Jack Bieler – The Great Principle of the Torah and discussion of Dov Weiss, Rav Shagar, Jewish Education, and Modern Orthodoxy

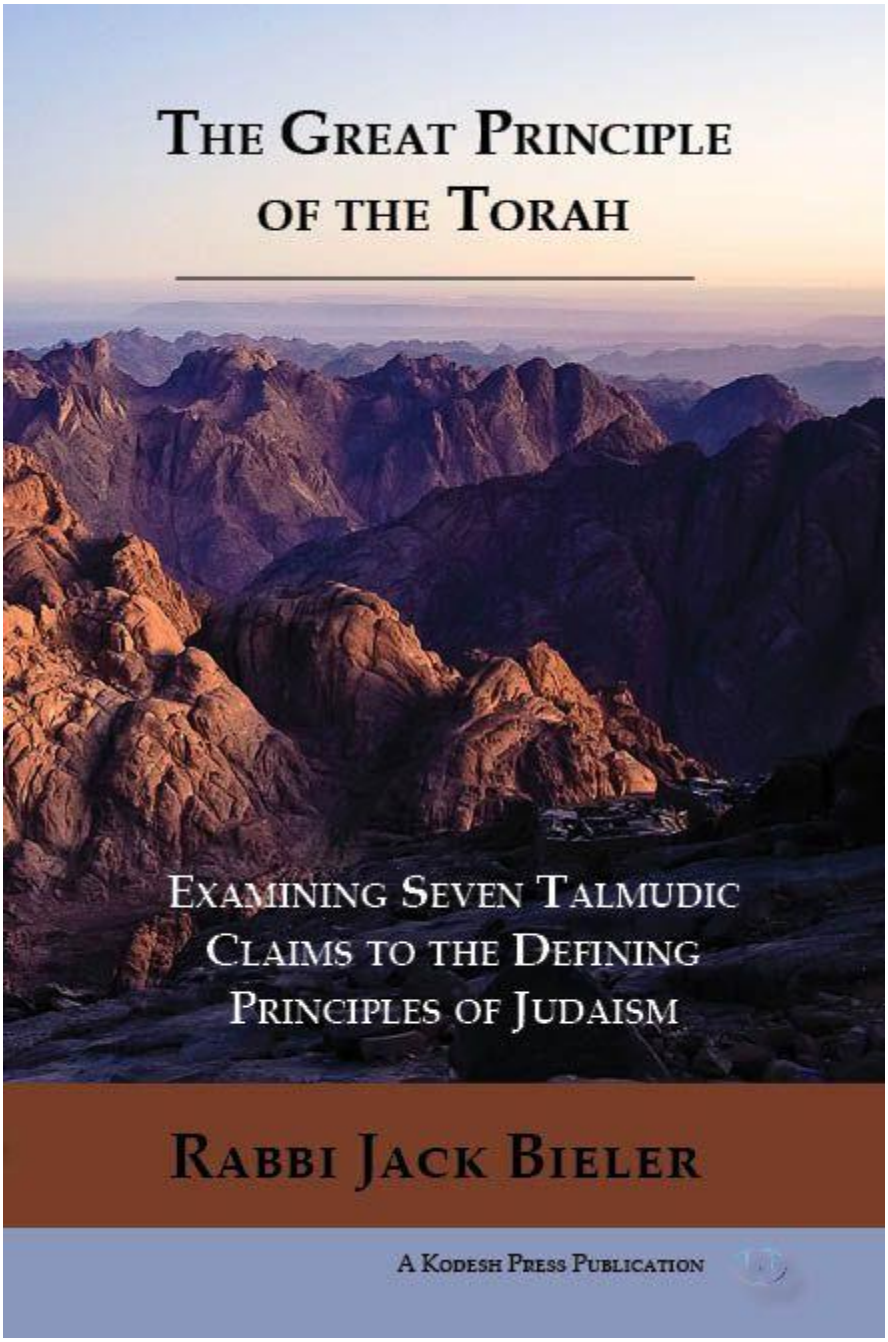
Posted on November 7, 2016 by Alan Brill | Leave a comment

I received my copy of Rabbi Jack Bieler's delightful new book *The Great Principle of the Torah* (Kodesh Press, 2016) in the spring but did not review it at the time because the content was not sufficient for a long review, fitting in with this blog's current style. However, when I posted my Interview with Dov Weiss on arguing with God, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a response from Bieler. In the interim, I also received a response from Bieler concerning my Rav Shagar post. Together with quotes from his articles, it produced a fine post.

