

OPENING ASSEMBLY/SCW

1. Beginning new year studies -- Torah and Mada...
2. Appropriate ask selves a question that has not only theoretical but also existential value: what, if anything, relates them to each other in a substantive way, i.e., other than their existence in one curriculum at YU or being pursued by same student? There are, of course, a number of answers. But today, at threshold of a new year, I wish to focus on one of them: the moral goal of both Torah and Mada.
3. Torah: אמר רב: מה לי שחיטה מן הצואר\ מן העורף? אלא לא הבריות -- thus: moral ends to Torah study.
4. Secular Studies (מדע, דרך ארץ, חכמה). Same answer: גם' ברכות די"ז. -- תכלית חכמה - תשובה ומעשים טובים
5. Thus: purpose all our studying = development moral character. Primary element: חסד -- עשיית הטוב.
6. Granted חסד as goal, question is: what is its roin human life? Is man fundamentally good or evil? Is חסד an integral part of his nature, or is it acquired from without?
- In Western thought, two major tendencies: Freud - the Id, libido -- all יצר הרע. Jean Jacques Rousseau -- "the noble savage", basically good, but society corrupts. Judaism: man possesses both propensities, יצ"ט ויצה"ר, and their struggle for conquest of his soul is the greatest drama of his life -- his agony as well as his glory.
7. However, that's not altogether clear. Question: we find man's penchant for evil in Genesis -- יצר לב האדם -- רק רע מנעוריו, but what of his better nature, capacity for חסד, טוב?
8. Answer: that too. Commend insight of R. Yaakov Zvi Meklenburg, author "הכתב והקבלה" -- we know man created in צלם אלקים, but do we know about Him? Most emphatic in 6 days creation: כי טוב, His creation is good. But that's only creation; what of Creator?

9. Answer: ה' הוא טוב = כי טוב = כי ה' הוא טוב. Thus, since God is good, and man is in His image, then man has goodness ingrained in him.

10. Kabbalah: this quality is known as חסד -- overflowing of שפע, kindness, existence itself.

11. Thus, Halakhah: if happy at new acquisition, make one of two ברכות -- either שהחיינו or הטוב והמטיב. Which one when? Answer: שהחיינו when for self; הטוב והמטיב when for both self and others -- because מטיב means He makes us good, and goodness requires חסד to others.

12. Thus too understand creation of woman: לא טוב היות האדם לבדו -- not that it's not comfortable, pleasant for him; but man can't be good if no one to be good to -- i.e., no one on his level (thus excluding Creator, other creatures).

13. This means that our studying -- both תורה and חכמה -- must perforce lead to a character of חסד, goodness; otherwise we have wasted time and talent -- let alone money spent on an education. If we study only for a career; or only to feel more educated; or only to be more attractive to those who value education and a sheepskin; or even only to enhance our spiritual lives and find meaning in our Jewishness -- we have missed the point of both our Torah learning and our academic training.

All the above are important: career, a good feeling about oneself, attractiveness to others, certainly to win our חלק לעולם הבא. But these are ancillary to the real purpose of both Torah (את הבריות) and Hokhmah (תשובה ומעשים טובים), both of which are subsumed under heading of טוב, חסד.

14. This is the mandate of Torah for a program of חסד by each & every one of us. SCW students always outstanding in this respect. I'd like to see this enhanced, increased. Thus: shut-ins in neighborhood... the homeless... altruistic attitude towards fellow students -- even teachers... givingness to Israel, Russian Jewry, the Jewish poor -- both of substance and time, also leadership.

15. But in addition -- to non-Jewish causes, to those needs that address us as human beings, in common with

other human beings: poverty of all peoples; war and peace; civil rights; the ecology; etc. If indeed we do so because we created in divine צלם, then remember: God is not a tribal deity for Jews; He is Creator of all and everything. Next time you say אֱשֶׁרִי, note constant repetition of one small word: כֹּל -- all, everything. פִּתּוּחַ אֵת: טוֹב ה' לְכֹל וּרְחֵמֵי עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו. or: יָדִין וּמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רִצּוֹן. So throughout all of it. So too the first בֵּרַכָּה of בִּרְכַּת הַמִּזוֹן.

