

Another Insight into Torah Umadda
(delivered at Honors Graduation Luncheon for JSS/IBC/SBMP)

This Shabbat – read Avot !! –

רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר, יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ, שגייעת שניהם משכחת עון. וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה, סופה בטלה וגוררת עון.

The פשוט is quite clear and requires no elaboration. So Rashi implies, if one is occupied with both Torah and ארץ or, in our parlance, מדע, he will be so exhausted that it will paralyze the otherwise hyperactive יצר הרע.

This standard interpretation of the Mishna is based on the word משכחת meaning: to cause, to forget.

However, the same root in Aramaic has a completely different meaning: to find, to discover, to make manifest. Thus, a standard Talmudic phrase is היכי משכחת לה, where is it found? How is it possible? Similarly, the Talmudic lament, חבל על דעבדין ולא משתכחין.

In that case the Mishnah may be using an Aramaism, thus: Whosoever occupies himself with תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ will discover sins or lacunae. By this I mean, that in the confrontation of Torah and Madda, Torah will guide us to evaluate properly the envioning Madda culture, guiding us in what to accept, what to reject, what to change. It will, therefore, make it possible for us to identify the עון in the world of Madda.

By the same token, Madda will be of service to Torah, in telling us what interpretations are to be taken literally and what, because not in accordance with scientific knowledge, must be taken metaphorically.

Example: Rambam, in מוי"נ, says that if Aristotle could prove Eternity of Matter (hence not accept בריאה יש מאין), he would accept that doctrine and reinterpret בראשית to fit into it. However, since then Eternity concept is neither proven nor disproved, he prefers to accept the Biblical doctrine as understood by the Mesorah