

Though by now the study of secular studies has been sanctioned by the overwhelming majority of religious authorities, questions concerning the feasibility, scope or desirability of a synthesis between Torah and modern culture remain among the most divisive issues encountered within the Orthodox camp. A very extensive literature has grown around this controversial subject which affects the very foundation of a Jewish religious philosophy of life. The author of this essay, a distinguished writer and thinker, presently serves as chairman of the Department of Jewish Philosophy of the Hebrew Theological College in Skokie, Illinois. His most recent contribution to these pages was an article on "What is Jewish Philosophy?" in the Spring 1961 issue.

## AN INTEGRATED JEWISH WORLD VIEW

### I.

It is with a sense of intellectual discomfort that one approaches the theme of this article. It is deeply embarrassing that in our time it is still necessary to discuss the relationship between *limudei kodesh* (religious studies) and *limudei chol* (secular studies) with a view to justifying their integration within a wholesome and complete form of Jewish education. There are still many individuals as well as substantial groups who, in the name of Judaism, question the religious propriety of teaching Jewish youth secular subjects. Grudgingly, they put up with the prevailing situation in Jewish Day Schools, in which secular subjects are taught side by side with religious ones, but they object to higher forms of secular studies at colleges and universities. One must count it among the frustrating anachronisms of our days that in *yeshivot* in this country as well as in the State of Israel, teachers and students often violent-

ly reject the idea of a higher professional secular education as being contrary to Jewish religious faith and piety. I know of a young man, studying at one of the great *yeshivot* in Eretz Israel, who wrote to his younger brother in this country advising him to throw all his secular books out and to concentrate on nothing else but his talmudic studies. The reason given for such a radical suggestion was: let *Goyim* be physicians; for a Jew there is nothing else but the study of Torah. The young man overlooked, of course, the fact that even in the famous *Cherem* (interdict) that the *Rashba* and his *Bet Din* invoked for the duration of fifty years against any one who in their congregations would read "in the books of the Greeks," one finds the following exception: "We have excluded from our interdict the science of medicine even though it is based on nature; for the Torah gave the physician permission to heal."\*

It should not be difficult to show, even halakhically, that the same exception applies to all other scientific disciplines, which are *lekuchot min ha-teva*, based upon the study of nature, and whose pursuit is no less essential for the maintenance of life than that of medicine itself. Needless to say that in the present state of the close interrelation of all branches of science, the science of medicine is inconceivable without the sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, and many more. One cannot pursue any scientific discipline effectively without having scientists carrying out research in numerous related areas. But it is not our intention to discuss the question from its halakhic angle. We believe that the *Halakhah* in this case has been decided by life itself, not in the sense that life, as so often, ignoring *Halakhah*, has gone past it; but there are certain fundamental requirements of life which *Halakhah* cannot ignore and without whose adequate satisfaction *Halakhah* itself becomes impossible. The living example of the State of Israel offers the most compelling proof of our point. It is inconceivable that the Jewish people could exist in the State of Israel for a single day without effective mastery of those sciences which form the foundation of present-

\* והוצאנו מכלל גזרתנו חכמת הרפואות אע"פ שהיא לקוחה מן הטבע לפי שהתורה נתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות. תשובות הרשב"א ס' תמ"ו.

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day civilization! Since it is the intention of the Torah that there be a people of the Torah, living in the land of Israel, it must also be the intention of the Torah that Jews be physicians, engineers, physicists, mathematicians, men of creative search and practical application in every field of human endeavor, without whose knowledge and skill no nation can survive. This is obvious in our own days, and the situation was undoubtedly the same whenever Israel lived as a people in its own land. Agriculture, commerce, industry, national administration and defense, whether on an advanced modern level or during the periods of the First or Second Temple, have always required education and training in those disciplines called *limudei chol* (secular studies). The very existence of the State of Israel demonstrates that the raising of the question of permissibility of secular studies, as if a question of *Halakhah* were involved, is one of the sickly manifestations of the *Galut* mentality. Only in the Diaspora could the fantastic idea have arisen that scientific knowledge and education was only for the Gentiles, whereas a Jew should occupy himself only with the Torah. When one views the matter from the perspective of the life interest of the Jewish people in its historic normalcy, the idea of limiting Jewish education to the "four cubits of the law," to the exclusion of all secular and worldly knowledge, vanishes in its own meaninglessness.

