
Torah Umadda: The Unwritten Chapter

Jonathan Sacks

Torah Umadda, the combination of Jewish learning with secular knowledge, is the motto of Yeshiva University. In his recently published book of the same name, Rabbi Norman Lamm has both analysed and defended the philosophy behind the phrase.

In the following article Rabbi Jonathan Sacks presents the case for a continuation of the argument. There is, he suggests, more to be said, if *Torah Umadda* is to be the force it can and should be.

Norman Lamm's new book, *Torah Umadda* (Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), is an outstanding achievement. Lamm is a fine scholar and an impassioned advocate. He has written much and he has written beautifully. But this new work is more than just another book. It is the most complete statement he has yet attempted of his philosophy of Judaism.

One question haunted him for several decades. Rightly so, for it is, in a sense, the question of Jewish modernity. What is, or should be, the relationship between Judaism and secular culture? More narrowly and specifically: what should be the relationship between Jewish and secular studies? Since the beginning of emancipation the question has resolved itself into a series of debates over *Torah im derekh eretz* and *Torah Umadda*, two phrases roughly synonymous but each with its own particular associations. [I ignore these in the present article, and use them interchangeably.] There were those who believed that Torah and secular studies were compatible. There were others who believed they were not. The argument between them has been — with the possible exception of the debate about Zionism — the single most bitterly fought dispute within Orthodoxy for the past century and a half. It coloured all else. What side you took defined the kind of Orthodox Jew you were. It was and is impossible not to take sides.

Particularly so in the institution in which Rabbi Lamm studied and taught and for the past fourteen years has led: Yeshiva University. The very name

suggests the possibility of incipient schizophrenia. For how could one and the same establishment be both a *yeshiva*, a total environment of Jewish learning, and a *university*, where secular studies are taught and secular methodologies employed? The phrase sounds like an oxymoron, a conjunction of contradictory terms. Yet Yeshiva University exists and flourishes. More so perhaps than any other post-emancipation Jewish institution — including Samson Raphael Hirsch's Jewish day school in Frankfurt, Azriel Hildesheimer's Berlin rabbinical seminary, and Rav Reines' college *Torah Va-Daat* — it has shown that the impossible combination can become actual and successful. At least, it can for institutions. Can it for individuals?

This was the question that has long nagged at Rabbi Lamm's mind. I remember first meeting him twenty-two years ago. I was then an undergraduate, religiously perplexed and in search of a guide. Travelling to America in the hope of finding answers, I sought our Rabbi Lamm, already famous as one of the most articulate and sophisticated of a new generation of Orthodox thinkers. Almost immediately our conversation turned to the dilemma of the student at Yeshiva University. The institution itself taught both sides of its curriculum well. But at different times and on separate sites. How was the student to integrate the two hemispheres of his brain, so to speak? Or to put it another way: in the phrase *Torah Umadda* ('Torah and secular knowledge') two things were clear. We know what Torah means and we know what *madda* means.

But what about the word 'and'? It could represent coexistence, synthesis and symbiosis. Or it could stand for tension and cognitive dissonance.

Yeshiva's great leaders — Rabbis Bernard Revel and Samuel Belkin — were convinced that the two worlds could be integrated. But they did not say exactly how. That was left to the student. And Rabbi Lamm was of the view that the student needed help. At least by way of philosophical guidelines. From time to time he has written essays on these themes. Now he has constructed something much larger: a conspectus of Jewish thought on the subject and a complete statement of his views. Or almost complete. For without in any way implying criticism of a fine book, there is another book still to be written.

Models of Integration

In *Torah Umadda*, Rabbi Lamm's focus is on the individual. Once the case has been made — as it has periodically throughout rabbinic Judaism — for the legitimacy of secular study, the question remains: how exactly am I to understand, in religious terms, what I am doing when I study a chapter of physics or mathematics or English literature? Given the permissibility of the act, what kind of act is it that I am engaged in? The question is important if, as a religious individual, I am in search of *shelemut*: spiritual growth, integration or 'wholeness'.

