

# The Scope of Torah: Aggadah, Normativity, Madda, Part III: What Are the Outer Bounds of Torah?

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## The *Sugya* on Saying Birkat ha-Torah

<u>1. Berachot 11b, Davidson Translation (sefaria.com)</u>	<u>1. תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף יא עמוד ב</u>
<p>Therefore, <b>Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: One who arose to study, until he recites <i>Shema</i> he must recite a special blessing over the Torah. If he already recited <i>Shema</i> he need not recite that blessing, as he has exempted himself by reciting the blessing of: An abounding love, which includes the components of the blessing over the Torah.</b></p> <p>Having mentioned the blessing recited over Torah, the Gemara focuses on a dispute over what constitutes Torah in terms of requiring a blessing. <b>Rav Huna said: For the study of Bible, one must recite a blessing, as it is the word of God, and for halakhic midrash, the derivation of <i>halakhot</i> from verses, one need not recite a blessing. And Rabbi Elazar said: For Bible and midrash, which includes <i>halakhot</i> derived from verses themselves, one must recite a blessing; for Mishna, which is only comprised of halakhic rulings issued by the Sages, one need not recite a blessing.</b></p> <p><b>And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Even for Mishna, which includes final, binding halakhic rulings, one must recite a blessing as well, but for Talmud, which comprises a study of the Mishna and the rationales for its rulings, one need not recite a blessing.</b></p> <p><b>And Rava said: Even for Talmud, which is the means to analyze the significance of the <i>halakhot</i>, and is the only form of Torah study that leads one to its true meaning, one must recite a blessing.</b></p> <p>This statement is supported by the practical <i>halakha</i> derived from observation of Rav's practice. His student, <b>Rav Ḥiyya bar Ashi, said: Many times I stood before Rav to study our chapter in the <i>Sifra</i>, also known as <i>Torat Kohanim</i>, the halakhic midrash on Leviticus, of the school of Rav, and I saw that Rav would first wash his hands, then recite a blessing, and only then he would teach us our chapter.</b> This demonstrates that even before their study of <i>Torat Kohanim</i>, which, due to Rav's explanation of the reasons behind the <i>halakhot</i>, was the equivalent of studying Talmud, one must recite a blessing.</p> <p>The Gemara clarifies: <b>What formula of blessings does he recite?</b> There is a dispute over the formula of the blessings as well. <b>Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said:</b> The formula of this blessing is like the standard formula for blessings recited over other mitzvot: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, <b>Who sanctified us with his mitzvot and commanded us to engage in matters of Torah.</b></p> <p><b>And Rabbi Yoḥanan concludes the blessing by adding the following: Lord our God, make the words of Your Torah sweet in our mouths</b></p>	<p>אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: השכים לשנות, עד שלא קרא קריאת שמע צריך לברך, משקרא קריאת שמע אינו צריך לברך, שכבר נפטר באהבה רבה. אמר רב הונא: למקרא - צריך לברך, ולמדרש - אינו צריך לברך; ורבי אלעזר אמר: למקרא ולמדרש - צריך לברך, למשנה - אינו צריך לברך;</p> <p>ורבי יוחנן אמר: אף למשנה נמי צריך לברך, [אבל לתלמוד אינו צריך לברך]. ורבא אמר: אף לתלמוד צריך (לחזור ולברך) [לברך];</p> <p>דאמר רב חייא בר אשי: זימנין סגיאיין הוה קאימנא קמיה דרב לתנויי פרקין בספרא דבי רב, הוה מקדים וקא משי ידיה וברך, ומתני לן פרקין.</p> <p>מאי מברך? אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה. ורבי יוחנן מסיים בה הכי: הערב נא ה' אלהינו את דברי תורתך בפינו ובפיפות עמך בית</p>

and in the mouths of Your people, the house of Israel, so that we and our descendants and the descendants of Your people, the house of Israel, may be those who know Your name and engage in Your Torah. Blessed are You, Lord, Who teaches Torah to His people Israel.

And Rav Hamnuna said an additional formula: Who has chosen us from all the peoples and given us His Torah. Blessed are You, Lord, Giver of the Torah. With regard to this formula, Rav Hamnuna said: This concise blessing is the most outstanding of all the blessings over the Torah, as it combines thanks to God for giving us the Torah as well as acclaim for the Torah and for Israel.

Since several formulas for the blessing over Torah were suggested, each with its own distinct advantage, the Gemara concludes: Therefore, let us recite them all as blessings over the Torah.

