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Secular Studies: Are They for Everyone?

This presentation will be divided into three parts. The first is the question of the use of secular studies for the purpose of *parnasab*, making a living through a trade or profession, known in the Gemara as *'umanut*. The second and major part is the permissibility or advisability of secular studies per se, when they are not necessary for *parnasab*. The last section will discuss some of the restrictions that apply even in those instances when secular studies are permitted.

Are secular studies permissible for everyone when they are necessary to provide for a livelihood? The answer is: for almost everyone.

The Gemara presents a disagreement between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai (Rashbi). Rashbi says a person should learn Torah the entire day and somehow he will find a way to support himself and his family. Rabbi Yishmael disagrees and maintains that a person is required to act in accordance with the verse וַיִּצְוֶה יְהוָה אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אֶהֱרָן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר וְאָסַפְתָּ דֶּגֶן וְתִירֶשֶׁת וְיִצְהַרְךָ וְיִצְהַרְךָ (Deut 11:14) in order to fulfill the will of Hashem. As Rabbi Yishmael puts it: הִנְהִיג בְּהֵן מְנַהֵג דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ—a person should combine Torah with *derekh 'erez*. Literally, *derekh 'erez* means “the way of the world,” which, in this context, means earning a *parnasab*.¹

Admittedly, in those days, *parnasab* did not mean attending a university. The phrase וַאֲסַפְתָּ דֶּגֶן clearly refers to earning a livelihood through farming. Nevertheless, this can be extended beyond simply farming since, even during the time of the Talmud, it was not limited to

that. A "strict constructionist" may argue that Rabbi Yishmael limited his opinion only to farming and did not allow one to be a shoemaker or a tailor, for example. It would seem, however, that Rabbi Yishmael's opinion is that one may study in order to earn a living, however that may be defined. In fact, not only is it permissible according to Rabbi Yishmael; it is advisable. And, without giving a formal *pesak*, the Gemara seems to follow this opinion by citing the famous remark following this controversy: אמר אביי הרבה עשו כרבי ישמעאל ועלתה בידן, כר' שמעון בן יוחי ולא עלתה בידן. Many followed the approach of Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded; while those who followed the approach of Rashbi did not succeed. One could, therefore, conclude that secular studies, at least in the context of enabling one to make a living, are for everyone.

The *Shulhan Arukh* presents all the laws relating to a Jew's daily schedule starting from waking in the morning through davening *shaharit* and eating breakfast. It then continues, אחר כך ילך לעסקיו דכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה סופה בטלה וגוררת עון ומ"מ לא יעשה מלאכתו עיקר אלא עראי ותורתו קבע וזה וזה יתקיים בידו. This is a quotation from the aforementioned Gemara that a person is obligated to consider Torah as his main preoccupation, and *parnasah* related activities as his secondary occupation. Torah is the *'ikar*; *parnasah* is the *tafel*. Nevertheless, it is clear from both the Gemara and the *Shulhan Arukh* that a person has an obligation to make a living. The *Shulhan Arukh* lists no exceptions to this rule. It would therefore seem that, in this context, secular studies are for everyone. To be sure, this does not mean that every person is required to engage in study. For example, someone could be a successful businessman, invest in the stock market and make a fortune—all without secular studies. If that is how one wants to make a living, that is his option. But if one decides to earn a living through a trade or a profession which requires a certain level of secular studies, it would seem to me that, based on the *Shulhan Arukh*, it would be permissible for everyone.

However, this is not quite the case. In his commentary on the above cited statement in the *Shulhan Arukh*, the *Bi'ur Halakhah* notes as follows:

כתבו הספרים שזהו נאמר לכלל העולם שאין כולם יכולים לזכות לעלות למדרגה רמה זו להיות עסקם רק בתורה לבדה אבל אנשים יחידים יוכל להמצא בכל עת באופן זה [וזהו שאמרו בברכות ל"ו ע"ב הרבה עשו כרשב"י ולא עלתה בידן ר"ל דוקא הרבה] והקב"ה בודאי ימציא להם פרנסתם וכעין זה כתב הרמב"ם פ"ג מהלכות שמיטין ויובלות ולא שבת לוי בלבד וכי ע"ש ובפרט אם כבר נמצאו אנשים שרוצים להספיק לו צרכיו כדי שיעסוק בתורה בודאי לא שייך זה ויששכר ובלקן יוכיח.

