

NORMAN LAMM

MAY 24, 1988

RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK ON TORAH UMADDA

(First make reference to the Rav's dichotomy between Adam the first and Adam the Second, majestic man and the man of faith...)

The Rav has, to my knowledge, never devoted major attention to the problem of Torah Umadda, in a separate paper or monograph. However, he has referred to it often in the course of his oral discourses. The following references are drawn from his Hamesh Derashot (publication data?) and represent, in a homiletic vein, the fundamental thinking of the Rav:

1. Pages 113-114. The Rav here discusses the two brothers, Esau the hunter and Jacob "the dweller in tents," and their relationship to their parents, Isaac and Rebecca. It was Rebecca who spared no effort to enable Jacob to receive the blessings from Isaac, because she knew that if Esau would be the only one who "knows how to hunt, a man of the field" -- the only scientist, technologist, agronomist, speaker, statesman who will determine all that happens in all the stormy areas of life -- there will be no hope or future for Jacob. If Esasu will remain exclusively in control of public life, then the day might well come when Jacob will be banished not only from the "street" but

also from his own "tent"... Isaac was originally apprehensive about Jacob, lest he leave his "tent" (i.e. protected spiritual environment) and become over-involved in the "field." But he ultimately recognized the justice of Rebecca's policy and conceded that Jacob not only had the ability to become proficient in matters of the "field," but the very field itself, under the protection of Jacob, would receive something very special: the blessings of G-d...It certainly would have been easier and more comfortable for Jacob to remain in his tents and never venture into the field. Certainly, it is easier to hold the tractate of the Talmud with both hands. But when historical circumstances force a Jew to be involved in the field too, and together with the Talmud to hold as well modern instruments in the war of life, he must be prepared and ready to accomplish this as well. In a word: Jacob must sanctify the "field."

FOOTNOTE

Compare the interesting treatment by Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glasner, Dor Revii to Hulin, 91b, of Jacob's dilemma of whether to return to the "tent" of exclusive concentration on his Torah studies or to risk plunging into the maelstrom of profane activity.

2. Pages 22 23. Speaking of the founding of the Mizrachi in 1902, applying to it the sobriquet of "the Joseph of 1902," the Rav declares that we are now in a new situation, in which the great majority of Jews are concentrated in the Western World, a

society based upon science and in which everything depends upon academic education. It is this contemporary Joseph who understood that one must not rely upon the status quo, that great changes are about to occur to Jewish life and that we must be prepared for them. When it comes to Halakha, the Holy One gave the Sages of Israel the authority to decide questions of law...; but with regard to historical questions, those that apply not only to the mundane specifics or everyday life, but to the very destiny of the eternal people, then the Holy One Himself decides the Halakha! No one has the right to reject the halakhic decision of the Holy One, and in our days the Creator of the world decided in favor of "the Joseph of 1902."

3. Pages 97 - 99. We must not remain behind artificial fences, turning our backs on the world. The challenge of our day consists not in the separation from life, but in its conquest. Providence demands of us now that we encounter the strange world with pride, with courage, with a kippah on our heads and a tractate of the Talmud in our hands.

4. Pages 11 -113. I believe with perfect ^{faith} that this Torah was given in order to survive, be realized, and be achieved in every place and in every time, in every social and economic and cultural context, under all technological and political conditions... This article of faith, that of "for it is very nigh unto thee" (Deut.-), negates the opinion that separation from this

world is the only way for the Torah to survive. In other words, those who advocate the policy of exclusiveness and absolute segregation lack the awareness that the Torah as an eternal teaching was meant to be realized in all the sociological changes and vicissitudes of a dynamic society which is always in motion, like a powerful stream. We reject the policy of segregation as dangerous for the existence of our people. Such segregation is suicidal. Because of this policy there is a danger that we will be shrunk to the dimensions of a small sect which cannot last long. We declare openly... that it is possible to study Torah and to fulfill it not only in the Bet Hamidrash, not only in the ghetto, but in every place in the world even if it be a modern home, a laboratory, a campus, or a factory, in both private life and governmental life. We do not minimize the difficulties and the complicated problems attendant upon living a life of holiness in modern society, but we believe that, "we shall go up and we will conquer it" (Numbers?)