporating it in their sermons and classes, and instead of educators in Jewish day schools serving as *Torah u-Madda* role models for their students by being interested and actively pursuing the many facets of the typical curricular and extra-curricular school goals, synagogues, Jewish day schools, and Jewish summer camps have increasingly focused upon narrower issues.

I detail below several reasons why *Torah u-Madda* remains important to our role as Torah Jews and some practical ways we can implement this approach.

Relating to the Nations

Torah u-Madda is important today because it assists Jews to fulfill God's ultimate expectations of them that they be a positive influence on the surrounding nations. This role of the Jewish people in human history can be inferred from God's expectations as expressed through His Prophet, Isaiah:

> I the LORD have Called thee in righteousness, and have Taken Hold of thy hand, and Kept thee, and Set thee for a Covenant of the people, <u>for a light of the nations</u>. (Isaiah 42:6)
>
> Yea, He Saith: It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Yaakov, and to restore the offspring of Yisrael; I will also Give thee <u>for a light of the nations</u>, that My Salvation may be unto the end of the earth. (Ibid. 49:6)

This idea is further expressed in R. Elazar's curious Talmudic perspective on Exile:

> And Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations <u>only so that converts would join them</u>, as it is stated: "And I will sow her to Me in the land" (Hosea 2:25). Does a person sow a *Se'ah* of grain for any reason other than to bring in several *Kor* of grain during the harvest? (*Pesahim* 87b)

From these texts, we come to understand that rather than circling the wagons and only worrying about ourselves, Jews are expected to engage positively and constructively with the mainstream populace.

Today, the general population either professes a religion different from our own, or no religion at all – in the words of the latest Pew survey, many are "nones." Therefore, in order to relate to and influence them,[1] we will require some sort of common language and form of expression. While the Torah states that the other nations will value *Mitzvah*-observance and regard its practitioners as possessing a special relationship with the Divine (as stated in Deuteronomy 4:56, "<u>for [these Statues are] your wisdom</u> and <u>your understanding</u> <u>in the sight of the peoples</u>, that, when they hear all these Statutes, shall say: '<u>Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people</u>'"), I am not sure that such a view of religion in general, and Judaism in particular, is still pertinent in current society. Whereas adherence to religion in the past was an important value shared by many human beings,

[1] While some "*Kiruv*" professionals might contend that promoting full observance of Torah and *Mitzvot* is a Jewish objective, a case could be made that Jews should attempt to be exemplars of moral and ethical living, and the Jewish mission is to try to encourage adherence to the Seven Noahide Commandments rather than the symbolic 613 representing a more complete corpus of *Mitzvot*. See *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 224:2: "One who sees a place from which idolatry has been uprooted from it, … Just as He has Uprooted it (idolatry) from this place, so too He should Uproot it from all places, and <u>restore the hearts of those worshiping it to worshiping You</u>." Further, those who established Judaism according to the bible were interested in spreading monotheism rather than conversion. See Bereishit 12:8 "…he (Avraham) built there an altar to the LORD and <u>invoked the LORD by Name</u>." Ibid. 13:4 "…and there Avram <u>invoked the LORD by Name</u>." Ibid. 21:33 "…and (Avraham) <u>invoked there the Name of the LORD, the Everlasting God</u>." Ibid. 26:22 "So he (Yitzhak) built an altar there and <u>invoked the LORD by Name</u>…"

today observance and punctilious devotion, without accompanying sacrifice and social action, particularly for those who are different from your own group, is suspect in many quarters of the world.

So how do we relate to the other nations in the modern age? This is where *Torah u-Madda* comes in. When people encounter an individual who is accomplished in his/her professional field, unabashedly observant, a knowledgeable, serious practitioner of religion, and interested in people and the world at large, there is greater potential today for that individual's spiritual and moral concerns to attract attention and even emulation. At the very least, religionists should be able to address questions directed at them, as well as those that well up within themselves, with sophistication, nuance, and gravity, instead of with a dismissive response. In order to influence the "other," some commonality has to be established, and secular subject matter can certainly provide such a dimension. Otherwise, observant Jews run the risk of being viewed as obscurantists, and their potential for serving as a "light unto the nations" might narrow considerably. Rather than hermetically compartmentalizing parallel ideas extant in secular and Jewish sources, being able to illustrate Torah ideas with parallels from the secular world and vice versa anchors Torah concepts in such a manner that they can be seen to be reality-based and contemporarily relevant, rather than detached from current practical and theoretical concerns.

Enhancing Torah through Secular Studies

Another dimension that justifies a *Torah u-Madda* approach which combines study of Torah and secular subjects is the degree to which secular knowledge can enhance Torah topics. In his essay "A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View,"[2] Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein argues that secular studies can contribute to greater understanding of one's Torah learning:

> Secular studies are often invaluable as a direct accessory to Talmud Torah proper. Consider simply the aid we derive by elucidation or comparison from linguistics in Amos, history in Melachim, agronomy in Zeraim, physiology in Nidda, chemistry in Chometz U'Matza, philosophy in Yesodei HaTora, psychology in Avoda Zora, political theory in Sanhedrin, torts in Bava Batra—one could continue almost indefinitely. (p. 93)

While it is probably an impossibility for most typical individuals to become polymaths and display deep understanding of a variety of secular disciplines, one can still attain expertise in some subset of secular disciplines based on one's personal proclivities. Someone with a scientific and/or health services orientation ideally will be able to make use of his or her knowledge of those topics to constantly contribute to his or her Jewish perspective. Rambam, in my opinion, makes a powerful case for studying science as a method of familiarizing him/herself with Jewish theological concerns:

> What is the path (*to attain*) love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His Infinite Wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify (*Him*), yearning with tremendous desire to know (*God's*) Great Name, as David stated: (Psalms 42:3) "My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living God."
>
> When he (*continues*) to reflect on these same matters, he will immediately recoil in awe and fear, appreciating how he is a tiny, lowly, and dark creature, standing with his flimsy, limited, wisdom before He Who is of Perfect Knowledge, as David stated: (Psalms 8:4-5) "When I see Your Heavens, the work of Your Fingers... (*I wonder*) what is man that

[2] Originally published in *The_Commentator* (April 27, 1961); reprinted in *Gesher*, vol. 1 (1963); reprinted in *Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning*, vol. 1, Chapt. 4 (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing, 2003).

> You should Recall Him." (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 2:2)

Similarly, Hazon Ish, in the first chapter of his *Emunah U-Bitahon*, specifically discusses human anatomy from the perspective of appreciating the wondrous "engineering" achievement that God has Done vis-à-vis one's body.

In a parallel vein, someone interested in the humanities can use those studies to better understand the human condition and therefore God. In a talk that he gave in the 1980s entitled "The End of Learning,"[3] R. Lichtenstein acknowledged that in the Torah world, if secular studies are in fact championed, it is usually "objective" science and mathematics, rather than "subjective" humanities. Having received a Ph.D. in literature, R. Lichtenstein articulately defended the latter, stating:

> The humanities…initiate us into the world of "Ruach Memalela"[4] at its finest, introducing us, in Arnold's celebrated phrase, to "the best which has been thought and said in the world."[5] Great literature presents either a rendering, factual or imaginative, of aspects of the human condition, or a record of an artist's grappling with the ultimate questions of human existence: man's relation to himself, to others, to the cosmos, and above all, to the Ribbono Shel Olam. (p. 113)

Religion in general is looked upon as part of the "humanities," and its presentation to young and old ought to include the existential orientation mentioned so passionately by R. Lichtenstein. Someone interested in the humanities should be able to look up to role models and become adequately educated in such a discipline in addition to continually studying aspects of the Jewish outlook.

While it is most likely that someone could pursue a course of *Torah u-Madda* thinking and learning professionally if one serves as a communal Rabbi or Jewish day school educator, laypeople should also be encouraged to take advantage of opportunities made regularly available to them. Efforts should be made to merge Torah and *Madda* in educational offerings within synagogues Jews attend regularly, as well as in the educational institutions in which they enroll and the summer facilities in which they participate.

Torah u-Madda and Interdisciplinarity

A theme of *Torah u-Madda* that is in essence educational and therefore suited for Jewish day schools is the topic of "interdisciplinarity." Such a pedagogic approach has become an educational given in the Jewish day school with respect to the development of critical thinking and a balanced *weltanschauung* on the part of the members of the student body. In my view, this type of study should not only take place among different secular subject matters, but should also involve comparing and contrasting Jewish ideas with those proffered by non-Jewish sources.

Not only will this type of cross-fertilization create deeper understandings of both Judaic and general studies themes and principles, it will also engender a "checks-and-balance" system that will lend perspective to all that is being learned and discussed. I look to both Judaic and general studies as potentially serving as correctives to extreme positions in domestic politics, Israel advocacy, responses to the pandemic, concern with environmental threats and more that may at first glance appear appropriate. Different sets of values and attitudes can have a profound influence on each other and moderate one's positions.

Some in the Torah world, even if they are positively disposed to general studies learning not only for the purposes of making a living but also as an area of knowledge that is important to acquire, will be adamant that Torah must always constitute the central emphasis of a Jewish life, and therefore secular studies must perforce be viewed as secondary and not temper Torah commitments. I am not so sanguine about prioritizing Torah in this manner given the excesses of particularism–

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[3] *Leaves of Faith*, Chapt. 5.

[4] Targum Onkelos, Beraishit 2:7.

[5] "Literature and Science" in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: 1949), 409.

i.e., caring exclusively about Jews as opposed to the global environment in which we find ourselves– that seem to have come to dominate the Orthodox world. Ignoring general studies can also lead to the adoption of extreme positions as noted.

In order to address this significant lack, I have long advocated that teachers of both Judaic and general studies in day schools, Rabbis of synagogues, and educators and counselors in summer camps, be trained in integrated thinking and multiple disciplines that specifically include Judaic and secular studies. If such individuals only think about the world in single dimensions, it is more than likely that their students and congregants will do likewise. When Jewish leaders present such a mindset as a given, they perpetuate some of the problems from which we are currently suffering. Every student should annually be challenged to undertake a topic from the Jewish and general studies perspective, reviewed by joint faculty members. Courses should also be presented from an interdisciplinary approach, thereby not requiring students to reconcile Torah with *Madda* on their own. Sermons and *Shiurim* should regularly introduce and integrate ideas from multiple disciplines. And camp educational and experiential programming ought to focus on and encourage this type of thinking.

Rabbis and *Ba'alei Batim*

A final consideration that would contribute to the necessity of *Torah u-Madda* is that we live in an age of ever-increasing specialization, and this type of exclusive focus has affected even religion. Those in rabbinic lines of work are expected to be knowledgeable about the depths of Torah, and other Jews are not expected to share this knowledge. The corollary to such thinking is that only *Ba'alei Batim* will be interested in the matters associated with the general world, and that Rabbis ought to "stay in their lane." While Jewish professionals and laypeople physically come together on Shabbat and Yom Tov mornings, or at *Shiurim*, these fleeting occasions are insufficient for the two groups to impart to each other what each has to offer and provide a qualitatively excellent, ongoing grounding in Judaics, general studies, and sensitivity to other people. A conscious effort must be undertaken in order for these two groups to "play-off" of one another on an ongoing basis in order to influence the thinking of every individual.

It seems to me that the centrality of *Torah u-Madda* in Judaism is a top-down issue, and that the educational centers at which Rabbis and educators are initially trained and then return periodically for Sabbaticals, *Yarhei Kallah*, and general "*Hizuk*," ought to be committed to, at least in part, presenting *Torah u-Madda* as an important way of thinking about all things Jewish within contemporary society. While some individuals can be counted upon to be autodidacts and develop *Torah u-Madda* sensibilities even though they were never provided with the proper preparation, this will only be a minority of those who serve in *shuls* and schools. I think that some of the individuals who head these institutions and services, are themselves lacking in *Torah u-Madda* sensibilities, and therefore do not consider this a value for their training institutions. That being the case, the Rabbis and educators produced and reinforced by these centers may be ill-prepared to meet the needs of the constituencies that they serve. *Torah u-Madda* done right, on the other hand, can bridge the gap between rabbis and laypeople.

When all is said and done, *Torah u-Madda* ought not to be the province of one group of Jews, but a philosophy to animate and inform our lives as Torah Jews today and tomorrow.

TORAH U-MADDA OR TORAH U-MOVIES?

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My Personal Connection to *Torah u-Madda*

I was fortunate to grow up in an environment where Torah study was taken with the utmost seriousness. In middle school I was already introduced to my first piece of *Kovetz Shiurim* by Rav Elchanan Wasserman, and the classes only became more sophisticated from there. However, I felt that something was missing and that there was an almost purposeful naivete when it came to secular knowledge. One of my high school rebbeim would like to start the day by teaching *mussar* works. *Vayehi ha-yom* (one

day), we came upon a passage that referred to the *dalet yesodot*—the four elements: earth, fire, wind, and water. Being the provocateur that I was, I pointed out that the Periodic Table that we learned about in chemistry class had far more than four elements and that the author's theory was based on an antiquated Greek construct. While I felt that the only place the four elements belonged was in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, my rebbe was taken aback by my purported assault on our Jewish faith. He doubled down by claiming: if *Hazal* said there are four elements, then there are only four elements!

The four elements as portrayed in Avatar: The Last Airbender

These kinds of attitudes prompted me to explore Rabbi Norman Lamm's *magnum opus*, *Torah Umadda*. It was nothing short of vindicating to read that one could be fully committed to Torah while also integrating scientific knowledge. As Rabbi Lamm wrote, "Torah Umadda holds that modernity is neither to be uncritically embraced nor utterly shunned nor relentlessly fought, but is to be critically engaged from a mature and responsible Torah vantage."[1]

In fact, *madda* (literally: science) could not only be reconciled with our Torah but moreover could be used to enhance it as well. I read the book cover to cover in eleventh grade, and due to my appreciation of it, I arranged to meet Rabbi Lamm at his office at Yeshiva University. I came with a prepared list of questions, and he answered each one patiently with erudition.

Throughout the years, I have contemplated the different models of *Torah u-Madda* and have reached different conclusions at different stages of my education about its definition and parameters. One generally finds *Torah u-Madda* invoked in discussing how Halakhah can be synthesized with scientific knowledge and how literary techniques can be used to sharpen our readings of biblical narratives. However, because of its ambiguous definition, some have extended *madda* to include other pursuits ranging from the appreciation of religious art to hallmarks of contemporary pop culture. Unsurprisingly, the latter category especially requires analysis. Granted, utilizing science to inform us that there are more than four elements constitutes *madda*, but can knowledge of pop culture be legitimately included in the religious imperative of *Torah u-Madda*? Can elements of pop culture truly be deemed a worthy use of an observant Jew's time? I am certainly not the first to the party. *Gedolim ve-tovim mimeni* (people wiser than me) have already addressed this question. However, I would like to take a less common approach by making the case for what the Science Fiction and Fantasy genre—also known as Geek Culture—specifically brings to the table. Subsequent to discussing the merits of Geek Culture, I will share several caveats unique to the genre, as well as the broader challenges of pop culture writ large.

Objections to Media and Popular Culture

Unlike the Modern Orthodox community,[2] the right-wing yeshiva world believes there is little discussion to be had about benefiting from non-Jewish media, particularly for recreational purposes. R. Moshe Shternbuch, in his *Kuntres Ba'alei Teshuvah*,[3] addressed the concerns of a young man who was uncomfortable with the fact that his parents own a television. The young man inquired whether it was permissible for him to destroy the TV remote to prevent his parents from committing this terrible sin. The most striking part of the responsum is not what R. Shternbuch wrote in his answer but what he

[1] Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1990), 48.

