

# HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

## 151 - TORAH AND SECULAR WISDOM PART 3 - TORAH U'MADDA/TORAH VE'CHOCHMA OU ISRAEL CENTER - WINTER 2020

- In Part 2 we saw some of the classic sources on the debate about whether one should learn 'Torah Only' or 'Torah With ...' some type of secular studies. We saw a brief overview of the debate through the centuries.
- In the times of the Rishonim it divided roughly between Ashkenazim and Sefardim, with the Ashkenazim favoring 'Torah Only' and the Sefardim promoting the learning of Torah with secular studies - astronomy, grammar, poetry, medicine, philosophy and many others.
- For the early Acharonim, the Rema, Maharal and others advocated 'Torah With ...' and the Maharshal and others 'Torah Only'.
- As the ghetto walls in Central Europe crumbled in the late 18C and the emancipated Jews flooded into the universities and professions of Western Europe throughout the 19C, this question became highly relevant once again.
- For a deeper perspective on this it will be helpful to briefly examine some of the key voices in this over the last 150 years, including:
  - Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch (mid 19C) on Torah Im Derech Eretz.<sup>1</sup>
  - Rabbi Shimon Schwab (mid 20C) on Torah Im Derech Eretz vs Torah Only.<sup>2</sup>
  - Rabbi Norman Lamm (late 20C) and the Yeshiva University expression of Torah U'Madda.<sup>3</sup>
  - Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (late 20C) on Torah U'Chochma.<sup>4</sup>
- We will also try to look at how these ideas translate into the new reality of the 21st Century.

### A] TORAH VE'CHOCHMA<sup>5</sup> - RAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN

Rav Lichtenstein is perhaps the most important late 20th Century voice on this issues. He was not only a Gaon in Torah but immersed too in the corpus of secular academic thought<sup>6</sup>. He wrote many articles on the issue of Torah and secular studies, in particular:

- Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict<sup>7</sup> ("Confluence and Conflict")
- A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View<sup>8</sup> ("Synthesis")
- The End of Learning<sup>9</sup>

### A1] WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE IN THIS WORLD AND HOW DOES CHOCHMA HELP US?

1. Definition of ultimate spiritual goals commends itself, at least, in theory, as a necessary prelude to deciding upon any significant course of action. All the more so, however, with respect to as complex and comprehensive a matter as the relation of Torah and general culture - to what, in current parlance, is generally referred to as the question of *Torah u-Madda*, or, as I would prefer to denominate it, as that of *Torah ve-hokhmah*. In dealing with it, we need to address ourselves at the primary level to four basic questions: (1) What is the contribution of *madda* and *hokhmah* to the realization of basic human aims? (2) Is that contribution sufficient to warrant diversion of time and effort from pure talmud Torah? (3) Whatever the benefits, what of concomitant risks? (4) What is the risk-benefit ratio, and might the dangers not preclude the pursuit of *madda*, however inherently worthwhile.

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1. See the previous shiur (#150) on Torah Im Derech Eretz
2. I have prepared a summary of Rav Shimon Schwab's position and his article 'These and Those', which address this questions in depth. I have not had this copied for the shiur but will upload it to my website - [www.rabbimanning.com](http://www.rabbimanning.com) - and will ask the OU to upload it together with this shiur.
3. See my previous shiur on this, available at <http://rabbimanning.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Halachic-and-Hashkafic-Issues-in-Contemporary-Society-Shiur-2-Torah-and-Secular-Studies-Torah-and-Derech-Eretz-OU-Israel-Center.pdf>
4. See below
5. Rav Lichtenstein prefers this expression to Torah U'Madda (which he feels is too limited to the academic sphere) or Torah Im Derech Eretz (which relates more to the vocational and social arena) - see Confluence and Conflict p220 n1.
6. His special area of expertise was in literature and his 1962 PhD was on the 17C rationalist theologian Henry More (and not, as commonly quoted, on Milton). His book - Henry More: The Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist, Harvard University Press, 1962 - remains one of the principal academic resources on More.
7. In Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures (Aaronson 1997) pp 217-292
8. Reproduced in Leaves Of Faith Vol 1, Chap 4 pp89-104
9. Reproduced in Leaves Of Faith Vol 1, Chap 5 pp105-118

2. .... שאין ראוי לאדם שיעסוק כל ימיו אלא בדברי חכמה ובישבו של עולם

רמב"ם הלכות גולה ואבדה פרק ו הלכה יא

*The Rambam rules that a person should spend their life involved in understanding matters of 'chochma' and perfecting the world around them.*

3. First in time, although not necessarily foremost in importance, is man's responsibility for the well-being, in all senses, of the world into which he has been born. While the mundane order may be nothing more than a way station, residents who have been entrusted with its care need to keep it clean, bright, and airy - and occasionally spruced up and renovated, both literally and figuratively.

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4. וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיְנַתְּהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ

בראשית ב:טו

*Mankind was placed into the Garden of Eden to 'work it' and to 'protect it'.*

5. Custodial responsibility is complemented, second, by the molding of self as a spiritual being; this, both as an end in itself and as an avenue to the attainment of ultimate beatitude. "Rabbi Yaakov says: This world resembles a vestibule to the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may enter the banquet hall" (Avot 4:16). The ongoing process of preparation encompasses numerous areas and includes a range of components; and its mode and substance - particularly as regards priorities - may vary considerably.

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6. Development, at both the collective and the personal plane, not only enhances the present but informs an incipient future. Hence, it relates to a third dimension of human existence: responsibility to history as both reality and process. Somewhere between the vestibule and the banquet hall there is an antechamber of a redeemed messianic world; and quite apart from man's duties to strive for his own spiritual perfection and the maintenance of his world, he is enjoined to help move that world to a higher and ultimately redeemed level.