Of course, we must set priorities, and family comes before outsiders -- וּמוֹשֵׁרֶן אֶל תִּתְעַלֵּם -- but while charity must **begin** at home, it must never **end** there. Priority means what comes **first**, not what cancels all else. Hence, the mission of תּוֹמ must emphasize our own, but never be limited by it. A Jewish young woman, properly educated in both Torah Umada, will extend her תּוֹמ to others, even outsiders, not despite but **because** she is a student of both תּוֹרָה and חִכְמָה or מַדַּע. I would love, therefore, to see a more intensive dedication to תּוֹמ by our students.

16. Now, you may well ask: if so, why bother with studying? Why not just go out into the streets and find the poor, man the ramparts for Soviet Jewry, demonstrate for Israel, collect for UJA?

The answer is that, while goodness is integral to man's nature, "doing the what comes naturally" in moral conduct, no less than in any other area, is simply inadequate.

I recall the story of the old Jew who was asked if he could play piano, and he replied, "I don't know; I never tried." The talent for music may preexist in man; the ability requires long and arduous hours of learning and practice.

תּוֹמ is no different. Without your learning of Torah, you will lack the criteria, the compass, to steer you through the maze of moral options and decisions that must be made at every step. Without the sophistication of secular learning, you will lack the tools and sense of discrimination to know what you can or cannot achieve.

17. Thus, Maimonides in הלכות דעות instructs us that character is naturally untutored and tends to extremes; only by use of reason and evaluation and thought can we create our own characters: שִׁיחָא אָדָם שֶׁם דַּעוֹתָיו ...

18. In one of his letters, the "ש"ן א"י" states his belief that conscience alone is totally inadequate as guide for action. It can only add moral fervor and enthusiasm to what we do; it cannot point to the direction we must take. That is reserved only for Halakhah, Torah.

19. Hence, if indeed our learning has as its goal the creation of a "good" character and the program of ת"ן for one's life, then our stay here at YU must be devoted primarily and intensively to our learning, for without it, whatever ת"ן we are engaged in will be amateurish and ineffectual -- "goody-goody" instead of truly "good." At the beginning of the academic year, therefore, it behooves us to resolve to concentrate on our learning in a devoted, mature, intensive manner. Such dedication to our studying is thus not just for the sake of intellectual growth but for moral growth as well. To this end, I would very much like to see more widespread and longer use of our ש"ן מדרש....

20. One last item which I believe is critical to this Jewish conception of the purpose of studying. I mentioned but a moment ago our intellectual and our moral growth. But those two are not enough. A YU education requires the development of our religious and spiritual dimensions at least as much as the other two.

If intellectual growth, in both Torah and חכמה, requires use of the mind; and moral and ethical growth requires use of the body and the self towards moral ends -- what R. Bachya called the חובות האברים; then religious growth requires the heart, the חובות הלבבות. In learning and cognitive growth, you look at and analyze texts and concepts. In moral-ethical growth, you look compassionately at your neighbor and fellow human and analyze his/her needs and sensitize yourself to them. In religious growth you look, of course, to God but, even before that -- you must look into yourself.

To quote the immortal words of the Tanya: if you want to behold the Creator, look for Him in your own נשמה -- or, as he put it, quoting King David, מושרי אמונה אלוך.

21. Being involved only in intellectual endeavor and in a flurry of ethical activity, and never looking into your own soul, is no different from the reverse -- spending your life in idle introspection, brooding only

against that. When we do that, and learn to raise our sights, we have truly engaged in תפילה.

25. It is with this in mind, therefore, that we at SCW emphasize the quality of our public davenning. Especially on Shabbat...