Rabbi Lamm offers six models. The first is *rationalist* or Maimonidean. We study physics and metaphysics to understand the Divine wisdom embedded in creation and the structures of the human mind. The second is *cultural* and is associated with Samson Raphael Hirsch's ideal of *Torah im derekh erez*. The best of secular culture is compatible with Torah and enhances our appreciation of it. The third is *mystical* and belongs to the thought of R. Avraham Hakohen Kook. Secularity is an illusion. In reality, all is sacred. By seeing the secular through the eyes of faith we transform and sanctify it. The fourth is *instrumental* and was advocated by, among others, the Vilna Gaon. There are disciplines without which certain branches of Torah are difficult to understand. A knowledge of astronomy is important in fathoming the laws of the Jewish calendar. Familiarity with animal anatomy is crucial to understanding laws of *shechita*. Secular knowledge, then, is a precondition of some kinds of Torah knowledge.

These are classic models. But there are problems with each. The Maimonidean synthesis was peculiarly tied to an Aristotelian physics. The Hirschian formula fails to satisfy Rabbi Lamm because it lacks spiritual depth. "Hirsch", he writes, "is an aesthete who wants Torah and *derekh erez* to live in a neighbourly and noncombatant fashion." Rav Kook's ideal is challenging but obscure and was never successfully translated into practice. The instrumental approach grants too little to secular study which it sees as simply a means to an end. So Rabbi Lamm presses on to two new models, both constructions of his own, though they draw richly on earlier sources.

One he calls the 'inclusionary' model. The word 'secular' is derived from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning 'the world'. When we engage in secular study, it is the world we are studying. But for a religious Jew the world is itself the work of God. Not only that, but according to the midrash 'God looked into the Torah and created the universe'. The world is thus a particular form of Torah. Rabbi Lamm quotes with

approval the striking remark of R. Zadok Hakohen of Lublin: "I heard it said that God wrote a book — the world; and He wrote a commentary on that book — the Torah." Secular study is therefore an absorption in 'textless Torah' and a form of Torah study in its own right.

The second he calls the 'Chassidic' model. Inverted commas are necessary here, for this doctrine is nowhere to be found in chassidism itself. But Rabbi Lamm adopts the chassidic paradigm of *avodah be'gashmiut*, serving God with the totality of our being, and argues that if the chassidim were able to invest ordinary acts like eating with immense and direct religious significance, how much more so does this apply to study. If we can serve God with the body, we can do so with the mind. Chassidism was traditionally concerned to discover the immanence of God in the full range of human activity. Secular study, then, is an act that can be sanctified.

Rabbi Lamm does not seek to advocate any particular model, though his sympathies clearly lie with a combination of the last two. Nor does he wish to rule out the view of those who are opposed to secular study altogether. He believes in a 'pluralistic Torah community' — particularly so here. For there is no one formula in relation to *Torah Umadda* that is appropriate to all people, places and times. This is evident in the way that talmudic and later debates on the topic were left open ended. There was no single halakhically normative ruling. The subject is, as R. Avraham Yitzhak Bloch once pointed out, as much a matter of aggadah as of halakhah.

But Rabbi Lamm's personal conviction is clear, and in this he is at one with Maimonides, Hirsch and Rav Kook:

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

This is well said, and needed to be said. In *Torah Umadda*, Rabbi Lamm has presented the perfect tutorial for anyone perplexed by the questions: How shall I integrate the two halves of my being? How, as a religious Jew, shall I understand what I am doing when I set the holy texts aside and study, instead, economics or biochemistry or the history of art? Am I engaged in a process that is necessarily secular? Or is this too part of a unified religious life? Lamm sets out the various answers to this question, acknowledges the legitimacy of each, and makes a powerful case for seeing secular study as a form of *avodat Hashem*, the worship of God. His analysis will leave a great many people in his debt. But a question remains.