[2] See for example www.koshermovies.com in which R. Herbert J. Cohen, a Modern Orthodox rabbi, selects religiously appropriate movies and expounds on the lessons that they have to offer.

[3] Moshe Shternbuch, *Responsa Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* (1:368).

deliberately chose not to reckon with. Instead of beginning the responsum by deliberating if and when television would be religiously problematic, he assumes from the outset that it is unequivocally prohibited:

> Behold, the prohibition to watch a television is very severe and is an *avizrayhu de-arayot* (an accessory prohibition to sexual sins), because as a result of watching this impure vessel, it will cause him to be drawn after them. A person is certainly obligated to distance himself from watching television, and to use numerous methods to do so. **This is really within the category of *pesik reishei* (a certain consequence), in that living in a house with a television makes those who watch it impure, God forbid.**

R. Shternbuch proceeds to find the most halakhically appropriate way for this young man to save his parents from Divine punishment for watching television. It is clear that he is not willing to entertain even the possibility that some television programs might be permissible.

An advertisement for a major anti-internet/anti-media conference at Citi Field in 2012.

Lest one write off R. Shternbuch as an outlier on this issue, note that R. Moshe Feinstein operated with the same premise when asked whether a Jewish man who goes to the movies should first remove his head covering. R. Feinstein ruled that one should not add one sin on top of another, first by going to the movies, and secondly by removing one's head covering.[4]

The concern, especially for the licentious nature of secular media, led R. Asher Weiss[5] to invoke *et la'asot la-Hashem heferu toratekha*[6] to justify turning biblical verses into Jewish pop music. He argues that despite the fact that the Talmud[7] forbade adapting the Song of Songs (and arguably other parts of *Tanakh*) into mediums for entertainment, our refusal to permit the adaptation of biblical verses into pop music would run the risk of many Jews turning to non-Jewish avenues for entertainment, which are fraught with illicit content.

While media was at one time more innocuous, the passe nature in which graphic sexuality is on display should disturb anyone with basic Torah sensitivities. A PG-13 film today can easily contain scenes which, from a halakhic standpoint, are no different than viewing *bona fide* pornography.[8] The quality of television and media has

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[4] See R. Elchanan Wasserman's treatment of theaters and other gentile gatherings in *Kovetz Maamarim* (90, 92-93). See also Rabbi Chaim David HaLevi in his *Responsa Aseh Lekha Rav* (1:63 and 4:47). Rabbi David Stav provides a useful summary of the topic in his *Sefer Bein Ha-Zmanim* (202-203).

[5] R. Asher Weiss, *Responsa Minhat Asher* (2:44).

[6] Lit.: "It is time for the Lord to work; they have made void Thy law" (Psalms 119:126). This principle is essentially the nuclear option of Rabbinic Judaism. When Judaism itself is at risk and there is no other recourse, this principle allows the Rabbis to violate a Biblical prohibition to preserve the religion. An iconic example is when the sages declared that the Oral Torah should be recorded in writing to avoid losing the tradition entirely (*Gittin* 60b).

[7] *Sanhedrin* 101a.

[8] From a religious standpoint, viewing a sex scene in a movie more than exceeds the threshold of constituting forbidden conduct. As the Talmud in *Berakhot* 24a, codified in the *Shulhan Arukh* (*E.H.* 21:1), states: "Anyone who gazes upon a woman's little finger [for sensual pleasure] is considered as if he gazed upon her naked genitals." *Kal va-homer* (*a fortiori*), the multitude of movies today which expose much more than a finger to evoke sensual thoughts would certainly be forbidden to watch.

devolved to such a great degree that even certain Modern Orthodox rabbinic figures have felt the necessity to put their foot down. Notably, R. Yitzchak Blau decries:

> We could imagine saying to a Haredi interlocutor: "Modern Orthodoxy's advantage is our ability to cull wisdom found in Bradley's philosophy and Yeats' poetry." Could we imagine saying: "Modern Orthodoxy's advantage is our ability to watch Friends and Desperate Housewives"? The time has come for a widespread communal effort to minimize intake of the vacuous elements of popular culture … Modern Orthodox Jews do not only watch enough TV and movies to regain their strength, they spend numerous hours watching TV **as an end in itself**, often failing to make discriminating judgments about which shows to watch.[9]

In addition to sexual content, R. Blau challenges us to take an honest look at ourselves and ask if indulging in entertainment media is truly a productive use of our time. The concern for *bittul Torah*, neglecting Torah, is frequently invoked by those who oppose secular media. Even if one finds an appropriate show to watch or a book to read, perhaps one should be allocating more of that time to religious pursuits. This behooves us to ask: since our time is axiomatically limited, what value does Geek Culture bring to the table that it ought to occupy a slot on our limited schedules?[10]

Geek Culture as a Conduit for Exploring Ethics and Morality

Yu-Gi-Oh!, Magic: the Gathering, Gloomhaven, Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings—the common theme between these words is the Science Fiction & Fantasy genre, or Geek Culture. I loved growing up on this genre and have continued with it to this day. When I studied at my gap-year program, Yeshivat Sha'alvim, it was almost the same group of students who attended the voluntary Early Prophets class that also gathered for *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*) during our break time. And it's no surprise—they both contain compelling narratives full of war, adventure, and religious intrigue.

When I subsequently attended Yeshiva College, we studied the third chapter of *masekhet Sanhedrin*,[11] which lists those who are disqualified from giving testimony in court. Upon reaching the case of the *mesahek be-kubya*, one who plays with dice, my rebbe facetiously asked, "So *nu*, anyone got some dice on them?" To everyone's surprise, I whipped out my pack of *D&D* gaming dice and passed them up to the front of the lecture hall. He poured the contents onto his desk and tried to make sense of this apparent new devilry. Upon seeing the vast assortment of paraphernalia, which, of course, included the iconic twenty-sided die, my rebbe exclaimed, "*Shaketz teshaktzenu ve-ta'ev titavenu*!"[12]

Typical dice used to play Dungeons & Dragons *and other Fantasy tabletop role-playing games.*

But in all seriousness, while Fantasy and Science Fiction (SciFi/Fantasy) have their fair share of questionable material (particularly Japanese Anime), there are many appropriate expressions of the genre that have enabled serious reflection and discussion about theology and the

[9] Yitzchak Blau, "Contemporary Challenges for Modern Orthodoxy," *Orthodox Forum* (303-305).

[10] For further reading, see: Norman Lamm, "A Jewish Ethic of Leisure," in *Faith and Doubt: Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 184-207.

[11] *Sanhedrin* 24b.

[12] "Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing" (Deuteronomy 7:26).

human condition.[13] This is especially salient when the genre explicitly and implicitly addresses the philosophical questions of morality.

Certainly, we cannot discuss Fantasy without invoking J. R. R. Tolkien, the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien has many lessons to share. For one, he conveys how it is often the smaller and seemingly insignificant things that can change the course of history. This can be observed in the heroism of the hobbits as well as in the disproportionate power of the One Ring. As Boromir remarked, "Is it not a strange fate that we should suffer so much fear and doubt for so small a thing?" These themes echo the David versus Goliath nature of the Jewish people throughout history from the times of the Maccabees to modern-day Israel. In his article, "The Secret Jews of the Hobbit," Rabbi Meir Soloveichik argues that the Dwarves of Tolkien's Middle Earth were intended to reflect the Jewish people's struggles of exile and their journey to reclaim their homeland. (He also notes the Dwarves' obsession with gold—but he makes the case for why Tolkien was certainly not antisemitic.) While an indescribable amount of credit is due to Tolkien, there are some underlying motifs that are potentially incompatible with Judaism.

A quintessential portrayal of Good versus Evil in popular Geek Culture.

For instance, the Torah and rabbinic tradition[14] reject the belief in cosmic dualism. As God in Isaiah 45:7 proclaims: "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the Lord, that doeth all these things." While Tolkien in *The Silmarillion* acknowledges an all-powerful creator, Eru Ilúvatar, the plotline of *The Lord of the Rings* puts the forces of Good and Evil on equal footing and portrays the fate of the world as being contingent on which one triumphs. This point is noted by Dr. Michael Weingrad, who writes:

> In general, Judaism is much warier about the temptation of dualism than is Christianity, and undercuts the power and significance of any rivals to God, whether Leviathan, angel, or, especially for our purposes, devil. Fantasy literature is often based around conflict with a powerful evil force—Tolkien's Morgoth and Sauron and Lewis's Jadis and the White Witch are clear examples—and Christianity offers a far more developed tradition of evil as a supernatural, external, autonomous force than does Judaism, whose Satan (or Samael or Lilith or Ashmedai) are limited in their power and usually rather obedient to God's wishes.

But there is also fantasy that succumbs far less to the charge of dualism. In particular, George R. R. Martin, in his exceedingly popular book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, addresses questions of Good and Evil through numerous morally gray characters. Unlike Tolkien, who created a generic conflict between the good people of Middle Earth and a patently evil Dark Lord, Martin deliberately crafts ambiguity and nuance to more accurately capture the human condition. In a *New York Times* interview, Martin explained that he incorporated the darkest and most unspeakable acts of human wickedness like rape and torture into his books because, "To omit them from a

[13] My general rule is that if the film or show has at least a *mi'ut ha-matzu'i* of problematic material, then it should be avoided, even if one attempts to skip the problematic material (certainly, if it's *parutz merubah al ha'omed*). In standard parlance, if the subject in question is comprised of more than 10% problematic material, my rule of thumb would be to avoid it entirely.

[14] See, for example, *Berakhot* 23b and *Kli Yakar*'s exposition of the verse in Deuteronomy 32:39: "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me; I kill, and I make alive; I have wounded, and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand."

narrative centered on war and power would have been fundamentally false and dishonest… and would have undermined one of the themes of the books: that the true horrors of human history derive not from orcs and Dark Lords, but from ourselves."

Martin's subversive take on Fantasy storytelling set the bar for other modern authors of the genre. One of the lead protagonists in Brent Week's *Lightbringer* series, Gavin Guile, is both charismatic and self-serving. Similarly, Joe Abercrombie, a pioneer of the Grimdark Fantasy subgenre, deliberately writes an entire cast of flawed and sometimes downright evil protagonists. A notable example is Sand dan Glokta, who nonchalantly tortures prisoners in his capacity as a member of the King's Inquisition. By making "protagonists" amoral or immoral, it beckons the reader to ask: what actually makes someone the "good guy"? Such storytelling decisions make us think more critically about why we accept certain individuals as good: is it because the state or the media tell us so, or do we analyze a person's merits based on Torah values?

Let us shift from Fantasy to Science Fiction by taking a look at Magneto, the Jewish, morally gray, arch-villain of the *X-Men* movie franchise. At first, one might be tempted to brand Magneto as a one-dimensional antagonist who simply wants to kill all non-mutant human beings. However, one cannot help but feel sympathy for him upon witnessing the tragic scene where he is pulled away from his mother in the Nazi concentration camps and fails to use his newfound powers to save her. Years down the line, when human governments posed a threat to his fellow mutants, he understandably stood up against the threat with force rather than pursuing pacifism and diplomacy, like the protagonist Professor Charles Xavier. Magento's traumatic backstory forged within him the resolve to say "never again" by resolving to take up arms—an attitude akin to what post-Holocaust early Zionists espoused.[15]

A juxtaposition of the X-Men *franchise antagonist, Magneto, portraying his tragic Holocaust backstory.*

There is also much to learn about morality from video and tabletop gaming. The 2003 video game blockbuster, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (*KOTOR*), not only provided one of the best known plot twists in video game history—it also helped revolutionize a morality system. Throughout the game the player makes critical choices to decide between the Light Side or Dark Side. These choices ultimately affect both the player's moral standing as well as their arsenal of abilities when using the "force." A given player might not have a strong preference for being evil, but if that is what it takes for him to wield a feat like Force Lighting, you can bet he will kill every NPC (non-player character) in the game if need be. Thus, *KOTOR* (as well as its later iteration, *The Old Republic* massive-multiplayer-online-role-playing-game, or MMORPG for short) gave players a sense of what it means to be tempted by power and to what extent they are willing to either resist or succumb to their evil inclination.

KOTOR, however, was not the first game in the genre to explore morality in gaming. *D&D* can be credited with popularizing the alignment system which categorizes characters on a scale from Good to Evil and Lawful to Chaotic. During my *D&D* days I would often argue with the Dungeon Master (DM) and claim that my character was right to kill an unarmed enemy who was too dangerous to be left alive.[16] While these discussions often derailed the actual gameplay, it produced a robust debate

[15] The recent animated Netflix adaptation of *Castlevania* serves as another poignant example of an antagonist whose motives evoke sympathy. The pilot episode shows the Catholic Church burning Count Dracula's wife at the stake which drives him toward madness and bringing vengeance upon the human race. While it goes without saying that genocide is certainly not justifiable, the creators of the show skillfully managed to give us a nuanced villian with a tragically understandable motivation, rather than the typical one-dimentional bad guy who is evil for its own sake.

[16] This is also akin to Anakin killing Count Dooku in *Star Wars Episode III: The Revenge of the Sith.*

about the definition of good and evil. For instance, I would always cite a case-in-point about how Batman refusing to kill villains like the Joker was actually an act of evil since they would eventually break out of Arkham Asylum and murder more innocent victims. My argument was in line with the statement in *Kohelet Rabbah* (7:16): "All those who are merciful in a place of cruelty, in the end they are being cruel in a place of mercy."[17]

The classic Dungeons & Dragons *moral alignment table with recognized movie characters for reference.*

Indeed, one of the most gratifying outcomes of discussing SciFi/Fantasy with others is when it serves as the basis for a halakhic debate. To briefly list a few more examples: Does Spock's assertion in *Star Trek*, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few," comport with the rabbinic conception of why it was permissible for a city to hand over one individual, Sheba ben Bikhri, in order to save the rest of its inhabitants?[18] *The Twilight Zone* featured an episode entitled "Cradle of Darkness" in which the protagonist goes back in time to kill baby Hitler—would baby Hitler be *nidon al shem sofo* (judged based on his future outcome) like the Rebellious Son,[19] or do we judge someone *ba-asher hu sham* (as they are in the present), like Yishmael?[20] Does the topic of whether *Eshet Eliyahu* (Eliyahu's wife) remained married to Eliyahu even after he ascended to heaven in a fiery chariot provide insight into what happens after someone's spouse returns post-Thanos snap?[21] And of course, there are the more oddly obscure questions: Does ordering a Solar Beam attack in *Pokémon* constitute *bishul be-shabbat* (cooking on Shabbat)? Can a man use the One Ring of Power from *The Lord of the Rings* to betroth a woman? Granted, these ideas may sound odd to the uninitiated ear; however, they have all managed to spark serious halakhic debates and prompted otherwise uninterested parties to engage in Torah discourse.

Several Concluding Caveats

At this point, I have demonstrated how deeply I enjoy SciFi/Fantasy and how I have benefited from Geek Culture both intellectually and emotionally. Still, I have a number of general reservations about how these interests interact with Torah study and general religious life. The first two caveats relate to the role of the pedagogue, and the latter two apply to any individual.

(1) I once attended a shul where the rabbi started his sermon every week with a sports analogy. I eventually got so put off by this that I started going to a different *minyan*. What bothered me was twofold: Firstly, I am a SciFi/Fantasy Geek, so I couldn't care less for what he was talking about.[22]

[17] Naturally, we also debated whether it was religiously appropriate for someone to play a cleric class, thus requiring him to worship one of the deities from the *D&D* pantheon.