In the well-known letter which he addressed to the rabbis of Marseilles, Maimonides complains that our ancestors "did not occupy themselves with learning the arts of war and conquest." Speaking of this mistake Maimonides continues: "This is what caused the loss of our Kingdom, the destruction of our sanctuary, the length of our exile, and brought us to our present condition. Our fathers have sinned, but they are no more."<sup>1</sup> If one tried to express the thought of Maimonides in the form of a general principle, one would have to say that the neglect of any branch of learning which is essential for the survival of the Jewish people is an anti-religious act, directed against Judaism itself. In this sense, the pursuit of scientific inquiry and the acquisition of scientific techniques, upon the application of which the survival of the Jewish nation in a Jewish land

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depends, is not only to be tolerated but must be considered a religious demand that emanates from the very intention and purpose of the Torah itself.

### II.

While, in our opinion, there is no question of *Halakhah* involved in the issue before us, we are certainly confronted with a question of ideological consistency. The problem may be felt most intimately in the realm of Jewish education. It is a fact that in Jewish primary and secondary schools, as well as at higher institutes of learning, at Jewish colleges and universities, in this country as well as in the State of Israel, our educational effort is divided into two branches, one secular, the other sacred. Most of the time, there is hardly any connection between the two. Each stands under its own independent authority. Our youth is being educated in the intellectual climate of two worlds that do not recognize each other. But can the two worlds ignore each other in the heart and in the mind of the student, too? There can be no education without an educational philosophy and consistency is the main requirement of such a philosophy. This, of course, means that all subjects must conform to the basic educational purpose: the educational goal must be reflected in the teaching of all the subjects. Such an educational philosophy may only be conceived on the basis of a philosophy of Judaism which in the name of Judaism itself is able to formulate a world-view within which the sacred and the secular become harmonized in a more fundamental unity.

We believe that in classical Jewish thought there is a rich treasure of relevant material which may guide us in formulating such a comprehensive Jewish view. For the sake of illustration we shall choose some significant ideas from the works of some of the great teachers in Israel.

There is, at least, one concept which has specific importance in relationship to knowledge in general no less than in relationship to the study of the Torah itself; it is the concept of truth. Without truth, there is no Torah; without truth, there is no knowledge of any kind. The question of truth may be asked

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epistemologically; it may also be asked ontologically. One may inquire about the means by which we reach the knowledge of truth; and one may investigate the essential nature of truth, its contents. Concerning the epistemological question, Saadia Gaon, in the introduction to his *Emunot ve'Deot*, maintains that there are three sources for the knowledge of truth: sense perception, immediate rational insight, and inference by means of logical necessity. There is, however, also a further source of knowledge, i.e., reliable tradition. Our acceptance of the Torah is based on such tradition. It is noteworthy that, in the name of Jewish monotheism, Saadia Gaon most determinedly rejects skepticism regarding the original three sources of knowledge. Since our acceptance of the Torah depends on a *Haggadah Ne'emenet* (reliable tradition), the question cannot be avoided: How does a tradition become reliable? Saadia Gaon's answer is that, like any other knowledge, tradition too must be validated by the three basic sources of truth. If sense perception is not to be trusted, then *Ma-amad Sinai* itself could be no witness to *Matan Torah*; if reason is not to be relied upon, we should of course not be able to grasp the contents and meaning of the Torah either. Thus, Saadia concludes that the validity of the *Haggadah Ne'emenet* is established "by reason of the fact that it is based upon the knowledge of the senses as well as that of reason . . ."

For Saadia Gaon, the epistemological question, "how do we know?", is solved in a comprehensive manner. For him, there is no two-fold epistemology, one for matters sacred and another one for matters secular. All truth must ultimately be validated by sense perception and by reason. In this respect, the concerns of Judaism and of the sciences are identical. One may, of course, disagree with Saadia and see in the act of revelation a way of reaching the truth which is essentially religious and different from other sources of knowledge. Such indeed, was the position adopted by Yehudah Halevi. However, the difference would only apply to those to whom revelation is actually granted. Undoubtedly, our acceptance of the Torah is based on *Ma-amad Sinai*. But we know *Ma-amad Sinai* not by means of revelation but by what Saadia calls *Haggadah Ne'emenet*. Thus we are back to the question: How does tra-

