

Mayer Schiller

Torah Umadda and The Jewish Observer Critique: Towards a Clarification of the Issues

It has long been a matter of discussion among Torah Jews what role, if any, knowledge, beauty and experience of a non-explicitly sacred nature should have in their lives. This issue was recently brought to the floor of public debate by Dr. Norman Lamm with his *Torah Umadda* [1](#) and by *The Jewish Observer* which has published one lengthy [2](#) and two shorter [3](#) critiques of the book.

For the Jew ever desirous of better serving God, this is a controversy with grave consequences in practice as well as in theory. In the reflections to follow, we hope to examine this subject with care by first attempting to clarify the root areas of the debate and then pursuing those topics to their practical conclusions. If, with God's help, our musings will assist some who have struggled with these issues, then their goal will have been achieved.

It is hoped that the reader will take the following thoughts in the spirit in which they are intended. Our desire is in no way to stir up acrimonious controversy and certainly not, God forbid, to personally criticize any who have entered into the *Torah u-Madda* debate. We take it as a given that the Rabbis and scholars who have challenged Dr. Lamm's book were as motivated as was its author by a deep desire to increase *kevod shamayim*. This is our goal as well. Hopefully, it will be realized.

It must be noted before we begin that there are two additional important questions that are very different from the one under discussion although they may appear similar to it. The first question is, how much time and effort should

a Jew devote to increasing his ability to make a decent living? This is an extraordinarily pressing question, but it has nothing to do with *Torah u-Madda* as presented by Dr. Lamm and critiqued by his opponents. In fact, we can better understand the issue by stating that, according to the *Torah u-Madda* position, if all of us were to receive a lifetime Kollel stipend we would still be called upon to seriously pursue secular knowledge. Second, there is the question of whether, or to what degree, a Jew may "live in" general society in 1995? Given the assorted manifestations of heresy and decadence spewed forth by those who dominate the contemporary public square, is it necessary to secede emotionally and, perhaps, even physically from the chaos? Is it possible to be connected to the culture of our age without severely damaging one's Torah orientation? Indeed, a strong case could be made that these two questions are of far greater relevance to most Torah Jews, of whatever camp, than are those concerning the theory and practice of *Torah u-Madda* which relate to a small and (given the reductionist-consumerism of the age) a rapidly shrinking constituency. However, they are both beyond the confines of this discussion.

The Jewish Observer's Definition of Torah u-Madda

Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum grants in the opening paragraphs of his review essay that Dr. Lamm is in agreement that Torah study is "preeminent among the *mitzvos*." The problem arises when Dr. Lamm gives "open-ended approbation . . . to secular studies" due to "the value that he attributes to these studies." It is then that "he undermines the traditional vision of Torah learning in significant ways" (p. 28).

The clear implication is that Rabbi Rosenblum also favors secular studies if their "approbation" not be "open ended". He too seems to be willing to grant them some value, but not as much as Dr. Lamm. This understanding is substantiated by a tantalizingly short footnote given at the conclusion of the "approbation/value" sentence (ibid.) There we are told that, indeed, "secular knowledge has . . . worth" (Let us assume that "worth" and "value" are being used interchangeably) and that the "Orthodox community has . . . benefitted from it."

These two propositions are based on three assumptions that Rabbi Rosenblum grants he "can readily concede": (1) "a proper understanding of both science and history can bring one to a deeper appreciation of *Hashem* . . ."; (2) "there are those who will require some post-high school education to earn a livelihood"; and (3) "the Orthodox community has benefitted in recent years from the infusion of the skills of *ba'alei teshuva* with broad secular educations

and from their demand for sophisticated answers to the deepest questions of faith." However, Rabbi Rosenblum tells us that "so broad are Dr. Lamm's claims for the value of secular education, that one may grant any or all of the above propositions without conceding anything of his essential thesis."

It is valuable to dwell on these concessions for, although remaining tantalizingly on the surface of what are clearly deeper questions, they shed much light on the confusion reigning over our topic. Rabbi Rosenblum leaves us in the dark as to his perspective on a host of problems which immediately leap to mind. For example, his admission that "a proper understanding of both science and history can bring one to a deeper appreciation of *Hashem*" leaves unanswered the following questions: (1) How deep or wide-ranging could (should) these studies be?; (2) How much time may be expended upon them?; (3) Are they permissible only if the student has the intention of arriving at a "deeper appreciation of Hashem"?; and (4) How often before, during and after one's studies must this "deeper appreciation" be a conscious part of the student's psyche? Suffice it to say that Rabbi Rosenblum's concessions open the door to many questions with which the Torah u-Maddaite will also have to grapple. They also point in the direction of the conclusion that the quarrel between the advocates of *Torah u-Madda* and its opponents may be only one of degree.

It is also worth noting in passing that there are many in the anti-*Torah u-Madda* camp who would regard Rabbi Rosenblum's granting of value to the study of history and science wrong, dangerous and bordering on the heretical. Actually, much of the critique that Rabbi Rosenblum will turn on *Torah u-Madda* has been voiced in hasidic and, in Israel, non-hasidic circles as well against his own position which does not challenge the American yeshiva world's acceptance of full fledged High School studies for all.

Furthermore, the glibness with which Rabbi Rosenblum offers his second concession, his endorsement of college (and why not post-college?) studies for *parnassah*, is quite shocking considering the passion which many of the yeshiva and hasidic worlds' leaders have brought in the past to their denunciation of college education of any kind and for any reason. Surely the questions of time wasted and negative environment which Rabbi Rosenblum will raise against Dr. Lamm later in his critique could also be launched against his acceptance of a post-High School education. The Rabbi's bold statement that there are "some" who will "require" it would surely be denounced in hasidic and, in Israel, yeshiva circles. There it would be argued that the negative aspects of secular studies far outweigh any possible financial gain that may accrue from them. Indeed, those societies do exist economically, however precariously, without any secular education whatsoever. [5](#)

Rabbi Rosenblum's third concession is a most fascinating one and its cryptic character demands further reflection. He informs us that "the Orthodox community has benefitted in recent years from the infusion of the skills of *ba'alei teshuva* with broad secular educations." The implication of this statement is unclear. If it is a "benefit", why should it not be actively sought by those from birth? Is it a benefit that is providentially provided only to those who have sinned by pursuing secular studies in their non-observant youth? Clearly the first two concessions are positing an imperative to engage in secular studies at some level; why should not the third concession do so as well?

This certainly seems to be the case in the second half of that concession where we are told that the "demand" of *ba'alei teshuva* "for sophisticated answers to the deepest questions of faith" have "benefitted" Orthodoxy. Who is benefitting? Apparently, it is not only other *ba'alei teshuva* but all of the "Orthodox community". If so, should not this benefit now be actively sought by all via the advanced education from which the *ba'alei teshuva* acquired it in the first place? Moreover, to what sort of benefit is Rabbi Rosenblum referring? Does he mean to say that the Torah community's understanding of its faith has been deepened by the analytical skills and questions which *ba'alei teshuva* have brought to it? Is he suggesting that this benefit would have been unavailable to Orthodoxy if it had pursued a "Torah only" approach? Indeed, the clear implication is that, would the "Torah only" approach have been followed, then "sophisticated answers to the deepest questions of faith" would be lacking.

The questions raised by this footnote seem to be indicative of a certain vagueness concerning the parameters of our topic. Indeed, many of those who have criticized *Torah u-Madda* in general, or specifically as it has been presented by Dr. Lamm, have prefaced their remarks by offering a general endorsement of "secular studies." This is then followed by a rejection of *Torah u-Madda*. What seems to emerge is that there are two ways to pursue worldly knowledge. One is legitimate, perhaps even commendable; the other is that of *Torah u-Madda*. Thus, in another context, we read the following in reference to the spiritual legacy of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, "The Rav believed in studying all wisdom . . . (and in) being a highly educated person. He did not however make an ideology out of it, and certainly was not a follower of T. U'M." [6](#)

Here we encounter a position akin to that of Rabbi Rosenblum. However, this position seems to encourage us to study "all wisdom" and become a "highly educated person." This would seem to be a bit more than Rabbi Rosenblum's "concessions." Yet, they are still not seen by their advocate as *Torah u-Madda*.

A similar perspective was offered by Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik in an open letter he wrote "in defense" of his brother shortly after the latter's passing:

. . . that the Rav had a positive attitude toward worldly wisdom is beyond question. . . . However, there is a great divergence between having a positive attitude and being committed to mada. Being committed to mada implies a belief that mada is an ikar in life. My brother did not consider mada an ikar in Yiddishkeit. As a matter of fact my brother in his lectures never mentioned Torah Umadda. [7](#)

Our concern is not with who possesses the correct interpretation of Rav Soloveitchik's approach. We have offered the above quotes only to illustrate that there are those who are even more enthusiastic than Rabbi Rosenblum in their endorsement of secular studies, yet, they still feel that Dr. Lamm's position, or at least what they describe as *Torah u-Madda*, is beyond the pale. What is it about *Torah u-Madda* as presented by Dr. Lamm that is so objectionable in the eyes of his critics?