[18] See II Samuel 20; *y. Terumot* 8:4; *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5:5); and recent rulings by *Chazon Ish* (*Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* no. 69) and *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer* (15:70). A friend and colleague of mine, R. David Tribuch, pointed out that the boat dilemma at the end of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* has also stimulated similar debates.

[19] See Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

[20] See Genesis 21:17 and *Rosh Hashanah* 16b: "And Rabbi Yitzhak said: A man is judged only according to his deeds at the time of his judgment, as it is stated: 'For God has heard the voice of the lad where he is (Genesis 21:17)."'

[21] R. Elchanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Shiurim* Vol. 2, 52-53) explores whether Eliyahu's wife remained halakhically married to him since he did not die but left this world through a supernatural means. This could provide insight into whether those who temporarily disappeared due to the supernatural powers of the Infinity Gauntlet would have been considered to have died and subsequently resurrected.

[22] I recall in high school it was essentially *minhag yisrael* for the rebbeim to exhort their students to avoid watching the Superbowl by making statements like, "Why do you want to watch a bunch of *beheimos* fighting to bring a ball to the other

Second, if a rabbi or Judaics teacher always needs to rely on a sports or pop culture *mashal*, many of the listeners may find it patronizing. While, on the one hand, this practice has the potential to pique the audience's interest, it also has the Achilles heel of indicating that either the primary material is not sufficiently interesting or that the audience lacks the sophistication to appreciate what is being shared with them. When someone tries too hard to be relatable, the listeners often notice.

That being said, I will often drop SciFi/Fantasy references in my classes because it entertains me and perhaps also every one out of twenty listeners, should I be so fortunate. While Geek Culture is experiencing a renaissance, it is still not mainstream in my social environs. I wish that more people understood my references, but I am consoled by the fact that I can still incorporate my "Easter Eggs" without it becoming a contrived attempt to earn popularity points. For me, it is just a nice way to give a nod to my fellow Geeks and feel a sense of solidarity with my cultural minority.

(2) In addition to potentially patronizing one's audience, the overuse of pop culture references cheapens the Torah that it is supposedly meant to enhance. As a mentor once told me, you need to know when you are being "*mekadesh* the *hol*" and when you are just being "*mehalel* the *kodesh*. While Geek and general popular culture has the power to bring people in, it also runs the risk of degrading the topic at hand. Are the Divine words of the Almighty Eternal God so unappealing that they need to be cheaply packaged with TV and movie lines?

(3) Moving beyond pedagogy, Rabbi Jeremy Wieder conveyed the following in his relatively viral 2017 critique of Game of Thrones:[23] "The famous passage in *Eikhah Rabbah*,[24] *'im yomar lekha adam yesh hokhmah ba-goyim, ta'amen...'*—if a person tells you that there is *hokhmah* amongst the nations of the world you should believe it—that's a very important value, but let me emphasize: **this is not *hokhmah*.**"

Assuming we can plausibly discern the *okhel* from the *pesolet* (the valuable from the waste) and use Geek Culture to provide opportunities to facilitate Torah study, all it really amounts to at best is a *hekhsher mitzvah*, or a preparatory activity for Torah study.[25] It is challenging to classify it as a true *hokhmah* to the extent that pursuing it as its own endeavor would not constitute *bittul Torah*, unlike areas such as medicine. I am a major proponent of all things Geeky, but I try not to delude myself into thinking that when I play *Call of Duty* or read *Harry Potter* that I am being *mekayem* some kind of *mitzvat aseh* (fulfilling a positive commandment). Rather, I listen, watch, play, and read what I do because I enjoy it—it's my preferred use of necessary leisure time. *Agav* (incidentally), once I am doing that, I am open to being inspired or intellectually captivated by a theme that in some indirect way might enhance my Torah study and service of God. But I try to keep myself honest by endeavoring not to conflate my recreation with my religion.

When I was growing up in the yeshiva world, I made it a point to advocate for incorporating and appreciating key elements of *madda*. However, the Modern Orthodox world does *madda* and secular culture quite well enough already. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in his afterword to Rabbi Lamm's *Torah Umadda*, "If we are to revive the failing pulse of Jewish existence in time—the dialogue between

side of the field? Go learn night *seder* instead!" Ironically, I actually enjoyed hearing this. Well, perhaps not for the intended reason, but it was certainly vindicating to hear a few disparaging comments about professional sports made by a religious authority figure. Of course, they would have given a similar critique against Geek Culture, but that was simply not on their radar.

[23] A friend of mine brought to my attention that there were a few "*frum*" Christians who selflessly volunteered to be the Nahshon ben Aminadavs and produced a version of the show which removes all of the sexually explicit content. This is akin to the pseudo-yeshivish acapella groups that adapt licentious pop music into a religiously acceptable format for Sefirah and the Three Weeks. It remains unclear to me, however, who issued them the *heter* to watch or listen to such material in the first place.

[24] *Eikhah Rabbah* (2:13).

[25] See Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, 131-134.

covenant and circumstance, the word of God and the existential situation of the Jewish people—**it is Torah rather more than *madda* which needs persuasive advocacy**."[26]

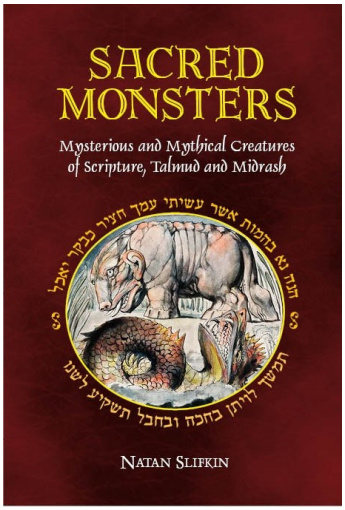
Moreover, *Torah u-Madda* has colloquially devolved into the *Tikkun Olam* of Modern Orthodoxy: a motto so flexible and amorphous that it has regrettably become next to meaningless. And like *Tikkun Olam*, since *Torah u-Madda* has become our movement's accepted mantra, anything that can conceivably be classified under *madda* is *ipso facto* regarded as a sacrosanct religious pursuit.

(4) As other Jewish Fantasy Geeks might experience, there is an inclination to fuse the two epic worlds of Torah and Geekdom. I remember many years ago I excitedly picked up R. Natan Slifkin's well-researched *Sacred Monsters* only to be disappointed that his work only furthered the connection between Judaism, Fantasy, and the natural world. I picked up the book with an image of an awesome and mythical creature known as the Leviathan, only to have it reduced to a mundane whale. The creatures discussed suddenly seemed less sacred and less monstrous at the same time.

Once upon a time, I too had sought to fuse Judaism and Fantasy. I made a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign base in the *Book of Kings* and pondered why R. Shimon bar Yohai could not use his powers to incinerate his Roman pursuers like Cyclops in *X-Men*.[27] Yet, as my own theology developed, I eventually espoused the aforementioned rationalist perspective on the Bible and rabbinic literature, which made it harder to read the fantastical into Jewish texts. In fact, R. Yitzchak Blau argues that attempting to mine Torah literature for fantastical content is a fallacious endeavor: "If we search the *gemara* for demon stories as we would eagerly anticipate the next *Superman* comic book, then we have missed the point. The *gemara* is not an action and adventure story, but a work of religious and ethical instruction."[28]

With this in mind, I have concluded that perhaps I need not synthesize my religion with my personal interests and pastimes. On occasion, one will find epic moments in *Tanakh*, such as when Eliyahu calls down a fire from heaven, but for the most part, one will not find the same breathtaking supernatural feats that the Fantasy genre provides.

Combining Torah and popular culture can be entertaining, and on occasion, even enlightening. But for the most part, it remains nothing more than a hobby and general area of interest for me. Thus, I learn Torah and I happen to engage in Geek Culture. When something in Geek Culture gets me to think seriously about a moral issue or provides me with a moment of inspiration, I am thrilled.



Sacred Monsters *by R. Natan Slifkin*

Nonetheless, the religious pursuit of Torah and the non-Jewish genre of Geek Culture need not intersect, just as I believe for the humanities writ large.

I am happy to live a life of Torah and Geekdom, but I am not convinced that it necessarily needs to be *Torah u-Geekdom*.

[26] Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, 218.

[27] See *Shabbat* 33b.

[28] Yitzchak Blau, *Fresh Fruit and Vintage Wine* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2009), 181.

It Will Be Torah and I Am Compelled to Study It: A Philosophy of Madda as Hiddushei Torah?

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I have sometimes suspected that the radical distinction between poetry and prose lies in the very different expectations of readers: poetry presupposes an intensity that is not tolerated in prose.
- Jorge Luis Borges, "The Translators of The Thousand and One Nights"

We sense that the spirit of the nation, which is bound with the light of Torah-truth as flame to ember, has, through its distinct character, fashioned the distinct form of the Torah She-ba'al Peh… Torah She-ba'al Peh inhabits the very character of the nation…
- R. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot Hatorah* 1

Questions of *Torah u-Madda* typically presume a stable division between Torah and Madda.[1] Of course, in one sense, this obviously holds true. *Bereishit Rabbah* is Torah, *The Feynman Lectures on Physics* is not. From an institutional perspective, the division is equally clear. *Bava Batra* is studied in the Beit Midrash, biology, business management, and binomial distributions in the classroom.

At a given time, with given texts, we can indicate Torah and Madda (or its predecessor, *hokhmah*). But consider Rambam's study of the Torah in a historical context in *Moreh Nevukhim* or his critical account of the development of the Torah She-ba'al Peh in his introduction to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, which challenged a traditional Geonic model of a more substantial Revelation of Halakhah.[2] Were these ideas first suggested today, they would likely be classified as Madda; now they are Torah.[3]

The study of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and *Ethics*, or Alfarabi's *Fusul al-Madani*, is not *talmud Torah*. But as we encounter their ideas and influence through the study of Rambam's notion of the mitzvah of *ahavat Hashem*, his *Hilkhot De'ot*, and his *Shemoneh Perakim*, it certainly is.[4] Jerome and Aquinas did not produce Torah, but what happens to their

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[1] Notable exceptions include R. Shalom Carmy's penetrating apprehension of the tendency to forego unmediated engagement with specific ideas in favor of labeling them as Torah or Madda and Alan Brill's perceptive recognition that the category of Torah has been constructed differently in different eras and communities, encompassing, at times, logic, folklore, philosophy, philology, and poetry, [R. Shalom Carmy, "As We are Now is Not the Only Way to Be: On the Place of the Humanities in Contemporary Religious Culture," *Tradition* 45:2 (Summer 2012): 11-30; Alan Brill, "Judaism in Culture: Beyond the Bifurcation of Torah and Madda," *The Edah Journal* 4:1 (Iyar 5764): 22; response by Yitzchak Blau, "Contemporary Fads and *Torah u-Madda*: A Response to Alan Brill," *idem* 4:2 (Kislev 5765)]. For a perspicacious critique of the idea that there is *a* coherent ideological question of *Torah u-Madda*, see R. Mayer Schiller, "Torah Umadda and The Jewish Observer Critique: Towards a Clarification of the Issues," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 6 (1995-1996): 58-90.
Recognition of the diversity of genre within the category of Torah complicates a simple division of Torah and Madda, see, for instance, a consideration of *piyyutim* as Torah in Tosafot on *Rosh Hashanah* 27a s.v. "*Kima'an'* and *Avoda Zarah* 35a s.v. "*Mai*," *Teshuvot Ve-hanhagot* 2:721, and the broader category implicated in *Sh"ut Har Tzvi Yoreh De'ah* 105. The ontology of Torah is further complicated by the observation that Torah does not simply accrue through the conscious interpretation of previous Torah texts and ideas. Consider the parabolic Torah of R. Nahman of Bratslav or the folkways of Torah depicted in *Berakhot* 62a. Furthermore, even works within the discourse of Torah are subject to evaluation of their claim to Torah, as can be seen in the case of the "*yenuka ha-pilai,*"see here.

[2] Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 54-63.

[3] See the contemporary controversy recorded by R. Dovid Breslauer, *Nahlei Devash: Inyanei Divrei Torah Ve-divrei Sofrim* (South Fallsburg, NY, 2015) 27. For a modern reformulation of the Maimonidean approach, see Netziv in the introduction to *Ha-emek She'eilah*.

[4] Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' 'Shemonah Peraqim' and Alfarabi's 'Fusul Al-Madani,'" *PAAJR* 31 (1963): 33-50.

biblical interpretations when they're quoted by Don Isaac Abarbanel?[5]

Once we move from specific texts to the realm of ideas and intellectual history, Madda ceases to be reliably distinct from Torah. As Torah engages with accounts of reality which have been furnished by Madda, as insights of Madda percolate into Torah, as truths of Madda redirect the flow of Torah's meaning, and as new discourses emerge in the Beit Midrash which, in their infancy, are undifferentiated from Madda, the boundary separating Madda from Torah dissolves. *Hokhmah* which is interpretively constrained by the discourse of Torah *is* Torah. A serious consideration of the religious value of what we think of as Madda needs to begin with an awareness of this historical confluence and move beyond the appreciation of Madda per se to a richer imagining of the possibilities of *talmud Torah*.

Madda as Torah

In its most coherent usage, Madda refers to truths and ways of thinking which do not appear indigenous to the *masorah*. But over the course of time, as it enters Jewish intellectual currents and then canonical works, Madda becomes Torah. For example, Empedocles' theory of the four elements was once just Madda, then it became a mix of Torah and Madda; having been abandoned by modern science, it now remains mostly Torah. In the introduction to his philosophically conservative *Magen Avot*, R. Simeon b. Zemah Duran justified his inclusion of "words of the nations amid holy words" by arguing that Moshe canonized the prophecies of Iyov as Torah despite their foreign origin. Today we might add Mishlei's embrace of the ancient Egyptian wisdom text *Instruction of Amenemope* and we can speculate if Plato's *Symposium* made its way into the Torah of *Bereishit Rabbah*.[6] Likewise, the sublimation of Madda into Torah is exemplified by the degree of gentile influence on *mussar* literature (with the sefer *Heshbon Ha-nefesh*'s use of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography being a notable modern example), and the incorporation of Neoplatonic and other philosophical ideas into early Kabbalistic writings, particularly, and acknowledgedly, by R. Azriel of Gerona.[7]

The Maimonidean controversy which erupted in early 14th century Languedoc over the popular study of philosophy was not over its value as merely supplemental to *talmud Torah*. While the opposing *Rishonim* maintained it caused laxity in observance and allegorical distortion of the Torah, the proponent *Rishonim* argued that philosophy is integral to the true understanding of Torah, a thoroughgoing part of its *masorah* and religious intellectual culture, and the salient force in the purification of theological beliefs.[8] Philosophy was not justified as Madda, but as Torah.

Torah u-Madda isn't an ideology or a pedagogy to be subscribed to or rejected. Certainly, there are perennial and unavoidable religious questions about the crucial balance between the dignity of cultural distinctiveness and healthy societal engagement and vital concerns about which texts or fields of study might be spiritually nourishing or deleterious, religiously enriching or challenging (if we admit such a dichotomy) – questions which different communities will adjudicate differently. But being haphazardly bundled together under the term *Torah u-Madda* obscures the nature of the encounter between Torah and universal wisdom. *Torah u-Madda* is a reality: a description of Torah's dynamic logos, an

[5] Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 27-58.

[6] Michael Fox, "From Amenemope to Proverbs: Editorial Art in Proverbs 22,17–23,11" *ZAW* 126:1, 76-91, and works cited therein.