A Philosophy in Search of Adherents

The history of *Torah Umadda* and its variants over the past century and a half has been a strange one. Ever since Samson Raphael Hirsch published the *Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel* in 1836 it has seemed as if a dialogue between Torah and Western culture was possible and necessary. Only so could Judaism survive in the

modern world. Jews were in the process of entering an open society. Some secular education would become necessary. It was, in many countries, a legal requirement. Jews had now to become integrated as citizens of states. They needed to learn the language and *mores* of a non-Jewish culture. They had to prepare themselves for a wider range of occupations, some requiring advanced education. Regardless of the caveats of their religious leaders, most had either already begun or were about to undertake the journey of acculturation which saw Jews — in common with all other minorities in western societies in the past two centuries — move out of their ethnic and cultural enclosures and enter the societal mainstream. Some synthesis was necessary if upward mobility was not to spell, at the same time, the collapse of tradition and identity. If *Torah im derekh eretz* had not existed, one might say, it would have been necessary to invent it.

But *Torah im derekh eretz* did exist. There were a dozen glittering precedents to choose from: Saadia, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, Nachmanides, Abarbanel and a host of others. It was hardly necessary to argue that creative interaction was possible between Judaism and the philosophy, theology, mysticism, literature and political theory of other civilisations. There was not a single dimension of the Jewish heritage that had not been enriched by the interaction between Jews and their neighbours: in particular, over a period of some six centuries, between Sephardim and enlightened Islamic culture. So the emergence of Jews into European society in the nineteenth century not only made a resumption of that tradition urgent; but also *there was a tradition to resume*. This, of course, is precisely what Samson Raphael Hirsch argued. The cultural isolation of Jewry in the ghetto was not a normative feature of Jewish history, he wrote. It was an anomaly and, spiritually speaking, a tragedy. The new age of emancipation merely made possible again what had existed before.

One question therefore reverberates throughout modern Jewish history. Why did so few spokesmen of the tradition embrace some equivalent of *Torah im derekh eretz*? Only two did so with any systematic passion: Hirsch and Rav Kook. There were no others. There were, to be sure, figures who were sympathetic to the idea and who created institutions in its spirit, among them R. Azriel Hildesheimer and R. Isaac Reines. But they produced no philosophical statements of their position, however loosely we interpret the word 'philosophical'. Meanwhile, against it were arrayed most of the *gedolei Torah*, the great Torah sages of Eastern Europe; and this at the very time when assimilation, secularisation and revisionary interpretations of Jewishness were devastating religious life throughout Europe and America. Not only this. Neither Hirsch nor R. Kook created a lasting environment for their ideas. Within a generation, Hirsch's successors were distancing themselves from his philosophy, already proposing the excuse that has haunted *Torah im derekh eretz* ever since, that it was a temporary concession to the times. R. Kook fared even worse. His plans for a broader *yeshiva* curriculum on the one hand, and on the other for a Hebrew University that would sanctify the secular, were never once realised. R. Kook's dream of religious renaissance, one of the boldest ever articulated since the days of the prophets, remained just that: a dream.

The mystery deepens when we turn to the present. It would be difficult to imagine a time when Jews *en masse* had a higher level of secular education. The

encounter with other civilisations, which in the Middle Ages was experienced by a socio-cultural élite, is today part of the quotidian reality for most Jews in most places throughout the world. Equally, it would be hard to find a precedent for the sheer quantity of talmudic study in contemporary Jewry. Who could have envisaged, a mere half century ago, the stunning proliferation of *yeshivot*, *kollelim* and the *daf yomi* programme? Today there are *roshei yeshiva* with doctorates and former philosophy professors teaching Talmud. According to William Helmreich's researches, some eighty-six per cent of *yeshiva* students in America proceed to obtain degrees. Never before has there been so substantial a population who embodied in their persons the dual achievements of *Torah* and *derekh eretz*. And yet, as a philosophy, *Torah im derekh eretz* is in a state of eclipse. A note of embattlement resonates through the pages of Rabbi Lamm's book. He is, it is clear, defending a position that is under attack.