It is clear from this statement that if a select few can devote themselves entirely to the study of Torah, they should do so and not engage in any other activity for *parnasah*. We can therefore say that secular studies, for this purpose, are for *almost* everyone.

Of course, the big question is who are the few who should devote themselves exclusively to Torah study, as explained in the *Bi'ur Halakhah*, and who are the "*klal ha-'olam*" who should otherwise work to earn a living? It seems that each individual should decide for himself into which category he best fits.

Rav Ḥayyim of Volozhin writes that an individual who has the capacity to study Torah all his life, "חובה מוטלת עליו" to do so.³ But what does the word "חובה" mean in this context? Is he, indeed, obligated to do so? This is somewhat problematic because of a very famous question raised by all the *meforshim*. We have already seen the disagreement in the Gemara between Rashbi who says that a person should study Torah all day and Rabbi Yishmael who says that a person should work to earn a livelihood. The *Tosafot R. Yebudah be-Hasid*⁴ points out that this contradicts another Gemara where we find the exact opposite positions being taken regarding this same issue of how much Torah a person is obligated to learn to the exclusion of everything else. There it is Rashbi who says a person should study Torah a little in the morning and a little in the evening while it is Rabbi Yishmael who says a person should study Torah all the time. Rabbi Yishmael interprets the verse, והגית בר יומם ולילה (Josh. 1:8), as an obligation to study Torah "all day and all night" while, according to Rashbi, one can fulfill this obligation even by the recital of the morning and evening *shema*.⁵ In attempting to show the consistency of Rashbi's opinion, the *Tosafot R. Yebudah be-Hasid* says, אלא מצוה בעלמא הוא דקאמר, מפני ביטול תורה. When Rashbi says in *Berakhot* that a person is supposed to study all day and night, he does not mean that there is an obligation to learn Torah all day. The obligation can technically be fulfilled even by the most minute learning during the day and during the evening. But ideally, for a מצוה בעלמא—to do Hashem's will—it should be all day.⁶

Then why does Rav Ḥayyim of Volozhin use the expression "חובה מוטלת עליו?" One gets the impression that if a person has no financial needs he is *obligated* to study Torah all day. Yet from the *Tosafot R. Yebudah be-Hasid* it would seem that although such intense Torah study is laudable and advisable and even represents the will of Hashem, still, the strict expression of "obligation" or "חייב" would not be appropriate. Perhaps Rav Ḥayyim understands that one who has the capacity to study Torah all his life is an exception to the rule.

In any case, it would seem that the sources indicate that secular studies for the purpose of earning a livelihood are for almost everyone. What about secular studies that are not for this purpose?

The Gemara (Menahot 99b) states: "Ben Dama, the nephew of Rabbi Yishmael, asked him, 'I already completed all of Torah; should I learn חכמת יונית (presumably the philosophy and Greek wisdom of that time, and by extension today, any secular studies)?' Rabbi Yishmael answered, 'You may, provided you do so during a time that is neither day nor night.'" In other words, Rabbi Yishmael's answer was "no." As indicated, this seems to contradict the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael expressed in Berakhot. After all, there he is the one who permits spending the entire day working the land. Why then should secular studies be forbidden?

The *Hasdei David* answers that the difference is in the purpose of the study in which one chooses to engage. The study of חכמת יונית was presumably not for the purpose of *parnasah* and therefore prohibited by R. Yishmael in the Gemara in Menahot. But if a person has to make a living and his profession is one which requires a secular education, then it is allowed (i.e., Rabbi Yishmael's opinion in Berakhot). Therefore, if a person is independently wealthy, or a businessman, or already has a degree and now wants to acquire knowledge for its own sake, this would not be permitted according to Rabbi Yishmael. Rather, he's obligated to study Torah every minute of the day, as the *meforshim* explain it, except for the time when he is at work.⁷

It would seem, therefore, that Rabbi Yishmael and Rashbi have diametrically opposite views on this matter. Rashbi states that although the ideal is Torah study all day and all night, one can fulfill his obligation with a minute in the morning and a minute in the evening. Rabbi Yishmael believes that the essential obligation is to study Torah all day and night, minus the time spent earning a living which is, itself, an ideal. Secular studies for their own sake impede the fulfillment of this obligation, according to Rabbi Yishmael. If one does not need to work, one's time must be spent on Torah, not on secular studies.