[7] For examples of the former, see Diana Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); D. Rosin, "The Ethics of Solomon Ibn Gebirol," *JQR* 3:2, 159-181; and Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993) 117-134. For the latter, see R. Azriel's *Peirush Ha-aggadot Li-Rabbi Azriel*; Boaz Huss, "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Kabbalistic literature," *Micrologus* 9, 125-135; and Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

[8] Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (London: Routledge, 2009).

undeniable historical commitment to the idea that the waters of Torah swell from all streams of truth.

Eternal Flux of Meaning

The apparent mutability of Torah finds its theological expression in the sweeping philosophy of *hiddushei Torah*, which entails that Torah is not only the contents of the original Revelation of the eternal *devar Hashem*, but that subsequent discussions, interpretations, and insights are also Torah, whose study demands the spiritual intensity which characterizes *talmud Torah*.[9] Torah, at least the Torah She-ba'al Peh, is not a fixed set of ideas, laws, and narratives, but a living discursive tradition which consists of the open-ended intertextual discussions which take place across the diachronic pages of Rabbinic literature and their perpetuation, understanding, and meaning which exist within the social reality of *Klal Yisrael*.

While the confluence of Madda and Torah occurs on the broader scale of intellectual history, the influence of Madda on the meaning of Torah is more subtle and pervasive. Torah qua Torah only has meaning within the national consciousness of *Klal Yisrael*. If no Jews understood the texts of Torah, would Torah exist? As such, although in one form, Torah has crystallized as a textual corpus - after all, textual study satisfies the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* and traditional debates over the circumscription of the halakhic category of *kol ha-Torah kula* refer to the primary textual corpora of the Written and Oral Torah[10] - the vibrant consciousness of Torah is perpetually being nurtured within a developing socio-epistemic reality. While the texts of Torah persist, their meaning is continuously being renewed, as they are reperceived through prevailing interpretive dispositions and against the background of accepted truths.[11] In its fullest sense, Torah is not embodied by a series of free-floating texts, but by a rushing stream of intergenerational consciousness.

Consider the first chapter in Bereishit. Despite traditional beliefs to the contrary, in many Modern Orthodox communities, an interpretation which took as its basis the notion that, from a scientific perspective, the observable universe is less than six thousand years old would be rejected as nonsense. Whereas in other frum communities, any alternative interpretation would be rejected as

[9] This philosophy is colorfully articulated by R. Isaac b. Shmuel of Acre in *Me'irat Einayim* (Jerusalem, 1993), 99-100, and in *Derashot Hatam Sofer: Helek Gimmel* (Jerusalem, 1959), 19. As it happens, R. Isaac expresses this philosophy in his critique of a Maimonidean stream of thought, namely, that the obligation to study Torah is satisfied with knowledge of the *Mishneh Torah* and the remainder of one's time should be occupied with philosophical speculation. And, furthermore, the emergence of this attitude can be traced to a reception of Rambam's idea that the controlling purpose of Torah study, with the probable exception of Tanakh, is to arrive at the ascertainment of what is obligated, permitted, and forbidden. Now, the pinnacle of the mitzvah of *talmud* for the Rambam, which consists of philosophy, also has a dialectic, discursive character. One can therefore speculate if the two approaches can be harmonized within a more contemporary philosophic temper which locates philosophical inquiry within the realities of a given tradition. [See Rambam's explicit circumscription of the transmission of the Torah to halakhic works in his introduction to the *Mishneh Torah* and multiple such descriptions including throughout the introduction, in his introduction to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, in *Yesodei Ha-Torah* 4:13, in his letter to R. Pinchas b. Meshullam the Judge of Alexandria (*Igrot Ha-Rambam*, ed. Y. Sheilat (Ma'aleh Adumim, Il: Sheilat, 1995), 438-445), and in the fragment of his letter quoted in an anonymous apologia (*ibid*, 257-259); and his description of the philosophical component of Talmud in *Moreh Nevukhim* 3:51; for the last point, see e.g. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988)].

[10] E.g. Rambam, Introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*; *Shulhan Arukh Ha-rav, Yoreh De'ah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, Kuntres Aharon*.

[11] In his exhaustive article circumscribing the category of Torah as subject to the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, R. Aharon Kahn notes the strange truth that the medical remedies in the Talmud are Torah even if they did not originate from within the *masorah*, ["Li-kiviat Ha-heftza shel Torah Be-mitzvat Talmud Torah," *Beit Yosef Shaul* 3, 305-403]. Conceiving of Torah as the hermeneutical discourse of Torah provides an explanation. The remedies codified in the Talmud were part of the Rabbinic consciousness through which Torah was understood.

unorthodox. And yet, even in the latter, few read geocentrism into Bereishit, despite some rabbinic effort to reverse the historical tide.[12] While the true meaning of Bereishit patently consists of a fundamentally different account of reality than modern science, truths of Madda have still recontoured the meaning of Torah.

This evolution can be witnessed in real time through my friend Nachi Weinstein's podcast Seforim Chatter, which invites both traditional and academic scholars of Jewish studies to share their research with a largely Yeshivish audience. Arguably the *Torah u-Madda* capital of North America, Seforim Chatter is actively changing the interpretive consciousness of an ostensibly non-*Torah u-Madda* community by introducing an academic awareness into the popular understanding of the history of Torah scholarship. Likewise, in a landmark contribution to Torah, R. Yonason Rosman, who studies in a Kollel in Staten Island, published a sefer, *Hokhmah Ba-goyim Ta'amin: Ve-hashpa'ot Hokhmat Ha-amim al Ha-yahadut Be-meshekh Ha-dorot*, which, after introducing the author's account of the difference between Torah and *hokhmah*, provides an impressive, although not exhaustive, catalog of the influence of gentile wisdom on the full historical range of Jewish intellectual culture, drawing on both rabbinic admission and scholarly research. By citing academic studies to substantiate its arguments, the sefer, which participates in a distinctly traditional discourse of Torah, has schlepped Madda into Torah. And should its observations impact the understanding of the dynamics of Torah within its communal discourse, it will have fostered the Torah of *Torah u-Madda*.

Torah as Its Holistic Spirit

Read carefully, the familiar midrash in *Eikhah Rabbah* (2:13) which distinguishes between Torah and *hokhmah*, "If someone tells you there is *hokhmah* among the gentiles (*ba-goyim*), believe him… that there is Torah among the gentiles, don't believe him," suggests this fluidity. The distinction made between Torah and *hokhmah* is often taken to be an assertion of the superiority of Torah over gentile wisdom: either by virtue of one of its characteristic features or by recourse to an external moral standard. Understood this way, the midrash implies a substantive contrast between Torah and *hokhmah* - Torah has one character, gentile wisdom another. But read in context, as a gloss on the verse in Eicha which serves as its basis, the midrash is actually making a more nuanced observation.

The midrash begins with the verse, "Their kings and leaders are among the gentiles (*ba-goyim*), there is no Torah," lamenting the lack of Torah among the Jews in exile. In Eikhah, the absence of Torah *ba-goyim* doesn't refer to the deficiency of the virtues of Torah among the canons of gentile wisdom, but to the impoverished state of Torah when *Klal Yisrael* finds itself *ba-goyim*. Torah is not depicted here as an abstract typology of wisdom against which *hokhmah* is contrasted, but as a palpable force swept up in *Klal Yisrael*'s historical voyage. Recognizing that Torah is shaped by the spiritual reality of *Klal Yisrael*, the midrash draws out the natural conclusion. While there is indeed *hokhmah ba-goyim*, there is no Torah *ba-goyim*. Torah exists *be-yisrael*. The distinction between Torah and *hokhmah* is not simply a matter of text but of context.

By describing Torah as the spiritual-intellectual current which flows through *Klal Yisrael* rather than an idealized, static, body of wisdom, the midrash thus allows for *hokhmah* to become Torah when it travels to *yisrael* and is absorbed into the discourse of Torah. Observably, where even *hokhmah* resides *be-yisrael* and not *ba-goyim*, we find *hokhmah* becoming Torah most distinctively – comparative scholarship and the literary-theological approach in the study of Tanakh, the partial collapse of the semi-arbitrary division of Yeshiva and academic Talmud study – reflecting the obverse of Eikhah: the organic flourishing of Torah when *Klal Yisrael* is not *ba-goyim*.[13]

Of course, as contemporary opposition demonstrates, *hokhmah* tends to encounter resistance before becoming

[12] See e.g. R. Yosef Zalman Bloch, *Be-emunah Sheleimah* (Monsey, 2012), 327-383.

[13] Lawrence Kaplan, "Back to Zechariah Frankel and Louis Jacobs? On Integrating Academic Talmudic Scholarship Into Israeli Religious Zionist Yeshivas and the Specter of the Historical Development of the Halakhah," *JMJS* 14, 89-108; Richard Hidary, "Traditional versus Academic Talmud Study: Hilkakh Nimrinhu le-Tarvaihu," *Kol Hamevaser* 3:3, 8-9.

Torah.[14] The tension between the Yerushalmi and Bavli over the value of Greek wisdom never resolves.[15] It continuously reverberates within the Torah, ensuring that the soul of tradition never gets carried away by the prevailing epistemic winds.[16] Thus, charges of importing foreign Madda were not only brought against Rambam and his philosophical successors. Tosafist dialectic was denounced as "*dialeqtiqa shel goyim*" in *Sefer Hasidim*,[17] the philosophical and psychological insights animating the mussar movement were objected to as an unorthodox corruption of tradition,[18] and R. Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky cautioned his students to stay away from "chemistry-learning… the foreign spirit which was incorporated into… the traditionally transmitted Torah:"[19] namely, the analytical Brisker approach to the study of Halakhah.[20] Nonetheless, in all these instances, communities in *Klal Yisrael* rejected the charges and the power of *hiddush* prevailed, in part by virtue of combination of factors – most prominently, an author or authors who are recognized as pious, firmly within the fold, and masters of

[14] "Furthermore, even as it enters the tradition, Madda is not permitted to affect all expressions of Torah equally. A Rabbi can turn Madda into Torah by delivering a sermon consisting of a psychological insight encased in a biblical narrative – which is understood and spiritually ingested by his congregants as Torah – but Halakhah, or the normative expression of Torah, proceeds according to its own more tightly constructed internal logic and resists such frictionless intrusions.

[15] Yerushalmi *Sanhedrin* 10:1, *Peah* 1:1; Bavli *Menahot* 99b. Jonathan Engel suggested to me that the Yerushalmi's intellectual liberalism reflects its formation *be-yisrael*.

[16] Nietzsche observed in *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 251, "The Jews, however, are beyond any doubt the strongest, toughest, and purest race now living in Europe; they know how to prevail under the worst conditions… by means of virtues that today one would like to mark as vices – thanks above all to a resolute faith that they need not be ashamed before 'modern ideas'; they change, *when* they change, only as the Russian Empire makes its conquests – being an empire that has time and is not of yesterday – namely, according to the principle, 'as slowly as possible.'"

[17] *Sefer Hasidim* (ed. Parma) 752. Whether Tosafist dialectic was actually influenced by Christian thought is doubtful. See Haym Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the 'Sefer Hasidim'," *AJS Review* 1, 339-357; Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 66-85.

[18] "Le-ma'an Da'at," *Ha-melitz* 155.

[19] *Beit Ridvaz* (Jerusalem, 1908), 4. See also Marc Shapiro, "The Brisker Method Reconsidered: *Review Essay* of The Analytic Movement: Hayyim Soloveitchik and his Circle by Norman Solomon" *Tradition* 31:3 (Spring 1997): 78-102.

[20] To be sure, although, as argued below (see esp. note 26) there are other important commonalities between *lomdus* and Madda, I doubt whether R. Wilovsky was personally acquainted with proficient practitioners of Brisker *lomdus*. It is likely he encountered the same caricature that unfortunately prevails in certain contemporary circles, namely that "Brisker *lomdus*" is a series of templatic distinctions between such binaries as subject-object [*heftza–gavra*] or action-result [*pe'ulah–totza'ah*], (a misapprehension which has unfortunately been exacerbated by seforim which attempt to reduce *lomdus* per se to a similarly crude framework). In fact, the words *heftza* and *gavra* never appear together in a single piece in *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim Ha-levi* (with the exception of one piece in which the word *gavra* is a talmudic citation indicating a specific person, i.e. *ha-hu gavra*), reflect a much older talmudic distinction between classes of *issurim* (see e.g. *Sh"ut Rivash* 98), and are in no way representative of either original Brisker or modern *lomdus*. In *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim Ha-levi* itself, the *lomdus* of *Hilkhot Tum'at Meit*, which is often overlooked in vulgar accounts of *lomdus*, receives the plurality of R. Hayyim's attention and defies the crude templatic depictions. In a footnote to a lecture delivered in early 1940, R. Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, the Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe, already denounced this caricature. [See *Shiurei Da'at: Ha-gra'i Mi-Telz Zatzukl* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2010) 92.] In actuality, rather than stodgy distinction, the desire of the *lamdan* is precise formulation. As described below, the heart of *lomdus* is the awareness that halakhic differences and divergences are not merely legal technicalities but rather flow organically from a precise elucidation of the nature of the underlying halakhic concept. Conflating *lomdus* with the popular series of binaries is analogous to drawing through a stencil and calling oneself a creative artist.

tradition; the compelling power of the idea(s) in question; and its resonance within traditional concepts and modes of thought – which certified their authenticity and allowed erstwhile Madda to be a celebrated expansion of the palace of Torah.

Lomdus and Philosophy

It is worth pausing on R. Wilovsky's characterization of Brisk. *Lomdus* has become so indelibly impressed into the contemporary halakhic consciousness that Torah thought cannot be entirely separated from Brisker insights. Everyone in the Yeshiva today, even those who aren't its conscious proponents, has become sensitized to the possibility that a given halakhic detail or rabbinic formulation can be explained through a more precise elucidation of the underlying halakhic concept.[21] And yet, R. Wilovksy's critique conjures a counterfactual reality in which R. Hayyim Soloveitchik's insights were rejected from tradition as Madda.

Now plainly, Brisker *lomdus* did not emerge ex nihilo.[22] R. Hayyim's principal *hiddush* was to masterfully hone *lomdus* and bring it to the fore. Moreover, a reorientation to sharply examine received Torah and clarify its core concepts is a recurring process in the Torah She-ba'al Peh. Attention to conceptual formulation suffuses the talmudic reception of Tannaitic literature and the precise language and organizational schema of Rambam's *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and *Mishneh Torah*.[23] When I hear grumblings about *lomdus*, I am reminded of the words of the German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel: "Poetry can only be critiqued by poetry. A judgment of art that is not itself an artwork has no citizenship rights in the realm of art…"[24] Surely, the only way of appreciating the talmudic

[21] A note of clarification about the term lomdus: in both academic and popular discussions of lomdus, "Brisker lomdus" is often conflated with "lomdus" per se, without differentiating the broader philosophical trend within Rabbinic discourse and scholarship of the past century from its particular form in the original lomdishe tradition of Brisk. (For example, figures such as R. Leib Malin, R. Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, and R. Shmuel Berenbaum have received little attention in the intellectual history of lomdus.) Furthermore, the distinction between the more ambitious, ideational, and dynamic lomdus of R. Hayyim and the conservative, classificatory, and technical lomdus of his son, R. Velvel, known as the Brisker Rav, has been overlooked. It is this latter lomdus which currently typifies a "Brisker vort" in the Yeshiva world.