Why so? It will not do to ascribe the waning of a vision to the persisting trauma of the Holocaust. The reaction against *Torah im derekh eretz* began long before that. Nor will it suffice to say that today's Jewish students prefer the simplicity of *yeshiva* to the complexity of *Torah Umadda*. That does an injustice to students and *yeshivot* alike. Why then, if *Torah Umadda* represents a coherent philosophy of Judaism, speaks directly to the personal situation of many Jews, and promises to unify otherwise divided minds, does it attract so few adherents?

The Culture of Modernity

Early on in the book, Norman Lamm provides us with the clue. It occurs at the point at which he defines what he means by *madda*. Definition is important. For when we seek to combine Torah with something else — whether we call it *derekh eretz* or *madda* or *chokhmah* — we must know what that something else is. It is not a constant. In mishnaic times it was a wordly occupation. In medieval times it was neo-Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. In the nineteenth century it was, roughly speaking, the philosophy of Kant and Hegel and the poetry of Goethe and Schiller. Torah does not change. But the environment in which Jews seek to understand Torah does change. The reference of the word *madda* alters from generation to generation. In our time *madda* represents *the culture of modernity*.

What are the salient elements of this culture? Rabbi Lamm defines them as follows:

[T]he substitution of experience for tradition as the touchstone of its worldview; a rejection of authority — at the very least a scepticism toward it, at worst a revolution against it; a radical individualism... and thus a preoccupation with the self; a repudiation of the past and an orientation to the future...; secularism, not as a denial of religion as much as an insistence on its privatisation...; and a rejection of particularisms of all sorts and an affirmation of universalism, the dream of the Enlightenment.

This is a fine summary of the intellectual world we inhabit, a world shaped by Kant, Hume, John Stuart Mill and Nietzsche, and by the transformations of society of which their thought is at once symptom and cause.

But this synopsis plays no further part in the argument. Lamm himself says that "the social, communal and general cultural challenge of modernity is

not our central concern here". But if not here, then somewhere else, a concern it must be. For in a single paragraph we have before us the most compelling possible reason for concluding that whatever might have been the relation between Torah and *madda* in the past, and whatever it might be again in the future, in the present the two are radically opposed.

Consider the aspects of modernity one by one, and their implications for Judaism. The substitution of experience for tradition undermines the *mesorah*, Judaism as tradition. The rejection of authority compromises the relationships on which the transmission of values rests: between parents and children and disciples and teachers. Radical individualism is destructive of community, in particular of the community of action which is the essence of the halakhah. Repudiation of the past subverts the self-understanding of the Jew as a person bound by birth to the covenant of Sinai. The privatisation of religion weakens the idea of *knesset Yisrael*, that the primary partner of the covenant is the Jewish people as a whole, not a series of sects and denominations each seeking relationship with God but not with one another. The rejection of particularism is a fundamental assault on Jewish singularity and the religious life in which it is expressed.

These are no abstract considerations. They are at the heart of the dilemma of Judaism in modernity. They are enacted daily. They result in an inter-marriage rate, throughout the Diaspora, of one in three; in a rising incidence of non-marriage and divorce; and in a Jewish world in which, according to Professor Daniel Elazar, some eighty per cent of identifying Jews no longer see themselves as bound by halakhah. These consequences are not surprising. They are precisely what one would expect to happen in a culture that bears the characteristics that Lamm has described. As every sociologist of religion has noted, modern consciousness is radically subversive of religious faith and traditional practice. Jews, having embraced modernity with unusual fervour, have experienced to the full its disintegrative effects. We are no longer, collectively and empirically, the people of Torah.