dition become *Ne'emenet*? How is it to be validated? One need not accept Saadia's epistemology, but one cannot escape his conclusion that the question can only be answered within a general theory of knowledge within which no distinction can be made between secular and sacred. Such a comprehensive theory of knowledge is a religious necessity. Without it, the flood-gates are opened for *Emunot Tefeilot* (superstitions) of all kinds, which are bound to distort and to degrade genuine religion. Without due respect for a sound theory of knowledge, even the famous leap of faith may be a form of tumbling into darkness and futility. This is the ultimate significance of Halevi's repeated statement: God forbid that there should be anything in the Torah which is contrary to reason. For the sake of religion itself, religion dare not ignore those requirements for the validation of truth to which all human inquiry is subject. Truth, as such, is a religious value.

### III.

As to the ontological character of truth, the actual nature of the object of knowledge for which it stands, differences in the importance between the various disciplines of knowledge are obvious. The statement that last winter saw more snow in Chicago than any other winter in the past twenty-five years may be true, but it is far less exciting than that in the beginning God created heaven and earth. No doubt, from the point of view of the value and significance of the truth taught, there is ample room for distinguishing between knowledge and knowledge. Nevertheless, there are also such among the teachers of Israel who, on the strength of the truth contents of the various disciplines of knowledge, were able to recognize a harmonious pattern between them, subserving a superior concept of unity. The outstanding one among these men was, of course, Maimonides. According to him, the purpose of man on this earth is to know God, and the goal of Judaism is to lead men to the knowledge of God. This knowledge Maimonides identifies with the knowledge of the supreme truth. But how can one reach it? How can one reach God, how can one know Him? As is

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well known, according to Maimonides, the essence of God remains forever unknown to human nature. Man can know God only from His deeds and from His handiwork. Since it is man's purpose on earth to know God, he must search in His works for Him. Only from the knowledge of the creation can one know the Creator. He lays down, therefore, the rule: "It is thus necessary to examine all things according to their essence, to infer from every species such true and well established propositions as may assist us in the solution of metaphysical problems (without which the knowledge of God is impossible".) The truth in Nature points to the supreme truth which is above Nature. Thus, in order to know God, one must be familiar with the natural sciences. These, however, are based on certain auxiliary disciplines like mathematics and logic. Maimonides has occasion to declare: ". . . he who wishes to attain to human perfection must therefore first study Logic, next the various branches of Mathematics in their proper order, then Physics, (i.e., the sciences of nature), and lastly Metaphysics."<sup>2</sup> Even the commandment "Thou shalt love the Eternal One, thy God, with all your heart . . ." (Deuteronomy 6:5) he explains in the light of this thought. Only a person who understands the nature of the universe and is able to meditate on God's wisdom revealed in it is capable of loving God with all his heart.<sup>3</sup> One may see in Maimonides the most extreme proponent of the concept of unity. Truth is one because all reality is one — the creation of the one God. All knowledge and all wisdom leads to the knowledge of the One. In the realm of truth, there is no distinction between the secular and the sacred. Truth is, as the Talmud teaches, "the seal of the Holy One, Blessed be He"; all truth leads man to its source, to God.

It is worth noting that even Bachya Ibn Pakuda, whose *Chovot Halevavot* is highly valued in the *yeshivot* as a work of *Mussar*, adopts a position very similar to that of Maimonides. As he states in the *Shaar Ha-Bechinah* of his work, it is through our meditations that we come to appreciate "the manifestations of God's wisdom in all created things . . . For all wisdom is one; even though its signs vary among the things created, in its foundation and essence it is all one . . ."<sup>4</sup> There is a certain

intellectual boldness in this concept of the essential unity of all knowledge which derives from our knowledge of the universe and which in its various partial manifestations adds up to the one divine truth. Because of that, Bachya declares it to be man's duty to study God's creation in order to come nearer to His wisdom. In another passage, elaborating the idea further, he practically develops a plan for the scientific study of nature, inspired by the purely religious motivation of coming closer to God.<sup>5</sup>