More broadly, lomdus is not merely the province of the particular traditions of Brisk and Telshe whose lomdus emerges from a distinct theological matrix, and, having a defined character, have received the majority of scholarly attention, but is indicative of the general tenor of Torah scholarship of the past century; no one would consider R. Moshe Feinstein a Brisker and yet no one would confuse Dibrot Moshe with Ma'arakhot R. Akiva Eiger. While the Torah of R. Elchanan Wasserman or R. Aharon Kotler is easily distinguishable from Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim Ha-levi, R. Hayyim's influence is unmistakable. Thus, while the Torah of individual scholars differ—not simply on the basis of halakhic philosophy, but due to personal scholastic inclinations such as style, scope, the balance of the thematic and the technical or of ideational clarity and textual fidelity, etc.—a universal stress on clarifying the halakhic construct under consideration unites the Torah of the modern Yeshiva world. Lomdus refers not only to a theoretical approach, but to a historical discourse of Torah, which is distinguished by a shared terminology, metaphysical realism, and distinctive emphasis on and esteem for the incisive formulation of internal halakhic concepts, in lieu of other explanatory methods. It is this discourse with its focus on the philosophical and metaphysical that resembles Jewish philosophy.

[22] For instance, Rashi frequently employs "Brisker" terminology (e.g. *paqa shem minei*), R. Isaiah di Trani explains *halakhot* by way of *lomdishe* distinctions, and R. Judah Rosanes (known for *Mishneh Li-melekh* and *Perashat Derakhim*) elaborates the implications of conceptual *haqirot.* The dawn of modern *lomdus* is apparent in the *Aharonim* in the century prior to R. Hayyim, for instance in the works of R. Aryeh Leib Heller, R. Yaakov Lorberbaum, and R. Akiva Eiger. And parallel trends are discernible in the collective halakhic consciousness of R. Hayyim's era, namely, in the works of R. Meir Simhah of Dvinsk, the Rogatchover Gaon, and R. Yosef Engel – though without R. Hayyim's characteristic incisive precision and focus on the halakhic *din.*

[23] Leib Moscovitz, *Talmudic Reasoning: From Casuistics to Conceptualization* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

[24] Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Fragmente,* 117.

conversation's dialectical dance of halakhic intricacies is through a new poetics of talmud.[25]

Nonetheless, an analogy to Madda is not without merit. Within the scope of halakhic thinking, *lomdus* refocuses the locus of inquiry directly on the nature of halakhic concepts.[26] Is prayer a heartfelt petition or awe-inspired worship? Is the telos of *talmud Torah* phronesis, erudition, or hedonic noesis? The discourse of *lomdus* constitutes a movement away from the practical, normative, and particular to the theoretical, philosophical, and systemic. And, in this way, *lomdus* is analogous to the most substantial contribution of Madda to Torah in the medieval period: the tradition of medieval Jewish philosophy, which, like *lomdus*, introduced a discourse which represented Torah as a philosophical system.[27]

Now, within the original tradition of Brisk, the analogy between *lomdus* and philosophy is limited to their theoretical orientation. Qua Jewish philosopher, R. Hayyim is opposed to the idea of philosophical inquiry as Torah.[28] In Brisker thought, Torah emerges from the Divine Will which is beyond the ken of human reason and explications of Halakhah consist of clarifying its internal definitions and mechanics, to the deliberate exclusion of philosophical rationale or historical, social, or psychological realia.[29]

However, the voluntarism of Brisk inspired the intellectualism of Telshe and invited R. Elya Meir Bloch's critique that halakhic reductionism fails to appreciate the wisdom of the Torah and ignores the social and psychological realities with which Halakhah is concerned.[30] In contrast to Brisk, Telsher thought understands that the

[25] The delightfully lyrical introduction to *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim Ha-levi*, written by R. Hayyim's son the Brisker Rav, consists of this argument.

[26] The analogy between Brisk and "Madda" is underscored by the similarity between *lomdus* and the more conceptual analyses emerging out of the contemporary academy which are concerned with, for example, the categories of charity, time, or atonement in Rabbinic literature.

[27] To be sure, although the sense of Halakhah as an ideal, unified, conceptual system emerges from R. Hayyim's hyperfocus on the elementary halakhic concepts, it is never explicitly presented as such in his writings. Both throughout *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim Ha-levi* and in the reflective introduction, the focus remains on clarifications of individual laws and concepts, which are driven by the resolution of specific difficulties and inconsistencies within Rabbinic texts. Halakhah does not depart from its classic, locally normative model. Likewise, although the notion that physical reality is perceived through halakhic constructs is implicit in talmudic discussions, when R. Reuven Grozovsky describes R. Boruch Ber Lebowitz's apprehension of reality through Torah (in the introduction to *Birkhat Shmuel* III), he ascribes it to his love for and devotion to Torah, rather than the cognitive dimension of Halakhah. The formulation of these two facets of Halakhah, as articulated in *Halakhic Man* and *Mah Dodekh Mi-dod,* constitute R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's most significant contributions to meta-*lomdus.*

[28] The Brisker dictum, "Faith begins at the point that knowledge ends," can be read as a proscription of philosophical speculation which would have occupied the intermediate space.

[29] For the theological basis of this approach, see Beit Ha-levi al Ha-Torah (Jerusalem, 1996) 119-123. The philosophical autonomy of Halakhah comprises R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's thesis in The Halakhic Mind, where he argues that a type of Jewish philosophy emerges merely from a richer appreciation of intrinsic halakhic concepts; philosophy begins with lomdus. It is telling that The Halakhic Mind is, at once, R. Soloveitchik's work which is most philosophically engaged and most representative of Brisker thought.

[30] Shiurei Da'at: Ha-mahariyil Mi-Telz Zatzukl I (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2010), 11-17, 200-204; R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man trans. Lawrence Kaplan, (Philadelphia, JPS: 1983), 52-53. It is no coincidence that the orders of Kodshim and Taharot, whose halakhot are often understandably reducible to Scriptural decree, are overrepresented in Brisker Torah, whereas the most creative and compelling lomdus of the Telsher halakhist R. Shimon Shkop is on halakhic civil law. For more on R. Shimon Shkop and the role of human reason, see Elisha Friedman, "Natural Law and Religious Philosophy in R. Shimon Shkop's System," Tradition 49:4 (Winter 2016): 53-70; Alex Ozar, "'These Are Matters Which Shatter Roofs': R. Shimon Shkop on Law and Normativity More Broadly" Dine Israel 34, 111-139, and the works of Sagi and Wosner cited therein.

wisdom of Torah is continuous with discourses of human reason and that a deeper understanding of the spiritual verities of the human condition yields sharper insight into Torah. While it has yet to be fully realized, the theology animating Telsher *lomdus* allows for the reincorporation of philosophy and Madda into the consciousness of Torah.

Possibilities of *Hiddushei Torah*

Already a millennium ago, in his introduction to *Ha-emunah Ha-ramah*, the philosopher R. Abraham Ibn Daud observed that the verse (Deut. 4:6), "Observe and perform them, for this is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations," indicates that philosophical substantiation is a part of Torah since it is through the ecumenical language of philosophy that the wisdom of Torah is recognized beyond its natural borders. Today, this role is shared by moral psychology, narratology, jurisprudence, literary theory, and an array of disciplines which beckon to new vistas in *talmud Torah*.

I think of R. Zadok Ha-kohen of Lublin, the philosopher of *hiddush*, who writes: "Even though later generations are inferior, they nevertheless have the virtue of dwarves on the shoulders of giants, since the Gates [of Insight] opened by their predecessors remain open before them and they themselves continue the process of opening new Gates. Even though they are greatly inferior, [their insights] penetrate deeper, for they have passed through the Gates in their soul opened by earlier generations."[31]

Every truth - of philosophy, aesthetics, history, science, or the human condition - has the potential to enrich the discourse from which *hiddushei Torah* emanate. And, although we can imagine a world where Torah was only nourished by our indigenous *masorah* and we had the hermeneutical tools to excavate all worldly wisdom from the Torah, as we live in an exilic world in which we are incapable of such exegetical feats and the Torah has already become conscious of foreign wisdom, the fundamental question is not if *hokhmah* is to be approached but, in a reality of its perpetual influence, what we, *Klal Yisrael*, want the texture of our Torah to be.

Consider a reality in which the Vilna Gaon's diagnosis that "to the extent one is deficient in secular wisdom he will be deficient a hundredfold in Torah study, for Torah and wisdom are bound up together," was taken seriously by a Yeshiva tradition which, to paraphrase R. Aharon Lichtenstein, taught "linguistics with *Amos*, historiography with *Melakhim*, agronomy with *Zera'im*, physiology with *Niddah*, chemistry with *Hometz U-matzah*, philosophy with *Yesodei Ha-Torah*, psychology with *Avodah Zarah*, and political theory with *Sanhedrin*."[32] I can imagine a tradition of a rich philosophical Torah attempting to move us from the first few verses of Kohelet to the last few and a *masorah* of psychology attempting to probe the pedagogical mechanics of Mishlei.

What would Torah be if R. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg's directive regarding the inclusion of an academic awareness into the Beit Midrash, "to introduce the love for the old Beit Midrash to those circles which viewed it as the remnant of a dated, vanishing past, and then to bring a new awareness and love for science and inquiry to those for whom the Torah and the literature and lifestyle connected to it are the highest attainment," had fostered its own Yeshiva world?[33] The colloquial chasm between Torah and art is only sustained by the lack of an artistic tradition emerging from within the walls of the Beit Midrash.

Reading Ludwig Wittgenstein or William James or studying Umberto Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* do not independently satisfy the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*. But I imagine a Beit Midrash with the same fierceness, vibrancy, creative passion, and *bikkush ha-emet* that I fell in love with when I walked into Telshe Chicago over a decade ago, in which the insights of Wittgenstein enrich our Torah of

[31] Resisei Layla 13; see also Likkutei Ma'amarim, 6; Yaakov Elman, "R. Zadok Hakohen on the History of Halakha," Tradition 21:4 (Fall 1985): 1-26.

[32] Sefer Uklidos (The Hague, 1780), Introduction; R. Aharon Lichtenstein, "A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View," in Leaves of Faith: The World of Jewish Learning (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003), 93. An early expression of this idea is found in R. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Yesod Mora Ve-sod Torah, Sha'ar 1.

[33] R. Shalom Carmy, "R. Yechiel Weinberg's Lecture on Academic Jewish Scholarship," *Tradition* 24:4 (Summer 1989): 15-23.

Halakhah, James our *hiqqerei emunah*, and Eco our *lomdus*. Our aspirations to *gadlus be-Torah* deserve no less.

Yagdil Torah ve-ya'adir.

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Sanctifying the Secular: A Torah u-Madda Approach to Popular Culture

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As a child watching the Disney animated version of 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame,' the evil priest Frollo speaks to the gypsy Esmeralda after learning she has claimed sanctuary, telling her, "You think you've outwitted me. But I'm a patient man. And gypsies don't do well inside stone walls." I immediately thought of the laws of *Ir Miklat*, the city of refuge. On the one hand, this city protects the accidental killer. However, once this individual steps outside its walls, he is fair game for those who want him dead. The visual depiction of this concept stayed with me, bringing the idea to life, as did a later scene where Quasimodo shouts "Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuary!" having saved Esmeralda from the jaws of death.

Similarly, when I read *The Black Cauldron* by Lloyd Alexander, there is a scene in which a character has a true dream about another individual, Ellidyr. "You I saw with a black beast on your shoulders. Beware, Ellidyr, lest it swallow you up" (27). Later on, he cautions once more "The black beast rides in the saddle with you. I see it even now" (31). Alternatively understandable as the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, and also similar to King Saul's *ruah ra'ah*, evil spirit (I Samuel 16:14), the black beast was a metaphor that clarified concepts within my own religion.

Swan Lake is the story of two women, identical in form, who are confused with one another. There is Odette, a beautiful maiden wearing the form of a swan. Then there is Odile, the daughter of the evil enchanter Rothbart, who assumes her form. A confused prince pledges himself to Odile when he means to marry Odette, with whom he is in love. The passion, emotions, and challenges that ensue provide a wonderful counterpoint to the experiences of our patriarch Jacob. He too accidentally pledges himself to and weds the wrong woman, realizing only when it is too late that it is she, and not the beloved Rachel, to whom he is wed. He too suffers the consequences. When *Swan Lake* is performed as a ballet, there are alternate endings. In some, the prince dies. In others, he lives on, having broken the curse on Odette. Which one is Jacob's ending? Though he lives, the repercussions of having wed Leah first forever alter the fabric of his life.

I have found Torah in many fairy tales. I have given lectures about Star Wars' 'The Last Jedi's Luke Skywalker as an educator,' whether, as the Game of Thrones adage states, love is the death of duty, and what Wonder Woman can teach you about Judaism. For every class I've given, there are a thousand more examples that live in my mind. Because for me, reading books, watching movies, and viewing TV shows is a spiritual experience. And I believe there are others like me, those for whom such recreation is an uplifting, sanctified experience.

This approach is not for everyone. In his article, "*Torah u-Madda* or Torah u-Movies?" Moshe Kurtz states:

> I am a major proponent of all things Geeky, but I try not to delude myself into thinking that when I play Call of Duty or read Harry Potter that I am being *mekayem* some kind of *mitzvat aseh* (fulfilling a positive commandment). Rather, I listen, watch, play, and read what I do because I enjoy it—it's my preferred use of necessary leisure time. *Agav* (incidentally), once I am doing that, I am open to being inspired or intellectually captivated by a theme that in some indirect way might enhance my Torah study and service of God. But I try to keep myself honest by endeavoring not to conflate my recreation with my religion.

For Kurtz, recreation is separate from religion. For me, they are indelibly intertwined. When I watch a movie, read a book, or view a TV show, I am always thinking, "How does this connect me to God? To Judaism? How does this enhance my understanding of my religion? Are there scenes here that echo the Tanakh?" It is a specific orientation towards recreation, and it is one that can be cultivated.

Why should we cultivate it? I will answer simply. In the Modern Orthodox world, it is very unusual to find individuals who are learning Torah 24/7. People are going to find some form of recreation. It might be watching sports games, chilling with Netflix, reading a popular novel, or attending a fitness class. And given that this is what the majority of individuals are doing, the question now becomes: what should the attitude towards such recreation be?

There are several choices. Some mindsets suggest that such recreation lies outside of one's religious self. One such attitude is inspired by guilt. "Really, I *should* be attending a Gemara class right now," is what this individual is thinking. "Instead, I'm watching *The Avengers*." If this guilt-based approach actually spurs the individual to act such that he or she does indeed join a Torah class, that is wonderful. Too often, however, it does not.

Another person's response may be defensive. "Everyone needs to relax sometimes," such an individual thinks. "After a long day at work, I deserve to sit back and enjoy a show." And so she does.

Whether guilty or defensive, both approaches suggest that the form of recreation one has chosen has little to no redeeming value. It is outside of Judaism. Outside of God.

For me, this is false. I am inspired by a Hasidic approach to our world. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes about it in his book *To Heal a Fractured World.* He explains that God, in making the world, "could not leave it devoid of his presence." God therefore "sent forth rays of his light." The light was "too intense for its containers, which thereby broke, scattering fragments of light throughout the world. It is our task to gather up these fragments, wherever they are, and restore them to their proper place" (74). This theory, based on Lurianic thought, is called *shevirat ha-kelim* ("breaking of the vessels"). When one lives a life "suffused with the love of God, it is possible to redeem these fragments and restore them to their proper place as containers of divine light" (75).