This surely is the crux of the problem. For we know too much about the corrosive effects of modernity to be as sanguine as was Maimonides when he attempted a reconciliation between Judaism and Aristotelianism, or Hirsch when he believed that Judaism could be enriched by an acquaintance with the science and literature of the nineteenth century, or Rav Kook, when he formulated his idea of the unity of all cognitive and aesthetic disciplines under the sovereignty of Torah. This is not to say that they were not right. It is merely that their *madda* is not ours. The secularisation of culture has gone further in our time than it had in theirs. Not all cultures are congenial to the values of Torah; and ours is less than most.

This explains an otherwise surprising omission from Lamm's book. R. Joseph Soloveitchik has been the greatest Orthodox thinker in the last half century. More than any other figure of the past two centuries he has combined mastery of the rabbinic literature with encyclopaedic knowledge of modern philosophy, theology, mathematics and theoretical physics. There could be no more supreme exemplar of Torah and *madda*. Yet, other than a few passing references, R. Soloveitchik plays no part in Lamm's analysis.

Rightly so. For no Jewish thinker has more acutely described the agonising conflicts between traditional

and modern consciousness. It was not always so. In his early works, *Halakhic Man* and *The Halakhic Mind*, R. Soloveitchik was more optimistic. To be sure, even then he did not believe in the kinds of synthesis entertained by Maimonides or Hirsch or Rav Kook. Rather, he believed that the differentiation and fragmentation of modern culture opened up a space for halakhic Judaism to be understood in its own terms, without having to be reconciled with other branches of knowledge. But in his later writings — those that reflect his experience of contemporary America rather than the pre-war University of Berlin — he came to recognise the pervasive influence of secularisation. His work took on a tragic-heroic tone.

Judaism is experienced as incessant conflict: thesis and antithesis without synthesis. To be heroic is to be defeated. To have faith is to be alone. The halakhic mind lives in the company of Hillel and R. Akiva and Rashi and Maimonides, not in the society of the present. Modern consciousness, with its relentless utilitarianism and self-gratification, has no place for the explosive force of faith. Traditionally, man served God. In modernity, God has been turned into a servant of man. Some of these themes — especially the untranslatability of the concept of Divine command into secular categories — are mirrored in the work of the Israeli exponent of Torah and *madda*, Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, another striking omission from Lamm's book. The true challenge to *Torah Umadda*, therefore, comes not from its *opponents* but its *practitioners*. It is precisely those who entered both worlds most deeply who sensed to the full their incompatibility.

The Case for Torah Umadda

Does this mean that *Torah Umadda* is, at present, an unviable option? No. To be sure, in recent years, three other options have gained strength. One is the principled *rejection* of secular study. The second is *compartmentalisation*: the option of Jews who study at *yeshiva* and university but make no principled connections between the two. The third is what Charles Liebman calls *adaptationism*: the attempt to restate Judaism in the language of modern consciousness, emphasising in particular the values of autonomy and pluralism.

Each has its virtues. The Torah-only position has been responsible for the dramatic revival of the *yeshiva* in our time, and provides our centres of religious intensity. The compartmentalists are doing what most Jews have done at most stages of Jewish history: treating secular study and the pursuit of a livelihood as a means to an end, not an end in itself. The *adaptationists*, Orthodoxy's radicals, are an important link between Orthodoxy and the rest of the Jewish world.

But none is in itself a sufficient response to the problem of enacting Judaism in the modern world. Torah-only is an option realistically available only to an élite. The *yeshiva* and chassidic communities who espouse it represent some five per cent of the Jewish population worldwide. Adaptationism lies at the very margins of Orthodoxy and continually threatens to part company with it altogether. Compartmentalisation works, but cannot inspire.

Torah Umadda remains a perennial Jewish challenge. For what lies behind the philosophies of Hirsch and Rav Kook is a fundamental feature of Jewish spirituality. Both understood that though the Torah's

imperatives are timeless, they must be actualised in specific societies and times. Both rejected the possibility that Orthodoxy could segregate itself entirely from its environment and live, hermetically sealed, in a timeless zone. They did so on spiritual grounds. A Judaism thus detached from the flow of life around it would ultimately lack vitality. It would fail, for Hirsch, to be a *kiddush Hashem*. It would fail, for Rav Kook, to align itself with the thrust of history and Providence.