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- Rav Lichtenstein identifies three main goals of humankind in this world - (i) Perfection of the existing world around us; (ii) Spiritual perfection of the self; and (iii) Bring this world to a new millennial redeemed state. He will argue that each of these can be immensely enhanced by access to secular learning.

7. .... *madda*, in this context, is not confined to the natural sciences. Man, after all, is the center of the vestibule, and whatever disciplines relate to his social, economic, and political institutions sustain human society in the most basic sense. It would be a strange Torah perspective, indeed, which regards a sewage system as more related to *yishuvo shel 'olam* than a family agency. Second, the knowledge in question is not merely an instrument of collective import. Even at the purely functional level, it relates to individual fulfillment as well. Quite apart from the spiritual well-being which is the ultimate object of *hatken 'azmekha*, orientation towards one's physical and social environment is, presently, itself an integral part of human self-realization.

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## A2] THE BENEFITS OF CHOCHMA IN UNDERSTANDING TORAH

### (a) Deepening our understanding of Torah

Rav Lichtenstein identifies a number of key benefits of learning chochma, as they relate to our understanding of Torah itself. These include:

- Using linguistics to help us define difficult words, obscure phrases and texts.
- Grasp of mathematics to understand certain sugyot.
- Understanding of Chazal's world - agriculture, medicine, economics, politics.
- Understanding history to gain context and appreciation of responsa literature.

8. Secular knowledge is not merely a tactical weapon, however. It possesses considerable intrinsic merit. We may consider it under two headings. First, secular studies are often invaluable as a direct accessory to *talmud Torah* proper. Consider simply the aid we derive, by elucidation or comparison, from linguistics in Amos, history in Melakhim, agronomy in Zera'im, physiology in Niddah, chemistry in Hometz u-Matzah, philosophy in Yesodei Ha-Torah, psychology in Avodah Zarah, political theory in Sanhedrin, torts in Bava Batra - one could continue almost indefinitely. As the Gaon insisted, there is hardly a province of Halakhah for whose mastery scientific, historical, and linguistic knowledge is not only helpful but indispensable. If pursuing such knowledge is not *talmud Torah*, it is, at the very least, *hekhsher talmud Torah*. And contrary to the general assumption, it is precisely the weaker student who stands most in need of auxiliary aid of this kind. While learning Sanhedrin, R. Hayyim Brisker evolved his own political theory. Most of us merely fumble.

Synthesis p93

- Using literary analytical methods<sup>10</sup> to help us learn deeper meanings of and symbolisms in Torah texts, in particular Tanach.

9. Under the impact of the midrashim and a lengthy homiletic tradition, the Torah world is highly sensitive to imagery and symbolism; but as to structure, sequence, sound patterns, and thematic development, less so. These are, however, genuinely relevant to a total experience of the text .... and whatever sharpens our apprehension of the power and beauty of resonant revelation enhances our spiritual existence. Above all, criticism accentuates awareness of the human element. Toward its appreciation, a literary sensibility, trained to observe perceptively and to respond empathetically, its imagination honed to grasp a scene or a moment as the focus of complex interaction, is inestimable. Criticism sensitizes to both what is said and - what the Ramban so acutely perceived - unsaid. ... Surely, a *talmid hakham* wholly bereft of any literary exposure could conceivably answer these questions intelligently and sensitively. Which academy did the Neziv attend? In most cases, however, he would not even fully appreciate their cutting edge. From a certain point of view, this is, of course, regarded as all to the good. Advocates of hagiographic *parshanut*, which portrays the central heroic figures of scriptural history as virtually devoid of emotion, can only regard the sharpening of psychological awareness with reference to Tanakh with a jaundiced eye. But for those of us who have been steeped in midrashim, the Ramban, and the *Ha'amek Davar* - in a tradition, that is, which regards our patriarchal avot and their successors as very great people indeed but as people nonetheless, and which moreover sees their greatness as related to their humanity - enhanced literary sensibility can be viewed as a significant boon.

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## (b) Organizing our understanding of Torah

10. The best case in point is our greatest collective achievement: the Gemara. I love Gemara passionately; and part of what I love, over and above its status as *dvar Hashem* (the Divine word), is precisely its disheveled character. Its student is not confronted by the judicious formulations of Justinian or Coke. Rather, he enters a vibrant *bet midrash*, hears and, with reverential vicariousness, participates in discourse animated by dynamic interaction, frequently marred by associative digression, and rarely formulated with integrative thoroughness. For the initiate, it is all very exhilarating, and the sense of the pulsating vibrancy of living Torah is pervasive. But this heady environment creates certain problems. The difficulties confronting the tyro are all too familiar. These are by no means confined to modern day-school students, ignorant of Aramaic vocabulary or syntax.

....  
As the multifarious history of the *Mishneh Torah* indicates, *talmidei hakhamim* likewise feel the need and the urge for comprehensive and systematic ordering of *halakhah*. To this end, *madda*, systematic both intrinsically and by dint of its classical roots, has much to contribute. Above and beyond the Rambam's personal genius, surely there is some link between his philosophic studies and his remarkable bent for structure and order. On a broader scale, it is no accident that Sephardic *rishonim* demonstrated a systematic capacity far greater than that of their Ashkenazic counterparts. .... Whatever the respective merits of various talents, the Torah world in its entirety is best served by the fusion of various qualities, of which the systematic impulse is surely not the least important. And that impulse is greatly energized by general culture.