Rabbi Zev Reichman explains this further in his book *Flames of Faith: An Introduction to Chasidic Thought.* He clarifies that "nothing can exist divorced from God. Even evil has a bit of Him in it to sustain it, this little bit of Godliness is called a Nitzotz, a spark of Divine light. When a Kellipah is broken, when I break a wall and find God behind it, then I am causing the spark of God that is hidden to be revealed" (163). Torah prohibitions set limits on which sparks we can raise—for example, we cannot eat pig while having the intention to use the energy we receive from the food for studying Torah. However, there is much within this physical world that is permitted to us. These are referred to as *Kellipat Nogah*, permitted physical pleasures.

The Baal Shem Tov believed:

> People with finely developed vision see each angel, that is, each manifestation of Godly power, with every tap on every blade of grass; they hear each heavenly decree and echo as it goes forth into the wide world. These people know that every place has sanctity, not only the heavenly realms. Not only is every vision and prophecy heaven-sent but also every utterance is a messenger from above. The discerning person will realize its purpose after sufficient contemplation.
>
> And that is why certain people can weave a cloth of *halachos* and lessons from seemingly mundane matters.
>
> -*Tales of the Baal Shem Tov* by Yisroel Ya'akov Klapholtz, Volume 5, page 42.

More recently, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook espoused such beliefs. There was a purpose, he argued, to be found even

within atheism. In his essay "The Pangs of Cleansing," he explains "Atheism has a temporary legitimacy, for it is needed to purge away the aberrations that attached themselves to religious faith because of a deficiency in perception and in the divine service" (*The Lights of Penitence, Lights of Holiness, The Moral Principles, Essays, Letters and Poems*, page 264). In his piece "Concerning the Conflict of Opinions and Beliefs," he argues that religions other than Judaism contain an "inner spark of divine light" (273). He argues:

> Therefore, instead of rejecting every pattern of ideas from which the tiny elements of good have begun to sparkle and which in themselves have trapped souls to lead them to the depths of the abyss—the place where reigns the darkness that deadens the soul in its prime of vigor—a task that is bound to fail, **it is for us to enhance the original light. It is for us to disclose the breadth and depth, the universality and eternity that is immanent in the light of the faith of Israel. It is for us to clarify how every spark of the good that is manifest in the world stems from its source and is linked with it in a natural bond** [emphasis mine].
>
> -Page 274.

Why are people attracted to secular books, TV shows, and movies? Because there is something good to be found within them, something attractive, moving, poignant, and powerful. They stir our spirit. They make us *feel*. I would argue that often what people find so moving is actually a spark of holiness. It is linked back to God. And we can raise it up. We can explicitly discuss the insight the book or movie afforded us and how it helped clarify a Torah, Jewish, or Godly concept.

So how does one go about doing this? There are two ways. Either one can do it on one's own, or one can learn from someone who has the knowledge base to do it well.

If one wishes to go about this on one's own, one must first be conversant with Jewish texts. This means setting aside time to study, or at least read, the Tanakh. (Reading it in English works, too!) I would recommend reading Midrash as well, whether in the original Hebrew or through a compendium like Louis Ginzberg (and Henrietta Szold's) *Legends of the Jews.* The Midrash is imaginative, fantastical, and redolent with magic. Unlike Moshe Kurtz, who writes, "On occasion, one will find epic moments in Tanakh, such as when Eliyahu calls down a fire from heaven, but for the most part, one will not find the same breathtaking supernatural feats that the Fantasy genre provides," I have found that every incredible moment in fantasy has its counterpart—or something even more scintillating—within Tanakh, Gemara, and Midrash. Indeed, one of my favorite things to do when I teach is to take a breathtaking moment, whether from a book or TV show, and show how our Jewish tradition had it first. (One easy example— and this contains spoilers for the Game of Thrones franchise—before there was the Red Wedding, there was Absalom's sheep shearing party.)

Then, one must become an *active* reader or viewer. Do not sit back passively and consume content. Instead, engage eagerly and avidly. You are searching for the spark of holiness that animates the book, the novel, or the show. Sometimes, you may even be searching for the point of departure. Take, for example, Harry Potter. In the final novel, Harry Potter must die and be reborn in order to kill the part of Voldemort that resides within him, the final Horcrux. (This death and resurrection is a reference to Christ.) There are so many directions one can go with this. There is the overt Christological reference, which one can examine through the lens of Judaism. Alternatively, one can begin a text-based discussion on whether it is better to slay the *yetzer hara* [evil inclination] within oneself in its entirety, just like Harry must kill the Horcrux within himself, or whether it is better to redirect it. One can question whether heroes in Jewish tradition are martyrs, sacrificing their lives for the sake of others, or whether Judaism privileges a different kind of heroism.

Finally, if you wish to model this approach to others, you must do so explicitly. This means actively discussing the book one is reading or the movie one is watching with spiritual mentors, teachers, friends, one's partner, or one's family—and explaining or examining how it has deepened your connection to God and Judaism. (Remember: not every book or film's messages and values will directly align with Judaism, and that point of departure is also useful!

Figuring out what the religion that you live and love has to say about the ideas that fill your mind is important.)

There may be some forms of media that are so crude or model such poor behaviors that they are ireedemable for most people. If they contain any sparks, those sparks are "tied up" and off limits, similar to how we cannot lift up the sparks within pig meat. So even if you are availing yourself of this approach, it is still appropriate to be selective in the content you consume. Are you being honest with yourself when you state that there is something in the book you are reading or film you are watching that will heighten your empathy, your goodwill to your friends or family, your understanding of fellow human beings, or your connection with God? Examine your motivations and make sure they are pure.

If you have set aside time to become conversant in your Judaism and religious heritage, are willing to become an active, not passive, consumer of secular content, can orient yourself to look for whatever can be uplifted, and be honest with yourself when you truly cannot find anything of value, then your recreation has the potential to be utterly transformed. You too may become the kind of person who can sanctify the secular—and who can see God within a story told on the silver screen.

Truth in Fiction: Pursuing Torah in Secular Spaces

Margueya Poupko has taught high school English in various girls' yeshiva high schools in New York and New Jersey.

As an English teacher in a right-wing girls high school, I am no stranger to the question a student asked me once: "If everything comes from the Torah, then why do we study literature?"

I have heard this question asked in a variety of ways – everything from "How could a yeshiva have us read books that go against our morals?" to "Isn't literature just a waste of time?" The questions no longer surprise me, but they never fail to sadden me. I find them ironic for a number of reasons, not the least because what inspired me to teach literature in the first place was how close reading brought me to God. If anything, it was the excitement of discovering life lessons through unlikely places that I found spiritually profound. But even more than that, the questions jar me for the same reason that I am always amazed when scientists dismiss the existence of God – how could the people who study the universe be the very people who do not see God's hand behind it? As students of literature, how can anyone not see the vital role these texts play not despite our religion, but in direct harmony with it?

Let's first address the humanities on their own, the value of which is indisputable, despite it being disputed regularly (whether it is cutting arts from the budget of any institution or downplaying the significance of classes that don't directly lead to a career). As our society marches closer to a utilitarian, process-oriented construct in which we Google for conclusive answers and eschew the process of free thinking, we strip ourselves of our own humanity, allowing robots to take center stage in our homes and in our pockets. While computers can give us information, they cannot give us experiences, knowledge, critical thinking, or empathy, the very skills that distinguish us as people and are cultivated and perfected through studying the humanities. We now dismiss the very subjects that remind us of who we are and encourage us to embrace the messiness of the human condition, in favor of clean-cut formulae and efficiency.

We know, though, that when Hurricane Sandy, Covid, and other crises shut down our access to anything soft – whether library books or theaters or museums – we all felt a loss that could not be filled. Whether it's strict escapism or a deeper understanding of the universe, we look to the products of the humanities to fill in the gaps that our frenzied, high tech lives leave in their wake. We gain appreciation for the layers and nuances of language, we argue the merits of fictitious characters' decisions, we measure their experiences against our own. We both lose and find ourselves in these manufactured worlds, so close to our own yet pleasurably distant. Society needs these outlets for entertainment, expression, and analysis, and the Torah society is no different.

But what about this specific subset, the relatively insular world of the Torah driven community? What value does literature hold for a people who already have a blueprint for how to live and feel? There are three schools of thought when it comes to this question – shun these influences for they all carry risk; utilize them as a necessary evil for obtaining a degree and career but nothing else; or embrace the broader world not as irrelevant to Torah but as a vital part of understanding it in the first place. The third, while the most audacious, speaks to the challenge of the modern man: exercising free will and strengthening one's convictions through confrontation rather than avoidance. Why would we be placed on this Earth if not to engage in this sort of battle, and can we not believe that the Torah will survive, or even thrive, from the challenge? The world of literature is a powerful one – to dismiss it as a "waste of time" is to outright deny the role it plays in our lives as Torah Jews. When Nathan the prophet was tasked with the unenviable job of chastising King David for his sin, he wisely presented David with fiction. He spun a related tale of a similar plot, and it was through the smokescreen of a fabricated story that David was able to own an uncomfortable truth. This is but one of the many tools of literature: the lifting of a mirror to man, however obscure and disfigured, only to reveal the hidden and unpleasant truths within ourselves. We are better people for it, and we are better thinkers for having taken on the challenge to extrapolate and incorporate these lessons.

And even in the abstract, when literature is not about confrontation but the mere pleasure of experiencing another person's journey, we are bettering ourselves in the process. My desire to become an English teacher in a yeshiva was first sparked in the classrooms of secular professors in a religious college, teachers who offered stories for no other reason than the joy of analysis. Almost despite themselves, the classes took on discussions rich with Torah thought – what should Lady Audley of *Lady Audley's Secret* do, a married woman who presumes her husband to be dead, changes her identity and marries someone else, only to then have her first husband track her down? The tension of her polygamy triggered a fascinating discussion on the sanctity of marriage and the function of the *get*. In my own classroom, we contemplate the necessary role that confession plays in redemption as we watch Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* advance in her Puritan community despite her sin – perhaps even because of it, having allowed the sin to become an opportunity for growth – while her partner in crime, Dimmesdale, languishes under the burden of the secret he refuses to share. We watch Macbeth change from an even-tempered man to a blood thirsty, paranoid tyrant through his own choices – and echo the Sages' wisdom when they both celebrated and warned that man is formed according to his own actions. While the lessons of Elul, *teshuvah*, and *behirah* happen effectively in their sanctioned classes, there is something perhaps even more powerful in seeing these lessons in unrelated, secular texts. A value system echoed or even misrepresented in an outside text allows for a resonance that a single-minded approach to Torah does not. Even when these values stand in contradiction to these works, such as when teaching *The Great Gatsby* or *The Crucible*, the conflicts only reinforce what we already know to be true – a morally dubious path will only lead to the downfall of man. These stories are not problematic as much as they are cautionary tales, all the more for their depiction of a struggle.

And perhaps most importantly, as my students and I struggle over Victor Frankenstein's hubris and subsequent unwillingness to take ownership of his mistakes, we not only discuss the dire importance of personal responsibility, and the crucial need to set aside one's ego as a scientist and as a parent, but we also find surprising bouts of sympathy for both him and his creation, men of suspicious and even deadly actions who can still remind us what it is to be human. And we can both learn from their mistakes and empathize with their temptations and limitations. Altogether, we are becoming more human as a result.

Even (or especially) in instances when students struggle as they sympathize with a villain, we are not distancing ourselves from Torah truth, but coming closer. Uncomfortable as it is to feel warmth towards someone whose choice we despise, it is this very nuanced level of thought and emotion that creates complex minds and encourages open, profitable discourse. As F. Scott

Fitzgerald famously wrote: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." Surely as people of the Book, meant to emulate God in His endless capacity for sympathy alongside judgment, we can benefit from these exercises, not by undermining our own principles but by sustaining differing viewpoints as a means of strengthening our insight and understanding. In today's time of intense polarity, literature has never been more important for this reason alone.

Perhaps the biggest testament to the Torah's divine origin is the fact that there is something in its pages for literally everyone. A concrete, linear mind will thrive on the clarity of expectations the Torah puts forth, while a mystic will find endless meaning in the spiritual and cosmic elements that are just as present. One can find justification for a more rigid infrastructure of religious adherence right alongside the person seeking validation for social justice and charity. This holds true for the literary minded as well. Malbim's commentary emphasizes the richness not only in the concepts of the Torah but by its very diction; Radak was as much a grammarian as he was a philosopher, engaging in close reading of Tanakh to derive deeper meaning; *parshah* stories provide us with the narrative arc of people whose mistakes shed light on our own and whose lessons are meant to be studied and internalized rather than whitewashed and canonized. Whether on a sentence level or in a bigger picture way, the study of literature can and perhaps should serve as a training ground for how to better study Torah, while the Torah itself helps further enhance the study of any other text.

That student who asked me about why we study literature will not be the last. The question speaks to both the strength and the challenge of her particular education – Torah is elevated and celebrated, rightfully so, but in so doing, a wall has been erected that keeps students like herself from recognizing the power that other subjects have, not only in servicing her in their own right, but by even enhancing the Torah that she prioritizes.

To her, to her classmates, and to the future students who will ask me, I say: look around the world, look within yourself, and consider that the question is not how can a yeshiva allow and even condone the study of literature, but how could it not?

The Dark Side of Torah u-Madda: Chaim Potok and Core-to-Core Cultural Confrontation

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My whole world has been an effort to utilize the sophisticated learning at the [Jewish Theological] seminary for fiction, the very sophisticated learning at the University of Pennsylvania, where I got my doctorate in secular philosophy, very deliberately chosen to see what the center of the Western World was really like... All that for the purpose of seeing whether somehow those aspects could be fused... to see in an honest way what aspects of the two cultures really could not be fused, were absolutely impossible in terms of blending.[1]

- Chaim Potok

Rabbi Dr. Chaim Potok is known to the American Jewish community for his novel *The Chosen*.[2] As a JTS-ordained rabbi turned scholar turned novelist, his writings—scholarly, theological, and literary—are not frequently read in the Modern Orthodox community.[3] Yet, Potok attended Yeshiva College, graduating in 1950 with a major in English literature, and he was a contemporary of Rabbis

[1] Conversations with Chaim Potok, ed. Daniel Walden (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2001), 31-32 (henceforth: Conversations).

[2] This essay could not have been written without the support of my friend and colleague, Rabbi Dovi Nadel. Dovi encouraged me to read The Promise in the summer of 2018, reintroducing me to Potok as an adult. I hope this essay expresses my appreciation.

[3] Potok's spiritual home was the Conservative movement. He served as camp director at Camp Ramah (Ojai) from 1957-1959, managing editor of Conservative Judaism from 1964-1975, and editor-in-chief of the Jewish Publication Society from 1965-1974. He also took on several rabbinic/pulpit roles throughout his career, which includes his chaplaincy in the US Army during the Korean War (likely the inspiration for his Book of Lights).