What is the Halakhah? The *Shulhan Arukh* states, . . . כל איש ישראל חייב לקבוע לו זמן לתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה שנאמר והגית בו יומם ולילה. ובשעת הדחק אפילו לא קרא רק ק"ש שחרית וערבית, לא, The Rama adds, ימושו מפיו קרינת ביה.⁸ This is in accordance with the view of Rashbi as explained above. In a certain sense, in the disagreement between Rashbi and Rabbi Yishmael, we decide according to the two קולות: we *pasken* like Rashbi that the obligation to study Torah can be fulfilled by learning a little during the day and a little at night (Yoreh Deah #246). And, at the same time, we *pasken* like Rabbi Yishmael that the ideal for most people

is to earn a livelihood and to learn only when not at work (Orah Ḥayyim #156).

The Rama adds, ואין לאדם ללמוד כי אם מקרא משנה וגמרא והפוסקים הנמשכים אחריהם ובוזה יקנה העולם הזה והעוה"ב אבל לא בלימוד שאר חכמות. He states explicitly that a person should not study other חכמות. This does not contradict what we have been saying until now. The clear obligation is to study Torah a little by day and a little by night. And during those hours when a person is not earning a *parnasah*, he should study Torah—not שאר חכמות. If we stop here, we could legitimately conclude: secular studies for the purpose of earning a living are for almost everyone; otherwise, they are for no one.

However, the Rama continues, ומ"מ מותר ללמוד באקראי בשאר חכמות.⁹ In this very important passage, the Rama is saying that it is permissible to study secular studies beyond those needed to make a living, but only "באקראי," i.e., on a temporary basis. Since the previous line describes an advisable course which is not obligatory, the phrase מותר מותר presumably means לכתחילה.

The question then is: if secular studies are intrinsically worthwhile and important, then why permit it only on a temporary basis? And if they are not advisable or worthwhile and not a *mizvah*, then why is it permissible to close the Gemara and study them at all, even part-time?

The answer according to the Rama, perhaps, is found in the Rishonim based on two *mishnayot* in *Pirkei 'Avot* which discuss the combination of Torah with *derekh 'erez*. They are: יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ (*'Avot* II:2) and אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ, אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה (*'Avot* III:17). What is *derekh 'erez*? From the Gemara in *Berakhot* it would appear that *derekh 'erez* means earning a living. In that context, one might take the "strict constructionist" approach and maintain that the Mishnah is telling us the same thing that we just learned in the *Shulḥan Arukh*, i.e., that it is important to have a source of income in order to spend time studying Torah while making an honest living. However, from the Rishonim on *'Avot* one gets the impression that *derekh 'erez* goes beyond the mere requirement of earning a livelihood. A number of them, including the *Maḥzor Vitri*, a talmid of Rashi, maintain that *derekh 'erez* refers to תרבות, or "culture."¹⁰ The Rambam maintains that in addition to the obligation of making a *parnasah*, *derekh 'erez* includes "חברות נאה," which means getting along in society.¹¹ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who was known for his views on this matter, interpreted *derekh 'erez* to include כלל-אנושי ואזרחי, anything related to the general wisdom of mankind, society, and civilization.¹² According to this, the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei 'Avot* maintains that it is a *mizvah* to study all these matters.

