



Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition

Norman Lamm

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The centrality of Torah_Jewish learning_in Judaism is beyond doubt, but less clear is the value that can or should be attached to Madda, secular knowledge. Is non-religious learning desirable, essential, optional- or even permitted? Can one's Jewish experience be enriched by exposure to poetry, art, history, and science? And, if the study of Torah is indeed the single most important precept of Judaism, how much room does this leave for the rest of human intellect pursuit? Torah Umadda, a provocative work by the president of Yeshiva University, shows that these concerns are by no means unprecedented. As Dr. Lamm writes, 'The intersections of Torah and Wisdom are not always clear; indeed, they are more often than not elusive and indeterminate. But the encounter between them is fruitful, sometimes fateful_and always fascinating.' Dr. Lamm explores six models of Torah Umadda, providing thorough overviews of such great Jewish thinkers as Moses Maimonides, Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Abraham Isaac Kook. He examines the ideological context of late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century Jewish religious thought that culminated in the creation of the citadel of Torah Umadda, Yeshiva University. And, borrowing from the work of more contemporary figures, he proposes a number of fresh approaches to the age-old issue. The result is an intriguing, incisive, and remarkably candid vision of a major issue confronting and frequently dividing contemporary Orthodox Jewry. Challenging, illuminating, and, above all, synthesizing, Torah Umadda provides a seminal and widely awaited 'mission statement' by a modern renaissance man on the continuing philosophical-theological validity of one of contemporary Judaism's most fertile fields. Simultaneously scholarly and passionate, Torah Umadda itself shines as a brilliant example of that very school of thought it so eloquently puts forth.

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