The “Intrinsic Value” Problem

Rabbi Rosenblum begins his critique by claiming that Dr. Lamm "invests secular studies with intrinsic religious value." This leads ultimately to regarding Torah and *madda* as "co-equal forms of knowledge" (p. 28, 29). In order to prove that this is indeed Dr. Lamm's position, Rabbi Rosenblum quotes from *Torah Umadda* where we read that "Torah . . . and madda . . . together offer us a more overarching and truer vision than either one set alone. . . . Each alone is true, but only partially true; both together present the possibility of a larger truth" (p. 236). This yields, in Rabbi Rosenblum's view, the conclusion that, "So great is the value of madda for Dr. Lamm that the distinction between it and Torah finally blurs altogether" and that this leads him to "entertain seriously such questions as: Should one recite *birahas ha-Torah* on entering the chemistry lab? May one study calculus all day and thereby fulfill his obligation of Talmud Torah?" (ibid.).

The phrase employed by Rabbi Rosenblum which demands a definition is "intrinsic religious value." Presumably there is a dispute between Dr. Lamm and his critics as to the value of studies other than Torah. Rabbi Rosenblum has already agreed that secular studies possess some religious value. They can lead us to "a deeper appreciation of *Hashem*" and provide "answers to the deepest questions of faith." Yet, for some reason, this does not invest secular studies with "intrinsic religious value." Apparently, Rabbi Rosenblum wishes to reserve

the term "intrinsic religious value" only for those activities which fulfill God's specific commandments. In other words, secular studies can lead us to, or assist us in, the pursuit of explicitly sacred activities, but they must remain merely instrumental and not "intrinsic". Let us grant this dichotomy for the meantime and turn our attention to the nature of acts which possess non-"intrinsic religious value".

Secular studies, when viewed in this light, at least achieve the status of "eating, drinking, walking, sitting, rising, sexual relations and talking" which we are called upon in Chapter 231 of the Shulhan Arukh to perform for the "Creator's service" or "for something which facilitates His service." Applying this standard to the study of science, for example (the "worth" of which Rabbi Rosenblum has already granted), if one studies astronomy in order to achieve a greater sense of fear and love of God, then that act is being performed for the "Creator's service" if while it is happening the person experiences the biblically enjoined emotions just mentioned. The study may be "for something which facilitates His service" if, upon conclusion, these feelings exist or if they yield a personality now more receptive to Divine reverence in the future, whether it be during prayer, while viewing nature, etc.

In fact, however, this type of scientific study is arguably not merely instrumental Divine service. The requisite emotions of fear and love of God and attachment to Him produced during or following this study are themselves the fulfillment of *mizvot*. If this takes place, we are no longer in the realm of Chapter 231 which discusses actions "facilitating" Divine service; we are, rather, engaging directly in Divine service while studying science. Would this pursuit not qualify as an "intrinsic religious value"?

We have thus far dealt with those who experience a greater apprehension of God or yearning for Him while actually engaged in "worldly disciplines." It is also worth dwelling on the degree to which the pursuit of secular studies or physical actions in order to better serve the Creator at a later time could also be regarded as possessing "intrinsic religious value." Certainly eating in order to study Torah fits in the category of Chapter 231 of being "something which facilitates His service." In fact, the Shulhan 'Arukh concludes its detailed description of how one's thoughts should be oriented towards God while performing "mundane" acts by adding, "He who does so serves his Creator constantly." Thus, a neutral act becomes a form of Divine service. This could also logically apply to one who studies literature in order to deepen his understanding of the human condition and use that knowledge to better serve God in innumerable ways or to one who studies the physical sciences in order to deepen his prayer experience by better appreciating the Creator's glory. Should these actions be termed "instrumental" or "intrinsic"?

Of course, it might be argued that eating in order to study Torah or to preserve one's health is not to be described as an "intrinsic religious value", this phrase being best reserved for *mizvot* themselves. However, it is not at all clear whether instrumental acts when done with the proper intent do not become *mizvot* in and of themselves, i.e., preparing for a livelihood by studying a trade or engaging in exercise in order to maintain health or pursuing non-explicitly sacred knowledge for any of the reasons previously given. In fact, the *Mishneh Berurah* sees earning a livelihood in order to support a family or give charity as "under the category of *zedakah*. [8](#)

It might still be maintained that exercise or eating, while spiritually enhanced by good *kavanah*, are not solely dependent upon it. By exercising, our health is maintained (and God's will fulfilled) regardless of our intention. However, this may also be the case in literature, for example, where the broadening of one's mind and heart may also be taking place, regardless of one's conscious awareness of it. At the very least, it would seem that in order to pursue non-explicitly sacred acts one must have a general orientation towards God's service. In other words, were an atheist to study astronomy or were he to exercise, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to argue that he is thereby coming closer to God by doing so. However, if the general orientation of a person to God exists, then the lack of explicit intent might not be disqualifying.

In any event, we are now clearly involved in a debate that is either semantic (for all concerned grant the Divine service potential of these activities) or subtly metaphysical. The question of the precise terminology to be used in describing non-explicitly sacred activities performed in accordance with God's will (i.e., extrinsic/instrumental or intrinsic) does not seem to be a matter of great import. The acts are pleasing to God, they may be sacralized, thus becoming a form of divine worship which is not only permissible, but commendable.

A cautionary note is here in order. There is little doubt that the spiritual efficacy of non-explicitly sacred acts whose sanction is derived from their instrumental nature is profoundly altered by the intention one brings to them. Their sacred nature is enhanced and they become more pleasing to God to the degree to which the practitioner of them becomes more frequently and enthusiastically conscious of their Divine purpose. In other words, unlike explicit *mizvot* which we are required to perform where the act remains intrinsically sacred throughout its practice, [9](#) instrumental acts secondarily yielding the sacred are largely defined by their intent. Their religious content lies in the consciousness of the one performing them, so too their merit. Thus, the "intrinsic spiritual value" of exercise or of secular study depends, to a large extent, on the degree of Godliness with which these acts are imbued.

Having said this, it is clear that the more religious (God-centered) consciousness that one brings to secular knowledge and pursuits, the more would one enhance their value as a means to approach God. This greater awareness requires a disciplining of the senses which, as one continues to grow in Torah and 'avodah, becomes easier and more productive. In fact, throughout his work, Dr. Lamm evidences an awareness of this problem when he maintains that secular studies be pursued in "awe and reverence" (p. 166) and by suggesting that an appropriate prayer be recited before beginning them (p. 209-10). [10](#) These comments and others which actually raised the opposition of Rabbi Rosenblum (p. 33) were precisely geared to preclude a flippant study of the secular which would effectively sever its practitioner from God's service and render the entire enterprise religiously invalid.

We may therefore conclude that Rabbi Rosenblum would also attribute "religious value" to secular studies under his previously quoted first or third concessions. Whether he chooses to label that value "intrinsic" or not cannot be the source of his rejection of *Torah Umadda's* theories. Hence, we must turn to what the critic sees as the "effect" of Dr. Lamm's investing "secular studies with intrinsic religious value"; the transformation of "Torah and Madda into what appear as co-equal forms of knowledge" (p. 29).

Complementarity, Co-Equality and Distinctions

Rabbi Rosenblum asserts that Dr. Lamm sees Torah and Madda as "complementary" and "equally valid ways of viewing the world" (ibid.). In order to substantiate this, he quotes at length from *Torah Umadda*. In his version of Dr. Lamm's words, Rabbi Rosenblum cites the following:

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. . . . (p. 29).

The foregoing paragraph evoked fiery criticism from some readers of *Torah Umadda*. Perhaps the most bothersome phrase is, "Each alone is true, but only partially true." This seems to run counter to many statements of *Hazal* who see all wisdom as being present in the Torah. [11](#) Although this is, of course, true on

a deeper mystical level, nonetheless, as far as we perceive things with our this-worldly understanding, there is knowledge that is not in the Torah. Accordingly, although Dr. Lamm's choice of words might be seen as lacking in traditional reverence, he was merely stating the truth as we perceive it. To illustrate, the wisdom of plumbing is not readily available in the Torah, nor is a detailed analysis of chemistry. Conceivably, extraordinarily holy mystics may be able, by penetrating beyond the Torah's outer garment, to find these forms of knowledge within it. Surely, though, neither Rabbi Rosenblum nor anyone else would encourage budding plumbers or chemists to seek knowledge of their field via the Torah.

Thus, the phrase "partially true" refers not to any (God forbid) falsity in the Torah, but to the fact that for the average man Torah truth is limited to that which the texts themselves reveal. Going one step further, let us cite the example of medicine, whether physical or mental. There, too, all Jews turn to secular wisdom in order to supplement the picture of the world offered by the Torah. In order to cure everything from heart attacks to neuroses, we reach out to those other truths. Thus, as Dr. Lamm writes, "both together present the possibility of a larger truth" (pp. 4647).

Nonetheless, it does seem that Dr. Lamm could have found a clearer phrase to express his point. Torah is not "partially true". It may present us with a partial picture of all that is true, but it remains totally true. However, as we turn to Dr. Lamm's approach to apparent conflicts between Torah and *madda*, it will become clear why he chose wording capable of being misunderstood.