What is the source for this Mishnah? If *derekh 'erez* means earning a

living, we can base it on the *pasuk* of ואספת דיגנך. But if it is also meant to include some level of secular studies for its own sake, what is the source to permit it? While these subjects are important for our participation in society at large, is that in itself enough of a reason to engage in their study? There is, however, an earlier text which may be suggested as a source. The Torah states, ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם (Deut. 6:7) and the *Sifri* comments,

עשם עיקר ואל תעשם טפלה שלא יהא משאך ומתנך אלא בהם, שלא תערב בהם דברים אחרים, שמא תאמר למדתי חכמת ישראל אך ואלמד חכמת האומות תלמוד לומר ללכת בהם (ויקרא יח:ד), ולא ליפטר מתוכם.¹³

At first glance, this is a negative source as far as the legitimacy of secular wisdom is concerned. It would appear from here that no non-Torah discipline is acceptable. However, according to Rav Hirsch (Lev. 18:4), one can derive a certain positive attitude towards secular studies from this source as well. The *Sifri* is telling us that Torah must be the עיקר, one's main interest. We are not permitted to make it secondary by placing secular wisdom on a higher level or even on the same level as Torah. One may infer, therefore, that the only prohibition is to consider secular studies as important as Torah. However, it may be permissible to indulge in secular studies providing that one recognizes that they are not to be considered on the same level as Torah. The *Sifri* stated, שלא תערב, i.e., that one should not mix the two. It does not mean that one cannot look at secular material at all, only that one must remember that Torah is the עיקר, and that anything else is the טפל. The phrase, שלא תערב, presumably refers to a serious preoccupation, like לעסוק בדברי תורה, but not to study done באקראי. Secular studies, therefore, are not intrinsically prohibited. They serve a function and, depending on the importance of that function, may even be advisable.

Some fifty years ago, Rabbi Shimon Schwab, Rav of K'hal Adas Yeshurun in Washington Heights, wrote to many of the giants of Lithuanian Jewry asking their opinion regarding the legitimacy of secular studies. A number of responses to his query were subsequently printed. They are from Rav Barukh Ber Leibowitz, the *rosh yeshiva* of Kamenetz; Rav Elhanan Wasserman, the *rosh yeshiva* of Baranowicze; Rav Avraham Yizhak Bloch, the *rosh yeshiva* of Telz; and the great Rogatchover, Rav Yosef Rozin.¹⁴

The view expressed above is basically that presented by Rav Elhanan Wasserman. His response to Rabbi Schwab's question is that Torah studies have to be one's main involvement and that secular studies are the exact opposite of Torah. Torah must be learned לשמה, as an end unto itself; secular studies must be learned שלא לשמה, only as a means to an end. He goes on to say that the major problem with secular

studies is that people equate them with Torah. Someone who does not need secular wisdom for *parnasah* but rather שרוצה להשתעשע בה—he wants to be a man of the world and cultivate an intellectual curiosity—may study secular subjects but only “באקראי,” on a part-time basis. The reason why he cannot engage in it full-time is not only because of ביטול תורה, but also ליתן להם חשיבות כחשיבות התורה. He notes: ובעיקר הגדול הזה משתבשים מאד במדינתם שהחשיבו לימודים חיצוניים כלימוד התורה. כי סבורים היו שכמו שצריך ללמוד את התורה לשמה, כך צריך ללמוד את הלימודים החיצוניים לשמה. While Rav Elhanan emphasizes at length that this attitude is wrong, he does allow one’s intellectual curiosity to be satisfied through secular studies. If one wants to read a book on history or some other pursuit, it is permissible according to Rav Elhanan, provided it is done only on a temporary basis and is not equated with Torah, i.e., it is not done “לשמה.”

Still, how can the Rama advise this even if only “באקראי?” Would it not be better if one spent all his time on Torah? Perhaps we can find the answer in something found in the Rogatchover’s writings. The Rogatchover says, based on the Rambam in *Hilkhot Roze’ah* V:5, that it is a *mizvah* to learn חכמה. Not only is it permissible, it is actually advisable. In fact, one must come to that conclusion because if it is not to be considered advisable, then why would it be permitted? Presumably, therefore, there must be something positive about secular studies. Indeed, the Rogatchover says precisely that, based on the Rambam (*ibid.*) which rules that it is a *mizvah* to teach a child “*hokhmah*,” and the term “*hokhmah*” there is used in contradistinction to “*umanut*” i.e., the pursuit of knowledge not for the purpose of learning a trade or profession but for its own sake.