This post will be somewhat different than my ordinary post in that I will be more explicit in direct comments as a form of internal dialogue between ideal and reality and between different modes of thinking about religion and culture. I am not aiming to critique Rabbi Bieler in any way, rather to work out in public some of the issues about Modern Orthodoxy. I have known Rabbi Bieler as an email confrere for almost fifteen years since the days of the defunct EDAH. One can use this post as an insight into what one person from the Torah uMadda era envisioned. One can also use the post to evaluate why the intellectual and moral approach did not garner wide support leading to it being replaced by progressive social inclusion, halakhah as a closed discourse, community building and outreach, and popular culture- in both its open and right wing forms. By the fourth question, we have Bieler's own elegy for a path not taken.

Rabbi Jack Bieler founded Kemp Mill Synagogue in Silver Spring, MD in 1990, where he served as spiritual leader until his retirement in 2015. He received ordination from Yeshiva University and was a faculty member of Yeshivat Ramaz and the Berman Hebrew Academy. He has a website that is worth reading for his archive of articles. In addition, he sends out a daily dvar Torah article on his blog.

In *The Great Principle of the Torah*, Rabbi Jack Bieler works from a fundamental belief in moral imperatives as the driving force in Judaism. This book deals with seven statements from the Talmud and presents the rabbinic positions on each principle together with further sources in the Biblical commentators, medieval and modern Jewish thought and connections to the Torah readings. In most of the chapters he also offers pedagogic advice and charts.



The seven principles are:
1. Love they neighbor- Hillel's opinion that "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." This is a variation of the biblical: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."
2. Universalism- Ben Azzai focused on the biblical statement "This is the book of the generations of man in the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him."
3. The concept of ever more concise Principles- prophet Habakkuk wrote "But the righteous shall live by his faith."
4. Everyday Consciousness -Bar Kappa's "In all your ways know him and he will direct your paths."

5. Pleasantness and Peace- Rabbi Joseph "Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace."
6. Loving-kindness- Rabbi Yehudah emphasized kindness, for one who denies it "denies the most fundamental principle."
7. Lawfulness- Rabbi Elazar said: "The entire Torah is based upon justice."

These principles are not to be seen as random quotes from the Aggadah, rather fundamental directives that, according to Bieler, should color one's entire approach to Judaism above and beyond the halakhic or ritual obligations.

In the chapter on Rabbi Joseph's principle "the whole of the Law is also for the purpose of promoting peace, Bieler even considers whether Judaism's legal character is an obstacle to pleasantness and peace. The chapter concludes by cautioning that "it is necessary for Jewish leaders to make absolutely certain that before they make a pronouncement that could have negative social consequences, they have exhausted all legitimate options to render a more inclusive or humane decision."

Bieler concludes that the value of these principles is more in the reflection on what is involved in a Jewish religious life than in determining the application of principle, their study becomes more of an act of helping his students attain moral maturity than providing set answers. The book belongs in every Jewish high school and middle school library as well as in the synagogue; it is a goldmine for creating lesson plans and homiletic materials. I would have loved a book like this twenty-five years ago when I taught high school, where it would have been integrated into my Talmud and Bible lesson plans for the year.

Bieler's thought is a synthesis of old school Torah uMadda with elements of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, musar movement, and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, along with Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Alter, Bibliodrama, and Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.* Those who still envision the possibilities of an educated and observant Jewish life should definitely buy the book and read it over a weekend for a vacation to an Orthodoxy that spoke of "meta-principles" and ethical vision. The book is stimulating and fruitful while at the same time returning to basics.

Now for my dialectic. Why did this approach not catch on? There contents and message of this book are similar to Rabbi Yuval Cherlow's recent work on the need for human dignity and ethics ias well as developing a Torah humanism and Cherlow based his approach on the same principles. Bieler's book may even be better grounded in the sources.

I do think that part of the answer for lack of resonance is that Rabbi Cherlow is in the newspapers and public functions every week dealing with a contemporary social and political questions. Torah uMadda and Hirsch's TIDYism were theologies for educators to develop virtue in their students and did not have a strong enough social element. For example, one does not see American Modern Orthodox leadership having much to say about the serious ethical issues of our day. In addition, there has been a shift to looking for fixed halakhic resolutions, rather than using a Hirschian or Kohlberg oriented moral training. Why the professional community wanted this halakhic approach over the other is a bigger discussion.