It may be difficult to accept the extreme rationalistic position of Maimonides. Yet, he and Bachya Ibn Pakuda have prepared the ground for us for a religious approach to a scientific investigation of all reality and to the evaluation of the truth which it may reveal. The basic principle is that this world is God's world: and all truth has its source in God. The laws of nature are God's laws; and the wisdom in the creation is of His wisdom. The truth revealed in God's creation and the truth revealed in the Torah are akin to each other — both have their origin in the same *Emet ha-Elyonah* (higher truth), to use the terminology of Maimonides. Trying to establish that it is man's duty to study the nature of all creation in order to understand God's wisdom, Bachya quotes the words of the Talmud: "Had the Torah not been given to Israel, we could have learned modesty from the cat, chastity from the dove, conduct from the rooster, and respect for the property of others from the ant."<sup>6</sup> According to him, the saying shows that in the opinion of the teachers of the Talmud one may find Torah in the wisdom revealed in creation, too.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, Maimonides occasionally emphasizes that Nature and Torah emanate from the same source.

Before concluding this part of our discussion, we should like to refer to the views of another one among the thinkers and teachers in Israel, to those of the Maharal of Prague. The Maharal would, of course, not accept the opinion that "all wisdom is one." He recognizes a difference in essence between knowledge grasped by the human intellect as the result of human endeavor and the knowledge that comes from God in the form of revelation. The truth of God is inaccessible to man unless

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it be revealed to him in God's Torah. Nevertheless, he considers it a religious duty, incumbent on every Jew, to occupy himself with the study of those man-made disciplines of knowledge which try to penetrate the nature of reality in order to understand the existence of the universe. He finds a basis for his contention in the well-known saying of the Talmud: "Rabbi Joshua, son of Levi, said in the name of Bar Kappara: 'He who knows how to calculate the turn of the seasons and the motions of the planets but does not do it, concerning him the verse (Isaiah 5:12) says: But they regard not the work of the Eternal One, neither have they considered the operation of His hands.'"<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Shemuel Bar Nachmani even adds that to make the astronomical computations of the motions of the planets is a commandment of the Torah, which he derives from the words of the Bible: "This is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples" (Deuteronomy 4:6). The originality of Maharal's interpretation consists in seeing clearly that this statement of the Talmud should not be limited to the study of astronomy alone, but that it applies to every type of human knowledge that investigates God's creation. This, of course, is supported by the verse from Isaiah, which serves as the justification of the original talmudic opinion, "But they regard not the work of the Eternal One, neither have they considered the operation of His hands." In keeping with the wider meaning of this verse, a man should not only meditate on the revolutions of the planets, but is obligated to penetrate to the understanding of all works of the Creator. Thus, Maharal sums up his position in the following words: "From this we may learn that a man ought to study everything that will enable him to understand the essential nature of the world. One is obligated to do so, for everything is God's work. One should understand it all and through it recognize one's Creator."<sup>9</sup>

### IV.

We have then before us a classical tradition of Jewish thought which in our own days may serve as a guide in the development of a Jewish-religious world view that will embrace the whole

of reality and relate all human knowledge to the focal point of all Jewish-religious affirmation and commitment. We are, of course, still far removed from such a comprehensive and consistent world outlook. The foremost intellectual challenge of our generation is to create such an outlook. It is inconceivable that Jews as individuals and Israel as a nation should make practical use of successful scientific inquiry and yet the genius of Judaism should ignore the fact that the same scientific disciplines carry within themselves certain insights or suggestions which are not without consequences for religious faith and for that ultimate truth which is God's own seal. In the continuous progress of human knowledge and search for the truth, there is ever present a spiritual challenge that influences the life of man in its entirety.

A scientific understanding of certain biological processes, interpretations of laws of nature, understanding of historical developments may often tend to undermine some forms of established religious faith. How is Judaism to meet such challenges? By closing its eyes to them? The problems will not go away. The attitude of *Bitul* (disdain) toward all secular knowledge, which is propagated in certain circles, is based on a profound ignorance of what it despises and rejects, and, far from being a solution, is in fact a sign of spiritual incompetence and intellectual cowardice. If religious faith is joined by intellectual honesty, it must find the idea intolerable that the truth of religion should be defended by such questionable means. What is worse, a truth so defended must itself become questionable. If any branch of human knowledge poses problems to religion, then out of religious zeal for the truth and for the truthfulness of religion itself, religion must take such problems seriously. It will meet such problems effectively, or at least live with them comfortably, not by rejecting secular knowledge but by mastering it. All so-called *limudei chol* (secular studies) are now within the scope of Jewish religious interest and concern. Without a knowledge of their premises, methods, and conclusions by the believing Jewish scholar, a comprehensive world-view of Judaism cannot be formulated.

