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Torah u-Madda and Freedom of Inquiry

Let us start from the beginning! The position of Torah u-Madda is surprisingly simple. It posits that in addition to an unequivocal and pre-eminent commitment to Talmud Torah, there is also a need to be involved in the intellectual and cultural experience of mankind. The exclusion of Gentiles from the study of Torah does not mean that Jews be excluded from the world of *hokhmah*. In fact, the Jew should be no less competent in the cultural arena than the Gentile.

The underpinnings of this position rest on two ideas. First, the Jew as a human being, ipso facto, must be a participant in mankind's intellectual adventure. Secondly, this intellectual endeavor should be viewed as an experience of Hashem's creation, as expressed in the theme of "the heavens speak of Hashem's glory" (Ps. 19:2). In support of this thesis, exponents of Torah u-Madda cite a host of halakhic and midrashic sources certifying the general correctness of this Weltanschauung.

Torah u-Madda supporters feel that excluding worldly wisdom from one's experience of Yiddishkeit, though certainly not *kefirah*, nevertheless limits and even stultifies one's Jewishness. They maintain that rejecting a serious and broad intellectual experience confines Torah and its supporters to a severely limited role in society and at the same time diminishes *kevod Shamayim* in the world.

Of course, Torah u-Madda adherents are aware of the dangers inherent in the study of secular culture. They do not feel, however, that Torah u-Madda should be suppressed because of flashing red signals. Caution and care must be exercised, but at no time should the vitality of Torah

u-Madda be squelched as many traditionalists would have them do. Madda for Torah u-Madda proponents is much too crucial to be truncated from one's vision of Yiddishkeit.

One may surmise that Torah u-Madda has carved out for itself a bona-fide path in contemporary Jewish life. Indeed, its adherents are convinced that it will ultimately win the day because it reflects the truth of Judaism. At the same time, its detractors are of the equal conviction that Torah u-Madda will ultimately undermine Torah itself.

The purpose of this presentation is not to become embroiled in prognostications and argumentations for either side. My intention, rather, is to focus on and analyze a critical methodological feature of Torah u-Madda. This method as theoretically formulated not only tolerates freedom of inquiry but even espouses it. To place any constraint *on honest and inquisitive searching for truth* would run counter to Madda and all that it implies. To permit one aspect of scientific or literary investigation and proscribe another would deny the very integrity of the Madda process itself. And just as the substantive range of Madda extends to the entire realm of intellectual activity so does its erstwhile companion, i.e., freedom of inquiry. As a result, Madda and its methodology allows for an unfettered investigation of such sensitive areas as evolution, cosmology, determinism, agnosticism and biblical criticism.

If and when the inferences from Madda study appear to clash with the tenets and truths of Torah then a resolution must be sought. Hopefully, deeper analysis will show that, in fact, there is actually no clash. If, however, a resolution remains elusive, Torah u-Madda devotees maintain that one must learn to live with the resulting inner tension until such time that an adequate solution is found. In fact, some maintain that this tension is a healthy and creative force that can produce even greater insight into the fabric of Judaism. The danger is clear but Torah u-Madda thinkers feel that such dangers are part of the ultimate intellectual challenge with which Hashem has charged His people.

There is, however, a serious halakhic hurdle that Torah u-Madda must overcome before it can claim bonafide standing. There is a decision of the Rambam in Hil. Avodah Zarah (II:2-3) that states the following:

ספרים רבים חברו עובדי כוכבים בעבודתה היאך עיקר עבודתה ומה מעשיה ומשפטיה. צונו הקב"ה שלא לקרות באותן הספרים כלל ולא נהרהר בה ולא בדבר מדבריה. ואפילו להסתכל בדמות הצורה אסור שנאמר 'אל תפנו אל האילים'. ובענין הזה נאמר 'זפן תדרוש לאלהיהם לאמר איכה יעבדו' שלא תשאל על דרך עבודתה היאך היא אע"פ שאין אתה עובדה שדבר זה גורם להפנות אחריה ולעשות כמה שהן עושין שנאמר 'זאעשה כן גם אני': וכל הלאוין האלו בענין אחד הן והוא שלא יפנה אחר עבודת כוכבים וכל הנפנה אחריה בדרך שהוא עושה בו מעשה הר' זה לוקה. ולא עבודת כוכבים בלבד הוא שאסור להפנות אחריה במחשבה אלא כל מחשבה שהוא גורם לו לאדם לעקור עיקר מעיקרי התורה מוזהרין אנו שלא להעלותה על לבנו ולא נסיה