Finally, there might have been a sense of the correctness on the part of the advocates of the Torah uMadda approach that did not feel the need to sell itself. For example, this book seems to be lecture notes for a high school class without concern for 21st century presentation. There are long textual quotes, separate discussions in the notes, and no index, as well as a lack of ethical discussion geared for an adult who is not an educator.

In order to further the discussion, let us turn to the email response I received from Rabbi Bieler after the post by Dov Weiss. (The question and answer format was added for the blog post.) In the response, one sees a Torah Umadda that seeks to integrate Jewish history and Jewish texts but without historicism and without considering different texts as alternatives to our presentism. At the same time this approach, assumes that Torah is sophisticated and moral, without leaving a way to directly confront or condemn the overwhelming amount of non-ethical and unsophisticated forms of Torah.

1. **How do you see a tension between academics and the classroom concerning the recent book by Dov Weiss?**

Reading the book review and interview with Dov Weiss on the occasion of the publication of *Pious Irreverence: Confronting God in Rabbinic Judaism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), in which evolving depictions of the Divine are attributed to various collections of Rabbinic literature written in different epochs, once again raised in my mind a conundrum that probably confounds at least some Orthodox Jewish day school educators and community Rabbis like myself.

I would just suggest that a less untraditional approach to "God's erring and having to change His mind" would be a modeling of Divine Reevaluation or Self-Reckoning that could serve man well as a moral lesson.

In that sense, *Pesikta Rabbati,* piska 44 on "Shuva Yisrael" describing God as having to model as an exemplar case of repentance (teshuva) that can be used in educationally in order to encourage fearful Israel to emulate His example.

Rabbi Yosef Yehudah Bloch in *Shiurei Da'at* suggests, based on Rashi (Genesis 1:1), that the image in midrash of Divine repentance (teshuva) manifests that the workings of the world were recalibrated when man came on the scene, from the exclusive province of attribute of judgement (*middat hadin*), to the addition and precedence of the attribute of mercy (*middat harachamim).* This is a less radical approach than that advanced by Dov Weiss, but may be a point of view that will allow broad-minded traditionalists to "dance at both weddings," at least for a little while longer.

For this very reason, I suggest a Katuv HaShlishi HaMachria Beineihem (fig., a third approach that can ameliorate the two extreme alternatives delineated above) as a means to resolve the tension.

Rabbinic sources themselves discuss a certain "plasticity" when it comes to how God intends to be viewed, not only in different historical contexts, but even during the same period of time. The

various Names associated with and descriptions of God indicate how at different times, cGod deliberately assumes different modalities in His dealings with the world and mankind, e.g., a) "Elokim"—law and justice; b) "Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh" (the Tetragrammaton)—kindness and mercy; c) "ShaKai"—omnipotence; d) "Keil Kana"—jealous and vindictive; d) "Man of War"—Exodus 15:3; e) "Groom"—Jeremiah 2:2, etc.

To my mind, these varied guises constitute formats deliberately chosen by God in order to suit a particular time and place, rather than merely terminology attributed to Him by man due to fundamental changes in human beings' conditions and attitudes, thereby allowing a more traditional, and nevertheless complex and sophisticated approach to thinking about God.

Consequently, with respect to a book like Dov Weiss's volume, in the words of Michael Rosenak, the traditionalist will necessarily have to "translate" concepts from the world of academia into terminology and assumptions that will be appropriate for the traditional premises of the world that he inhabits.

2) What is the tension of academic and classroom understandings of texts?

As a serious student and teacher of Rabbinic sources, I feel responsible to familiarize myself with the state of research in the field. Yet at the same time, since I am not a university academic, I find myself wondering about the extent to which I can justify incorporating contemporary initiatives and discoveries within my presentations in the Modern Orthodox day school classroom and synagogue Beit Midrash, when presenting such material potentially could have adverse effects on the beliefs of my students.

Such concerns have been in the back of my mind for some time, but became starkly delineated at a conference that I attended several years ago. In 2008, the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish education at Brandeis University, hosted a series of presentations entitled "Teaching Rabbinic Literature," part of a project called "The Initiative on Bridging Scholarship and Pedagogy in Jewish Studies."