Judaism, for them, is not a private concern only, a matter of synagogue, school and home. It is concerned with the perfection of society. Therefore Jews must be involved *as Jews* in society. To be sure, they had different societies in mind. Hirsch was concerned with the diaspora, Rav Kook with the possibilities of a Jewish state. That in large measure explains the differences in their philosophies. But as soon as the public domain of Judaism is mentioned, we are already in the world of *Torah Umadda*. For we cannot hope to perfect society without understanding society. And we cannot understand society without understanding the way it understands itself, namely through its own resources of knowledge and culture.

The lack of appeal of *Torah Umadda* in our time is a symptom of one of the most devastating effects of secularisation: *the privatisation of religion*. Judaism is experienced as a phenomenon of private life. There — in the home, school and synagogue — it makes immediate sense. But we are far less sure as to what Judaism might mean in the public domain. That is why the one branch of Jewish ethics to have flourished in recent years is medical ethics. For most medical questions involve private decisions between patient and doctor. But on public questions, the discussion has been meagre. What, in present circumstances, would constitute a Jewish environmental ethic? To what extent does Judaism endorse the minimalist state? Where should we draw the line between state welfare and private philanthropy? What are the parameters of a Jewish business ethic for large corporations? Should publication of *The Satanic Verses* have been suppressed under a law of blasphemy?

Discussion of these and similar topics has been desultory. Presentations usually consist of a rehearsal of Biblical and talmudic sources, all of which indicate — an important fact in itself — that the Jewish tradition has rich resources with which to confront the issue. But beyond that there has been very little, particularly when we turn to the question: what kind of society, then, should we try to create *now*? The health of a tradition is measured by the strength of its arguments on the central issues facing its adherents. The great public questions of our time — whether in Israel or the *golah* — have simply not generated serious religious argument within the Jewish community.

When rabbis have discussed issues like welfare or the environment or blasphemy or religious education in state schools or public broadcasting policy, interest has come from the non-Jewish rather than the Jewish public. It is as if religious and secular Jews alike, right across the spectrum of commitment, had conceded the secularisation of the public domain. Under these circumstances what point is there in drawing connections or contrasts between Torah and *madda*, our larger cultural environment? For we have implicitly agreed that the two have nothing to do with one another.

This failure of nerve could not have come at a more inappropriate moment. For the very circumstances of which Hirsch and Rav Kook dreamed have come to

pass. Jews, as Hirsch hoped, have reached prominence in the Diaspora. In America they have reached higher educational and occupational levels than any other ethnic or religious group. In Britain, unprecedentedly, the Chief Rabbi has been elevated to the House of Lords. The vision that animates Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* — of Jews as moral exemplars in the midst of humanity — may have been, in retrospect, desperately inappropriate to Germany. But it is hardly absurd given the receptivity to a Jewish voice in the United States or Britain.