ישראל ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל כלנו יודעי שמך ועוסקי תורתך, ברוך אתה ה' המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל. ורב המנונא אמר: אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו. ברוך אתה ה' נתן התורה. אמר רב המנונא: זו היא מעולה שבברכות. הלכך לימרינהו לכולהו

## 2. ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן מז סעיף ח

צריך לברך בין למקרא בין למשנה בין לגמרא בין למדרש והיינו מדרש המקראות במכילתא וספרא וספרי [רש"י ברכות יא]: [ודע שיש להסתפק בלומד דברי אגדה כמדרש רבה או חכמת הקבלה אם מחויב לברך התורה דהנה בגמרא שם יש פלוגתא דרב הונא אמר דרק למקרא צריך לברך ור' יוחנן אמר דגם למשנה צריך לברך [גירסת הרי"ף] ופירשו תלמידי רבינו יונה משום דהמשנה מפרשת טעמי המצות ור"א אמר דגם לגמרא צריך לברך משום שהתלמוד מפרש עיקרי הפסוקים [תר"י] והמסקנא דגם למדרש צריך לברך משום שבמדרש לומד ג"כ מהפסוקים מקל וחומר ומגזירה שווה ומהמדות שהתורה נדרשת בהם [שם] ולפ"ז משמע שאין החיוב רק בדברים שמפרשים דיני התורה אבל דברי אגדה או קבלה שאין עיקרם לדינים והלכות א"צ ברכה אבל אם נאמר הטעם משום שהכל ניתנה למשה מסיני [הגר"ז] או משום דכולהו תורה מקרי [לבוש] פשיטא שגם אגדה וקבלה ניתנה למשה מסיני ומקרו תורה אבל מלשון תלמידי רבינו יונה לא משמע כן וצ"ע לדינא:

## 3. טור אורח חיים הלכות ברכות השחר ושאר ברכות סימן מז

(ה)וצריך לברך למקרא למדרש ולמשנה ולתלמוד

## 4. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות ברכות השחר ושאר ברכות סימן מז סעיף ב

צריך לברך בין למקרא בין למשנה בין לגמרא.

הגה: בין למדרש (טור).

## 5. לבוש אורח חיים סימן מז סעיף ב

וחייב לברך בין למקרא בין למשנה בין לתלמוד בין למדרש, דכולהו תורה מיקרו:

## 6. פרי חדש אורח חיים סימן מז סעיף ב

הג"ה בין למדרש. הפוסקים לא כתבו מדרש דמכל שכן דגמרא נפיק. אי נמי בכלל מקרא הוי, וכן משמע בגמרא [ברכות יא, ב]. ומוהריק"ש [בספר ערך לחם] כתב שבכלל תלמוד הוא כדאמרינן לקמן סימן נ' שהמדרש כתלמוד, אבל הטור הזכירו:

## 7. ברכי יוסף אורח חיים מז ברכי יוסף אורח חיים סימן מז

א. [דין ב] הגהה. בין למדרש. מרן לא הוצרך לכותבו דכבר כתב לגמרא ולקמן סימן נ' כתב שהמדרש כגמרא. וכן מוכח מדאמרינן פ"ק דברכות דף י"א לפי גירסתו וגירסת הרא"ש (סי' יג) רבא אמר אף לגמרא צריך לברך, דאמר ר' חייא בר אשי זימנין סגיאין הוא קאימנא קמיה דרב לתנוייה פירקין בספרא דבי רב הוה מקדים ומשיה ידיה ובירך ומתני לן פירקין. הרי דקאמר רבא דלגמרא צריך לברך, ומייתי ראייה מרב דהוה מברך אספרא דבי רב, שהוא מדרש. ומוכח דמדרש כגמרא, דאי לא מאי ראייה מייתי.

הן אמת דק"ק דהא איתמר התם לפי נסחא דקמן, אמר רב הונא למקרא ולמדרש צריך לברך לגמרא א"צ לברך. אלמא מוכח מזה דמדרש [כמו מקרא] ולא [כמו] גמרא. ואם כן מאי ראייה מייתי רבא דלגמרא צריך לברך מזרבי ברין