Norman Lamm[4] and Aharon Lichtenstein. Consequently, his childhood[5] in the center of Modern Orthodoxy and *Torah u-Madda* is not merely a historical coincidence; Potok's exposure to the ideas and culture of *Torah u Madda*[6] facilitated his trailblazing literary creativity and scholarly output. In this essay, I argue that Potok offers a useful conceptual framework for *Torah u-Madda* as well as a uniquely relevant literary genre for Modern Orthodox Jews.[7]

For many in the Modern Orthodox community, the only association with Potok is *The Chosen*, which teachers often assign as middle-school reading, likely because of the storyline of two Jewish American *teenage boys* navigating a newfound Jewish experience in America. Unfortunately, Potok's literary project, I believe, is lost on young children. Throughout his prodigious literary output—which includes novels, non-fiction, short stories, plays, and children's books—Potok attempts to capture the cultural conflict at the heart of Judaism's encounter with modernity. When two cultures clash, Potok argues, creativity blossoms; moreover, the fusion enhances the individual's worldview. In his words:

> [The] tension between small and particular worlds of value on the one hand and an individual suddenly looking for a new way to perceive the world on the other hand–this polarization constitutes one of the great themes in modern literature...probably the profoundest theme.[8]

In the wake of modernity, Potok argues, nations, cultures, communities, and groups that ordinarily would not encounter other ways of life are exposed to new ones. The encounter that occupies Potok's attention is what he calls a "core-to-core" cultural confrontation.[9] Such encounters pin the fundamental or substantive elements of one culture against another. Core cultural elements pervade and characterize the attitudes, beliefs, norms, behaviors, institutions, modes of thought, and ways of living; they generally dominate the cultural narrative and intellectual discourse. A new experience occurs when "an individual raised in the very heart of one particular culture encounter[s] an element, or elements, from another culture - right from the heart of that other culture . . . when cores of culture have met in confrontation, out of the ensuing tension has come creativity that enriches us all and each time just takes us that much farther away from the dark magic of our beginnings."[10]

In contrast to core-to-core encounters, Potok avers, are "peripheral" encounters between secondary or superficial elements of two cultures.[11]

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[4] For more comparisons between Potok and Lamm, see my Twitter thread.

[5] In truth, Potok's family's rigid and closed orientation led him to abandon Orthodoxy and join the Conservative movement. See *Conversations*, 113, 158-159.

[6] Here I don't use the phrase "*Torah u-Madda*" in the ideological sense, but to refer to the broad interaction of Torah, culture, and religious personalities that a student of Yeshiva College would have experienced in the forties. For example, Potok's *The Promise* takes place at the fictitious Samson Rafael Hirsch college (likely based on Yeshiva College), but Dr. Samuel Belkin's "synthesis" and "harmony" model of *Torah u-Madda* is nowhere to be found. However, the *entire* story is saturated by the cultural conflict of Torah and general culture.

[7] Potok himself viewed his literary project as universal—he was merely using his particular upbringing (and cultural encounter) as a way to express the universal. He frequently quoted James Joyce's explanation for why he wrote about Dublin: "For myself I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities in the world. In the particular is contained the universal" (Conversations, 127). Yet, I will argue below that Potok's unique cultural encounter can be particularly powerful for Modern Orthodox Jews.

[8] This quote is from Potok's 1989 lecture entitled "Literature and Religious Authority: the Writer Against the World," which took place at The John Adams Institute in Amsterdam.

[9] *Conversations*, 55-57.

[10] Potok, "Literature and Religious Authority."

[11] Potok differentiates himself (See *Conversations*, 5, 9, 43) from Jewish-American authors like Phillip Roth and Saul Bellow, for example, as Roth and Bellow engage in more peripheral encounters, whereas Potok writes about core-to-core confrontations. Readers familiar with Roth and Bellow can consider the veracity of Potok's claim.

> There are many ways in which we encounter other cultures. We can encounter the periphery of another culture—**its noise, its passing fads, its pop culture, superstitious elements**, and so on. Those are—without sounding too elitist—more or less peripheral elements of a culture in the sense that they are the **easiest elements of a culture to acquire**. They demand the least of the person acquiring them. They are interchangeable elements which come and go. They don't effect the essential direction of a culture in any profound way. All cultures have these elements. And yes, it is an elitist view of culture.[12]

The majority of Potok's novels explore core-to-core confrontations between Judaism and various elements of Western civilization: integration and rejection of American culture (*The Chosen*), Judaism and psychoanalysis (*The Promise*), traditional Talmudic methods and Source Criticism (*The Promise*), the Jewish mystical tradition and Eastern religions (*The Book of Lights*), Divine Election and monism and religions/cultures without contact with nor influenced by Judaism (*The Book of Lights*), Jewish tradition versus aesthetics and art (*My Name is Asher Lev*), patriarchal religious authority and feminism (*Davita's Harp*). One could easily imagine a Potok novel written for today's questions—navigating, for example, Judaism and gender and sexual diversity or Jewish tradition and Postmodernism.

Applying Potok's Framework

Potok's conceptual model offers a helpful vocabulary for *Torah u-Madda* as a project of fusing, or exploring the interaction between, Torah and general culture. For Potok, core-to-core confrontations are attempts to synthesize the richest possible cultural fusion; peripheral confrontations, by contrast, yield less meaningful gains. When Torah and *madda* clash, what is the nature of the relationship? Is it core-to-core (primary elements or core values from Torah with secular disciplines), peripheral-to-peripheral, or core-to-peripheral? This question is not merely a mathematical formula for a *Torah u-Madda* equation, but it presupposes that the interaction of Torah and *madda* has better and worse forms and that we should strive for the best combination.

For example, someone engaged in the study or practice of *mussar* might reflect on the work ethic of Michael Jordan and consider how his herculean strides can inform our life as hard-working *ovdei Hashem*. While this is a nice idea, one could make the same argument about many cultural phenomena, human activities, and even microbiological organisms. This peripheral cultural encounter (*mussar* and sports) does not offer a rich understanding of human nature or enhance our understanding of Torah. By contrast, I previously argued that a ripe case of core-to-core confrontation is synthesizing the halakhic category of *me'abeid atzmo le-da'at* (death by suicide) with contemporary research on suicidality. Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein in his *Arukh ha-Shulhan* devotes five sections to the halakhic dimensions of death by suicide. He argues that *poskim* must attempt to attribute death by suicide to other reasons (e.g., mental illness) because people, under ordinary human pressures, are so highly unlikely to choose death by suicide. Our study of Halakhah and understanding of human nature is further enhanced when we bring it into conversation with modern psychology's research on suicidality. We can more accurately understand, for example, the etiology of suicide. Dr. Thomas Joiner's research demonstrates that perceived burdensomeness, social alienation, and acquired ability to enact lethal self injury are the three key etiological factors. This core-to-core encounter produces a rich *heftza shel Torah u-Madda*, one that understands Halakhah and human nature more deeply.

Within the realm of Judaism and psychology, there has been an explosion of writings in recent years. Yet, many books explore the periphery of both Torah and psychology. They might cite, for example, psychological studies and a comment of Netziv or Rav Hirsch to share a nice *vort*, but they avoid dealing with core human and psychological questions. By contrast, Rabbi Dr. Reuven Bulka in his *Jewish Marriage: A Halakhic Ethic* explores the central tasks and challenges in marriage through the dialogue between halakhic texts about marriage, intimacy,

[12] Conversations, 125, emphasis mine.

and sexuality and clinical research and theory on couples and marriage.[13]

Another shortcoming in this literature relates to halakhic dimensions of psychotherapy. A recent work dedicated to the *halakhot* of psychotherapy lacks a holistic approach or wide-sweeping framework for Halakhah's encounter with psychotherapy. Instead of engaging the core goal and purpose[14] of psychotherapy, this work examines individual techniques or aspects of psychotherapy (which one might refer to as the periphery). To truly grapple with the halakhic challenges posed by psychotherapy, one must understand its fundamental objective. However, the core understanding of psychotherapy is not enough; one must offer a compelling vision for Judaism's conception of behavior and the psyche. Professor Moshe Halevi Spero's work,[15] to my mind, is the only scholarship produced by a Jewish thinker who substantively blends Jewish texts, psychoanalytic theory, and philosophy to arrive at the rich core-to-core encounter between Torah and psychology.[16]

Spero serves as an excellent example of applying Potok's model for a deep and profound encounter between Judaism and general culture.

Torah u-Madda as Literary Genre

In addition to using Potok's core-to-core paradigm for furthering human understanding and Torah, Potok's novels also form a distinct literary genre that embodies the *Torah u-Madda* experience. Potok is different from rabbinic ideologues and theologians such as Rabbis Norman Lamm and Aharon Lichtenstein who wrote treatises and monographs about the *philosophical* and *theological* conflicts between Judaism and modernity (with the goal of discovering synthesis, harmony, and integration). While for R. Lamm *Torah u-Madda* manifests in the dialogue between Freud, Menninger, Rambam, and Radbaz about self-incrimination,[17] and for R. Lichtenstein in using Milton's sonnets to understand the experience of blindness,[18] Potok's books contain the *experience* of traditional Jews struggling with their encounter with modernity.[19]

For Asher Lev, it is the tension that emerges between his Hasidic upbringing and his passion for art; for Reuven Malter, it is the acceptance of academic methods for Talmudic study in light of his rabbis' disapproval and disdain for modern innovation; for Gershon Loran, it is a devout Eastern spirituality challenging his particularist, exclusivist religious tradition. Each of Potok's protagonists are tasked with navigating a religious tradition and culture

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[13] For the interested reader, see chapters 10 ("Conjugality: The Concept") and 11 ("Conjugality: The Practice"), in which Bulka demonstrates immense creativity in synthesizing halakhic texts on sexuality and secular research/theory.

[14] In the words of Dr. Jonathan Shedler, a leading thinker in psychodynamic psychotherapy, "The goal of psychoanalytic psychotherapy is to loosen the bonds of past experience to create new life possibilities." In other words, the goal of psychotherapy is to free the individual from harmful patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (often outside their conscious awareness) preventing them from living a life aligned with their values and beliefs, yearnings and aspirations.

[15] For example, *Judaism and Psychology: Halakhic Perspectives* (New York: Ktav, 1980), *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Jewish Ethics* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1980), *Religious Objects as Psychological Structures: A Critical Integration of Object Relations Theory, Psychotherapy, and Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[16] See Halevi's chapters "Psychology as Halakhah: Toward a Halakhic Metapsychology" in *Judaism and Psychology: Halakhic Perspectives* (New York: Ktav, 1980), 11-30, and "Modern Psychotherapy and Halakhic Ethics: Approaching Consensus in Values and Practice" in *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Jewish Ethics* (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1980), 1-31, in which Halevi proposes a general theory for conceptualizing psychotherapy in Halakhah and breaks down the core assumptions and beliefs of psychotherapy and proposes an integrative halakhic approach.

[17] Norman Lamm, "Self-Incrimination in Law and Psychology: The Fifth Amendment and the Halakhah" in *Faith and Doubt* (Jersey City: KTAV, 2006), 266-284.

[18] Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?*, ed. Jacob J. Schacter (Northvale: Aronson, 1997), 254-255.

[19] "What I'm really writing about is the feelings of people involved in those confrontations because a novel is not only time and character, but is also feelings" (*Conversations*, 33).

that they cannot leave and a new system or culture with antithetical, yet meaningful, values.

Potok's novels contain the pulsating excitement of Jewish life and tradition. In *The Promise*, for example, Potok recreates the frenetic animation of studying a *sugya* and the intensity of serious Talmudic *"hasmadah."* Potok's novels embody *Torah u-Madda* by expressing a religious phenomenology through the literary form. Put differently, by capturing the rich experience of Jewish living and Jewish texts, Potok engenders a form of literature that presents Torah (broadly conceived) through the form of *madda*. In addition to experience, Potok's books contain ideas and texts from *Tanakh*, *Gemara*, *Kabbalah,* and more. Potok is not alone in this genre—S.Y. Agnon, and more recently, Rabbi Haim Sabbato, have written novels that incorporate quotes, phrases, and allusions from biblical and rabbinic texts into the textual fabric of the novel. Their books not only capture Jewish life but express a textless representation of *talmud Torah*.

Lastly, Potok's characters don't always arrive at satisfying religious conclusions—from the perspective of halakhic commitment. Many accept the non-Jewish cultural enterprise, compromising on their absolute religious commitment, and start a hybrid life transformed by the cultural encounter. This proverbial dark side to Potok's novels allows the reader to experience a compromised life born out of cultural confrontation. In a sense, Potok allows us to live a vicarious existence in a world deeply informed by, but not limited to or bound by, religious tradition. As Modern Orthodox readers, we can explore the "what if" of complete cultural immersion without the concern of violating halakhic norms.

This essay has argued that Potok's thought and works offer a valuable lens and language for thinking about *Torah u-Madda*; its expectations are high but its vision grand. Some may object to it as an elitist and inaccessible model. Yet, even if the intellectual model is not democratic, Potok's novels are available for all to experience the vibrancy and dynamism of Jewish life and Torah. Although Chaim Potok left the world of Orthodoxy, his contribution to *Torah u-Madda* remains.

Letters to the Editor: The Boundaries of Torah u-Madda & Does Torah u-Madda Answer Today's Questions?

The dynamic conversation continues with letters to the editor widening our perspective on Torah u-Madda from Steve Gotlib, Ezequiel Antebi Sacca, Eugene Korn, Noam Stadlan and Larry Grossman.

Living Torah u-Madda in the Real World

In her contribution to the Lehrhaus' *Torah u-Madda* Symposium, Dr. Erica Brown wrote that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l's living and modeling an integrated life of Torah and Madda was "more worthy of emulation than whatever he wrote to [try to] convince us" to live such a life ourselves. This is a point that cannot be understated, and it points toward a general weakness I've noticed throughout the symposium.

It's wonderful to talk about the value of embracing a *Torah u-Madda* perspective, but I'm not entirely sure how much it accomplishes in actuality. A life of *Torah u-Madda* involves living said life in addition to (or maybe even in contrast to) pontificating about its underlying philosophy. It doesn't matter what someone's politics are, what university they attended, which yeshivot or seminaries they learned at, or what subjects they prefer to study in their spare time. What matters more than anything else is that they all strive to live lives that integrate religious and secular aspects in productive ways.

When I was an undergraduate at Rutgers University, I wrote an article in which I lamented the fact that people spend so much time saying "I'm Orthodox, BUT I do x, y, or z" and then extending so much effort trying to justify the perceived contradiction. I instead suggested that people should strive to be "Orthodox, AND x, y, or z." In other words, one should seek to live a life of integration rather than contradiction. Integrated lives don't always require an integrated philosophy, though. It's much more important to develop an integrated personality. The need to constantly justify the apparent contradictions of *Torah u-Madda* by spending so much time and effort writing about its philosophical ins and outs seems to reveal the underlying "Orthodox, but," which comes with a lack of

confidence in *Torah u-Madda* to compellingly address today's questions.

This thought occurred to me again when I read R. Shalom Carmy's contribution to the symposium. Two of his points particularly struck me. The first was R. Carmy's example of "a sincere, intelligent young man, not blessed with stellar yeshiva training," whose academic and professional background led him to want to carefully and respectfully analyze Torah subjects. His sincere questions, however, were met with the "fanfaronade of cheerleading for Torah, varied with lame, half-hearted attempts at real discussion that veer off into self-celebratory proclamations about the superiority of the yeshivish lifestyle" so common in *kiruv* spaces. While such a man will not necessarily go "off the *derekh*," his appetite for Torah will undoubtedly be blunted by this experience. R. Carmy concluded his point by noting that in Torah study "it is increasingly important for us to work with all the intellectual aptitude and integrity we can achieve. At the same time, it is disturbing to realize the danger of Babel invading our forums of Torah as well."

This is very much on point. I vividly remember feeling patronized in many *kiruv* spaces when I first began learning Jewish religious texts in a serious way. Had I not ultimately found the path of *Torah u-Madda*, I would easily have assumed that Judaism, Orthodox or otherwise, lacked the intellectual sophistication I was becoming so enamored with in university.