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11. Rewarding as the quest for order may be with respect to halakhah, it is of even greater significance as concerns *mahshavah* .... Hazal's *weltanschauung* was expressed primarily through numerous aggadic statements, usually scattered through Shas and midrashic literature. These are mostly aphoristic, homiletic, or exegetical, more hortatory or expository than analytical. Of course, these statements - they are, after all, Hazal's - individually and collectively, enlighten, stimulate, and inspire .... The fact remains, however, that the means are primarily illuminative flashes and penetrating insights rather than systematic exposition or discursive analysis.

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10. Rav Lichtenstein distinguishes between classic academic Biblical Criticism - which he calls 'anathema' and 'a fusion of heresy and blasphemy' - and 'criticism geared to apprehending texts and contexts in their multiplanar complexity', which is very helpful.

A3] CHOCHMA AS A CONTRAST AND COMPARISON WITH TORAH

12. Quite apart from direct elucidation, *madda* enriches our understanding of Torah ... by providing a basis for comparison. The natural sciences generally deal with subject matter which is not part and parcel of Torah. Their relation to it is therefore peripheral or incremental. The social sciences and the humanities, by contrast, are directly concerned with many issues which are of the woof and warp of Torah proper. The structure and substance of law, the fabric of state and society, the nature of man and his cosmic context all fall within the purview of general as well as Torah thought. Knowledge of how such questions, legal and/or philosophic, have been treated in different traditions can frequently enhance our understanding of Torah positions, as regards either broad outlines or specific detail.

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A4] CHOCHMA AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT IN PSAK AND PSIKA

- Whilst knowledge of secular studies can be very helpful in certain elements of reaching a psak, filling in important technical detail, it is critical when implementing that psak in the real world.

13. והאמר רב: שמונה עשר חדשים גדלתי אצל רועה בהמה לידע איזה מום קבוע ואיזה מום עובר;

סנהדרין ה'

*Rav spent 18 months as an intern with a shepherd to gain experience concerning 'mumim' - what is a permanent and what a temporary blemish on a first born animal.*

14. the implementation of Torah .... takes place within the physical or social world, and intimate knowledge of that world is a sine qua non. Ignorance of realia is a major impediment even at the level of theoretical *pesak*, as regards application, it simply disqualifies.

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15. Logically, the same principle should presumably apply to other areas, of *halakhah* and of human life, as well. To an extent, this is true even with respect to the inner psychic realm .... but surely so, in relation to the behavioral and particularly the interpersonal sphere. *Halakhot* regarding the social, economic, or political order, generally formulated with reference to several variables, simply cannot be properly implemented unless one has or had access to knowledge concerning the situation to which they are to be applied. One cannot translate ordinances concerning neighborly relations into contemporary terms without some knowledge of both the classical and modern socio-economic scene. One cannot properly apply *halakhot* governing labor relations without the capacity for extrapolating from one milieu to another. Determination of the current equivalent of Hazal's regulations concerning the collection and distribution of *zedakah* is only possible through an informed comparison of their world and ours. *Madda* is a significant repository of requisite factual knowledge; and, what is often no less important, a vehicle of developing sensitivity to intangibles which mark respective eras. General culture is thus of value in implementing Torah even at the relatively narrow, formal - and, if you will, mechanical - level of the application of specific rule to particular situation. Its value is measurably increased, however, if it is brought to bear not upon the normal *halakhic* process of normative application but within the context of innovation and initiative.

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16. *madda* .... can possibly provide psychological and sociological tools which can enhance the capacity for evaluation in general. Second, to the extent that the prospective audience is itself suffused with secular values and sensibility, knowledge of general culture is invaluable toward the understanding of its particular character and projected response. Even if one contends that the theoretical knowledge is superfluous, as perspicacity is more readily attained through Torah proper, the application of insight to a given social reality obviously is largely dependent upon familiarity with its characteristic features. Hence, the relative resurgence of *Torah u-Madda* in the modern period ... was not due solely to the stimulation provided by the intrinsic cultural and intellectual challenges of modernity or to secular seepage into the religious world (although that, too, has probably been a factor). It was no less the result of a perceived need to respond for pristine Torah reasons to a changed communal situation. Within a relatively homogeneous ghettoized community, Torah leadership sans *madda* can communicate effectively with its constituents and accurately assess their needs and inclinations. The situation is quite different when a cultural gap - at times, a chasm - divides the shepherd from his flock.

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17. If the realization of so central a value is a function of the spirit of the age, sensitivity to the *zeitgeist* is a fortiori essential to other aspects of communal life. To many, the point will, quite rightly, appear elementary. And yet, it needs to be stressed. .... Failure to grasp the essence of contemporary society and to perceive it in proper historical perspective cost Orthodoxy dearly in Eastern Europe. Some of the disintegration and demoralization which affected Polish, Russian, or Lithuanian Jewry earlier in this century - much of it obscured today by nostalgic romanticization but painfully real at the time - was no doubt inevitable. But not all. Better collective grasp of the forces which were buffeting those great bastions could have arrested the decline measurably. To that end, *madda* - which could have sharpened insight into social dynamics, generally, and, say, Socialism, particularly - could have contributed significantly.
- But need one resort to the past for supportive examples? Contemporary Israel is, unfortunately, an excellent case in point. Within the religious community, concern for the country's spiritual character is genuine and widespread; but attempts to cope with the problem are often grievously misguided and inept. Culture shock has left some elements of its Torah world in bewilderment and disarray.
- Others, particularly within the political realm, are confident to the point of being overweening, but often fight the wrong battles with the wrong tools; and while some of these are nevertheless won, many of the triumphs are Pyrrhic victories which already exact an immediate toll but whose full cost - in the form of *hillul Hashem*, anti-religious resentment, and national divisiveness - is deferred to the future. Those who lack the capacity to understand the secular mind properly may find it easier to misconstrue or disregard it. The result is a blatant obliviousness to Hazal's admonition (*Mo'ed Katan* 17a): "And put not a stumbling-block before the blind" that text applies to one who beats his grown-up son," because, as Rashi explains, he is thereby possibly inciting him to rebel in recoil. A true gadol, such as Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l, intuitively understands the situation fully and is, indeed, consequently dismayed. For most, however, a measure of *madda* can be vital toward illuminating both the present scene and the ramifications of prospective courses of action.