אמדרש. וכן לגירסת הרא"ש דגריס אמר רב הונא למקרא צריך לברך למדרש אינו צריך לברך, ר"א אמר אף למדרש צריך לברך למשנה א"צ לברך רבי יוחנן אמר אף למשנה צריך לברך לגמרא א"צ לברך ורבי אמר אף לגמרא צריך לברך דאמר ר' חייא בר אשי וכו'. וקשה דכיוון דלר"א ור"י משמע דלמדרש צריך לברך ולגמרא א"צ לברך, ופליגי במשנה, מאי מייתי רביה רבא דלגמרא צריך לברך, מדרב. שוב ראיתי להרב מעדני מלך (שם אות ר) שעמד בזה ע"ש. איברא דבש"ס לא קשה, משום דמצינן למימר יש לחלק בין מדרש למדרש, דמדרש דנקיטי אמוראי היינו מדרש אגדה, דדריש לקראי דרך דרש ואגדות של יופי. ומדרש זה, למאן דאמר, הוי כמקרא. אבל בריתות דספרא וספרי, דהן הן גופי תורה, לכו"ע דינם כגמרא. ואתי שפיר הא דרבא. אבל רש"י כתב מדרש הוא קרוב למקרא כגון מכילתא וספרא וספרי, לפ"ז קשיא. ובאמת דנראים דברי רש"י, דאי אמרת דבריך אמדרש הגדה דדריש לקראי, למה יגרע ספרא וספרי, דבשגם הם דינין הוו פירושא דקראי, וטפי מסתבר לברך אספרא וספרי, דתרתיה איתנהו בהו משפטים ישרים ופירושא דקראי, והם עיקר התורה. וכתב עוד הרב מעדני מלך ז"ל, ומיהו בפי' דלקמן דף י"ד ע"ב דהתם איתא מני להא שר"ח בר אשי, ולא גרסי' התם בספרא דבי רב, ואמרינן התם דקמ"ל דלמשנה צריך לברך, והיינו כפי הגירסא בגמרא שלפננו דגרס בדברא למשנה, עכ"ל. ונסחא דקמן בדברא לגמרא. ומדברי התוספות בסוטה דף ל"ט (ד"ה כל) משמע קצת דהווי גרסי לקמן בדף י"ד נמי ספרא דבי רב, ע"ש. והפר"ח כתב דמדרש בכלל מקרא, וכן מוכח בגמרא. וק"ק דלא העיר במאי דכתיבנא. ומדברי גורי האר"י זצ"ל מוכח דהמדרשים והאגדות הם כמשנה, ויש להם ישיבה אחת בעול"ם. וזה מסכים למה דאמרו בש"ס פרק היה קורא כמדובר. שוב בא לידי ספר לשון למודים הנדפס מחדש, ושם ראיתי שעמד בעניין זה סי' ק', ולא זכר מהרב לחם חמודות ..

### **8. פסקי תשובות אורח חיים סימן מז**

סעי' ב', שו"ע: צריך לברך בין למקרא בין למשנה בין לגמרא. רמ"א: בין למדרש. ואפילו 30 אינו מבין מה שלומד, וכן 31 ללימוד הזוהר והקבלה חייבים ברכת התורה קודם לכן, וגם 32 בלימוד ספרי מוסר דרוש וחסידות, כי בדרך כלל משולב בהם פסוקים ומאמרי חז"ל. זולת עובדות וסיפורים מגדולי ישראל שאין צריך להם ברכת התורה, אף שיש בהם מוסר השכל.

### **9. פסקי תשובות הערות סימן מז הערה 31-32**

31. כה"ח סק"ג עפ"י טעם הלבוש דכלהו תורה מיקרי, וכ"ה בערוה"ש סעי' ח' עפ"י טעם שו"ע הרב סעי' ב' דכולם ניתנו למשה בסיני.

32. מקור חיים לחו"י סעי' ב'. ובתשובות והנהגות ח"ד סי' י"ז דה"ה לימוד א' ב' עם תינוק מסתבר דלא גרע מלימוד ובעי ברכה"ת דרמוז בא' ב' גופי תורה כמוכא בגמ' (שבת ק"ד א), אלא שבשעה"ח כששואל ממנו על איזה אות וכדו' א"צ לימנע מלהשיב ויכוין שלא לשם מצות ת"ת.

## **Qualitative Levels of Talmud Torah**

### **10. נפש החיים שער ד פרק ב**

ענין עסק התורה לשמה. האמת הברור. כי לשמה אין פירושו דביקות כמו שסוברים עתה רוב העולם. שהרי ארז"ל במדרש שבקש דוד המע"ה מלפניו ית' שהעוסק בתהלים יחשב אצלו ית' כאלו היה עוסק בנגעים ואהלות. הרי שהעסק בהלכות הש"ס בעיון ויגיעה הוא ענין יותר נעלה ואהוב לפניו ית' מאמיר' תהלים. ואם נאמר שלשמה פי' דביקות דוקא ורק בזה תלוי כל עיקר ענין עסק התורה. הלא אין דביקות יותר נפלא מאמירת תהלים כראוי כל היום.

### **11. שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות מגילה ופורים סימן תרפז סעיף ב**

מבטלים תלמוד תורה לשמוע מקרא מגילה, קל וחומר לשאר מצות של תורה שכולם נדחים מפני מקרא מגילה, שאין לך דבר שנדחה מקרא מגילה מפניו חוץ ממת מצוה שאין לו קוברים (כדי צרכו), שהפוגע בו קוברו וחלה ואח"כ קורא.