In the above cited quote, Dr. Lamm makes reference to the fact that secular wisdom may present a "perspective that may not agree at all with" that presented by "Torah, faith, religious learning. . . ." However, the sentence after this one is omitted by Rabbi Rosenblum in his rendition of this quote. The crucial sentence reads, "Yet, 'they are given from One Shepherd', as Ecclesiastes (12:11) taught." Clearly, Dr. Lamm's intention is not to posit knowledge and Torah as in some sort of conflict where one side must prevail. Indeed, Rabbi Rosenblum also omits the conclusion found in the paragraph's last sentence. The complete sentence with the missing words italicized reads, "Each alone is true, but only partially true; both together present the possibility of a larger truth, more in keeping with the nature of the Subject of our concern" (p. 236). Dr. Lamm's understanding, based upon the belief that all truth stems from God, is that it is an impossibility that true secular knowledge and Torah could be in contradiction. Indeed, the existence of the One Shepherd which is the source of both makes this impossible. The "larger truth" to which he refers represents the clarification of our understanding of Torah or *madda* created by the attempt to reconcile what

was only an apparent conflict. In the end there must be agreement between both perspectives. [12](#)

One might have preferred Dr. Lamm at this point to have explicitly stated that, at the moment when we see no solution to a conflict between Torah and madda, we must assert the truth of the former. This must be done even when it flies in the face of what appears to be reason and all available evidence. This is the minimum demanded by our *emunah*. However, Dr. Lamm actually goes a step beyond this formulation. He chooses to see conflicts as ultimately reconcilable when viewed from the "divine" as opposed to the "human point . . . of view" (p. 234). In truth, his notion of "complementarity" (pp. 232-38), whereby seeming conflicts cannot be reconciled by this-worldly understanding, is strikingly akin to the supra-rationalism of "simple faith" advocates. There are truths that are beyond the grasp of finite humans. Although there may seem to be no answer to certain Torah and madda conflicts, that is only because our perspective is human and therefore, by definition, limited. God is the author of revelation and creation. Torah and madda cannot be in conflict. As Dr. Lamm writes, ". . . both together present the possibility of a larger truth." This "larger truth" remains only a possibility, because God and His reality can never be adequately grasped by us.

Rabbi Rosenblum also asserts that Dr. Lamm "finally blurs altogether" the distinction between Torah and madda. He cites as an example Dr. Lamm's hypothesis that, following Rambam, "the study of the sciences and humanities is, in effect, the study of Gemara and thus a fulfillment of the study of Torah" (p.165). This seemingly shocking proposition is, in reality, based upon the Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah* where some forms of secular wisdom are, indeed, viewed as being part of *pardes*. Certainly, as Dr. Lamm notes, this position was not embraced by the halakhic tradition. Rabbi Rosenblum, who writes that Rabbi Barren entertains "seriously" the possibility of reciting a birkhat ha-Torah upon studying organic chemistry, is guilty of distorting his position. Dr. Lamm himself describes this question (and the other cited by Rabbi Rosenblum of studying calculus all day long and thereby fulfilling Talmud Torah) as "equally absurd" (pp. 163-64). His reference to Rambam's position is presented as speculative and a possibility only according to the *Mishneh Torah*, a view which he grants has not been codified into law. [13](#)

Before leaving this area of his critique, Rabbi Rosenblum criticizes Dr. Lamm for questioning the ability of *poskim* devoid of secular knowledge to offer "proper halakhic decision- making" (p. 30). In a footnote to his text we are told that "Many of the leading halachic works dealing with modern medicine and technology are the work of *Poskim* with no formal secular training" (ibid.). Whether or not the *posek* himself must have secular training, there is no doubt

that all *poskim* regularly draw upon secular knowledge or, at the very least, authorities in the field of secular knowledge, i.e., doctors, lawyers, psychologists, etc. before rendering their decisions. Hence, someone must be *madda-knowledgable*. If this knowledge is a prerequisite for the rendering of proper *pesak*, then its pursuit must perforce be imbued with religious value of some level.

The larger question raised here is whether Dr. Lamm is correct when he postulates that "ignorance of the facts, the realities, and the temper of contemporary life---the social, political, economic and cultural as well as the technological---will distort the knowledge base that goes into proper halakhic decision-making . . ." (p. 230). Quite conceivably he is. His assumption is that one must have access to the "fifth *Shulhan Arukh*" which opens the *posek's* eyes to the subjective variables of the case brought before him. For example, a *posek* would not respond in similar manner to a question sent to him from Me'ah She'arim as he would to a question submitted from Fargo, North Dakota. Likewise, an awareness of contemporary temperaments would perforce have to come into play in deciding an assortment of halakhic questions. One wonders whether Rabbi Rosenblum feels that *she'elot* concerning a Middle American day school should be sent to a *Dayan* in Satmar or those emanating from Toldos Aharon be answered by the RCA. What Dr. Larsen is trying to argue is that the ability to respond to the halakhic and spiritual needs of modern people requires an understanding of modernity.

Rabbi Rosenblum sees in this what he describes as the Modern Orthodox attempt to bring halakhah "into conformity with the 'temper of the times'." However, in fact, Dr. Lamm is advocating no such thing.

As a believing Jew, he has frequently stated his fierce antagonism to those manifestations of modernity which run counter to the Torah. The Torah remains immutable. [14](#) What is necessary, however, in order to make the Torah's message intelligible is that it be expressed in understandable language and that the particular halakhic standards advocated be in keeping with the spiritual status of those to whom they are addressed.

I do not intend to suggest that the phenomenon described by Rabbi Rosenblum does not take place often among those on the left of Modern Orthodoxy. There we often find meek acquiescence to the dictates of the *zeitgeist* on issues ranging from feminism and the nature of philosophical tolerance and free inquiry to acceptance of contemporary man's leisure activities as normative. However, this acquiescence has nothing to do with an acceptance of the pursuit of knowledge, beauty and experience or any of the theories advanced in *Torah Umadda*.

Finally, in this section of his critique, Rabbi Rosenblum sees the theories of *Torah Umadda* as negating "the immersion in Torah studies which has always been considered the *sine qua non* of any substantial achievement in Torah" (p. 30). Of course, this critique is highly subjective; it could equally be applied to the American yeshiva world with its full high school curriculum as well as to the Hirschian ideal of *Torah 'im Derekh Erez*. Indeed, it could be used against any of the Torah authorities to whom Dr. Lamm makes reference in his book who spent substantial amounts of time in "secular" pursuits. [15](#)

In truth, the amount of time one spends being "immersed in Torah" to the exclusion of all else has varied considerably throughout Jewish history. Until the first World War in Eastern Europe, only those young men particularly gifted in their studies would spend long years in day-long Torah study. This was done, up until the dawn of the modern era, under the tutelage of scholars who would only accept gifted students. Later years saw the establishment of yeshivas, but these were also limited to a small number of the exceptionally qualified. The vast majority of young people received the basics of Jewish learning from the local *melamed* in *Heder* and shortly after *bar-mizvah* would go to work or begin to learn a trade. Although it may be argued that this situation was far from ideal, the fact remains that the vast majority of young Jewish men left full-time learning at a relatively young age. On the other hand, there are many educators who would maintain that our current policy of day-long "immersion" in purely Torah study is by no means beneficial to many of those forced to pursue it. In fact, both the traditional system of allowing the majority to pursue a livelihood and the current system of subjecting all to what was once the province of an elite are the results not so much of conscious ideology but more of economic and social factors, e.g., Eastern European poverty (which made it impossible to maintain a large social class of students) and western universal education (which forces the entire population to remain in school for a long period of time). The ideal system would probably allow for the obviously existing vast divergence in human intelligence and personality by devising diverse methodologies for different students. This will surely be very difficult to achieve in an age given to mass education and uniformity.

Incidentally, since Rabbi Rosenblum claims that "*Torah Umadda* is by Dr. Lamm's own admission an apologia for Yeshiva College (p. xiii) and its bifurcated curriculum - Torah studies from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and the rest of the day in *Madda*" (p. 30), it is worth casting an objective glance at that institution's commitment to immersion in Torah studies. In today's Yeshiva University milieu, Torah study does not stop by any means at 3:00 p.m. but continues in the evening with a night *seder* attended by hundreds of undergraduates. In addition, there are many students drawn to Torah study who,

upon the completion of their undergraduate pursuits, do turn to day-long Torah involvement. This devotion is the logical result of the fact that almost all those brought up in the Yeshiva University orbit spend a year, at times two or three, in full time Torah study after the conclusion of their high school careers before they begin college. It does not at all follow that an involvement in God's creation need yield a lack of ardor for His revelation.

Concerning Pedigrees and Implementation

Rabbi Rosenblum divides the individuals and movements which Dr. Lamm offers as "models" for Torah u-Madda into two categories. There are those the former sees as illegitimate examples because they themselves did not pursue *Torah u-Madda* and there are others which he disqualifies because they were spiritual giants and hence irrelevant to our current, contemporary situation. As far as the first category is concerned, Dr. Lamm readily acknowledges that his references to the great Mitnagdic and Hasidic leaders are not to their personal examples, but to their theories. He is the first to admit that he attempts to extend and apply their theories beyond the confines of what they actually did and said while remaining true to their essential philosophical assumptions. His is an attempt to separate the core of their teachings from their particular cultural context (pp. 148-53).

This is admittedly speculative but let us dwell for a moment on one of the examples given. Dr. Lamm points to the hasidic concept of *'avodah be-gashmiut* as a possible source for pursuing non-Torah learning. As Dr. Lamm puts it :

. . . For Hasidism . . . a profane act performed for the sake of Heaven is considered in and of itself as worthy. If it is so consecrated, its value is intrinsic, it is a worthy fulfillment of the divine Will, and it is not merely propaedeutic to some other good.