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#### A5] CHOCHMA AS A COMPLEMENT TO PERSONAL GROWTH IN TORAH

18. *Hokhmah* can inform and irradiate our spiritual being by rounding out its cardinal Torah component. It effects this, either by casting light, if not upon the stuff of Torah proper - its basic texts and concepts, with all their derivatives - then upon the issues to which they relate; or, alternatively, by expanding our spiritual and intellectual horizons through exposure to other areas of potential religious import.

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19. The benefits extend over a range of disciplines, relating to various facets and levels of revelation. The natural sciences manifestly decipher and describe a divinely ordained order whose knowledge both inspires praise and thanksgiving to the *Ribbono Shel 'Olam*. ....
- If science probes one facet of immanent revelation, history describes another. Its sphere, however, is not God's exclusively but the interaction of the human and the divine. From the perspective of faith, historical study consists of the exploration and analysis of the events and records of the drama of conjunction and confrontation between providential direction and creaturely freedom. The nature and proportions of that interaction constitutes a major crux of religious philosophy.
- ..... The study of history offers ... limited apprehension of the working of Providence, perceived through a glass darkly. How much more powerfully, though, does it illumine for us its second aspect - the actions and peregrinations of man, collective and individual. This, too, is of spiritual, rather than merely pragmatic, moment. The truism that history helps us plan and implement the future apart, the understanding it affords us of human character and destiny as manifested throughout the ages, provides insight into *zelem E-lokim* (the image of God) qua agent and sentient. At one level, it portrays social and cultural dynamics as concrete realities rather than sociological abstractions. At another, it enables us to see how and why individuals have made a difference and, what is no less important, to see those individuals.

Confluence and Conflict p 239, 241

20. This brings us, in turn, to a third area in which *madda* complements Torah. If science deals with God's handiwork and history with the conjunction of the human and the divine, the humanities - broadly defined to include the humanistic social sciences - deal with homo sapiens proper: with his existence and experience, his responses and reflections, with the insights of his rational faculties and the progeny of his creative powers. ....
- Advocates of *madda* have often contended that its study ought be confined to the natural sciences through which one can engage in direct contemplation of divine creation and thus, in the spirit of the Rambam, attain both illumination and inspiration. .... In certain respects, the attitude is thoroughly understandable. On the one hand, to the extent that physics or microbiology involve direct perception of God's creative power, they presumably have more to offer religiously than literature or philology .....

And yet, at bottom, the notion that Shakespeare is less meaningful than Boyle, Racine irrelevant but Lavoisier invaluable, remains very strange doctrine indeed. .... Unlike the naturalist or historian, the poet is free to focus upon archetypal physical and psychological patterns; and, in transcending accidental detail and portraying essential qualities and forms, he offers a more universal - and hence, philosophical - account of reality. ....

To those who extol chemistry because it bespeaks the glory of the Ribbono Shel'Olam but dismiss Shakespeare because he only ushers us into the Globe Theater, one must answer, first, that great literature often offers us a truer and richer view of the essence - the "inscape," to use Hopkins' word - of even physical reality. .... the basic sense that literature sharpens our experience and, hence, our understanding of various aspects of reality has broad application. Can anyone doubt that appreciation of God's flora is enhanced by Wordsworth's description of "a crowd/a host, of golden daffodils;/ Beside the lake, beneath the trees,/ Fluttering and dancing in the breeze?"

Confluence and Conflict p 242-4

21. Of course, we can hardly be so naive as to regard humanistic studies as guarantors of humaneness. Not, surely, in this post-Holocaust generation. The point was made with telling force by one of the most learned of contemporary literary critics. In his soul-searching preface to *Language and Silence*, George Steiner writes<sup>11</sup>:

*We come after. We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning. To say that he has read them without understanding or that his ear is gross, is cant. In what way does this knowledge bear on literature and society, on the hope, grown almost axiomatic from the time of Plato to that of Matthew Arnold, that culture is a humanizing force, that the energies of the spirit are transferrable to those of conduct?*

This is, no doubt, a terrifying question for believers in the self-sufficiency of secular humanism - and a formidable one even for advocates of religious humanism. Nevertheless, I believe the abiding valuation of culture as a civilizing and ennobling force which, when harnessed to moral and religious commitment, can help energize and uplift the human spirit, remains basically sound. On its own, it did not - evidently, cannot - prevent brutalization. However, within a spiritual context, it can make a genuine contribution.

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## A6] WHY CAN'T WE GET EVERYTHING FROM TORAH?

22. בן בג בג אומר הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה!

אבות פרק ה משנה כב

*Some raise this mishna in Pirkei Avot and claim that it means that all wisdom is within Torah, so there is no need to turn to secular studies. Whilst the approach of the Vilna Gaon is to see secular chochma as rooted in Torah (although R. Baruch of Shklov, encouraged by his Rav, the Vilna Gaon translated the geometry of Euclid into Hebrew!) this is not the approach of all commentators. The Meiri on this mishna understands that it is simply informing us that all Torah issues can be answered from within Torah - there is no need to turn to other disciplines for Torah answers. But, for example, one cannot learn physics or astronomy from Torah.*

23. Our moral and religious lights did not address themselves with equal vigor to every area of spiritual endeavor. *Hazal* engaged little in systematic theology or philosophy and their legacy includes no poetic corpus. ...

