

## **1. Rabbi Yehuda Parnes, “Torah u-Madda and Freedom of Inquiry,” *Torah u-Madda Journal* 1 (1988), 68-71**

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...

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)...

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...

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 the Torah. Such a thesis is untenable. Were this the case, the Rambam would not have had to present a rationale for this prohibition...

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?... 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 *kishuf*, goes so far as to say that if it is done *להבין ולהורות* (i.e., to understand and makes [sic] decisions) it is permissible... That is a far cry from an unconditional intellectual endeavor in the domain of *kefirah*...

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 *אמונה*. Then, Torah u-Madda will have the opportunity to represent itself as an authentic and historical tradition in Jewish thought.

## **2. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, “Centrist Orthodoxy: A Spiritual Accounting,” *By His Light* (2003) pp. 220-252, accessible at <http://gush.net/archive/develop/12develop.htm>**

Starting with the question of general culture, I wrote a brief essay in the 1960’s setting forth my position with respect to the validity and value of such culture and its relation to the dual problems of *bitul Torah* (taking time from Torah study) and potentially pernicious influences. In certain respects, the piece is unquestionably and clearly dated...

I freely admit that, during the intervening years, confidence in culture—culture in Arnold’s sense, “the study of perfection”—has been generally shaken, and this for at least three reasons. First, high culture—“the best that has been thought and said in the world,” as Arnold defined literature—is less cherished than it once was. Interest in the humanities has waned, both within academia and outside of it, as the focus has shifted to more pragmatic and technological areas. Not only have priorities changed, but to most people the kind of spirit which animated an Arnold to posit literary culture as the “one dam restraining the flood-tide of barbarian anarchy,” now seems hopelessly naive.

## **3. William Kolbrener, “Torah Umadda: A Voice from the Academy,” *Jewish Action* 5764, Special Section**

There are, I think, two reasons to hesitate at the enterprise of *Torah Umadda* as Rav Lichtenstein conceives of it: 1. The nature of our students (and the contemporary culture in which they find themselves) and 2. More fundamentally, the nature of the university and the forms of attention and inquiry that it encourages...

These *bachurim* (young men) to whom I was speaking, though championing *Torah Umadda* in the abstract, also failed to have anything more than the most superficial connection with secular studies...

I remained confused by the disparity between their enthusiasm for the concept and their indifference to the actual phenomenon until one of the young men confided: “It’s not so much that we are interested in *Torah Umadda*, what we are really interested in is Torah and *entertainment*.” This *talmid* provided, and he did so humorously, the *reduction ad absurdum* of the position (to the discernible relief of his friends), but he revealed that the primary concern of many yeshivah boys (aside from *parnassah*) is not incorporating the classics into the life of the *ben Torah*, but rather accommodating Torah into a contemporary lifestyle—of popular culture, of movies and of MTV...

But it’s not only our young people who have changed—and this provides the second of my hesitations about Rav Lichtenstein’s contemporary advocacy of *madda*—the university itself has changed, and *radically* at that. Rav Lichtenstein himself acknowledges that the “academic scene has changed” (274), though it does not seem to me that

he recognizes the full extent of the shift. The scene, in fact, has probably undergone, since Rav Lichtenstein received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1962, something more like an earthquake. For the ideals of secular humanism, or what goes under the name of a liberal arts education, have changed fundamentally in the last generation...

In the contemporary university, what were once considered the classics of Western literature and philosophy are now often viewed as mere markers of prejudice, power and oppression. There is no reason to expect that Rav Lichtenstein would keep up with the developments in the contemporary university, but T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis and Matthew Arnold rarely find themselves in the undergraduate curriculum. Certainly those bearers of Christian humanism find very few sympathetic ears within the halls of the contemporary university...

[T]exts of the past are not looked to as means of potential instruction and guidance, but as evidence of how much the cultures of the past fail to live out the ethics and ideals that a current generation has allegedly perfected. This is not then merely a question of a curriculum change, but a major shift in the way in which one relates to texts, traditions and authority...

Rav Lichtenstein's works all give the sense—whether he is occupied in Torah or *madda*—of a profound engagement with the texts he encounters. In the postmodern academy, the very attitude—call it that of the secular humanist or that of the classicist—has been deemed outmoded, and replaced: The hermeneutics of suspicion reigns. One cannot help but point out the irony that a postmodern multiculturalism, ostensibly representing a commitment to cultural difference, entails nothing like a real openness to different cultures...

The university, as it is currently conceived, even a religious university, does not always allow students, within the structure of a classroom, to foreground their own “moral and theological” perspectives...

For [a student studying Jewish philosophy in the academy,] embracing the perspective and standards of academic disciplines led to finding himself no longer addressed by the tradition, but looking at it, analyzing it from outside. In this sense, the perspective implicit in the contemporary university may serve the regrettable function of turning the *learning* of Torah into its mere *study*...

I do not demur from Rav Lichtenstein's evaluation of the intrinsic value of the classics of the Western tradition, but rather the role of the classics—given the institutional frameworks currently available—in the life of the *ben Torah*... In the 1950s and early 1960s, Torah found itself, in America, at home in a culture that was hospitable to the ideals of religious humanism; the problem of synthesis may have been a genuine *avodah* for that generation. The chore of the current generation—in a very different climate—may require not synthesis, but rather simply maintaining the forms of attention required to receive and transmit the Torah.