It should by now be obvious that there is a very small step from *avodah begashmiut* to Torah Umadda, from worship through corporeality to worship through intellectuality. . . . The religiously inspired study of Madda is the cognitive equivalent of *avodah begashmiut* . . . provided . . . that it is pursued *as an act of avodat ha-Shem*, and not merely for career reasons, cultural curiosity, or because it is socially expected (pp. 173-74).

Rabbi Rosenblum grants that the "underlying idea that every physical action can be elevated if it is performed in the proscribed manner . . . is hardly revolutionary" (p. 34). What he finds objectionable is the amount of time to be spent on these pursuits. Just as eating to excess would not be considered *'avodah*, so too with secular disciplines .

We are here, once again, dealing with the question of degree. How much time a person should spend on eating, drinking, sleeping or recreation is a matter which is left to every person's discretion. The ultimate norm is that one's primary focus should be on explicitly sacred matters and that one's intention in pursuing the non-explicitly sacred should be the service of God. It is certainly possible that one may become over involved in the non-explicitly sacred. But this is a fear that every *'oved Hashem*, pursuing whatever path, must have. It is correct to assume that the more one is involved in these pursuits, the more one must replenish ones spiritual wellsprings via Torah, prayer, *mussar* and so forth. Indeed, this is precisely Dr. Lamm's point when he emphasizes that those following the notion of *'avodah be-gashmiut* must do so "for the sake of Heaven" and that its prerequisite would be "spend[ing] a significant portion of . . . time in the formal study of Torah." He warns us that to "To vulgarize this concept . . . as an excuse to minimize the study of Torah or to deny its centrality, either theoretically or functionally, is to distort it most deplorably" (p. 177-78).

Rabbi Rosenblum is further concerned by the fact that the notion of *'avodah be-gashmiut* was one which Hasidim extended only to *zaddikim*. He feels that "highly refined *kavanos* (intentions) are central to the doctrine." Accordingly, he concludes that no one is capable of approaching secular studies with the mindset necessary "to confer upon those studies religious value" (p. 35).

If this, indeed, be the case, then the very notion of serving God through the physical world via eating, drinking, sleeping, etc. is called into question. Are we to refrain from engaging in any physical activities because of what Rabbi Rosenblum sees as the impossibility of proper intent? Surely we are called upon to forever seek to heighten our religious consciousness while pursuing the physical, but to suggest that we refrain from activities necessary or salutary because of the imperfections of our intent is to refute the entire notion of "placing God constantly before us." [16](#)

We now turn to Rabbi Rosenblum's distinction between such Torah giants as "Rambam, Maharal and Vilna Gaon" who, he grants, "read in non-Torah texts" and the "average college student raised in a cultural milieu in which the non-Jewish influences may be at least as strong as the Torah influences." He further points to the fact that the Torah giants' approach to the secular was "based on a clear vision of how those readings were of an aid to either understanding the

Torah, to conveying Torah, or to intensifying one's love of *Hashem*. . . ." (pp. 31, 32).

In many ways this is, indeed, a telling argument. As Br. Lamm grants, the appropriate intention is extraordinarily important to the proper pursuit of *madda*. Sadly, there is no doubt that many who go under the banner of *Torah u-Madda* are ignorant of its fundamental assumptions and indifferent to its real goals. It is of utmost importance that those pledged to this ideal seek first and foremost to imbue themselves and their followers with a God-centered world view rooted in devotion to Torah, Halakhah and *yir'at shamayim*.

Unfortunately, sociological forces have led large numbers of people whose relationship to Halakhah is hazy to associate themselves with leaders and institutions pledged to the philosophy of *Torah u-Madda*. This has led to the erroneous impression that laxity in Halakhah and confusion concerning the basics of faith are somehow connected to this philosophy. What emerges is that the leaders of these communities must emphasize to the utmost of their abilities the basics of Judaism to their followers before embarking on more ambitious attempts to imbue them with some of the finer points of *Torah u-Madda*. Even in relation to those of their followers who are pledged to Torah and Halakhah, there is a burning need on the part of these leaders constantly to restate the fundamental God-centered principles which motivate *Torah u-Madda*, warn all concerned of those aspects of modernity which are antithetical to Torah, demand absolute adherence to the letter of Halakhah and seek to transmit a spirit of warmth, passion and enthusiasm in the practice of Torah and mizvot. If this agenda is assiduously pursued, then Rabbi Rosenblum's objections would carry less weight. At present, however, I fully grant that the proper implementation of *Torah u-Madda* as outlined in Dr. Lamm's book still needs much work. [17](#)

The “Spiritual Danger” Argument

In the concluding section of his article, Rabbi Rosenblum points to "the very grave dangers inherent in an open approach to virtually every aspect of secular knowledge" (p. 38). Using Dr. Lamm's own description of the vast array of contradictions between the basic assumptions of modernity and those of Judaism, he claims that the philosophy of *Torah u-Madda* is far too insensitive to the noxious effects of our age.

Rabbi Rosenblum quotes an extraordinary admission from Dr. Lamm in which the latter writes, "many religious casualties have already resulted from this historic program of Torah Umadda, and there are more yet to come" (p.

135). If this admission be reflective of fact, then, indeed, it is cause for grave concern. May we encourage masses of Jews to pursue a path which would lead to the spiritual ruin of "many" of them? Indeed, even if the *Torah u-Madda* advocate is correct in his assumption that one's *'avodat Hashem* may be improved by an awareness of, and an exposure to, knowledge and beauty, we must still ask whether this improved service of God is of greater value than the *total loss of "many" a Jewish soul*. In other words, may the *hiddur mizvah* of some be viewed as of more value than the total defection from Judaism of others?

Dr. Lamm's choice of words here may not have been prudent. In fact, in other areas of *Torah Umadda* he argues that an exposure to knowledge can actually work to protect a Jew's commitment to faith. This is similar to the dictum of Hazal who advise us, "Know what to answer to a heretic" (*Avot* 2:14). The young Torah scholar, well versed in and imbued with the holiness of the Divine Will, who is also familiar with the specious arguments and absurd lifestyle of contemporary man will, in many cases, be less tempted by its falsehoods and allures. Might it not be argued that the devastating effect of Haskalah philosophies on Eastern European Orthodoxy was due to that community's inability to respond to heretical challenges in the language of the times? Why is it that the "Torah only" bastions of Mitnagdic and Hasidic Jewry succumbed in shocking numbers to the assorted evil heresies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Could it not be argued that their ignorance of science, history and literature left them open to be tempted by many who manipulated those fields in order to promote secularist dogmas? [18](#)

A possible response to this argument would be that ours is a decidedly non-ideological age and that we are no longer influenced by heresy, but merely by sin. What tempts us today are not errant ideas, just pure hedonistic pleasure. In fact, there is much to be said for this response. Indeed, contemporary man's disinterest in reflection or knowledge is one of the most profound and not yet adequately explored phenomena of our era. The masses are no longer tempted by Wellhausen or Darwin, but by a lifestyle which is often in conflict with Halakhah. However, if this is indeed the case, then the entire debate surrounding *Torah u-Madda* becomes increasingly irrelevant to contemporary needs. If modern man is becoming decidedly non-reflective, then not only will his *'avodat Hashem* not be enhanced by exposure to *madda*, but it will not be threatened by it either. As much as those of us who are moved by ideas and knowledge may bemoan this situation, it does seem to be the trend of the times.

In any event, it is an open question as to whether exposure to knowledge threatens or protects the *ben Torah* and *'oved Hashem*. Certainly Dr. Lamm cited in his book a large number of Torah authorities who believed that not only

does it serve to protect one's faith but also to enhance it. His statement about "religious casualties" must be balanced against his claim that many become spiritually protected due to their awareness of knowledge and reflective thought.

[19](#)

Rabbi Rosenblum also makes reference to "recent alumni magazines of Yeshiva University" which feature "alumni dressed up in formal attire for a night at the opera" and which list "honorary degrees being bestowed on great authors who are celebrated for their works that . . . cast doubt on the veracity of Torah" (p. 39). His argument seems to be that we see in practice that *Torah u-Madda* has failed. We need only look at Yeshiva University, supposedly its leading practitioner, in order to witness this failure.

Of course, an initial response might be that Yeshiva University taken in its entirety is not, in fact, due to a host of sociological factors, a proper model through which to view *Torah u-Madda* in action. As noted before, Modern Orthodoxy by its very nature attracts to its ranks many whose commitment to Halakhah is very far from ideal. Whether this situation is a negative or a positive one may be debated. Surely the quasi-affiliated will not easily travel in the worlds of Telz or Satmar. The comfort which they feel within the confines of Modern Orthodoxy enables some who would otherwise abandon many of the basics of our faith to remain committed to large areas of Torah and *mizvot*. This positive situation unfortunately has negative repercussions, in that Modern Orthodox institutions must carry within their ranks many lacking a clear Torah orientation. This is a paradox which seems destined to haunt *Torah u-Madda* advocates for some time to come. However, it is not a theoretical refutation of this *shitah* and is merely an institutional version of an *ad hominem argument*.

There are two methods whereby these advocates can, at the very least, begin to address this problem. First, by never allowing *Torah u-Madda* to become confused in the public mind with a lessening of commitment to *limud ha-Torah*, scrupulousness in Halakhah or passionate faith. Second, since large numbers of Jews of hazy commitment (or in some cases little or no commitment) operate in their sphere of influence, they must use all possible means (limited, obviously, by prudential considerations and long-term tactics) to bring those souls to genuine Torah Judaism.