However, while acknowledging the validity of “*hokhmah*,” the Rogatchover places significant constraints on its study. For example, he says that it cannot be done בציבור, in a public setting. Yes, every father should teach his son “*hokhmah*” in addition to a trade, but one cannot teach liberal arts in public. There can be no Yeshiva University! He doesn’t really explain why, but it seems that it must be for the same reason mentioned earlier, namely, that to teach “*hokhmah*” to an entire class raises the status of the subject and equates it with Torah, making it a דבר שבקבע. This would be in opposition to the *Sifri*, cited above, which stated, שלא תערב בהם דברים אחרים.

Taking this one step further, one might argue that this limitation of the Rogatchover applies not only to the founding of liberal arts schools in the Jewish community but also to trade schools. After all, just as one should not make “*hokhmah*” an עיקר, so too *parnasah* should not be an עיקר either. After all, this is found in the Gemara and the *Shulhan Arukh*: תורתו קבע ומלאכתו עראי and עיקר משאו ומתנו יהיה בו. This, in fact, is the

opinion of Rav Barukh Ber, the *rosh yeshiva* from Kamenetz, in his answer to Rabbi Schwab. Rav Barukh Ber understood the Rama to mean that learning "*hokhmah*," even for the purpose of *parnasah*, can be done only "באקראי." This is the view of the Rogatchover taken to its natural conclusion. It seems, therefore, that Rav Elhanan, who clearly interprets the Rama allowing the study of "*hokhmah*" as referring to cases which are *not 'umanut*, is proposing a different opinion. He is not suggesting that a person may consider secular studies a *דבר שבקבע* in the fullest sense. He appears to be of the opinion that a person may study secular subjects for the purpose of *parnasah*, even in a school and, by extension, may study "*hokhmah*" beyond the context of *'umanut* also even in a school. The only caveat is, and this is critical, that the person has to know what is *עיקר* and what is *טפל*.

This value judgment is true in two senses: the sense of time and the sense of value. In terms of time, the Rambam tells us the schedule of a *בעל הבית* who is not able to study Torah all day because he has to earn a living. If one can do a full day's work in three hours, then nine hours should be spent learning Torah, allowing the other twelve hours for eating, sleeping, davening, and other needs.¹⁵ The Rambam understands *עיקר* and *טפל* in a very literal sense. But if a person cannot achieve that kind of ratio in his daily schedule, he should at least maintain the proper priorities. This is the sense of values, the sense of what is ultimately important in his life.

This position is espoused by the *ba'alei musar*. They maintain *עשה עראי* even though they knew that people in Europe didn't follow the Rambam's daily schedule. Most people were clearly spending more time on earning a livelihood than on their Torah learning. Still the *בעלי מוסר* kept emphasizing that the major interest of every Jew must be *לימוד התורה*. If making a living takes nine hours and only three are left for Torah, so be it. But those three have to be the most important ones of the day. The others are only there to help a person physically survive.

What is true for *parnasah* is also true for "*hokhmah*." If a person is involved in studying "*hokhmah*" for a particular reason, he must make sure that Torah occupies the majority of his time. If a person were to say to the Rambam, "I get paid by the hour and I cannot support my wife and children on just three hours of work a day and therefore need to work longer," the Rambam would probably look on him with kind eyes and say, "Go ahead." But if he said, "I want to spend three hours a day learning Torah and nine hours studying history and philosophy," the Rambam would never permit it. In a famous letter to R. Jonathan ha-Kohen, the Rambam wrote about his devotion to Torah study and then continued: *ואף גם זאת הרבה נשים נכריות נעשו לה צרות . . . והש"י יודע כי*

The other¹⁶ לא נלקחו מתחלה אלא להיותן לה לרקחות ולטבחות ולאופות "strange women," the secular subjects, are to be used only as "handmaidens," to serve Torah. If they are given equal importance, that is a mistake.

It seems that this is a big problem here at our Yeshiva. Not everyone understands the Rambam's position on secular studies. It has been said that if the Rambam were alive today, he would teach at our Yeshiva. Perhaps. But then we would have to accept the Rambam's position that while there is a place for secular subjects, they are only to be used as רקחות טבחות ואופות, occupying a secondary status to Torah. Our motto is "Torah u-Madda"—in that order. And to think otherwise is very dangerous according to the Rambam, Rav Elhanan Wasserman and all חכמים שבכל הדורות and the *gedolei ha-poskim*.