דעתנו לכך ונחשוב ונמשך אחר הרהורי הלב. מפני שדעתו של אדם קצרה ולא כל הדעות יכולין להשיג האמת על בוריו. ואם ימשך כל אדם אחר מחשבות לבו נמצא מחריב את העולם לפי קוצר דעתו. כיצד פעמים יתור אחר עבודת כוכבים ופעמים יחשוב ביחוד הבורא שמא הוא שמוא אינו. מה למעלה ומה למטה מה לפניו ומה לאחור. ופעמים בנבואה שמא היא אמת שמא היא אינה. ופעמים בתורה שמא היא מן השמים שמא אינה. ואינו יודע המדות שידין בהן עד שידע האמת על בוריו ונמצא יוצא לידי מינות. ועל ענין זה הזהירה תורה ונאמר בה 'ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים.' כלומר לא ימשך כל אחד מכם אחר דעתו הקצרה וידמה שמחשבתו משגת האמת. כך אמרו חכמים 'אחרי לבבכם' זו מינות 'ואחרי עיניכם' זו זנות. ולא זו אע"פ שהוא גורם לאדם לטרדו מן העולם הבא אין בו מלקות.

It appears that the Rambam prohibits freedom of inquiry in the areas of idolatry and heresy. Though freedom of inquiry is generally a desirable and appropriate approach, with respect to areas of thought that are essentially heretical, the halakhah imposes a prohibition ruling out free intellectual activity. Seemingly, the Rambam should have been the last person to issue such a ruling. And yet it is he, the great intellectual hero of thinking Jews, that banned freedom of inquiry in areas that spark and arouse ideas which are antithetical to the tenets of our faith.

Argumentatively, one may suggest the possibility that the Rambam's intent was only directed at those who study such works in order to develop a faith in idolatry or out of a desire to forsake Torah. Such a thesis is untenable. Were this the case, the Rambam would not have had to present a rationale for this prohibition. It is only because an honest and objective freedom of inquiry is the focus of the *'issur* does the Rambam find it necessary to present an explanation. The sudden limiting of thought in a particular sphere impelled the Rambam to provide a reason. Though freedom of inquiry is almost a prerequisite to acquiring knowledge generally, it is nevertheless eschewed in the critical area of *kefirah*. In fact, the Rambam (*ibid.*), based on a Gemara (Shabbat 149a) prohibits not only an intellectual involvement with *'avodah zarah* but even an aesthetic experience with it, such as viewing an icon of *'avodah zarah*.

Some have suggested that Torah u-Madda is clearly supported by the very person of the Rambam. Did the Rambam himself not study Greek philosophy assiduously? Did he not read voluminously about the ancient practices of *'avodah zarah*? In truth, the apparent inconsistency between the Rambam's words and deed is easily resolved. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 68a), with respect to the *'issur* of *kisbuf*, goes so far as to say that if it is done להבין ולהורות (i.e., to understand and makes decisions) it is permissible. Similarly, the Meiri (Sanhedrin 90a) indicates that the reading of *divrei kefirah* may be sanctioned if done for that purpose. להבין ולהורות represents nothing more than an application of Torah

principles to all spheres of life including *divrei kefirah*. That is a far cry from an unconditional intellectual endeavor in the domain of *kefirah*. The Rambam himself (Hil. Sanhedrin II:1) says that members of the Sanhedrin were supposed to be familiar with the practices of *'avodah zarah*. It, therefore, seems both obvious and natural to conclude that the Rambam's reading of *'avodah zarah* literature was done with the intention of "understanding and decision-making."

Based on all of the above, Torah u-Madda can only be viable if it imposes strict limits on freedom of inquiry in areas that may undermine the *י"ג עיקרי אמונה*. Then, Torah u-Madda will have the opportunity to represent itself as an authentic and historical tradition in Jewish thought.