Does Yeshiva University always live up to these standards? This is an open question, about which good men may disagree. However, it need be noted that Yeshiva University practices what, for lack of a better term, we may describe as "inclusionist Judaism." By recognizing the sense of Jewish identification and positive contributions of all Jews, it seeks to accord those whose path it crosses proper respect and dignity. Given the sorry state of Torah knowledge and commitment among many Jews today, this approach, although certainly subject

to debate, is one geared to make as many Jews feel comfortable in at least some modicum of identification with their God and His people. This method is similar to that practiced by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe and other Hasidic leaders who always chose to view the good which resides within every Jew. Like their approach, Yeshiva University's is geared to evoke positive religious responses due to its inclusionist rhetoric and action. Hence, if one chooses to honor "not yet frum" Jews because they have made some contribution to *Klal Yisrael*, then the intention is to give them credit for the good they have done while prayerfully hoping to influence them towards a larger good. This method may be questioned; indeed, its de-emphasis of the existence of heresy and sin may occasionally lead the non-discerning observer to become confused. However, these problems are attendant any inclusionist approach dating from Reb Zusya of Anipoli to the late Belzer Rav.

What Rabbi Rosenblum may demand is that Yeshiva University be as clear in its public pronouncements and postures as to the true dimensions and beliefs of Torah Judaism as were the aforementioned sainted leaders. It is one thing not to condemn individual Jews (due to a recognition of the effect of their environment and a desire to bring them to Torah); it is something else entirely to mute one's public articulation of the divide between faith and heresy or virtue and sin. Inclusionists must be forever lucid and passionate in their presentation of the *'ikrei emunah* (basics of faith).

Rabbi Rosenblum also claims that the weakness of *Torah u-Madda* may be proven from the fact that "by far the largest percentage of (defections from Orthodoxy) are experienced by those who define their Orthodoxy in terms of their modernity" (p. 39). Once again, we observe that these "statistics" must be viewed in light of the easy access which Modern Orthodoxy provides for all Jews. If, in fact, larger numbers of those attending Modern Orthodox high schools leave the faith than do those attending yeshiva or Hasidic institutions, then this need not be attributed to any inherent results of the *Torah u-Madda* philosophy but merely to the natural sociological tendencies of the populations being serviced. Were Modern Orthodoxy to create schools solely for those in its ranks who are totally Torah committed, then one wonders what their defection statistics would be. Put in other words, even without the creation of separate institutions, if one takes the top thirty percent of students (for argument's sake) from Modern Orthodox institutions in terms of religious commitment and analyzes whether their participation in *madda* has led them to defect, I have no doubt that the results would be largely similar to institutions of the Right. Was not, in fact, participation in general knowledge and beauty part and parcel of the worldview of Hirschian Orthodoxy? Did German Orthodoxy's immersion in the language and culture of their time lead to mass defections?

On a personal note, it has been my experience, having taught Talmud in Modern Orthodox high schools for twenty years, that those few who do abandon the faith do so not because of their exposure to secular disciplines, but because they found a hedonist lifestyle more pleasant. As noted earlier, this is the great crisis which confronts Modern Orthodoxy and all segments of Orthodoxy today—hedonism, not ideology. It is the cheap attachment to popular culture which threatens, not that of knowledge and beauty in the larger sense. My students did not abandon Judaism because they studied history or literature with too much passion; rather, they left because they were tempted by images presented to them on television, movies and popular music. If a cautionary note should be sounded, it is that Modern Orthodox leaders are far too silent about this real threat to the souls of their constituents. It would require honesty and courage on their part to demand of their followers abstention from the vile (but today totally accepted) manifestations of popular culture. No, it is not necessary to throw out our volumes of classical poetry or great music; it is merely necessary to smash the television and shatter junior's CD collection. [20](#)

At his article's conclusion, Rabbi Rosenblum raises once again the question of "why?" He claims that "Dr. Lamm ultimately fails to provide any reason why one should lessen his study . . . of Torah, through which *Hashem* is apprehended most directly, for the study of nature, through which He can only be deduced" (p. 40). Of course, throughout the article, our critic has, in fact, himself offered numerable arguments why we should do precisely that. Beginning with his three concessions, continuing to where he grants the possibility that "neutral" endeavors may be "elevated if . . . performed in the proscribed manner", Rabbi Rosenblum consistently endorses the notion that God's service may be enhanced by the pursuit of non-explicitly Torah endeavors. It is certainly appropriate to demand that these endeavors be focused upon *'avodat Hashem* and that they be secondary to explicitly sacred activities. However, this position is, in fact, precisely that of Dr. Lamm who writes that:

Nature, the world, must not be neglected, and it must be studied and explored as part of man's relationship with his Maker. But Torah, as more than a creation of God, but His very word, ever remains supreme (p. 147).

Even more than seriousness and depth in the study of Torah is the axiological dimension: For Torah Umadda to be religiously meaningful, it is imperative that Torah be acknowledged as possessing central value and primacy over all else. Only when such centrality is affirmed does the enterprise of Madda become pregnant with meaning and the promise of sanctity. Writing of the righteous, the psalmist says, "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God" (Psalms 93:14). Indeed, only if one is firmly planted

within, in the inner precincts of Torah, will he or she spiritually flourish in the outer courtyards of *Madda* as well (p. 202).

In his letter to *The Jewish Observer* the above paragraphs were offered by Professor Lawrence Kaplan as proof of the true nature of Dr. Lamm's philosophy. [21](#) In response, the Novominsker Rebbe remained unconvinced. He wrote that, "despite the many disclaimers . . . the total effect of the *Torah Umadda* philosophy, as propounded by its principal spokesman, is to posit *Madda* as the co-equal, or near co-equal of Torah. . . ." [22](#) It is difficult to understand Rabbi Perlow's refusal to take Dr. Lamm at his word.

Perhaps he does so because he views the entire *Torah u-Madda* enterprise as errant. In his words, it represents "a radical departure from the tenets and traditions of *Yahadus*" due to its attempt at "sanctification" of the "culture of the times" and "secular wisdom." Dr. Lamm has "accorded" *madda* "the status of a quasi-religious imperative." According to Rabbi Perlow, earlier attempts made "in medieval Spain and nineteenth-century Germany" which might have seemed to be of a *Torah u-Madda* nature were not. They were "accommodations" not "sanctifications." [23](#)

These distinctions are difficult to understand clearly. Surely the Novominsker would grant that all of a Jew's non-explicitly sacred pursuits should be "sanctified" as best one can. This "sanctification" can only be attempted by pursuing them with God-centered intent. Indeed, the great Torah scholars and saints of our history accomplished just that. Was their approach simply an "accommodation"? It is difficult for anyone reading Rambam or Rav Hirsch to see them as accommodators. Rabbi Perlow claims that "the entire thrust of the Jewish soul-commitment is directed exclusively at Torah study." If this means that Torah study is to receive the primary focus of our attention, then the Rebbe would get no quarrel from *Torah u-Madda* advocates. However, if it is to mean that our pursuit of other areas of existence should not be based upon a "soul-commitment", then what are we to make of Rambam's Aristotelian studies or Rav Hirsch's devotion to Schiller's poetry? Surely, throughout Jewish history, as Dr. Lamm demonstrates, there were Jews who felt that secular studies should be pursued. Since everything God-fearing Jews do must, in the end, be motivated by a desire better to serve God, then surely their actions have religious motivation. This would seem to qualify as a "religious imperative."

Jews, “Humans” and “Our Task in the World”

In his next paragraphs, Rabbi Rosenblum accuses Dr. Lamm of denying that there is any fundamental difference between Jews and non-Jews: "To Dr. Lamm, the distinction between a Jew and a human being is an 'artificial' one. . . . The distinction between a Jew and a human being, however, is fundamental: All men are created in the Divine Image; only Jews are called children of the Omnipresent" (p. 40).

Unfortunately this criticism is based upon a complete misreading of a crucial passage in *Torah Umadda*. The relevant paragraph reads:

Thus, advocates of Torah Umadda do not accept that Torah is fundamentally at odds with the world, that Jewishness and Jewish faith on the one side, and universal concerns and preoccupations of humanity on the other, are fundamentally inapposite, and that Torah and Madda therefore require substantive "reconciliation." Rather, whereas it may be two that effectively Torah and culture have become estranged from each other . . . in essence they are

part of one continuum. Hence, the motivating mission of Torah Umadda must be to reunite and restore an original harmony. In other words, the exclusive concentration on one of these two poles to the detriment of the other is a sign of *galut* (exile), the one sidedness that results from the need to respond to an artificial distinction (Jew/human) that carries the weight of established doctrine while being inherently invalid (pp. 142-43).

The "artificial distinction" referred to is clearly one that exists within the individual Jew. It is addressing what it considers to be the erroneous notion that Jewish concerns and those of all humanity need be in contradiction. There is no discussion here whatsoever of whether Jews and non-Jews differ in some basic way. The selection of the Jewish people and the uniqueness of their souls are basic doctrines of our faith. Clearly our reviewer did not read the paragraph carefully. Instead, having come to the words "artificial distinction (Jew/human)" he seized upon them as proof of Dr. Lamm's rejection of *atah behartanu*.