An account of Rabbi Akiva's spiritual odyssey could no doubt eclipse Augustine's. But his confessions have been discreetly muted. The rigors of John Stuart Mill's ... education are not without parallel in our history. But what corresponds to his fascinating Autobiography? Or to the passionate Apologia Pro Vita Sua of his contemporary, John Henry Cardinal Newman? Our Johnsons have no Boswells ...

I am neither so overweening as to contend that such understanding cannot be attained without general literary education nor naive to the point of assuming that it is invariably conferred by it. Knowledge of *Paradise Lost* is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the best grasp of *Sefer Bereishit*. But, to the extent, and I believe it can be significant, that the particular fusion of knowledge and power, insight and inspiration provided by great literature enables us to relate to *ruach memalela* and to enrich our spiritual lives, we shall often profit from grazing in foreign pastures. Where in our treasure, shall we encounter a despondent and tragically deserted father to compare with King Lear? Of thousands who have been imprisoned, who has left a record of his experience on par with Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* or Bonhoeffer's *Letters from Prison*? Do we have a paean of inspired passion to wedded love to match Spenser's *Epithalamion*.

Confluence and Conflict p 252-6

11. George Steiner, *The Language of Silence, Essays, 1958-1966* (London 1967) 15-16

24. At the personal level, too, the lack of madda poses potential problems. To be sure as long as one remains securely ensconced within his bastion, insulation offers comforting security, although as recent Eastern European and North African history demonstrated, if the walls are penetrated they may come crashing down. At the same time, it may render one's view shallow and even crude-delineating too precisely. He who can at most only be vaguely apprehended, and only perceiving in general outline that which can be carefully analyzed; bereft of imaginative sweep, and thus confined, not just spatiotemporally but spiritually, within the four walls of a very pedestrian existence. Spiritual experience may thus be admirably profound and intense in one sense and yet simplistic and superficial in another.
- What may occur at the interface of both sectors can be illustrated by a concrete example. I recall the respective funerals of two of the giants of our generation, Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l, and Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l. Of those who delivered eulogies about the former, only one - Mr. Irving Bunim, a layman - provided any real insight into his personality.
- All the others lamented the loss of a great *gaon* and *zaddik* and appropriately exhorted the audience to take stock and to take heart, but nary a word of genuine portrayal. The scene was pretty much repeated at Rav Moshe's funeral (in Jerusalem). Again, the familiar dirge over the loss of a *gaon* and *zaddik*, some account of his profound commitment and prodigious diligence, but barely the faintest trace of a portrait. Incredibly, the most basic aspect of his contribution to the Torah world, the scope and nature of his activity as a posek, was virtually ignored for reasons which can only be surmised.
- It was all very true, very sincere, and terribly deficient. One reflected in dismay and disbelief that a listener who had had no previous knowledge of either would have come away from both funerals with the impression that there was relatively little difference between the *gedolim*. .... It was astounding that *talmidei hakhamim* who were habituated to noting the finest distinctions in a halakhic *sugya* could so utterly fail to delineate and define persons they had known and admired; and it seemed unlikely that this was simply because they were now overcome by grief. I sensed that the requisite powers were simply lacking; and I reflected that a measure of certain aspects of general culture could have remedied the deficiency.
- .... Nevertheless, it will be rejoined, is this truly significant? Does it really matter if one thinks and speaks of these geonim as archetypal *gedolim*, without reference to their individual personalities? Even if one grants that *hokhmah* would have helped flesh out these portraits, would that be genuinely material? For myself, I must answer in the affirmative. To be sure, such insight does not deserve the very highest priority. One can lead an upstanding Jewish life without it, and yet it is no pittance.

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#### A7] DANGERS AND CONCERNS 1 - BITUL TORAH

25. As in all decision making, having established the inherent desirability of a given phenomenon, one must still determine its concomitant costs .... we must evaluate, qua costs, both price and possible side effects. Translated into the terms of our specific issue, we need to consider first the extent, if any, to which personal and/or communal resources (time, energy, funding) may or should be allocated for the pursuit of culture; second, the danger that religious commitment may be diluted by exposure to secular culture, especially as that may occur within a context of constricted Torah study.
- Each question is itself reducible to two components, or rather, may be posed at two distinct levels: that of rigorous halakhic norm and that of general spiritual desirability. To the committed Jew, the latter is of course critical, but it must, generally, be raised within the parameters of the former. .... one must determine whether a course of action is permissible before he presumes to judge whether it is beneficial.

Confluence and Conflict p 256-7

26. More recently, R. Barukh Ber Leibowitz<sup>12</sup> expanded upon this theme extensively in a responsum written shortly before World War II, which analyzes various aspects of the *mizvah* of *talmud Torah*. .... he postulates, first, that, as regards his sons, one is duty-bound "to make and train them to be geonim and Torah scholars"; and second, that it is likewise incumbent upon one to attain this level personally. R. Barukh Ber further assumes that, quite apart from the need to attain a given level of proficiency, the *mizvah* of Torah study per se requires continuous learning unless absolute physical, economic, or religious necessity (i.e., the need to perform some immediately pressing *mizvah*) precludes it. This, as we have seen, is a matter of dispute<sup>13</sup>. Even if this contention be rejected, however, his earlier definition is of considerable moment with respect to Torah u-Madda. If that be the standard of minimal compulsory knowledge, then the question of the scope of the injunction against *bitul Torah* per se becomes, for all but a handful, largely irrelevant as they must learn constantly in any event simply to pass muster. On this view, little room is left even for the acquisition of a trade or a profession, much less, for general culture. ....
- The responsum in question, reflecting the polemical atmosphere of the time, includes a blistering attack upon university education as a subversive force and categorically rejects it as a legitimate option. Even for those who do not share his revulsion, however, acceptance of his definition effectively precludes the pursuit of *Torah u-Madda*.
- It is, however, ... a radical definition.