### **12. שו"ת בית אפרים אורח חיים סימן סח**

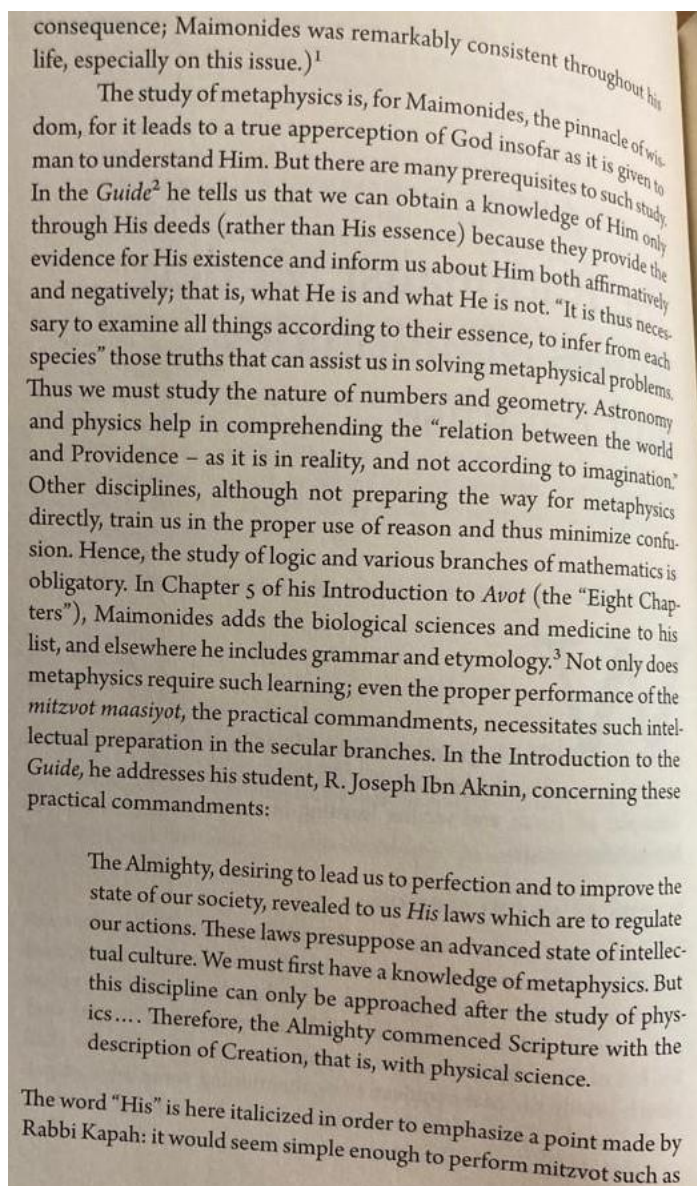
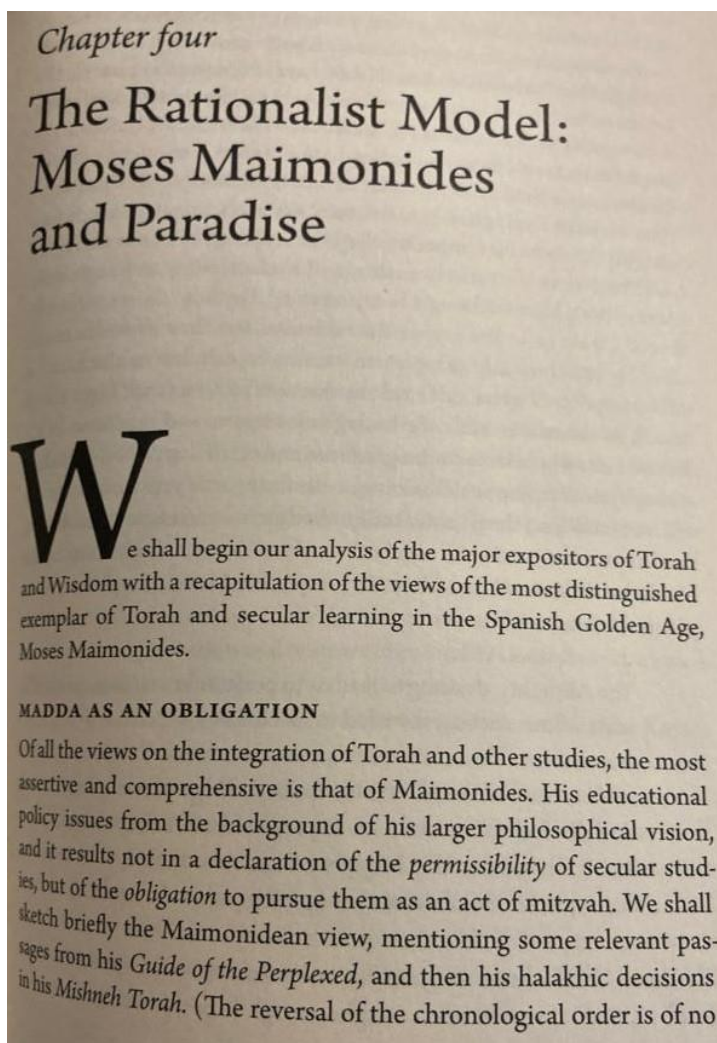
ונראה דאפילו בלימוד נביאים וכתובים בדרשות המקראות הוי ביטול לגבי לימוד משנה וגמרא ומכ"ש בקריאה בעלמא ומשנה מפורשת בפ' כל כתבי שאין קורין בכתובים בשבת מפני ביטול בית המדרש ופרש"י שם לפי שבתוך הדרש היו מורים להם הל' איסור והיתר וטוב להם לשמוע מלקרות בכתובים ואמרינן התם דף קט"ז ע"ב אף על פי שאמרו אין קורין בהם אבל שונין בהם ודורשין בהם אלמא דבקריאה בעלמא ודאי ביטול בית המדרש הוא

