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Dear Lamm,

I very much enjoyed speaking with you last Wednesday, and appreciate the time you took out from your busy schedule.

Afterwards, I had some thoughts about Torah education that I'd like to set before you as speculations, not as recommendations or criticisms regarding Yeshiva University.

In the quote from Likutei Halachos that I mentioned that cries out against secular learning (R. Nossan of Nemirov, "Choshen Mishpat," p. 100), R. Nossan denounces making Tanakh a major focus of one's learning; instead, he recommends that students study in the traditional manner, concentrating on Talmud and poskim, with only a little Tanakh learning. Also, I recently spoke with someone who mentioned that traditionally the vast majority of Jews were ignorant, and that only the few (principally those from wealthy families) were able to learn (even in Vilna, as you point out in Torah for Torah's Sake, most people were ignorant).

This leads to the simple conclusion that the traditional model of learning recommended by R. Nossan is predicated on having only a small elite of scholars. However, in present-day society, where almost every religious Jewish child receives at least an extensive introductory education, such a model can be irrelevant, if not harmful.

Furthermore, this is also connected to an idea that we were discussing - i.e., the integration of all aspects of life into Torah, rather than the older tendency to, in R. Steinsaltz's words, formally recognize only limited areas of one's life in terms of Torah ("Human Holiness," in The Strife of the Spirit).

I would like to point out what I mean with the analogy of an engineering school. Imagine a society which is dependent for its

physical survival on having expert engineers; and which is capable of training only a small cadre of elite intellectuals. The leaders of that society will therefore set up a system of education in which engineering is the *raison d'être* of learning, in which universities teach almost nothing but engineering, and in which a stress on any other topic of learning will be viewed as inimical to that society. Furthermore, since the only people to become engineers will be those whose talents lie principally in that field, it actually would be a waste of their talents if they were to devote themselves to, say, Shakespeare studies.

But now, imagine that a new policy is instituted: open college admissions. Every member of society will be educated. Not every member of society is talented to become an engineer. To the contrary: there are many other talents that people have that contribute to society, and to the fulfillment of their own potential as members of that society and as individuals in their own right. Although before, only engineering was formally recognized as being a topic that is worth studying, we would have to now recognize the importance of many other areas of study and achievement.

One might fear that in such an atmosphere, those who might have become great engineers will go off to learn Shakespeare; although that may happen in some cases, such losses would be more than offset by the great number of people contributing to the society by becoming expert in other fields of ability.

The analogy, I think, is clear. In an era in which few people learned, the one learning that had to be stressed was the basic (as well as practical) one of Talmud and poskim: halachah is as basic to Jewish living as engineering is to bridge-building. But in a society in which everyone can study, we cannot expect everyone to have the aptitude or desire to become a Talmudic lamdan, just as no secular teacher expects every one of his students to become an engineer. (Imagine a poet condemning himself because he cannot understand engineering, then spending the rest of his life leafing through introductory engineering texts and regarding his poetic gifts as useless or as impediments to his legitimacy as a member of his society). In our era, provision has to be made for all people with all of their varied interests and abilities. Therefore, for some people Tanakh should be their main learning. I recall reading that the Ramchal set up a yeshiva which was double-tiered: one group consisted of his intimates with whom he learned advanced topics, and the other was of ordinary people who learned such topics as Aggadah (and not Talmud). And, if I recall correctly, there were periods in Sephardi history when study of Zohar superseded study of Talmud. It would be important to study what was really the course of Torah in the many Jewish communities across the ages, rather than relying on statements such as the one in Likutei Halachos.

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Related to this, about a year ago, I heard a pleasing interpretation of the idea that all souls will have to come into the world before the Moshiach comes: this means that every individual will have to fulfill his unique potential.

And I would take this view of Torah study further. In the Western culture that we live in, every topic of intellectual interest is intensively studied. Multitudes of books pour forth on every topic, and multitudes of schools of thought apply themselves to interpreting all of reality from their standpoints. For example, feminists have rewritten pre-history and history, re-interpreted aesthetics and art, redefined sociology and anthropology, and even reformed theology (having begun a new anti-Semitic theology, as pointed out in the present issue of Tikkun).

Lehavdil millionei havdolos (excuse the neologism), why can't Torah studies do the same? Rather than just offer greater breadth of traditional Torah topics, why can't Torah studies be implemented to deal with all aspects of reality? (For instance, you mentioned that Yeshiva University may institute think tanks to address the meeting of Torah and science). I think it would be a kiddush Hashem, not to mention a way of demonstrating the relevance of Torah to disaffected Jews, to produce intelligent and sophisticated constructs offering Torah-informed views of aesthetics, of history, of literature, of science, of psychological health and the like; and to offer Torah literature, Torah music, Torah theater and so on of a high quality.

For those who worry lest such a program might divert students who would otherwise be more profitably engaged in learning Talmud and poskim, I would answer that although some might be diverted, most would not (just as most engineers do not devote themselves to learning Shakespeare, despite the availability of Shakespeare courses at their universities). Furthermore, such possible losses would be more than offset by the number of people who would find this their introduction to Torah. Today, we do not have a population of learned and unlearned religious Jews so much as we have a population of learned religious Jews and unlearned secular Jews. Rather than being afraid of losing Borough Park, it would be more to the point to think of gaining Park Slope. Rather than being afraid of losing Flatbush, it would be more realistic to realize that such a program could provide an entree to many secular Jews. It could, in this age of degraded values, provide a forum for the presentation of Torah values that could enter into the general consciousness the same way that anti-Torah values have been broadcast into the general consciousness.

Such a program of study would, I think, be in line with the idea of integrating all areas of intellectual life into the domain of Torah. In Orot Hakodesh, Rav Kook makes the comment (as best as

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if you can find it

I presently recall) to the effect that when Torah is seen as being a limited field of study, all other fields of study demand to be recognized as separate endeavors. But when Torah is recognized as being a wisdom that encompasses all other fields of study, then they all are subjugated to the light of Torah and are assimilated into Torah.

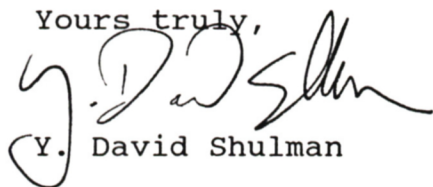
Not related to the above, I recently saw a statement in Likutei Moharan that seems to contradict your thesis in Torah for Torah's Sake regarding the uniqueness of R. Haim's view of the origin of Torah. I'm not at home right now (I'm typing this during some free time at work), but - b'li neder - I'll send you the quotation.

As I understood from our talk, you would see no problem in saying that Chazal's view of physical reality (such as, for instance, astronomy) was mistaken, being limited by the state of contemporary science. If this is not your point of view or if you consider such a view unacceptable, I would appreciate your letting me know.

Also, I have trouble with the Shabbat hymn, Kel Adon al Kol Hamaasim, because it seems to so clearly present a factually incorrect version of the heavenly bodies (as in Rambam's description, they are conscious, self-willed angelic beings). It is one thing to study a Torah text and interpret it as being limited by the science of its day; another to be expected to recite it in a devotional state of mind. If you have any thoughts about this, I would certainly appreciate hearing them as well.

I realize that you are quite busy, and so will value all the more any correspondence that we can engage in.

Yours truly,



Y. David Shulman