Confluence and Conflict p 264

12. Birkat Shemuel, Kiddushin, sec 27

13. In the pages prior to this quotation, Rav Lichtenstein engages in a detailed analysis of the obligation of learning Torah and the parameters of *bitul Torah*

27. For a Jew, there is no substitute for Torah. It is the unchallenged central driving force, moulding, directing, and informing his spiritual and intellectual life. But that is hardly the question. At issue is no whether Torah ought to be central but whether it should be exclusive.

Confluence and Conflict p 265

28. R. Ishmael holds that one ought not devote spare time to inane endeavors. How "spare time" is to be defined is another matter, however. He recognizes that there are legitimate needs to be met, whose pursuit does not constitute *bitul Torah*. ... Just what can be subsumed under the rubric of "legitimate needs" is, however, of critical importance. R. Ishmael presumably speaks directly of economic need. But as this licence is not based upon a dispensation of *piku'ah nefesh* (the saving of life), we hardly assume that only maintenance of the barest subsistence level is intended. I suppose we would take it for granted that physical or psychological need would likewise be recognized. Why not, then, psychic spiritual needs such as general wisdom and culture help satisfy? But, it will be rejoined, those are not needs at all, just intellectual indulgence. That, however, is precisely the point at issue. One cannot reject *madda* categorically on the ground of bittul Torah unless one has already dismissed it in part on other grounds; unless one has already decided, independently of the question of diverting time from Torah study, that it serves no truly meaningful purpose in human life. ... Of course, inasmuch as there are more legitimate pursuits, Torah being primary and unique among them, than time in which they can be realized, choices must be made, priorities determined, and some overall balance struck. At that plane, if one acknowledges its spiritual value, the possibility that some time will be allotted to culture cannot be precluded purely on the grounds of bittul Torah. This was, manifestly, the view of the Rama ....

Confluence and Conflict p 268-69

29. I fully admire and appreciate those who single-mindedly take their literal cue from the text in *Kinyan Torah* (Avot 6:4): "Thus is the way of Torah: You shall eat bread with salt, drink water by ration, sleep on the ground, and live a life of hardship, while toiling in the Torah." I am awed by the rigor of R. Hayyim Volozhiner<sup>14</sup> who contends that, even according to R. Ishmael, only the most minimal diversion from Torah study is permissible and that, moreover, "Also, during the same time and brief period that you engage in earning a livelihood because of the need and compulsion to subsist, in your mind's thoughts, in any event, you should be thinking only of Torah matters." But I fail to understand opponents of Torah u-Madda who think it is perfectly legitimate to labor long and engrossing hours in order to eat lamb chops, drive a Volvo, or vacation in St. Moritz, but illicit to devote those hours instead to exploring, with Plato or Goethe, vistas of thought and experience. I do not, of course, equate Plato with lamb chops. I just hope we are not so Philistine as to value him less.

Confluence and Conflict p 272

## A8] DANGERS AND CONCERNS 2 - CORRUPTION OF OUR MORALITY

30. ... the prevalent attitude of the first-rank leaders of the American Torah world during the last generation seems clear. Daughters of Rav Mosheh Feinstein, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, and Rav Yaakov Ruderman *zz'l* graduated from college; daughters of Rav Aharon Kotler, of *mori ve-rabbi* Rav Yitzhak Hutner *zz'l* and of *rabbi muvhak*, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *zz'l* received doctorates - all presumably with paternal blessing. Today, the situation is, of course, quite different, in part, because the academic scene has changed, but primarily because attitudes have shifted. Be that as it may, these gedolim's positions regarding this point - again, without reference to the element of bittul Torah, so critical in other respects - is unquestionably clear. The content of their message is threefold. First, I do not for a moment imagine that they were heedless of the moral and religious damages attendant upon exposure to secular culture. Recognizing those, however, they evidently felt, secondly, that these could be overcome; and, thirdly, that the benefits of general education rendered the effort of coping worthwhile.

Confluence and Conflict p 274

31. And of course it is not just a matter of lust versus reason. Even those who reject Socratic rationalistic ethics and regard desire more charitably can recognize the potential impact of the arts upon the whole range of moral being: action, attitude, impulse. The respective roles of reason and emotion, as well as the kind and degree of emotion; the level of spirituality, of purpose if not of mission, in human life; aggrandizement, arrogance, egotism, and dissoluteness, as opposed to accommodation, humility, altruism, and discipline; the various catalogues of cardinal virtues and deadly sins - can these be less the stuff of ethical being and moral philosophy than prurience and chastity? Inasmuch as, for better or for worse, culture patently affects us with respect to the gamut of moral existence, our concern with its content and over how we relate to it should be wide-ranging.

14. Nefesh HaChayim 1:8



Finally, the danger is not confined to works in which libido or macho are purveyed straight. Intravenous poison is no less deadly than hemlock potions. In many respects, a novel in which authority is invariably vested in the hands of rigid pedants while its opponents are imaginative and gentle is more insidious than nihilist manifestos. Precisely because it is less perceptible, subliminally insinuated influence may be doubly nefarious.

Confluence and Conflict p 275, 277

### A9] DANGERS AND CONCERNS 3 - CORROSION OF OUR FAITH

32. ... 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 נסיון 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. .... 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 ....

רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה פרק ב הלכה ג

*The Rambam rules that we are halachically restricted in what we may read and think about. Subject matter which may lead us astray in authentic Jewish thought is prohibited.*

33. .... Know, my masters, that I myself have investigated much into these matters. The first thing I studied is that science which is called judicial astrology - that is (the science) by which man may know what will come to pass in the world or in this or that city or kingdom and what will happen to a particular individual all the days of his life. I also have read in all matters concerning all of idolatry, so that it seems to me there does not remain in the world a composition on this subject, having been translated into Arabic from other languages, but that I have read it and have understood its subject matter and have plumbed the depth of its thought. From those books it became clear to me what the reason is for all those commandments that everyone comes to think of as having no reason at all other than the decree of Scripture.

Maimonides Letter on Astrology

*And yet he evidently understood that, for some people, reading such works is permitted!*

34. The second major concern is religious, especially as regards the sensitive area of faith and dogma .... The study of philosophy may issue in agnosticism or atheism or, less radically, in denial of revelation. History often purports to present findings which contravene Scripture or tradition; or, alternatively, it may distort the tensile balance between the eternal and temporal aspects of Torah by overemphasizing the contextual cultural matrix within which it flourished. Schools of psychology and sociology tend to embrace determinism while life sciences may portray man as devoid of the divine spark of *zelem E-Iokim*. Beyond confrontation, moreover, lurk subtler dangers - some, the flip side of palpably positive elements. Comparison with other civilizations is a case in point. On the one hand, it heightens and sharpens our awareness of the genuine character of Torah. .... On the other hand, the very act of comparison often jades a sense of uniqueness. .... If comparison reveals difference, relativistic pluralism rears its head; if similarity, homogenizing universalism. So long as the Torah's uniqueness is not truly ingrained, comparative studies can be both doctrinally and experientially unsettling.

Confluence and Conflict p 277-8

35. כִּי אַתָּה בְּאֵלֵי הָאֲרָץ אֲשֶׁר־הָאֱלֹהִים נָתַן לָךְ לֵאמֹר לִמְד לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּתוֹעֲבֹת הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם:

דברים יח:ט

*The Torah instructs us not to learn the disgraceful ways of other nations.*

36. דאמר מר לא תלמד לעשות - לעשות אי אתה למד, אבל אתה למד להבין ולהורות.

סנהדרין סח.

*Whilst it is prohibited for us to learn such matters in order to imitate them, we may learn 'to understand and teach'.*

37. The parameters of the injunction and the license, respectively, thus remain somewhat murky; and they constitute today, as they have over the centuries, a major crux of the ongoing controversy over *Torah u-Madda*. *Le-havin u-le-horot* pertains not only to the motive of study but to its mode. To an extent, the purpose defines the attitude. Clearly, what is envisioned is study of general and, particularly, deviant material from a critical perspective in light of basic ideological and methodological premises. Hence, the two factors that have been suggested with respect to the Rambam's precept and practice may very well conjoin. If the license to pursue general culture is predicated upon its being approached through the prism of Torah, it should presumably be restricted to those who are suitably equipped to effect such an approach or who, at the very least, are properly guided in the course of its study. It would thus be limited to those who subscribe to the modality of *le-havin u-le-horot* in principle and who have the spiritual wherewithal - both the religious commitment and the critical faculties - to implement it in practice. This would not necessarily restrict serious exposure to questionable material to singular individuals who have ingested bread and meat on the Rambam's scope, but it would firmly establish a functional relation between the depth of one's Torah roots and the range of his cultural branches. The linkage between the twin variables of Torah stature and cultural exposure is obvious: the more sensitive and problematic the material, the greater the caution and selectivity with which it is to be approached.

Confluence and Conflict p 282

38. Even if problematic studies be deemed permissible, given the right motive and the right person, it does not follow that they are necessarily advisable. As with respect to the moral realm, potential gain and loss must be weighed carefully. Qualifying variables aside, the bottom line of course is that the risks remain. Taking them can only be justified by the faith that they can be counterbalanced by genuine spiritual beliefs, not by the pretense that they are either fictitious or flimsy. A would-be philosopher who had attended Rav Soloveitchik's shiur once turned to him for counsel as to whether he should pursue graduate studies in the field - and in a denominational university, at that. The Rav responded that airplanes are known to crash and yet people fly. The questioner subsequently confided that several years later he woke up one morning with an urge to call the Rav to tell him that the plane had just crashed, as indeed it thunderously had. .... Those who contend that questionable material confers no benefits either because it has nothing of value to offer or because its positive content can better be attained otherwise sans possible complications are perfectly justified, given their premise, in avoiding all contact with it. Only where the possibility of true spiritual benefit is perceived, tested faith being regarded as either sturdier or worthier, or if exposure is valued as enhancing the ability to cope with the *apikoros* without or within, or if, in a more positive vein, the material itself or the encounter with it is deemed as stimulating meaningful insight into Judaism, can the prospect of ideologically problematic pursuits be countenanced. With basic values at stake, real dangers cannot be blithely ignored in the name of liberal openness. Responsible commitment to Torah dictates that we err, if we must, on the side of caution.