### 13. שו"ת יביע אומר חלק א - אורח חיים סימן כו

ומכאן תשובה לקצת מחכמי הדור, שיש להם סגולה לגמור כל הש"ס בתוך תקופה קצרה בלי הבנה כלל, והוא איבוד זמן, ואינו נחשב להם לימוד, ואין לך ביטול תורה גדול מזה. ומצאתי שכ"כ הגאון ר' גבריאל איספראנסה בליקוטים שבסו"ס עץ החיים (דקל"ט ע"ד). וטוב מעט בכוונה מהרבות בלי כוונה. ועל כל פנים לבטל ת"ח מלימודם בכדי שיגמרו הש"ס גירסא בלי הבנה. הוא איסור גמור לפע"ד. ושו"ר כיו"ב בס' פלא יועץ (מע' ידיעה), וז"ל: וכבר כתבו הפוסקים, שמי שיכול לפלפל בחכמה, ולקנות ידיעה חדשה, ומוציא הזמן בלימוד תהלים וזוהר, לגבי דידיה חשיב בטול תורה. ע"ש. וע"ע בפלא יועץ (ערך תהלים). ע"ש.

## Can Secular Studies Qualify as Torah?

### 14. Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Maggid Books, Third Edition, 2010), pp. 67-71



taking the *lulav* and *etrog* or laying the *tefillin* without such an extensive education. Why, then, the imposing list of prerequisites? The explanation is that with the proper perspective and understanding provided by a higher education, these halakhic acts are not merely *man's* practical commandments, but *His*, God's. Informed by the knowledge of His cosmos, the halakhic performance leads to the knowledge of God, and thus becomes *His* practical mitzvot. For "there is no way to know Him save through His works."<sup>4</sup>

The Torah, Maimonides tells us,<sup>5</sup> teaches only the final results to which our cognitive labors should lead us – such as the existence, unity, omnipotence, and will of God. "But these cannot be understood fully and accurately except after the acquisition of many kinds of knowledge." We are commanded to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), a mitzvah repeated time and again, and this love "is only possible when we comprehend the real nature of things and understand the divine wisdom displayed therein."<sup>6</sup> Mada enhances the life of Torah.

In the concluding chapter of his philosophical *magnum opus*, *The Guide of the Perplexed*,<sup>7</sup> Maimonides tells us that in the Prophets and the Talmud we find two categories of knowledge: that of Torah and that of *Hokhmah*, Wisdom. The latter is called upon to provide the intellectual, scientific, and speculative infrastructure for the former. Thus, Moses is praised as being a master (or "father") of both Torah and Wisdom. The Sages teach us that a man is required to give an account of himself first for his study of Torah and then for his study of Wisdom. Chronologically, one must first engage in the former, but it is the latter that helps us attain spiritual perfection and bestows immortality upon us, and, indeed, fulfills us as human beings.

We have enough evidence to justify the view of Rabbi Kapah, who states that "if one studies all these disciplines and sciences which for some reason are called 'secular,' in order thereby to attain greater understanding and knowledge of God – which is the foundation of all wisdom and without which, according to Maimonides, it is impossible to reach such a state of knowledge – such studies are the holy of holies."<sup>8</sup> It is with this firm conceptual underpinning that one can appreciate Maimonides' halakhic decisions concerning the study of Torah and of ("secular") Wisdom.

In *Hilkhot Teshuvah* (10:6), Maimonides states that the love of God is contingent upon one's knowledge of God. Hence, one must take care to study and ponder all branches of wisdom that lead us to understand Him. Such study, as he later reiterates in his *Guide*, as quoted earlier, is thus a fulfillment of the mitzvah to love God.