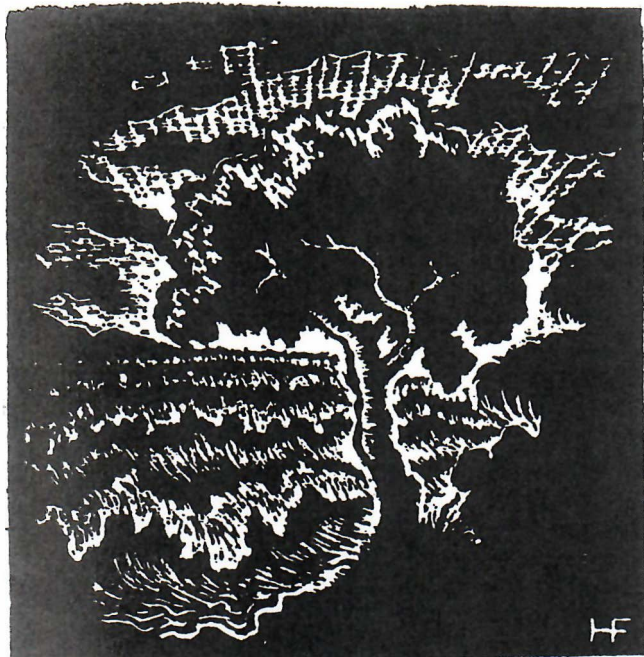
What Rav Kook dreamed of, too, has happened: Jewish statehood and the revival of Torah in Israel. His challenge therefore still stands, namely, the interpenetration of Torah with the arts, culture and ethos of Israeli society. The conditions conducive to *Torah Umadda* exist now as they did not in Hirsch or Rav Kook's day. Yet the call has, by and large, been declined.

A Critical Dialogue

But models exist, whether created by Orthodox Jews or secular Jews or non-Jews, for what a critical dialogue might be like between Judaism and contemporary culture. Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue*), Michael Walzer (*Spheres of Justice*) and Michael Sandel (*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*) have shown us the inseparability of tradition, community and ethics. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ernst Gombrich and Brevard Childs have revealed the essential connection between tradition and understanding in hermeneutics, the arts and Biblical studies. Robert Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*) has traced the linkages between tradition and citizenship. T. S. Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) has even demonstrated the tradition-governed nature of scientific enquiry. Taken collectively, these are powerful critiques of Enlightenment assumptions, and important resources for a sophisticated restatement of Jewish beliefs and values.

Nearer to home, Daniel Elazar has speculated thoughtfully on what a renewed Jewish political tradition might be like. Mordechai Rotenberg has outlined an approach to psychiatry based on a mid-rashic and kabbalistic understanding of the self. Reuven Feuerstein has based his pioneering educational techniques on Jewish perceptions of cognitive development. Michael Wyschogrod, in his sadly neglected *The Body of Faith*, has mounted an important defence of Jewish particularism. Closer still to central Jewish concerns, Aharon Lichtenstein and Gerald Blidstein among others have written with deep insight on the inner dialogue between halakhah and the structure of Jewish values. Above all, future generations will find in the writings of Rav Soloveitchik just what it was that Jews in the second half of the twentieth century found lacking in a utilitarian and individualistic culture.

Torah Umadda is a process rather than an ideology. It is the ongoing dialogue in which Jews reflect on the meeting between Torah, experienced as timeless command, and the time- and place-specific culture in which they have been set. That meeting has usually enriched both sides. Jews have taken and have given in return. New environments have allowed Jews to discover new dimensions of Judaism, always implicit but never before realised. The merest glance at the different customs and literatures developed by a variety of Jewish communities throughout time and space will show how this has happened. There are



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times at which Jews have sensed a deep kinship between their values and those of their non-Jewish neighbours; others at which they have been aware of mutual antagonisms. But in both cases they have been shaped by the encounter and the way they perceived it. The process of discernment, by which Jews saturated in Torah determine which developments are an enhancement of Judaism and which are a diminution of it, is perhaps the highest task of judgement to which we are called. This is the ongoing imperative of *Torah Umadda*.

Arguing for Torah

Its eclipse in recent centuries is the single most striking feature of modern Jewish history. The contribution of the very greatest minds of Jewish provenance — Spinoza, Marx and Freud — has been an assault on rather than an expression of Judaism. Jewish novelists have shaped the literary sensibility of twentieth century America. Yet, as Ruth Wisse wrote recently, "If asked to reconstruct the 'Jewish' moral imagination on the basis of American fiction... I would go to the Protestant John Updike sooner than to the Jewish E. L. Doctorow; not only is Updike closer in his view of life to Jewish tradition, he has more interesting things to say about the Jews". No less fatefully, liberal Judaisms — including the American Conservative movement — have tended simply to accept as normative the secular ethos of the age.