I clearly recall the point at which it became very obvious to me that there exists a significant difference in approach of the university and the day school, regarding research, learning and teaching.

At a session devoted to liturgy, when, following a most stimulating talk addressing the Biblical and Rabbinic sources that contributed to a particular prayer, the academic presenter was asked during the question-and-answer period, "How can we incorporate these ideas in our day school context where prayer is approached as an important part of students' experiential educational experience?" The frank and direct response given by the scholar was: "My students' religious outlook is not my concern and therefore I have nothing to say in this regard."

Both the day school teacher and synagogue educator, as part of their job definitions, per force must take into consideration the manner in which students are likely to respond religiously to what is being taught. While I am not advocating that day school curricula and synagogue course material be deliberately made misrepresentative of contemporary thinking and research offered

by experts in the field, to be indifferent to the ultimate effects of what is presented is, at least in my opinion, is inappropriate and even irresponsible for practitioners like myself.

Since I did not begin my Jewish education until my freshman year at Yeshiva College, I remember observing a similar dilemma with respect to how Judaic and general studies were being presented. While certain educators modeled by their personal examples how Jewish thought and practice were able to not only co-exist with, but even complement the premises underlying general studies, there were virtually no curricular contexts in which these two subject areas were directly and formally brought to bear upon one another. Consequently, students, who were required to enroll in both Judaic and general studies courses, more often than not were left to their own devices to try to resolve what they often experienced as the "cognitive dissonance" between the ideas to which they were exposed first in the morning during Judaic studies, and then over the course of each afternoon, when general studies were pursued.

Those heavily involved in the humanities, as I was, acutely experienced the conflict of such assumptions. Some students dealt with the clashing postulates with which they were continually bombarded by engaging in strenuous exercises of compartmentalization, or what Erving Goffman has elegantly referred to as "dimming the lights." Some students allowed one subject area to assume overriding precedence over the other, reducing the potentially challenging educational experience offered at Yeshiva U. to a monolithic one, comprised of either the "Yeshiva" or the "University."

Other students grappled with the conflicts head-on, with many of these eventually giving up on the idea that the two realms could coexist within their minds and outlooks.

I felt then, and have continued to believe throughout my career in day school education and the synagogue rabbinate, that students and congregants must not only honestly be presented with such conflicts, but also with strategies for the resolution of at least some of the issues raised.

It seems to me that a similar process occurs for those who wish to remain informed regarding the state of a field like Rabbinic thought, but who are at the same time are concerned that their students and congregants will be unable to understand how to reconcile the apparent "dissonance" that almost inevitably arises when the frame of reference for ideas is a historical one that has resulted in significant changes regarding how God is perceived and described by human beings over time.

3) Response to Rabbi Shagar's essay on Postmodernism

My most fundamental concern with this chapter is what I consider an internal contradiction with respect to the terms that ShaGaR employs. On the one hand, he defines post-Modernity as a position "that denies that certitude is possible" as well as legitimizing "the freedom of the individual to establish himself and his values" (p. 2). But then he states that the key to a constructive approach to religion now entails an honest "accepting the yoke of Heaven" (p. 4).

If one cannot be certain of the components of a system, and he believes that he can establish any sort of identity and values for himself, then doesn't the idea of "accepting the yoke of Heaven"

become absurd? If one cannot be sure of the idea that Torah originates with some type of objective Revelation at Sinai of both a Written and Oral Tradition, what "yoke" becomes relevant? If one defines for himself whatever it is that he feels is sincere and freely accepted, then instead of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation in favor of the Revealed Will of some Higher Power that has seemed to go hand-in-hand with the religious lifestyle, a solipsistic system is substituted which one somehow has become convinced is synonymous with the Will of Heaven. Perhaps ShaGaR understands "the yoke of Heaven" differently; I would very much be interested in understanding what this connotes within his thinking.

Secondly, his invocation of Rav Kook as someone who "attempted to come to terms with modern culture" (p. 2), drawing upon "mysticism as the seed of religion" (p. 6) is certainly evocative, but, in my opinion, fails to take into consideration that R. Kook was at the same time a firm Halachist who could even be said to have tended towards the Chumra (stringency) end of the spectrum of staking out Halachic positions. I have long thought that this objective structure supplied an anchor to R. Kook that served as a check-and-balance to his profoundly creative and original ventures into trying to hammer out new approaches to religious observance and a relationship with God. It seems to me that based upon ShaGaR's definitions of the premises of post-Modernity, such a dialectic is not possible.