#### IN PARADISE

But Maimonides goes beyond that. In the first four chapters of his halakhic code, *Mishneh Torah*, he outlines the basic premises or beliefs incumbent upon every Jew in order to serve the Lord properly. In *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah*, he writes:

The subject of these four chapters, which constitute five [separate] mitzvot, is what our early Sages called *Pardes* [Paradise; literally: orchard], as when they said, "four entered the *Pardes*." And even though they were giants in Israel, not all of them were able to know and understand all these matters properly.<sup>9</sup>

The subject matter of *Pardes* is conventionally assumed to be an esoteric probing into the mysteries of the Creation narrative at the beginning of Genesis (*Maaseh Bereshit*), and the obscure vision by the prophet Ezekiel of the "Divine Chariot" (*Maaseh Merkavah*). For Maimonides, however, these are not mystical or kabbalistic passages. Rather, they represent, respectively, physics and metaphysics. Natural science and philosophy are thus the contents of *Pardes*.

Now, in the same *Mishneh Torah*<sup>10</sup> Maimonides recommends dividing one's study time into three: one third for the Written Law, or Scripture; one third for the Oral Law; and one third for the study of Gemara (or Talmud). In this last category he includes *Pardes*. Thus, for Maimonides, Mada (what he more accurately calls Wisdom) is incorporated in *Talmud Torah*; in other words, it has value as the study of Torah. (Indeed, he often couples Torah and Wisdom with regard to a number of halakhot where others speak only of Torah. The term *Hokhmah*, Wisdom, for Maimonides specifically refers to secular wisdom, as indicated in the *Guide* passages cited earlier.)

Thus, Maimonides holds the proper study of worldly wisdom to be, halakhically, the fulfillment of the commandment to study Torah.

It is strange, indeed, that such a remarkable ruling, in his halakhic code, by the greatest halakhic authority of the entire post-Talmudic period – an authority whose every paragraph, indeed every nuance, has been analyzed in enormous depth and the halakhic implications of which have been spelled out and relied upon for the past eight or nine centuries – is usually glossed over in silence by most rabbinic commentators in the vast literature of exegesis of the *Mishneh Torah*. Later we shall return to probe the halakhic consequences of Maimonides' decision and attempt to attain the same goal by a different route.

We have here, then, a fully developed presentation of Torah Umada, buttressed both philosophically (in the rationalist idiom) and halakhically. Mada is not alien to Torah but, if studied in the manner and for the purposes described by Maimonides, becomes part of Torah itself.

**15. Norman Lamm, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Maggid Books, Third Edition, 2010), pp. 138-39**

**LEVELS IN THE STUDY OF TORAH**

R. Hayyim posits a hierarchy of texts and their values within *Talmud Torah*. He approvingly quotes from *Midrash Tehillim* (1:8) that David pleaded that learning his Book of Psalms should be considered on a par with learning the mishnaic tractates of *Nega'im* and *Ohalot*, that is, regular halakhic study. Since there is no indication that his plea was granted, R. Hayyim assumes that the divine response was negative. Hence, the highest value is assigned to the study of Halakhah. Thus, while *Talmud Torah* includes a variety of subjects and texts, including such things as the recitation of Psalms, they do not have equal rank with the study of Halakhah.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, R. Hayyim also asserts that just as each verse, indeed each letter, in a Torah scroll is equal in holiness to any other, so is all of Torah of uniform and equal sanctity and one may not make invidious distinctions within Torah. Thus, for instance, he considers the study of arcane and apparently irrelevant sections of the order of *Kodoshim*, dealing with the pre-exilic laws of sacrifices, to be as holy and significant as the study of *Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim*, which is the standard code of law for contemporary daily living.

Now, this seemingly contradicts what we just said in R. Hayyim's name concerning the Book of Psalms. However, I believe there is no inconsistency if we accept that what he is saying is that there is a hierarchy of values in the various branches of Torah, so that Halakhah is superior to Psalms – indeed it is preeminent among all such branches of Torah – but that within each branch one may not assert priorities in value and sanctity.

Thus, if one studies Agadah, he is credited with the reward for the study of Torah, although not on the same level as Halakhah.<sup>2</sup> What of, let us say, the ethical literature, the *sifrei musar*? Clearly, if such works contain quotations from Bible and Talmud, they too are considered *Talmud Torah*; but if not, is such study to be designated as *bittul Torah*, an invalid waste of time that ought to have been dedicated to Torah study, or may such study be categorized as satisfying the requirements of the mitzvah to study the Torah?

R. Hayyim himself does not touch on this question directly in any of his own writings, that is, his *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* and the few responses of his that have survived. But there is ample oral testimony from his disciples indicating that he did indeed regard such efforts as *bittul Torah*.<sup>3</sup> Hence, we shall call upon Maimonides for assistance in this matter. With his help, and according to R. Hayyim's hierarchical view of *Talmud Torah*, we may find a role for the study of *Madda* within the realm of Torah.