#### **4. Aharon Lichtenstein, “To Sharpen Understanding,” *Jewish Action* 5764, Special Section**

Modes of contemporary criticism, currently in cultural and political vogue, have debased and defiled the *sancto sanctorum*, “the holy of holies,” of the humanities, eviscerating them of spiritual content and exposing their students to deleterious and dangerous intellectual habit and attitudes. Rather than drawing inspiration and guidance from what Arnold defined as “the best that has been thought and said in the world”... they are trained to debunk and condemn, to trivialize and relativize. Moreover, he charges that young minds, thus habituated and contaminated, may, concurrently, lose their sense of the objective truth and significance, of the majesty and grandeur, of Torah...

[E]ven advocates of Dr. Kolbrener's position can acknowledge the need to keep the home fires burning in hope for better times. My great humanist mentor, Douglas Bush, once jestfully surmised that the whale in *Moby Dick* signified “the spirit of literature tearing and rending Symbolist critics.” Perhaps today he stuffs his ravenous maw with the acolytes of suspicion. We, in the interim can, minimally, “only stand and wait,” yearning for a fresh dawn. Even if winter's here, might we not, with inspired vision and informed counsel, anticipate the spring? That hope does not absolve us of present responsibility for prudence and selectivity; and we are admittedly left, in conclusion, with a nagging and even cruel concern: fear lest, in some cases, exposure to general culture and its pursuit may lead, beyond adulteration of Torah commitment, to its abandonment.

#### **5. Sarah Rindner, “A Consideration of Synthesis from a Student Point of View: A Response to Rav Lichtenstein,” *The Commentator*, February 13, 2006**

In “A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View,” R. Lichtenstein makes a powerful case for the spiritual value of a strong secular education.

“Secular studies possess immense intrinsic value insofar as they generally help to develop our spiritual personality. Time and again, they intensify our insight into basic problems of moral and religious

thought. History and the sciences show us the divine revelation manifested in human affairs and the cosmic order. The humanities deepen our understanding of man: his nature, functions, and duties. In one area after another a whole range of general studies sustains religion, supplementing and complementing it, in a sense deeper and broader than we have hitherto perceived."

When I first read those words during my year in Israel, they strengthened my decision to go to college in a Jewish environment. They made me proud to be engaging in an integrated pursuit of "wisdom" that would color every aspect of my school day. But the more I became attuned to the "basic problems of moral and religious thought" that R. Lichtenstein is referring to, the more I questioned how exactly they were going to contribute toward a deepened spiritual involvement.

This was because some of the most searching problems raised by the literature I've encountered have involved man's sense of isolation in the universe, or the complexities of human conflicts in contrast to coherent moral and philosophical frameworks. With the possible exception of explicitly devotional poets such as John Milton and George Herbert, the bulk of the Western literature I have read, and grown to love, has seemed intent on taking us into the depths of human suffering and the chaos of belief, without entirely lifting us out. The *Odyssey* is most compelling precisely when the gods don't take care of Odysseus and he seems to be in his excruciating journey alone. We laugh at Plato's expulsion of poets from his ideal republic, because as good readers we see nothing wrong with thinking about beauty and pain and confusion in contrast to abstract philosophical and religious ideals. In "Dover Beach," when Mathew Arnold's speaker gazes into the sea before him, he does not find religious confirmation, but rather, that the world "Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain"...

I still cannot imagine how R. Lichtenstein's Torah-centered ideal of synthesis could function in a serious college English literature class, even with the most religiously grounded of students. The supplementary, ancillary model of secular education that R. Lichtenstein lays out, however inspiring it is from a "Torah point of view," does not create the kinds of students who would make our English professors proud. That is, purveyors of the Western literary tradition ask for a similar personal engagement that our Rabbis ask of us, and it is unreasonable to expect committed students to stop listening or being attracted to secular perspectives after those ideas cross a certain line. I can understand how a line can, in theory, be drawn; but in my experience in English classes, students who find literature interesting enough to read and care about tend to find themselves to a certain extent "lost" in the worlds they encounter, temporarily losing sight of the relationship between a novel they are immersed in to Torah values they've inherited.

**6. Gil Perl, "Postmodern Orthodoxy: Giving Voice to a New Generation," *Lehrhaus*, November 6, 2017, at <https://www.thelehrhaus.com/commentary/postmodern-orthodoxy-giving-voice-to-a-new-generation/>**

If that was true in the Modern Orthodox world two decades ago, it is only more so today. Not only is the towering presence of Modern Orthodoxy's original luminary, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, still sorely missed, but his oversized student, intellectual successor, and philosophical ambassador Rabbi Lichtenstein is no longer with us as well.

And while their writings have a deservedly hallowed place on the shelves of the serious Modern Orthodox student, their content for many of Modern Orthodoxy's young and hungry minds comes up short. The Brisker dialectics, Neo-Kantian categories, Hegelian syntheses, Miltonian sensitivities, and Kierkegaardian paradoxes which dominate their writing speak with unmatched eloquence and profundity to the problems of modernity. Yet the questions plaguing the community that continues to look to these works for guidance are less frequently the questions of modernity and more frequently the questions of postmodernity.

Today's students are less bothered by their inability to reconcile seemingly competing value systems as they are by their inability to determine whether objective value systems do—or ought to—exist at all. It is not the incongruence of their world that motivates their angst as much as its fluidity. Boundaries taken for granted only a generation ago—between private and public, leader and laity, normative and deviant, even male and female, are increasingly evaporating.

The scientific prowess of the post-industrial twentieth century—that which informed the tantalizing transition of Germany's *Torah Im Derekh Eretz* to America's *Torah u-Madda*—is increasingly being recast as hubris and conceit. Today, our technological know-how is no longer celebrated as a vehicle for progress toward some more enlightened future, but is seen at best as a last resort for saving humanity from itself and, at worst, as humanity's inevitable march toward obsolescence. Indeed, in today's world of infinite information and unparalleled opportunities for learning, our young men and women often feel that they know less rather than more.