Having thus misread *Torah Umadda*, the critic proceeds to give a distorted impression of it in his next sentence. He claims that since Dr. Lamm sees the distinction between Jews and non-Jews as "artificial", he is "led to the celebration of a life of exploration of what it means to be fully human" (ibid.). The phrase is that of the critic. It is his distillation of two pages, the gist of which is that man should harness all his faculties better to serve God. As Dr. Lamm puts it, "the harnessing and realization of personality must be guided by a

purpose beyond itself. . ." (p. 217). That purpose is not, as Rabbi Rosenblum would have it, a vague "exploration" of man's potential but, "The purpose was enunciated by the founding Father of Israel. . . . The goal of such total involvement of the self and the actualization of all its potential is to achieve *shlemut* (author's note: defined previously as religious perfection) by 'walking before' God. It is, in fact, religious growth" (pp. 217-18).

In order to solidify his condemnation of Dr. Lamm's humanism, Rabbi Rosenblum portrays him as advocating "a life in which the study of the music of Beethoven, the painting of Cezanne, and the poetry of Wordsworth takes its rightful place alongside the study of Torah" (ibid.). The implication once again is that these endeavors are to be seen as equal, an accusation which we have previously refuted.

However, what is interesting is that, in the paragraph in which he refers to artistic creation, Dr. Lamm actually devotes two sentences to describing the means whereby the study of the physical sciences "can inspire in us a fascination with God's creation that Maimonides identifies as the love of God" (p. 223).

Why did the critic choose to omit this reference to secular pursuits of the natural order which carry Rambam's imprimatur? Is it not because our critic is caught on the horns of a dilemma? He has already granted that "science and history can bring one to a deeper appreciation of *Hashem* as both Creator and as the moving force in human history" (p. 28, n.). He has also granted that Rav Hirsch's approach, which warmly embraced secular disciplines, is a legitimate one (p. 29, n.). [24](#) He has even endorsed "the non-Torah reading" of Jewish leaders of the past since what they did "was based on a clear vision of how those readings were of an aid either to understanding the Torah, to conveying Torah, or to intensifying one's love of *Hashem*, or else related to their roles as leaders of their generation" (p. 32). Yet, he still wishes to be able to state at his review's end that "Dr. Lamm ultimately fails to provide any reason why one should lessen his study of that which brings us to the World-to-Come for that which primarily enhances our appreciation of this world; why one should exchange the study of Torah, through which *Hashem* is apprehended most directly, for the study of nature through which He can only be deduced" (p. 40). As already noted, hasn't Rabbi Rosenblum himself presented us with many such reasons?

This apparent discrepancy is also echoed in the words of Rabbis Ahron Soloveitchik and Abba Bronspiegel (quoted above) both of whom endorse having a "positive attitude toward worldly wisdom" and "studying all wisdom", yet reject *Torah u-Madda*. May we suggest a possible resolution to this paradox. Outside of those various segments of Orthodoxy who seek to recreate largely authentic models of Eastern European Jewish life either in Israel or America,

every other approach within Orthodoxy embraces the pursuit of worldly knowledge, beauty and experience to a certain degree. However, there is little in the philosophy which they have inherited from their Eastern European predecessors that can legitimate these pursuits. Thus, what emerges is an assent to the value of general knowledge as well as the pursuit of non-Torah activities among those who, in theory, should reject both. "Torah only" advocates generally are trapped by their instinctive reaction to the value of the non-explicitly sacred. They feel a "positive attitude" towards "wisdom", and other forms of human achievement, yet, their world view is helpless when it comes to explain the significance of these phenomena. What, in their opinion, is God's response to one who explores the intricacies of biology or chemistry? To Jonas Salk? Or to Beethoven? What is the achievement of Edmund Hilary in God's eyes? Or Stan Musial? What was the value of Hemingway's "old man" and his struggle to bring home the "fish"?

I have often sat with Hasidim who have declared that a "*frumer* doctor is a *kiddush Hashem*", but will resolutely refuse to draw any theoretical conclusions from their musings. [25](#) Indeed, isn't it standard practice in the "Torah only" world, at fund raising events, to honor those with advanced academic degrees and praise their accomplishments? Recently I sat with a prominent mitnagdic Rosh Yeshiva who waxed rhapsodic over Ebbets Field, Happy Felton's Knothole Gang, "Campy" and "Pee Wee" and, yet, felt obligated to declare those wondrous memories of his youth "*shtusim*". [26](#) The gap between a mathematical theory of good and evil and the reality of the bounty of God's creation is difficult to overcome.

Critics of *Torah u-Madda* need to probe their own pronouncements with greater analytical rigor. If it is good to "study all wisdom", or, at least, "science and history", then, clearly, in God's eyes, these endeavors have at least some value. They are something good and pleasing to Him. To what degree this good is intrinsic and to what degree it is "functional" is an intriguing question. But Dr. Lamm never suggests that their metaphysical value is equal to that of Torah. What Dr. Lamm and a few other thinkers have done is to grapple with the question of the ontic status of knowledge and, by extension, of the totality of creation that exists outside the realm of the specifically sacred. They have tried to explore the nature and purpose of the almost infinite plenitude of existence. In sum, they have tried to take seriously (in the deepest sense of the term) that which others have accepted as part of life's givens. [27](#) The question that Rabbi Rosenblum raises of why should a Jew ever step out of the world of study and prayer except to earn a living and attend to one's bodily needs has already been answered positively in practice, but not in theory, by all except the extreme

right. They have even offered halting justifications for it. What they have not done is firmly to root the value of all of creation in its Creator.

The ultimate guarantee that knowledge, beauty and experience of a non-explicitly sacred nature is good (provided, of course, that they be in no way sinful) is that they are from God who has chosen to create the world and imbue it with its particular qualities. To reject this notion would be to maintain that God created the vast expanses of the universe only to tempt us, that all the beauty that inheres in nature and all the joys of life are lies, and that all the seemingly limitless banquet of being is a snare calculated by the Creator to attract us while, in truth, leading us astray. Actually, isn't the profusion of beauty in nature the clearest proof that God wished to bestow upon us more than the blessings of prayer and study?

Of course, these other blessings must be pursued with a spirit of gratitude and reverence. They must forever be leading a Jew back to the Creator, back to the Gemara, to prayer, to an assent to every nook and cranny of Halakhah regardless of the spirit of the times. This is not a compromise, but an arduous task. It is, in Dr. Lamm's words, a "view of religious growth" which "if properly pursued, constitutes a lifelong process of *'avodat Hashem*, the service or worship of the Creator" (p. 224).

Rabbi Rosenblum concludes his critique with a rousing call to all Jews: "Our task in the world . . . is to develop ourselves in those areas given to us alone and thereby reveal *Hashem's Will* to mankind" (p. 40). Yet, again, we encounter absolutist rhetoric used to defend a position which is, in truth, far more open and complex. It should by now be obvious that this review endorses many activities and interests that are not merely "given to us alone." However, due to a lack of a theoretical framework, the critic is repeatedly forced to employ arguments which undercut his own case. [28](#)

What Really Irks the Critics?

Is the problem with *Torah u-Madda* purely a theoretical one? Is it only because Dr. Lamm's critics claim, in the words of Rabbi Joseph Elias, that he ignores the fact that "While Torah . . . represents objective truth, man's use of reason and his understanding of the world . . . are inevitably time-bound and suffering from human limitations. . ."? [29](#) We find this accusation despite *Torah Umadda's* numerous statements which echo these very sentiments. One, quoted by Rabbi Elias himself, states emphatically that it is "imperative that Torah be acknowledged as possessing central value and primacy over all else." [30](#)

Rabbi Elias writes that Dr. Lamm's statement that we may "embrace" Torah and Mada "simultaneously without violating the integrity of either one" is false because we must first "acknowledge that the pursuit of wisdom itself be subject to the dictates of the Torah (ibid.)." Yet, we read almost precisely these same words in *Torah u-Mada*, ". . . Nature, the world, must not be neglected, and it must be studied and explored as part of man's relationship with his maker. But Torah, as more than a creation of God, but his very word, ever remains supreme" (p, 147), Indeed, Dr, Lamm repeatedly emphasizes the primacy of Torah, and even his remark about "partial truth", when properly understood in context, is clearly referring to a supra-rational reconciliation predicated upon Divine truth, His critics' unwillingness to grant this is due, as noted above, to their own lack of a clearly articulated alternative conceptual framework, but also, probably, to a deeper concern, at times conscious and at times subconscious.

Quite frankly, the Agudah-world critics of *Torah u-Mada* (the book) and *Torah u-Mada* (the *shitah*), especially those of a Hirschian bent, are at root concerned about far more than theoretical threats, It seems to me that they see *Torah u-Mada* as a cover for a general indifference to the distinctions between faith and heresy or virtue and sin, For example, advocates of *Torah u-Mada* have generally also been supporters of Orthodox participation in "umbrella" organizations alongside Reform and Conservative leaders, This policy could be justified by assorted God-centered reasons, i.e., it will keep the Reform and Conservative movements from straying too far, it will give us a chance to influence them personally, it allows American Jewry to present a united front towards others, etc. However, what tended to happen was that the personal kindness extended to the adherents of these movements and their leaders (justified at times due to their halakhic status as tinokot shenishbah) carried in its wake a reticence to declare their ideas heretical. In other words, it seems that if *Torah u-Mada* advocates had stated clearly and consistently that the doctrines of the Reform and Conservative movements were *apikorsus* and that their leaders could not speak in the name of Judaism because what they believed in was not Judaism but a tragic Jewish heresy, then their credibility would have been far more firmly established in the circles of their critics.