**MAIMONIDES ON TEXTLESS TORAH**

Maimonides, as we pointed out in Chapter 4, holds that *Madda* has *Talmud Torah* value. Although, as stated, R. Hayyim himself does not subscribe to this view, we may proceed to integrate the Maimonidean position into the framework of R. Hayyim's hierarchical view of *Talmud Torah*. We may then say that just as R. Hayyim envisions a hierarchy of texts of *Talmud Torah*, so is there a category of *Talmud Torah* that is *textless*, a form of Torah study that calls for intellection but has no formal, canonized text upon which such thinking is focused. *Madda* is that *textless* subject of *Talmud Torah*.

Now, if *Madda* is to be accepted as included in *Talmud Torah*, we are presented with some immediate questions, namely: Should one recite a *birkhat ha-Torah* (the blessing mandated for the formal study of Torah) upon studying organic chemistry? Or, equally absurd, may one study calculus all day and thereby be halakhically exempt from all other *Talmud Torah* that day?

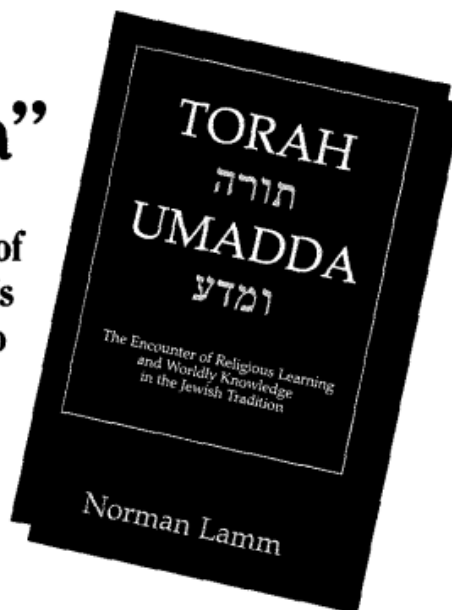
The first question can be answered quite simply. The Torah blessing is restricted to *texts* of Torah and the review, explication, and analysis of such texts, Written or Oral, and is not to be recited in the absence of a specific text or its derivatives. Nevertheless, the study of matters that Maimonides classifies as *Pardes*, or what we call *Madda*, remains a case of *Talmud Torah*.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the study of physics, for example, done in the proper manner, is an act of study of Torah but requires no blessing.

The second question, about the division of one's time, can be dealt with similarly. Maimonides' teaching about dividing one's time into three equal parts holds true, he says,<sup>5</sup> only for the *early* part of one's career in studying Torah; but once a student has made reasonable progress, so that he has learned all of Scripture and no longer has to spend much

Rabbi Yonason Rosenblum

## "Torah Umadda'"

A critique of  
Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's  
book and its approach to  
Torah study and the  
pursuit of secular  
knowledge.



### A NEW APPROACH TO AN OLD CHALLENGE

It is over 200 years since Moses Mendelssohn brought to the fore of German Jewry the issue of Judaism's stance towards the surrounding culture, and of the proper relationship between Torah learning and secular studies. And when Napoleon's armies spread the French Enlightenment 30 years later, the confrontation between Torah and secular ideals reached Eastern Europe as well.

But the nature of the struggle between Jewish life and modernity has changed over the years. The intellectual challenge to Torah today is, if anything, less than it was sixty years ago. It is doubtful that any current Rosh Yeshiva would feel the need to prove that Torah is deeper than Kant, as one well-known *mashgach* did in post-World War I Lithuania. Nor is there any modern-day parallel to the intellectual attraction that socialism and Zionism once exercised on yeshiva students.

Though hedonism and materialism seem more powerful lures today than great ideas, modern, post-tech-

nological society poses its own unique set of challenges. The isolation in which Jewish communities once flourished is but a historical memory. It is inconceivable today to imagine large numbers of Jews unable to speak the language of their host country, as was true in Eastern Europe a century ago. The openness of American democracy, the pervasive nature of the modern media, and the fact that most of us are consumers of advanced technology, make it harder than ever to erect barriers to the outside world. With the world a far smaller, more integrated place than ever, knowledge of the surrounding society often seems more necessary than in previous generations.

Budding yeshiva students, kollel fellows, and Torah-directed laymen must all deal with a secular world, its resources of information and its value system. Through the years, *Gedolei Yisroel* have prescribed different approaches to this challenge. Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, חיד, for example, addresses the question in a letter, published in *Koveitz Maamarim*, wherein he limits secular studies to areas that do not deal with prohibited topics—such as alien forms of worship or atheism—and that are essential for career preparation. (Of course, *psak halacha* re-

quires comprehensive knowledge of both the circumstances of the case being judged and the *halacha*.)

By contrast, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, exponent of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*, assigned a place to secular knowledge as an auxiliary of Torah knowledge, but only to the extent that it first pass the test of consonance with Torah. In the Hirschian worldview, there is no place for the sciences or the humanities as a source of values, or as a co-equal to Torah as an area of study.