In all these cases the critical dialogue has broken down. So long as our values are shaped by Torah we have the necessary distance to be able to engage in moral critique. We are no longer prisoners of our time. It is Torah that continually sets before us the dissonance between what is and what could and should be, the distance we call *galut* and which lies at the very heart of the prophetic-halakhic imagination. If we were asked, however, to define the mood that is the leitmotif of modern Jewish history, it would be a profound weariness with the tensions of *galut*, and a massive desire to make the here-and-now home.

When this happens, Torah is inevitably the casualty. Either it is abandoned altogether, or it is domesticated

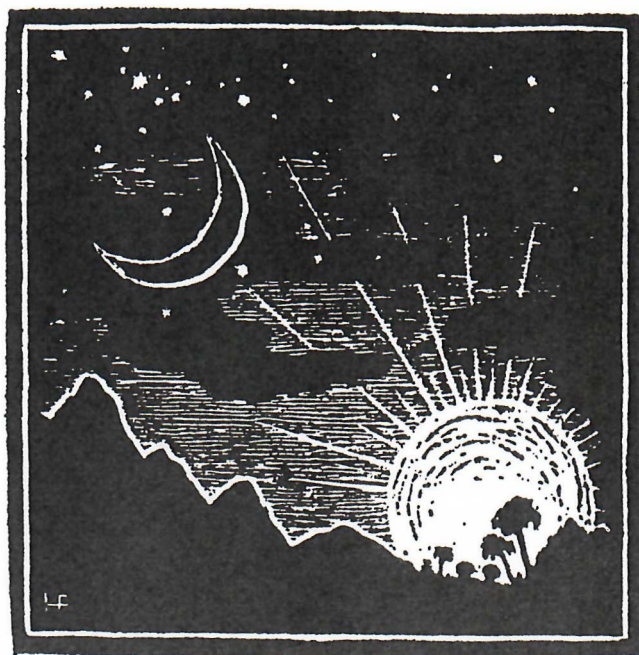
to fit the latest fashion in ethics. Small wonder that most Jews no longer have any clear idea what Judaism is or stands for. In a national telephone survey taken by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1988, when asked 'What qualities do you consider most important to your Jewish identity?' fifty-nine per cent replied, 'a commitment to social equality' while only seventeen per cent chose 'support for Israel' or 'religious observance'.

The failure of *Torah Umadda*, then, is not something that should be seen within the ambit of Orthodoxy alone. It is, in essence, the Jewish failure to construct a viable cultural continuity in the modern world: a problem that affects Israel no less than the Diaspora. The key to this failure has been the loss of Torah: as text, as tradition, as command, and as summons to build a society that is not yet but might be.

And here is the crux. In his latest book, Rabbi Lamm has argued the case for *madda*, a Jewish acquaintance with the best available secular knowledge and culture. Yet that is precisely what the vast majority of today's Jews already have in superabundance. What they do not have is Torah. Or even any clear sense of why, without Torah, the Jewish destiny loses all coherence.

Torah and *madda* are not equal partners. To paraphrase Maimonides, Torah leads to *madda*, but *madda* does not lead to Torah. If we understand Judaism, we are led to explore the world we are called on to change. But if we understand the world, we are not led by that fact alone to explore Torah. The defence of Torah is intrinsically more difficult than the defence of *madda*. And more necessary. If we are to revive the failing pulse of Jewish existence in time — the dialogue between covenant and circumstance, the word of God and the existential situation of the Jewish people — it is Torah rather more than *madda* which needs persuasive advocacy.

There is another book to be written. It is called for by that voice which, according to the sages, issues from Sinai every day, lamenting the loss of Torah among the people whose covenant and destiny it is. It is a defence of the other half of the phrase *Torah Umadda*. There is no one who could write it better than Rabbi Lamm.■



The Sun and Moon