The truth is also that we should not feel that this problem is unique at our Yeshiva. At other yeshivot, the question is the same—not regarding the place of "*hokhmah*" but of studies for the purpose of *parnasah*. *Talmidim* from other yeshivot sometimes fall into a mode where their main preoccupation, both in time and in thought, is their occupation. When they are asked, "What do you do?" they answer, "I am a doctor, a lawyer, a stockbroker." But that is wrong. The answer should be, "I am a בן תורה; to earn a living I engage in business, etc." This is a problem in other yeshivot as well.

At Yeshiva University we should not denigrate ourselves and say that we are not doing the right thing. On the contrary, we are following the *Shulhan Arukh* by trying to teach our *talmidim* to have an אומנות נקיה וקלה¹⁷ Perhaps the other yeshivot feel that all of their *talmidim* are either capable of earning a livelihood which does not require a college degree or are the "אנשים יחידים" of the *Bi'ur Halakhah* cited above who are supposed to devote themselves strictly to Torah study. But we have nothing to be ashamed of. We are teaching our *talmidim* what the "כלל העולם" are supposed to learn. We have a big yeshiva and we are obligated to meet the needs of the majority of the population.

Let us now review the various secular subjects one by one.¹⁸ First, the natural sciences. At the very beginning of his *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam discusses the basis of the Jewish religion, and he writes:

האל הנכבד והנורא הזה מצוה לאהבו וליראה אותו שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלקיך. ונאמר את ה' אלקיך תירא: והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו. בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול. כמו שאמר דוד צמאה נפשי לאלקים לא-ל חי. וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו ויפחד ויודע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות.¹⁹

This was true in the days of the Rambam and is true today as well. It is an approach taken by Gedolim of every generation. The Ḥazon 'Ish used the science of his day to prove that God exists and how great He is.²⁰

What about the study of history? The *Shulhan Arukh* rules that a person may not study history on the Shabbat nor during the week because it is a מושב לצים, lacking any specific value.²¹ However, later authorities state views in direct contrast to this. Specifically, Rabbi Ya'akov Emden maintains that it is important for a learned Jew to study history—למען יידע להשיב שואלו דבר ולא יהא נחשב פתי וסכל בעיני העולם חכם—so that a תלמיד חכם should not appear to be an ignoramus in the eyes of the world.²² It would curtail his ability to communicate with people. How can someone who has no idea of what went on before his time, or outside of his place, tell someone else how to behave? What credibility will he have? One must be at least a little worldly. The Ḥazon 'Ish goes beyond this and claims that a person who doesn't learn history is doomed to repeat the failures of his people. He quotes the *pasuk*, ויאמרו ויקניך ויגדך זקניך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו, שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו (Deut. 32:7).²³ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch gives the best answer of all. He believes that in history, especially Jewish history, one can “draw the right conclusions of the Jewish position in the world.”²⁴

What about knowledge of languages? R. Yeḥezkel Landau, the *Noda bi-Yehudah*, maintains that it is critical for rabbis to be fluent in the language of the country in which they live.²⁵ This was a radical statement in its time and even now there are still those who say, “חס ושלום,” we are supposed to separate ourselves entirely from the non-Jewish world. Perhaps one could say: אלו ואלו. If a person totally separates himself from the world at large and lives in a ghetto, then let him speak Yiddish. But since there is no one in our society, or at least in our university, who is going to live like that, then it is critical that our *talmidim* know how to read, write, and speak English properly.

What about literature? The study of literature has a number of pluses. Firstly, it enables a person to develop language skills, which, as we have said, is important. Secondly, knowledge of literature enables a person to intelligently engage men of letters. This comes under the category discussed earlier, that a תלמיד חכם should not be viewed as an ignoramus. However, one need not go too far. One need not be conversant in all the dimensions of English literature and philosophy.²⁶ For then what would happen to the study of Torah? And it would also leave precious little time left for the mastery of other important areas of knowledge.