This is similarly true in the area of practice. No one would have quarreled with *Torah u-Mada* advocates if they would have stated that their toleration of leniencies in crucial halakhic matters among their followers was a pragmatic strategy dedicated to slowly but surely weaning their adherents towards a *Shulhan Arukh* based life, However, what often seemed to be the case was a studied silence on those areas of "normal American" life which ran obviously contrary to Torah. It was not a case of "let's solidify *shabbat*, *kashrut* and *taharat ha-mishpahah* and then we'll move on", but "let's solidify the big three

and that's it." It is this, more than any reasoned theoretical objection, which seems to me to animate criticism of the *Torah u-Madda* ideology,

Changing Times . . . Changing Attitudes?

However, the time may have arrived for all concerned to reconsider their assumptions. The picture of Yeshiva University and the world of *Torah u-Madda* which has developed over decades in the minds of its Agudah critics is no longer true to reality to the extent to which it may ever have been true. In fact, an extraordinary explosion of Torah learning and scrupulous *mizvah* observance has taken place within the ranks of what used to be referred to as Modern Orthodox. As an educator in that community for nineteen years, I have been a first hand witness to this transformation. In ever growing numbers, especially among the young, there is an enthusiasm for Torah study, prayer and Halakhah which has percolated throughout the movement.

There are several factors which have led to this unanticipated turn of events. First and foremost among them, perhaps, has been the radical reorientation of Religious Zionism in Israel. In the wake of the Six Day War, the revitalization of Religious Zionism personified by the *hesder* yeshiva movement was something unforeseen in previous decades. Its emphasis upon Torah study and halakhic Judaism attracted large numbers to its banner. The days in which one could safely conclude that the standards of religious observance in Mizrachi and Bnei Akiva circles was inferior to that of the yeshiva and Hasidic world have passed. Throughout the land of Israel, yeshivas, and eventually whole communities, sprouted whose allegiance to uncompromising Torah Judaism was in no way lessened by their devotion to Zionism.

This startling development eventually made itself felt on the American Modern Orthodox scene. This took place via many routes, not the least of which was the ever-growing number of young men and women who, after concluding their high school experience in America, would study for a year or more in these new institutions in Israel. Upon their return to America, the presence of these young people had the inevitable effect of raising the devotion to Torah study and halakhic observance in Yeshiva University and throughout other institutions of Modern Orthodoxy. In addition, the links between Modern Orthodox leaders in America and their counterparts in Israel began to embolden the religious clarity and commitment of the former. These factors, coupled with the general explosion of readily available Torah materials in English as well as public celebrations and events dedicated to reinforcing Torah study, led to enthusiastic

involvement in Torah study and observance on the part of many Modern Orthodox laymen.

Slowly but surely, everything from public *shiurim* to minyan attendance improved amongst large segments of Modern Orthodoxy. Also improving (although at a slower rate) was the percentage of those in the Modern Orthodox camp who refrain from transgressing assorted laws (mostly in the field of *zniut*) which were neglected in their parents' generation. Young Torah scholars, educated either in Yeshiva University or similar institutions, have entered the field of education and the Rabbinate. They have carried with them the passion which they acquired in Israel and under the tutelage of Modern Orthodox *Roshei Yeshiva* here in America.

It may well be argued that the Religious Zionist movement in Israel, as well as some of the educators and leaders of Modern Orthodoxy in America, are in no way advocates of *Torah u-Madda*. [31](#) They are essentially believers in Torah-only, rejecting the significance of the non-explicitly sacred, who happen to be receptive to the doctrines of Zionism. [32](#) Nonetheless, some of these Torah figures are committed to a God-centered pursuit of worldly knowledge. Others have yet to think the matter through to the degree Dr. Lamm has. [33](#) Therefore, they may be seen as "subconscious Torah Umaddaites." Yet, their personal allegiance to *Torah u-Madda* is not what concerns us here. The fact of the matter is that a Torah revolution has taken place in the ranks of the Modern Orthodox.

Hence, many of the fears which linger in Agudah circles are based upon realities which simply no longer hold. Of course, the process is still unfolding, but the trend is certainly most positive. Accordingly, it would seem that the time is ripe for a rapprochement of sorts.

In his critical comments concerning Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Elias (p. xxiii) cites Dr. Emmanuel Rackman's comment about a married woman's hair covering as an example of that movement's halakhic laxity. The latter wrote: "We believe that it may, indeed, be possible to be an Orthodox Jew and not insist that our married women go about with covered heads. . . . I feel that with regard to the laws of dress or attire, the Halachah simply mandates modest attire . . . and that it is not the precise form of that attire with which (it) is concerned."

What needs to be taken into account is that Dr. Rackman's perspective is no longer that of the up and coming Torah leadership of Modern Orthodoxy. Their ranks are almost uniform in their fulfillment of the halakhah that a married woman must cover her hair. Indeed, in Israel this has now become the standard practice in the *hesder yeshiva* world. Thus, the linkage between Modern

Orthodoxy and laxity in proper devotion to Torah and *mizvot* is steadily disappearing.

Finally, as we have attempted to point out, it was never the theory of *Torah u-Madda* which led to whatever weaknesses in observance existed amongst Modern Orthodox masses. It was, rather, their lack of fealty to halakhic dicta. Accordingly, as their standard of observance improves, the real source of our controversy may be eliminated.

Transcending the Evils of an Age

A poignant criticism of Dr. Lamm's book was penned shortly after its publication by Sigmund Forst. He raised the question of whether in this post-holocaust world, "should our problem be that of a re-orientation of our educational system towards modernity." Rather, he argued, we should seek "disentanglement from a let-loose, dislocated and fragmented bankrupt culture." He views it as a grave error to see "Madda . . . as separate and detached from the cultural matrix from whose roots it has grown." [34](#)

On an instinctive level we are tempted to say "yes, let us be done once and for all with the horrible goyim and their treif culture. Let us return to the bosom of our people and to our God's holy texts." Verily, in an age that has witnessed a Hitler and a Stalin, that has provided hospitable environs for a pernicious relativism, that has created a "value-free" society, we have all wanted to say, at one time or another, "no more contact - our devotion will be only to the holy Torah."

Yet, the world and even our age are not devoid of goodness and beauty. Creation can never be divorced from its Creator. Indeed, it is true that we must forever separate the chaff from the wheat. We must fearlessly pronounce all heretical ideologies (be they non-Jewish or Jewish in origin) as utterly evil. We must courageously label all manner of sin, so easily accepted by an age gone mad in many ways, with its appropriate designation. However, this need not mean that we close our hearts and minds to the wondrous and sublime divine gifts of knowledge, beauty and experience.

What Are We to Make of the World?

The reality of all facets of existence which are not explicitly sacred has yet to be sufficiently dealt with from a Torah perspective. Dr. Lamm's book is a first

step in the direction of coming to grips with creation and our role in it. The question of knowledge is, in truth, a question concerning the very meaning of being. It leaps out at all believing Jews in much the same manner that it confronted Rabbi Rosenblum. We are called upon to weigh our approach to the world by God's standards. The voice which haunts (and should haunt) us constantly asks, what is the value of any given action before God? How will it be measured on the day when we shall stand before the Throne of Glory? Our answers will impact not only upon ourselves, but upon the souls of all those with whom we come into contact in our lifetimes.

Does God want us to seek Him via reverential contemplation of creation or in-depth study of the intricacies of the natural world? Should we delve into the pathways of history and the beauties of humanly created art in order to find Him? What about experience? Does God await us in the physical exploration of His worlds? In manual labor? In recreation? Hobbies? Comedy?

It is to anyone who instinctively feels that the answer to any of the above questions is "yes" that Dr. Lamm has devoted his book. He provides us with sources, models, theories and simple advice for this particular service of God. It is for this attempt, despite our quibbles over details here or there, that he deserves our lasting gratitude.

Notes

1 .Norman Lamm, *Torah u-Madda* (Northvale, 1990). All subsequent references to Dr. Lamm are from this work. In keeping with scholarly convention, when citing an author's work, I will be referring to him without his honorific titles.

2 .Yonason Rosenblum, "*Torah u-Madda*": A critique of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's book and its approach to Torah study and the pursuit of secular knowledge", *The Jewish Observer* 25:2 (March 1992): 27-40. All subsequent references to Rabbi Rosenblum are from this review, unless otherwise noted.

3 .Yaakov Perlow, "The Clash Between Modernity and Eternity", *The Jewish Observer* 26:10 (January 1994): 9-15. This article is devoted to a wide ranging exploration of the conflicts between Torah and modernity, with the criticism of *Torah u-Madda* as incidental to its main theme (see p. 13).

In "Modernity vs. Eternity: 2 Letters and 2 Responses", *The Jewish Observer* 21: 3 (April 1994): 13, Rabbi Perlow devoted himself solely to *Torah u-Madda*.