Confluence and Conflict p 284

39. Admittedly, it is conceivable that even with the best safeguards the encounter with *madda* may lead some astray. Given mass exposure, it is likely that not all will be able to sustain the tensile balance between respective realms. This, in turn, raises the obvious question as to whether the pursuit of general culture can be justified, regardless how worthwhile on balance. The problem is genuine, but it should be noted that we are here confronted educationally with a dilemma analogous to that regarding the use of say, automobiles. If we were presented with the grisly proposition that vehicular traffic could be maintained on the sole condition that a number of designated innocent people be executed, we should certainly respond .... that the proposal was morally revolting. Yet, while we know full well that, despite all exhortation to caution and regardless of the safeguards, many will perish in traffic accidents, we regard this as the inevitable price for the comfort and convenience of automotive travel; and we pay it socially and morally inasmuch as we are dealing with statistical projections rather than willful carnage or specific victims. By the same token, if we were told that *madda's* overall enrichment of our collective spiritual life was conditional upon the apostasy of specific individuals, we would certainly forgo its contribution. We should then assert with C. S. Lewis<sup>15</sup>, "that the salvation of a single soul is more important than the production or preservation of all the epics and tragedies in the world". At the statistical plane, however, even if one recognizes sadly that, caveats notwithstanding, some will probably lapse, advocacy of *Torah u-Madda* can very well still be sustained, depending, of course, on the overall balance of benefit and loss.

Confluence and Conflict p 286

15. C.S. Lewis, *Christianity and Literature*, in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (London 1939) p196

## A10] DANGERS AND CONCERNS 4 - THE CHILLING OF OUR FERVOR

40. רבי יהודה בן אילעי אומר כל העושה דברי תורה עיקר ודרך ארץ טפל עושין אותו עיקר בעולם הבא. דרך ארץ עיקר ודברי תורה טפל עושין אותו טפל בעולם הבא. משלו משל למה הדבר דומה לאיסטריטיא שהיא עוברת בין שני דרכים אחת של אור ואחת של שלג. אם מהלך כנגד האור הרי נכוה באור, ואם מהלך נגד שלג הרי הוא לוקה בצינה. כיצד יעשה? ילך בינתיים ויזהר בעצמו שלא יכוה באור ושלא ילקה בצינה:

מסכתות קטנות מסכת אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק כח

*Chazal stress the importance of making Torah primary, at the same time as maintaining Derech Eretz as secondary. The balance between the two is the narrow bridge between the dangers of fire and of ice!*

41. .... culture .... often reduces spiritual intensity generally. At times, the dispassionate objectivity upon which its votaries pride themselves issues in the loss of spiritual nerve and verve, in blandness bordering upon frigidity. Seven and one-half minutes (I've clocked it) spent at *minhah* with a *minyan* of academicians at a university library provide a more effective argument against *Wissenschaft*-centered Judaism than reams of *Yated Ne'eman*. If, as some would have it, the so-called *haredi* world is marred by excessive passion, the modern Orthodox community is often afflicted by endemic lassitude; and it can ill afford the diminution of spiritual enthusiasm.

Confluence and Conflict p 287

## A11 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS - BALANCING WHAT IS TRUE WITH WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

42. Philosophy and theology aside, however, we are confronted by a second, no less important, element - practical, and particularly educational, in nature. How well, if at all, can Torah and secular wisdom meld within a single personality or institution; the promise and risks - the cost-benefit ratio, if you will - of any projected synthesis; determination of priorities and the appointment of energies; the psychological and sociological impact of differing relations to ambient general culture - these are all issues which need to be candidly confronted by the philosophic devotees of symbiotic integration no less than by its detractors. ....

One may regard the integration of Torah and wisdom as not only legitimate but optimal, and yet hold that, within the context of an overwhelmingly secular modern culture, it is generally best foregone. Contrarily, one may subscribe to the purist ideal of comprehensive singleminded devotion to talmud Torah and yet favor an integrated curriculum as an accommodating concession to the *Zeitgeist*. What is certain is that Torah educationists ignore either aspect at their - and, more importantly, their students - peril. .... Whatever our orientation, we can hardly afford Procrustean disdain for pragmatic realities.

Confluence and Conflict p 221

## B] RESPONSES TO RAV LICHTENSTEIN

Rav Lichtenstein's 1997 article, *Confluence and Conflict*, is certainly not the end of the discussion (although it may prove to be the most expansive and eloquent analysis of the issues). Important subsequent articles include:

1. A series of articles in *Jewish Action* Spring 2004<sup>16</sup>, including a response by Prof. William Kolbrener to Rav Lichtenstein's *Confluence and Conflict*, and a reply in turn by Rav Lichtenstein. Prof. Kolbrener<sup>17</sup> challenges Rav Lichtenstein on the basis that (inter alia):
  - Rav Lichtenstein has massively overestimated the academic level and capabilities of most of our students. Whilst many Modern Orthodox devotees defend Torah U'Madda as an ideal, it is essentially a rallying cry, and most have no real interest or enthusiasm to learn the actual material of madda. In practice, it becomes 'Torah v'Entertainment', or at best a very dumbed down version of popular culture.
  - The university environment is so driven by physical and mental distractions, that any wholesome Torah experience is very difficult.
  - Prevalent intellectual approaches in contemporary academia make it neigh on impossible for Torah to ally itself with Madda in the way that Rav Lichtenstein advocates. The rational humanism championed by the *madda* heroes of Rav Lichtenstein has given way to a deeply relativistic 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in which 'texts are not read for their instruction (certainly not their moral insights), but as a register of the extent to which they diverge from contemporary notions of what might be considered politically acceptable'.
2. A more optimistic article in the 2012 *Orthodox Forum* by R. Yitzchak Blau - *Contemporary Challenges for Modern Orthodoxy*.<sup>18</sup>

16. Available at <http://ou.org.s3.amazonaws.com/publications/ja/5764/5764spr/RAVLICHT.PDF>

17. See also Professors Kolbrener's detailed Literature Curriculum in the Twenty-First Century Jewish Day School - available at <http://www.atid.org/publications/pdfs/litcurriculum.pdf>

18. Available at <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/777853/rabbi-yitzchak-blau/contemporary-challenges-for-modern-orthodoxy/>