But there is another important issue directly relevant to this discussion. After ruling, ומ"מ מותר ללמוד באקראי בשאר חכמות, the Rama continues, ובלבד שלא יהיו ספרי מינים. Secular books may be read “באקראי” as long as

they are not books compiled by heretics.²⁷ What exactly is he referring to? It seems that he is not talking about books which deal with heresy itself for studying actual heresy is a real prohibition. The Rambam writes,

ספרים רבים חברו עובדי כוכבים . . . צונו הקב"ה שלא לקרות באותן הספרים כלל ולא נהרהר בה ולא בדבר מדבריה ואפילו להסתכל בדמות הצורה אסור שנאמר אל תפנו אל האלילים.²⁸

The Rambam prohibits us from even looking at actual heresy. The Rama here is going a step further. He was referring not to heretical works *per se* but to general works written by non-believers. After all, he is discussing "שאר חכמות" or wisdom in general. The problem is that sometimes even acceptable wisdom is found in books written by non-believers or atheists. Because the author's lack of belief will color his understanding and presentation of general wisdom, it is incumbent upon us to avoid any of his works.²⁹

Even more serious for us, however, is the next statement of the Rama, והו נקרא בין החכמים טויל בפרדס. ואין לאדם לטייל בפרדס רק לאחר שמלא וזהו בשר ויין, והוא לידע איסור והיתר ודיני המצות.³⁰ This statement is based on a ruling of the Rambam that physics and metaphysics, which he calls "*pardes*," should not be studied until a person "has filled his stomach with meat and wine," i.e., has become highly proficient in the laws of the Torah.³¹

So how do we justify Yeshiva University? Do we assume that our students are so advanced by the time they enter our classrooms that they already are experts in the laws of the Torah? One could suggest a possible approach, which admittedly goes against the Rama's opinion, but which does justify our course of study here. The Vilna Gaon disagrees with the Rama. He writes, לשון הרב אינו מתוקן because if these *hokhmot* are in fact *pardes*, how could the Rama be so ambivalent about them? On the contrary, the Gemara tells us that *pardes* is a most important subject of study. The Vilna Gaon was of the opinion that *pardes* refers to the study of Kabbalah which, he claims, neither the Rambam nor the Rama knew.

Assuming that *pardes* is Kabbalah, it is obvious why it cannot be studied until one masters Torah. The source for this is the Talmudic story (Ḥagigah 14b) about "the four who entered the *pardes*," ben Azzai, ben Zoma, Elisha b. Avuya (Aḥer) and Rabbi Akiva. One died, one lost his mind, one became an *apikorus*, and only Rabbi Akiva emerged unscathed. Why? Ben Zoma and ben Azzai were very young—that is why they were still called "ben." As far as Aḥer is concerned, the Gemara (Ḥagigah 15b) says that even before he entered the *pardes* he used to have ספרי מינים in his pockets, and that caused him to go astray.

If, in fact, *pardes* really is Kabbalah as the Vilna Gaon maintains, then perhaps we do not need a prerequisite to study secular studies. Otherwise, if we followed the Rambam and the Rama, our school's catalog would

have to list knowledge of "בשר ויין," i.e., *shas* and *posekim* as a prerequisite for entering college, or even high school. Perhaps we follow the opinion of the Vilna Gaon that the need to master Torah first refers to the study of Kabbalah and therefore, for general wisdom, no prerequisite is needed.

To summarize, then, for purpose of *parnasah*, secular studies are allowed for almost everyone. If it is not for *parnasah*, it is permissible, and sometimes even a *mizvab* to learn various disciplines, providing that such study is considered of secondary importance, both in terms of time and value for, above all, Torah must always be the עיקר.