In his recently published work, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition*, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, presents yet a different vision of the relationship between Torah learning and non-Jewish studies. Before examining his approach to this topic—which defines the Jew's view of himself in the broader world—it would be appropriate to briefly sketch the traditional approach to Torah learning.

### THE PRE-EMINENT MITZVA: TORAH STUDY

The study of Torah, we affirm daily, is not only pre-eminent among the *mitzvos*, but equal

Rabbi Rosenblum, a member of a Jerusalem Kollel, is a regular contributor to these pages.

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## I. TORAH AND MADDA AS COMPLEMENTARY AND EQUALLY VALID WAYS TO VIEW THE WORLD

Let us first examine how Dr. Lamm invests secular studies with intrinsic religious value: Throughout *Torah Umadda*, he dwells on the potential for “fascinating creativity” offered by a “synthesis” of Torah and Madda (p.2), on the op-

portunity afforded by worldly knowledge “to create something new and original in the world of the spirit” (p.128). Worldly knowledge, he claims, offers to the religious Jew, “a large and embracing vision... and a more capacious theoretical framework into which [one] can integrate his most precious Jewish ideals” (p.85) than he would have in a pure Torah-only setting.

The effect of this emphasis on synthesis is to transform Torah and Madda into what appear as co-equal forms of knowledge. Torah and Madda are presented as composite parts of some primordial unity of all knowledge (p.141, 184), complementary—and equally valid—ways of viewing the world, just as the apparently contradictory descriptions of light as waves and as particles are both true and complementary (pp.232-236).

“Torah, faith, religious learning on one side, and madda, science, worldly knowledge on the other, together offer us a more overarching and truer vision than either one set alone. Each set gives one view of the

Creator as well as His Creation, and the other a different perspective that may not agree at all with the first....Each alone is true, but only partially true; both together present the possibility of a larger truth....”<sup>2</sup>

So great is the value of Madda for Dr. Lamm that the distinction between it and Torah finally blurs altogether:

“So long as we continue to learn Scripture and Oral Law, to acquire new knowledge and to refrain from forgetting what we know, *then the study of the sciences and humanities is, in effect, the study of Gemora and thus a fulfillment of the study of Torah*” [emphasis added] (p.165).<sup>3</sup>

This conclusion leads him to en-

<sup>2</sup>This extraordinary quotation gives us some idea of the vast gulf between Rabbi Lamm’s *Torah Umadda* and the *Torah Im Derech Eretz* of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch—a theory which Dr. Lamm finds wanting in comparison to his own. Complementarity requires, Dr. Lamm argues, that the distinct methodologies of the Torah and secular studies be preserved and that secular studies not be taught from a Torah perspective. This position is diametrically opposed to that of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, for whom Torah was always the litmus test for the value of any idea from non-Torah sources.

<sup>3</sup>We shall consider the validity of this view in Section II.

ertain seriously such questions as: Should one recite *birkhat ha-Torah* on entering the chemistry lab? May one study calculus all day and thereby fulfill his obligation of Talmud Torah? (pp.163-64).

Torah learning, devoid of secular knowledge, becomes in this view deficient. In a recent speech to Yeshiva University alumni entitled, “Is Chiddush a Chiddush?”, Dr. Lamm maintains that one no longer hears of students in traditional *yeshivos* who are *oker harim* [lit., “uproot mountains”], blessed with creative insight, as opposed to being repositories of vast stores of knowledge. The very concepts of creativity and innovation, he maintains (based on two bits of anecdotal evidence heard second-hand), are suspect in such *yeshivos*.<sup>4</sup>

And in *Torah Umadda* he ex-

<sup>4</sup>One wonders what precisely Dr. Lamm means by creativity and innovation. If he is referring only to *chiddushei Torah*, then his comments reflect nothing more than ignorance of what is going on in traditional *yeshivos*. But if he is championing some other type of innovation, then his criticism of traditional *yeshivos* may indicate an even more fundamental divergence of approach.

### 17. Mayer Schiller, “Torah Umadda and The Jewish Observer Critique: Towards a Clarification of the Issues,” *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 6 (1995-1996), pp. 58-90, at p. 68

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*The Torah U-Madda Journal*

not embraced by the halakhic tradition. Rabbi Rosenblum, who writes that Rabbi Lamm entertains “seriously” the possibility of reciting a *birkhat ha-Torah* upon studying organic chemistry, is guilty of distorting his position. Dr. Lamm himself describes this question (and the other cited by Rabbi Rosenblum of studying calculus all day long and thereby fulfilling Talmud Torah) as “equally absurd” (pp. 163-64). His reference to Rambam’s position is presented as speculative and a possibility only according to the *Mishneh Torah*, a view which he grants has not been codified into law.<sup>13</sup>