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Rabbi Norman Lamm
President
Yeshiva University
500 West 185 Street
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Dear Rabbi Lamm,

I have just had the great pleasure of reading your Torah Umadda. I very much enjoyed reading a book that presented a spectrum of viewpoints in Torah thought, as opposed to championing one band as the only genuine approach; I enjoyed your creative approach to Hasidic thought, and your comparative analysis of that and Rav Kook's approach; I enjoyed your bold and radical formulations, and that you did not allow a fear of misinterpretation to blunt your analysis (and, similarly, that you did not allow the spirit of apologetic reactionism to smother your thought); and I enjoyed the fact that your intellectual analysis was not intimidated by the greatness of the men you discussed (I found your characterization of R. Hirsch's approach as "bourgeois" especially interesting, because when I was studying in Monsey's Ohr Somayach some years ago, I one day realized that the yeshiva was espousing a view of life that I then termed "Torah bourgeois.")

I have been lately moved to characterize Orthodoxy as the use of lies to support truth, and I found your book, in regard to this, singularly refreshing and un-orthodox - i.e., honest Torah conceptual thought characterized by integrity and substance.

This is not to say that I agreed with everything you said, but rather that I agreed with the spirit in which it was said.

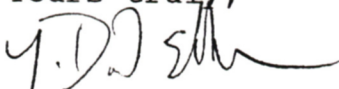
In regard to one of the concerns that I felt your book hinted at, I would like to ask you the question: What is emunas chachamim - in regard to Chazal, through Rishonim and Achoronim, and to our day? I have asked this question in right-wing circles, where this concept is stressed so dogmatically, yet no one I have spoken to has known (or seemed to care) exactly what it is; in fact, I was sometimes given the impression that asking exactly what emunas chachamim is constitutes lack of it. (One rabbi responded, "It will make you happy to say that Rashi made a mistake?") For me, this is not an academic, theoretical question. It is central to my concerns, and I would very much appreciate your speaking to this point.

Also, you refer in passing to people who have honestly faced the challenges of scientific theory and discovery. My experience is that almost all endeavor in this area is a pious if sometimes sophisticated fraud, a massive apologia consisting, at best, of refutations of particular details of scientific disciplines such as archeology or cosmology, but evading the fact that the overwhelming picture of reality offered by science is (even when one removes the dogmatism of Darwinists and the like) (a) reasonable and (b) in contradiction to the standard understanding of Torah. I myself have worked out a skeleton of an approach that deals with all this and that, as well, fits into the structure of Jewish mystic thought, to the small extent that I know of it. (This skeleton is not scientific, since it cannot be disproved, but it at least deals with the entirety of the challenge of scientific thought).

I would very much like to hear of others who are honestly inquiring in this field, to read their investigations, and to share my occasional amateur thoughts with them (including yourself, if you would be interested). I would very much appreciate your pointing out to me people who are active in this field.

Thank you very much.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Y. David Shulman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Y. David Shulman