NOTES

1. Berakhot 35b.
2. *Shulhan Arukh*, Oraḥ Ḥayyim #156. For this phrase, see 'Avot II:2.
3. R. Ḥayyim of Volozhin, *Nefesh ha-Ḥayyim* I:8.
4. Berakhot 35b.
5. Menahot 99b.
6. [For a discussion of various interpretations of this apparent inconsistency in the opinions of R. Yishmael and Rashbi, see Y. Levi, "Torah ve-Derekh 'Erez," *ha-Ma'ayan* XVII:1 (1976), 24–26; XVII:2 (1976) 25–31; reprinted in *idem.*, *Sha'arei Talmud Torah* (Jerusalem, 1981), 207–09, 237–45; *idem.*, "Ḥokhmat ha-Torah u-Sha'ar ha-Ḥokhmat," *Yad Re'em* (Jerusalem, 1975), 211–12; H. M. Montefiore, "Ve-Hagita Bo Yomam va-Layla—Perushim ve-Hashlakhot," *Mamlekheth Kohanim ve-Goy Kadosh*, ed. by Y. Shaviv (Jerusalem, 1989), 136–44; see more below.—ED.]
7. *Hasdei David* on *Tosefta*, Avodah Zarah I:3, end.
8. *Shulhan Arukh*, Yoreh De'ah #246:1.
9. *Ibid.*, #246:4.
10. Commentary on 'Avot III:17; cited by Y. Levi, *Sha'arei Talmud Torah*, *op. cit.*, 185. Most of the sources quoted are cited in Rav Levi's thorough and excellent work, which is must reading for any serious student of these issues.
11. *Commentary to the Mishnah*, Kiddushin, end Chap. 1; cited by Y. Levi, *ibid.*
12. S. R. Hirsch, *Commentary on 'Avot* II:2; cited by Y. Levi, *ibid.*
13. This is cited by the Gaon of Vilna, *Bi'ur ha-Gra*, Yoreh De'ah, #246:17.
14. All four responsa were printed by Y. Levi, *Sha'arei Talmud Torah*, *op. cit.*, 296–312. [See above, pp. 1–2. For a recent analysis of the positions of Rabbis Liebowitz and Wasserman, see M. Breuer, "Torah 'im Derekh 'Erez bi-Yamenu," *Mamlekheth Kohanim ve-Goy Kadosh*, *op. cit.* (n. 6), 44–67.—ED.]
For a discussion by R. Schwab on this subject, see his *These and Those* (New York, 1966).
15. See Hil. Talmud Torah I:12.
16. See J. Blau, ed., *Teshuvot ha-Rambam* III:57.
17. See Kiddushin 82a.
18. [For an earlier treatment of this, see Y. Levi, *Sha'arei Talmud Torah*, *op. cit.*, 248–86. For English versions of this material, see L. Levi, "Torah and Secular Studies: The Humanities," *Proceedings of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists* V (1979), 153–67; *idem.*, *Torah and Science* (Jerusalem/New York, 1983), 23–41, 119–31; *idem.*, "The Torah and the Sciences," *Moresheet Zevi: The Living Hirschian Legacy* (New York, 1988), 125–71. See also M. Weinberger, "On Studying Secular Subjects," *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* XI (1986), 88–128.—ED.]
19. Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah II:1–2.

20. See R. Avraham Yeshayahu Kareliz, *Sefer 'Emanah u-Bitahon*.
21. *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* #307:16. See Tosafot, Shabbat 116b, s.v. *ve-kol she-ken*.
22. J. Emden, *Mor u-Keziya, Orach Hayyim, ibid.*; (New York, 1953), 18a.
23. R. Avraham Yeshayahu Kareliz, *Sefer 'Emanah u-Bitahon, op. cit.*, I:8.
24. S. R. Hirsch, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, trans. by I. Levy (London, 1962), 69–70 (on Deut. 4:32).
25. Y. Landau, *Derushei ha-Zelah*, #39.
26. In addition, parts of literature are sexually arousing and are prohibited by the *Shulhan Arukh* (Orach Hayyim 307:16).
The unique problems of studying philosophy must also be addressed. See, for example, *She'elot u-Teshuvot ha-Rama*, #6, 7.
27. Rama, *Shulhan Arukh*, Yoreh De'ah #246:4.
28. Hil. Avodah Zarah II:2.
29. Presumably, this restriction would apply to a lecturer as well. The precise definition of *minim* in this context and the status of non-Jewish authors and lecturers are obviously critical and require further elaboration.
30. Rama, *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* #246:4, end.
31. See Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah IV:13.