We have yet to mention the most hazardous consequences

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of failure to integrate the entire scope of human knowledge within the framework of religious concern. Earlier in this paper reference was made to a talmudic passage which quotes the verse, “. . . for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples.” Most medieval Jewish philosophers justify on the basis of this text the demand for a rationally meaningful interpretation of Judaism. Maimonides quotes the verse to prove that even *chukim* are to be interpreted rationally.<sup>10</sup> It would be wrong to assume that the intention of the afore-mentioned was to impress the nations with the wisdom of the Torah. Their efforts in interpreting Judaism were inward-directed to the Jews, not outward, to the Gentiles. What they wanted to emphasize was that the truth of Judaism has universal meaning and applicability. Because of its universal import, it must be, at least potentially, recognizable as “your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples.” It must retain its ability to deal meaningfully with the human situation, even though only the Jew must accept its pronouncements as binding for himself. The moment Judaism loses this ability, it ceases being a world religion and degenerates into a marginal sect. This is, however, the danger if we turn away from the challenges of the various branches of human knowledge. A negative attitude to secular knowledge will not only prevent “the peoples” seeing in Judaism “our wisdom and our understanding,” it will not even allow the Jewish people to gain a comprehensive Jewish world-view. It may lose us the historic Israel and replace it by a handful of life-estranged Jewish sectarians.

There are, of course, dangers and pitfalls along the path we are required to take. One must tread carefully. But the challenge must not be ignored and the responsibility cannot be avoided. Our faith that Judaism’s intellectual and spiritual power is equal to the task is identical with our faith in the inexhaustible vitality and eternal validity of the Torah. In the world of the spirit one need not fear the truth; as to the untruth, one must know it in order to defeat it. Undoubtedly, the secular disciplines have often served as the basis of philosophies of life which the believing Jew cannot accept. Yet, when

confronted with the challenge of overcoming an untruth, one must understand the source of its strength. The powerful grip which secular and materialistic philosophies hold on the modern mind is in large measure due to the truth-contents of the sciences upon which they are based. But it must be remembered that each of the sciences may bring into relief only one facet of the truth. Philosophy often turns the partial aspect of the truth that is uncovered in some domain of knowledge into an absolute concept; this is the lie in such philosophy. The power of such a lie is at times frightening, but only because it has its root in something that is valid and true. In order to meet the spiritual challenge of our age, we must learn how to evaluate the truth-contents of all those disciplines of human knowledge that to a large extent determine the fabric of our civilization. Only thus shall we succeed in formulating that comprehensive Jewish world-view which will make manifest the truth-contents in the various disciplines of human knowledge as a part of a meaningful pattern which derives its validity and value from the truth which is of God.

Through the ages, Jews, as individuals, have greatly enriched every branch of human knowledge. However, in most of the separate branches a partial truth reigns supreme. And man's world is broken. With the rise of the State of Israel the Jewish people have been called by historic necessity to become a people of science in the widest sense of the word. For the religious Jew who sees in Israel's return to the land of its fathers the hand of God, the historic necessity for scientific effectiveness imposed by the return becomes a divine command. We interpret it as meaning that Israel, the people of the Torah, must acquire mastery in the realm of worldly knowledge and weave the pattern of unity between fact and value, faith and reality, between life and Torah. "For this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sights of the peoples."

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### NOTES

1. *Igrot ha-Rambam, Teshuvot le-Chakhmei Kehal Ir Marselia.*
2. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part 1, Chapter 34.
3. *Ibid.*, Part 3, Chapter 28.
4. Bachyah Ibn Pakuda, *Chovot Halevavot, Shaar ha-Bechinah*, Chapter 1.
5. *Ibid.*, Chapter 3.
6. *Eruvin* 100b.
7. Bachyah Ibn Pakuda, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.
8. *Shabbat* 75a.
9. *Kitvei Maharal mi-Prague*, Mossad Harav Kook, vol. 2, pp. 119-120.
10. Maimonides, *op. cit.*, Part 3, Chapter 31.