4 .It is by no means clear that the *Torah u-Madda* approach is an either-or proposition. It would seem that many of its advocates and opponents do not take into account the wide diversity of personalities in the Jewish community. Between the positions of *Torah u-Madda* for all and "Torah only" for all is a third position which would maintain that individuals would have the freedom to select the approach (or

combination of approaches) most congenial to them while considering their cultural situation, personal inclination, and emotional/intellectual makeup. As a matter of fact, this is close to the position articulated by Dr. Lamm in the conclusion to his work (pp. 227-39).

[5](#) .One wonders whether this revisionist view of college education is not the first step in a theoretical acceptance in yeshiva circles of what has long been an increasingly de facto reality. The painful truth, which becomes all the more obvious with each passing year as their populations explode, is that rightist Orthodoxy is plunging into an economic crisis the dimensions of which is in direct proportion to their unwillingness to provide their constituencies with the means of gainful employment. The dire straits in which these communities find themselves are sometimes accompanied by a painful array of scandals concerning the misuse of government funds. Inevitably, it is precisely those communities whose ideologies have the more thoroughly stripped them of even minimal educational skills that find themselves the most plagued by these problems. One of the crying needs of the coming decades is for courageous leaders on the Orthodox right to address this issue creatively and bravely.

[6](#) .Abba Bronspiegel, "The Rav and Torah U'Madda", *Algemeiner Journal* (August 20, 1993), B4. We leave aside for now the obvious question of why the "Rav" believed in "studying all wisdom" and being "highly educated" if this was not part of an ideological commitment? Was it merely haphazard? Or, was it rooted in a *shitah* or philosophy which for some reason the author does not wish to call "ideology"? T. U'M. is the abbreviation which Rabbi Bronspiegel uses for *Torah u-Madda*.

[7](#) .Ahron Soloveichik, "In Defense of My Brother Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik", *Algemeiner Journal* (July 23, 1993), B4.

[8](#) .*Mishneh Berurah*, *Orah Haim* 231:15.

[9](#) .The effect of the *mizvah* on the practitioner's soul and the fabric of being will, of course, be positively altered as it is more imbued with love, fear, desire of repentance, etc. Nonetheless, the full glory of the objective *mizvah* is the act performed halakhically. It is enhanced by better *kavanah*, not defined by it.

[10](#) .See R. Yaakov Hayyim Sopher, *Kaph ha-Hayyim* 231:8 who, quoting Hida and others, offers texts of prayers to be said before engaging in worldly activities in order that they be done "for God's sake."

[11](#) .See, for example, *Avot* 5:20 where we read, "Turn it [i.e., Torah] over and turn it over for all is in it." Actually, as Dr. Lamm points out, the Meiri maintains that the phrase "all is in it" simply means "that any problem within Torah itself is solvable without having recourse to sources outside of Torah" (p. 47).

[12](#) .In the pages preceding this quote, Dr. Lamm goes to great lengths to explain that certain "conflicting propositions may be true, reflecting an aspect of ultimate truth about a reality too large and too complex to be contained in the simple logic to which we have been accustomed" (p. 233). However, he cautions that, although this theory may help us navigate those areas of seeming contradiction between Torah and madda, it should not lead to the "relativistic thesis that all propositions are equally true or that all ideas have equal claim upon the truth" (p. 235).

[13](#) .Over three years after the appearance of his review of *Torah u-Madda*, Rabbi Rosenblum offered a "clarification" of his remarks concerning Dr. Lamm's position on this matter. He granted that his use of the words "entertain seriously" might be

misconstrued "as implying that he contemplates the recitation of a *beracha* as *halacha le'maaseh*. This is not the case since he labels such a practice as absurd." Rabbi Rosenblum then claims that he should have written, "Once Dr. Lamm has equated secular learning with Torah learning . . . he is not only forced to grapple with these questions, but is unable to provide a satisfactory account of why the answer is no." See *The Jewish Observer* 28:4 (May 1995): 39. However, there is a satisfactory answer, which Dr. Lamm himself points out, that we do not follow Rambam's opinion on "textless Torah" Further, the entire approach is only conceivable if "fundamentally religious emotions" always permeate "one's consciousness" (p. 166, 167).

[14](#) .In 1986, before an audience comprised largely of Jews affiliated with heretical movements, Dr. Lamm declared, ". . . halachah is given over to humans to apply to their daily lives, but they are not authorized to dispose of it according to personal taste or whim. . . . The halachah is heteronomous, it obligates us, it is above us; we are bound by it and must live within its parameters even if so doing proves personally, politically and even spiritually uncomfortable. It is after all the Word of God." For the complete text of this address, see Norman Lamm "Seventy Faces", *Moment* 11:6 (June 1986): 23-28.

[15](#) .In passing, Rabbi Rosenblum makes what would appear to be a negative reference to Yeshiva University's (in Dr. Lamm's words) "having left to the thinking individual himself . . . the essential synthesis of the teachings that make up *Torah u-Madda* (p. 30). Indeed, this would seem to be a situation to be bemoaned. And, in fact, Dr. Lamm does bemoan it. In the Preface to his book he outlines his attempts to publicly articulate in various forms exactly how this synthesis should be attempted (pp. x-xii).

[16](#) .We do find in the writings of Hasidic Rebbes of later generations that the '*avodah*' of 'raising one's thoughts" (whereby evil thoughts are to be converted to holy ones) is only to be attempted by the exceptionally pious. However, this does not relate to the demand that physical deeds be performed for God's sake which has remained a spiritual imperative throughout the movement's history.

[17](#) .In fact, Dr. Lamm is himself painfully aware of this problem and has called upon his community to rectify it. See, in particular, his "Torah Education at the Crossroads", *Ten Da'at* 4:1 (Fall 1989): 3-7.

[18](#) .See N. Lamm, 48-55, where this argument is presented at length.

[19](#) .See *ibid.*, 50-56, where the dangers of isolation to one's spiritual well being are spelled out in depth.

[20](#) .Thus, the proper response to defections or a lack of commitment in Modern Orthodox ranks today need not involve a detailed exploration of Torah philosophy. It requires, first, a catechetical restatement of the '*ikrei emunah*' and, most significantly, potent experiences of a lived Judaism whose force will equal that of pop culture's allures.

[21](#) .Lawrence Kaplan, "Modernity vs. Eternity", *The Jewish Observer* 27: 3 (April 1994):13.

[22](#) .*The Jewish Observer, ibid.*

[23](#) .*Ibid*

[24](#) .In a recent article, Rabbi Rosenblum goes further than merely grant Rav Hirsch legitimacy. In fact, he sees him as far more relevant to our generation than his Eastern

European peers. In "Levers For Our Times From an Earlier Century," *The Jewish Observer* 28:8 (November 1N5): 23-28, he writes, "No Jewish thinker of the preceding century speaks with such astonishing contemporaneity as Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch."

[25](#) .See David Shatz, "Practical Endeavor and the Torah u-Madda Debate", *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1N1-1N2): 98-149, where this and many similar arguments are explored at length.

[26](#) .Another mitnagdic Rosh Kolel told me that a trip to Niagra Falls would be "*bittul Torah*". However, when reminded of the Abbot and Costello routine of "Niagra Falls", he laughed so hard he could barely catch his breath. I asked him what he thought God felt about the joy he experienced at that moment and he was at a loss to answer.

[27](#) .For further, profound explorations of this issue, see Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and Culture: Confluence and Conflict" in a forthcoming book on the interrelationship between Judaism and general culture edited by Jacob J. Schacter.

[28](#) .In his later article, "Letters etc." (above, n. 24), Rosenblum himself grants that "outside of *Eretz Yisroel* and certain Chassidic circles, most *yeshivot* do provide a secular education through the high school years." However, he bemoans the fact that this "Hirschian educational program" is "completely detached from his *Weltanschauung*." Accordingly, "there is little emphasis on the Jew's role in *tikkun haolam* and *chillul Hashem*" (p. 28). This is a far cry from the Rabbi Rosenblum who seems to endorse a Torah-only approach in order to criticize Dr. Lamm.

Perhaps the root of the problem lies in the inherent tension between Hirschian Orthodoxy and that of Eastern Europe which, despite talk of a consensus of "*da'at Torah*," cannot be reconciled. Rabbi Rosenblum wishes that somehow both traditions be true; hence, his espousals of each of them at different times.

[29](#) .Joseph Elias, in *The Nineteen Letters* (Jerusalem and New York, 1N5), 315.

[30](#) . J.Elas, *ibid*, quoting from N. Lamm, 83-84.

[31](#) .This is particularly true when considering those involved in teaching higher level Talmud .

[32](#) .However, this allegiance is rarely extended to that movements' humanistic, peace oriented strands.

[33](#) .In his review of *Torah u-Madda* in *Jewish Action* 51: 1 (Winter 5751): 88, Rabbi Shubert Spero writes, "The most valuable aspect of Lamm's exposition seems to me to reside in his penetrating analysis and minute dissection of the problem to the point where the barebone ideas and conceptual components of the entire issue lie exposed." Incidentally, Rabbi Spero points out one of the areas where *Torah u-Madda* should be seen as a preliminary study to be followed by other efforts. He writes: ". . . the present reviewer would have liked to see the issue dealt with in its broadest possible terms, i.e. on all levels of involvement with general culture in our everyday lives. Not only as a particular discipline to be studied and understood but as chunks of experience which shape our character and our view of things." Indeed, in our decidedly non-reflective age, this would seem to be the direction to be explored.

[34](#) .Sigmund Forst, "Falling Idols", *Jewish Action* 51:1 (Winter 5751): 82-83.