R. Carmy's sentence about the "danger of Babel invading our forums of Torah" as an unfortunate side effect of academically-minded, but not yet religious, people embracing *Torah u-Madda* Orthodoxy feeds naturally into his second point made to which I want to respond. In his brief discussion of academic Jewish Studies, R. Carmy wrote that:

> insofar as the Torah is *sui generis*, different in kind from other disciplines, we cannot uncritically treat the Torah as we would any other ancient document…The threat of adapting and assimilating what should be overriding convictions in order to blend into the professional landscape is especially acute in Jewish studies, precisely because they overlap with the subject matter of Torah, our beliefs about Torah… and the reverence that should go with them.

I feel strongly about this as someone who majored in Jewish Studies because of, rather than despite, my embrace of *Torah u-Madda*. On the one hand, it's self-evident that the Torah should be held in an exalted place as a manifestation of the Divine Will. Therefore, it would be at best reductive and at worst blasphemous to examine it the same way one would other Ancient Near Eastern texts.

On the other hand, the Torah's divinity is no longer an assumption that Orthodox Jews can or should continue to take for granted in the face of contemporary scholarship. This does not mean that the Torah doesn't represent the words of Hashem (*has ve-shalom*), but it does mean that Orthodox Jews in today's era must be able to demonstrate in an academically rigorous manner why the Torah should be excluded from the same methodologies that are applied to other ancient texts. As Dr. Marc Shapiro noted, "a basic assumption of Modern Orthodoxy has been that traditional Judaism has nothing to fear from the conclusions of science and scholarship. The one divergence from this approach in the past century and a half has been the resistance to any challenge to the dogma of Mosaic authorship."

Why should the scholarly consensus on this matter feel so threatening to Modern Orthodoxy? Why exactly should the academic techniques used to glean information on Enumah Elish, the Gilgamesh Epic, Hammurabi's Code, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Christian Bible, or the Quran not also be applied to the Torah? If it's because our text is the one true word of God while the others are not, Modern Orthodox academics must be capable of and prepared to advocate for that position in compelling language that their secular colleagues can understand. Using internal discussions to pat ourselves on the back and strengthen our own convictions certainly achieves the goal of allowing Orthodox Jews to continue viewing our holy texts as unique even in an academic context while viewing

ourselves as embracing the best of both worlds. However, such internal discourse does little to solve the actual methodological contradiction that *Torah u-Madda* necessitates in this case and beyond. As such, I can't help but worry that such an approach is hard to sustain when moved from the four walls of Modern Orthodox *batei midrash* to secular academic settings.

That may be alright for one who wants to study Torah and Madda individually, but should give pause to those who wish to live lives of *Torah u-Madda*. Are we really as confident in our *hashkafah* as our writing implies?

Steve Gotlib
Toronto, Canada

Torah u-Madda: A Sephardic Perspective

I read the symposium about *Torah u-Madda* with interest. I want to share my personal story, with the hope of bringing a different perspective.

I am from Argentina and I was educated in a traditional Sephardic environment (Syrian community, more specifically). Growing up, I naturally read literature, philosophy, and science. When I was a teenager, there wasn't any kind of ideology behind that impulse: it was simply and purely out of curiosity. While many of my friends were more interested in business or soccer than philosophy, I don't think they had a religious objection to reading a Nobel Prize-winning book or a good book of science.

I think my first encounter with *Torah u-Madda* ideology was from the Jewish blogosphere. I didn't know about MO, OO, RWMO, LWMO and all the labels you can think of. In fact, these labels are absolutely irrelevant to my Argentinian Syrian community. We are observant and traditional, and that's it. We are isolated in terms of matrimony and social relationships but fully integrated in terms of pop culture.

When I was 15 or 16 years old, I bought a used copy of *The Lonely Man of Faith* by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (in an old Spanish translation). I literally encountered the book by chance in a used bookstore. I wasn't prepared for what happened. I took a bus and started reading the book. I was absolutely delighted. I believe I finished the book that very same day. Until that moment, I didn't know that kind of Torah. I was particularly taken by something that sounds almost comical: this was a well-written book! And the author used words like kerygma, behaviorist, *deus revelatus*, and *deus absconditus*! I know: it's ludicrous, but as a teenager I encountered for the very first time a Rabbi who was prepared to use philosophical terminology to explain Torah concepts. And it worked! This was a really good book, a Torah book that wasn't underestimating the reader. A book that speaks to me in a very intimate way. That is for me the climax of *Torah u-Madda*. A transformative experience, not only in intellectual terms but also in a very personal one.

Ezequiel Antebi Sacca
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Jewish Attitudes toward Christianity beyond the Rishonim

Yisroel Ben-Porat's "The 'Judeo-Christian' Tradition at Yeshiva" is praiseworthy, but unfortunately it is also misleading. While it is true that the majority of *Rishonim* considered Christianity to be *avodah zarah* (I assume that is what Ben-Porat meant by "paganism"), we cannot stop at these medieval rabbis. It is critical to add that the majority of rabbinic authorities throughout Ashkenaz after the sixteenth century (*Aharonim*) ruled that Christianity is not *avodah zarah*—not classical idolatry (at least not for non-Jews) and certainly not "paganism." These included Rabbis Moshe Isserles (*Rema*), Shabtai Hacohen (*Shakh*), Moshe Rivkis (*Be'er Hagolah*), Ya'akov Emden (*Ya'avetz*), Yehezkel Landau (*Noda Be-Yehudah*), Avraham Borenstein (*Avnei Nezer*), Samson Raphel Hirsch, David Zvi Hoffman and Yehiel Ya'akov Weinberg (*Seridei Eish*) to name but some. (For a fuller list see my article, "Rethinking Christianity: Rabbinic Positions and Possibilities," in *Jewish Theology and World Religions*, eds. Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Eugene Korn [London: Littman Library 2012], 189-216.) In addition, a number of these rabbis, such as Rivkis, Emden, and Hirsch, wrote that Christianity is a positive theological and moral step forward for humanity.

Stopping at the *Rishonim*, as the article does, fosters the incorrect impression that halakhic Jews must consider Christianity to be idolatry, which is both incorrect and would create impossible situations for any modern Jew in the West or even Israel. The determination of whether Christianity is considered *avodah zarah* today has widespread halakhic, behavioral, and moral consequences for halakhic Jews, particularly American Jews who live, work, learn from, and often socialize with Christians. Finally, Rambam's position, which the article highlights, is completely infeasible today. Rambam ruled (Commentary on *Mishnah Avodah Zarah* 1:1-3), that it is prohibited for Jews to live and even traverse a city that contains a church, a position that no Jew today, however halakhically careful, follows. Rambam also ruled (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and their Wars 8:10) that Jews are allowed to—or possibly should—kill gentiles who do not accept the seven Noahide commandments, which included Christians for Rambam. A fair description of the halakhic position on Christianity should include these points.

These latter rabbinic authorities understood that Christians can be theologically sophisticated and ethically sensitive people. They were also practical in their formulation of Halakhah regarding Christianity, which enabled Jews to coexist, interact with, and appreciate Christians and their faith. Modern Orthodox Jews should follow their wisdom and rulings.

Eugene Korn
Jerusalem, Israel

Torah u-God's Creation: we are asking the wrong questions and finding the wrong answers

Much of the discussion on "*Torah u-Madda*" seeks to justify the study of non-Torah subjects, deal with the challenges that science and archeology might present to faith, and address the influence that cultural or secular values have on our community.[1] These discussions begin with the assumption that the study of non-religious topics requires justification, and that the milieus and the products of this learning pose challenges to religion. I think these assumptions are wrong and the results frequently fail to "justify" non-religious studies.

The Torah starts with the creation story. Rashi famously tells us that it starts with creation to justify the Jewish claim to Israel—something I fully support. But the description of God's creation of the world also tells us just that. God created everything in the world, and therefore knowledge of anything in the world is potentially knowledge of God. Seeking knowledge, any knowledge, is intrinsically valuable. Some try to justify *Madda* on an instrumental or practical basis—this or that subject (usually science or medicine) is useful for a particular purpose, or some other subject (usually humanities) is not useful. This approach misses the point. The pursuit of knowledge is valuable in and of itself, and it does not have to be justified by being useful for a particular purpose.

Another misunderstanding is the confusion between the inherent value of an activity versus the allocation of time. Some approaches to Judaism treat choices in life as a video game, where the player can gain or lose *mitzvah* points based on what they do or how they spend their time. They claim that since "*Talmud Torah ke-neged kulam*" (Pe'ah 1:1) —learning Torah is equivalent to many other activities (or greater than other activities), one should learn Torah as much as possible to acquire as many *mitzvah* points as possible. I think this is a false dichotomy. Of course we have an obligation to learn Torah, and we have an obligation to encourage Torah learning. But I suggest that a life of pursuit of knowledge, observance of *mitzvot*, and fulfilling the obligation of Torah learning is one valued and encouraged by our religion. One does not have to devote oneself exclusively to Torah learning,[2] especially if one is drawn to the pursuit of other knowledge or other occupations.

The search for knowledge leads to knowledge. If we do not value that search, then we do not value the fruits of the search. Our community has moved away from valuing knowledge for its own sake towards valuing knowledge instrumentally: *Torah u-parnassah*. At the same time the

[1] I am indebted to Rabbi Marianne Novak for providing the main idea of this essay, an idea she learned at the Yeshiva of Flatbush in the 1980s.

[2] See here for a discussion of the technical obligation of times for Torah study.

rabbinic leadership in the United States has moved away from valuing facts and logic in *psak*, and moved towards claims of authority and "*Da'as Torah*." Recent events have also illustrated the danger when the community does not place value in science and objective knowledge.

Separate but related to the issue of worldly knowledge is that of worldly (modern) values.[3] Modernity in and of itself is neither positive nor negative. Those values that align with Torah values should be embraced. We need to teach our family and communities that we disagree with those modern values that are not consonant with Torah values. We should also emphasize that within our religion there are those who emphasize values (or perhaps in some cases, more accurately the balancing of values) that also do not fit our understanding of Torah values. Some values are simply old, not timeless. The dangers from the influence of values from each side is not symmetric, but that doesn't mean that they are not present. In the same way that we need to guard against excessive materialism, sexual immorality, and other antithetical values present in modern culture, we need to guard against misogyny,[4] discrimination (against converts, women, LGBTQ and others), gadolatry, and other values that simply should not be considered Jewish values.

Another challenge is what to do with worldly knowledge that appears to challenge religious beliefs. This notion borders on dualism, as if there is one god who gave the Torah and another who gave us the world. As R. Moshe Tendler *zatzal* wrote, "The reliance of traditional Torah law on the laws of science to make its ruling is the result of the Jewish definition of the monotheism that declares total identity between the God that gave us the laws of nature and the God that gave us His ethical principles on Mount Sinai."[5]

I would suggest that the natural extension of this idea is that God gave us not only the laws of nature but the entire world, and therefore any contradictions are simply questions that have not yet been answered. We should of course grapple with the questions seriously, but the assumption of the common Source means that they do not impact belief. Belief, if it is present, is pre-existing. Accepting that Torah and the world stem from the same Source does imply that legitimate contextual reading of sources, as opposed to dogmatically insisting on literal readings, will usually fit far better with our and God's reality.[6]

God created the world for us to perfect. We do that by learning Torah and living Torah. Living Torah includes living in God's world, interacting with the world and God's peoples, and learning about God's world. There is no bifurcation. Those who ignore the knowledge of the world and do not value the pursuit of knowledge are the ones who have veered off the path charted for us by God and our tradition. They are the ones who should be having symposia to justify what they do and think. We should proudly pursue knowledge, study Torah, and live lives applying and practicing what we have learned. This is the way of perfecting the world and moving God's creation forward.

Noam Stadlan
Skokie, Illinois

Torah u-Madda Cannot Cure Current Ills

The wide variety of ideas proposed in this symposium—a kind of Modern Orthodox wish list—shows how the term *Torah u-Madda*, however understood, has become, for many, a talismanic cure for the problems one perceives in

[3] For a more extensive discussion of the topic, see the introduction of this paper.

[4] Of course Judaism recognizes and mandates some differences in gender. There are also legitimate halakhic disagreements on these topics. On the other hand, there are some attitudes and halakhic positions that are simply beyond reasonable, and we should be very clear on that. One example that comes to mind is the erasure of the pictures of women.

[5] Rav Tendler did note that sometimes halakhic categories do not correspond to the natural world, but that does not decrease the significance nor importance of the natural world. See *Gesher*, vol. 1 p. 83.

[6] I have analyzed this idea with regard to the three major Abrahamic religions here.

contemporary Orthodoxy. Lest a false nostalgia lead us astray, we must recall the specific historical circumstances that led to the decision, in the late 1970s, to appropriate the words on the official Yeshiva University seal and designate them as the educational aim of the institution, and the outcome of that choice.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the Modern Orthodoxy that had largely characterized YU and the community with which it was associated faced the challenge of a rising Haredi Orthodoxy hostile to secular studies, especially on the post-secondary level, that was not for the purpose of making a living. Yeshiva College and Stern College, then liberal arts institutions, were therefore taboo for the fastest-growing sector of American Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, who assumed the YU presidency in 1976, attacked the problem by replacing the previously used term "synthesis" with *Torah u-Madda*. Not only was the latter couched in a Hebrew recognizable to the Haredi world, but it also seemingly maintained a separation between the two halves of the curriculum, keeping Torah from being "synthesized" into something else. *Torah u-Madda* was part of a broader plan by Lamm to replace "Modern" Orthodoxy, which had negative connotations for those repelled by modernism, with a more generic "Centrist" Orthodoxy.

The key components of his *Torah u-Madda* Project, which was funded by foundation grants, were a lecture series, a *Torah U-Madda Journal*, and Rabbi Lamm's book, *Torah U-Madda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition*. Anyone who today skims the topics of the journal articles or reads the book will see that this initiative aimed at justifying the pursuit of secular studies along with Torah, both in the eyes of Modern Orthodox Jews and Haredim, as realms that should enrich, not clash with, each other.

But two intersecting forces weakened the appeal of *Torah u-Madda* at YU itself. One was the Torah-only approach picked up by students during their post-high school year (or more) in Israel, aided and abetted by the hostility toward the liberal arts on the part of faculty members of the rabbinical school, especially once Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was not longer active. The other was the weakening of the American economy in the 1970s that led students to demand business and accounting courses that would prepare them to make a living upon graduation, and that necessarily entailed a reduction in liberal arts requirements. Today, YU's Sy Syms School of Business educates a majority of male undergraduates. Instead of Haredim joining the Modern Orthodox by flocking to *Torah u-Madda*, many Modern Orthodox students have adopted the Haredi model of Torah and *parnassah* even as they willingly immerse in a degraded popular culture and spend hours on social media. The failure of *Torah u-Madda* was glaringly evident upon Lamm's retirement in 2003, when no rabbi-scholar personifying his ideology could be found to succeed him.

Torah u-Madda in its original sense is an unlikely cause to rally around today if only because the liberal arts have continued to decline in universities across the country and pre-professional training remains the prime educational goal in our community. But there is a deeper reason for its irrelevance: the issues that confront Modern Orthodoxy today are far more complex than those of the 1970s and they are not, I believe, simply resolvable through an educational program that combines the holy and the mundane. Here are just a few: What shall be our response to the Pew finding that 30% of Jews raised Modern Orthodox no longer identify as such today? How shall we deal with feminism, gay rights, indeed the whole panoply of gender nonconformism? Can we make our peace with biblical criticism? Is intensive Talmud study turning off more young men than it attracts? Should we focus more on mystical and Hasidic approaches? Is the growing rate of Modern Orthodox *aliyah*, as admirable as it is, siphoning off potential leaders and innovators, to our detriment?

Torah u-Madda cannot begin to address such matters. Only serious thinking, experimentation, and bold decision-making—with the help of the Almighty—might.

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