Thirdly, in two contexts, ShaGaR references critics who have claimed that his approach will engender "nihilism" (p. 2, 5). While I agree that in the purest context, a disavowal of standard ideology in favor of striving to develop a personal, sincere relationship with God would be ideal and the furthest thing from nihilistic, it seems to me that an unavoidable nihilistic result would be to reduce the observant community as a whole, fractured as it might be currently, to an even looser collection of individuals who each possess a unique and "boutique" perspective on Jewish observance.

Finally, the "devil is always in the details" and ShaGaR mentions as an educational means for addressing the issues he raises in a post-Modern world, a Chassidic existential position (p. 3), and Haredi education "built from identity and not ideology" (p. 4). Diagnosing a problem is one thing; addressing how to effectively cope with it and even use it to improve what currently exists is quite another, and I for one would be very curious to learn why and how he feels such approaches could make a significant difference.

4) Why do you think Torah uMadda lost in hearts and minds of the congregants? What could have been done differently that might have changed the trajectory of Modern Orthodox history?

At the outset, I think that it is important to acknowledge that there are numerous reasons why Torah u'Madda has failed to capture the imaginations of contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy. Depending upon the frame of reference that one prefers, sociological, historical, psychological, epistemological, and theological reasons could all be brought to bear. Perhaps, as in so many areas of human existence, in order to gain as complete a picture as possible—an "eclectic" must be assembled comprised of the accounts of different individuals who each will be able to develop his/her own particular perspective regarding the issue at hand.

Having spent my working life as a religious educator in day schools and synagogues, I tend to view this, and many other issues, both religious and secular, in educational terms, once again realizing that my figurative "myopia" in this regard can't possibly capture all of the dimensions of the issue being considered.

Consequently, I have tended in my own thinking to attribute the ultimate failure of Torah u'Madda to the inability of Modern Orthodoxy's key educational institutions, Yeshiva University in particular, to self-consciously produce individuals committed to such an outlook and who are aspiring to leadership and influence in the community's key institutions, i.e., its synagogues and day schools.

Over the years, I have not found there to be a significant group of fellow-travelers who personally strive to model a Torah u'Madda philosophy in their professional and personal lives. While at times specific individuals have emerged from the community's schooling system who exemplify a Torah u'Madda approach, there never have been enough of them who by serving as community Rabbis and day school teachers, could by their examples and teaching, influence a broad swath of people to become committed to such an outlook. One can argue that charismatic teachers and Rabbis cannot be made to order; however, I believe that, at least currently, neither thought has been given nor concerted effort made to encourage the production of a critical mass of such individuals who in turn would be able to set a tone for both professionals and laymen presently referring to themselves as Modern Orthodox.

In another educational vein, even the structure by which Jewish education is delivered, beginning when subject areas are departmentalized in Jewish day schools, usually during Middle School years, countermands the development of a Torah u'Madda approach. Torah u'Madda is by definition an interdisciplinary approach, whereby elements of Jewish tradition and general studies are brought to bear upon one another. However, over the course of a departmentalized school day, not only are, e.g., English and TaNaCh, History and Talmud, Hebrew language and French, Mathematics and Jewish thought, usually presented in splendid isolation from one another, but even the subjects within the Judaic studies and general studies curriculum are rarely allowed to interact within the classroom. While occasionally, some teachers may personally be conversant with "both sides of the curriculum," the need to cover ground in the highly pressurized context of a double curriculum educational setting, usually precludes them from regularly incorporating "outside" ideas and thoughts into the classroom context.

Extra-curricular activities and experiences in youth groups and summer camps have focused upon affective rather than cognitive aspects of Jewish thinking, and therefore have not promoted a Tora U'Madda outlook.

Returning to the post-secondary educational scene, as well as the training of future congregational Rabbis and day school teachers, R. Aharon Lichtenstein, Z"L, a powerful exemplar of Torah u'Mada both by personal example as well in his teaching and writing, once commented that university education for many Modern Orthodox Jews has become the study of "sophisticated plumbing," I.e., vocational training rather than an exploration and quest to better understand the human condition. Such a relatively narrow approach to the college learning experience, was clearly evident to me with respect to many of R. Aharon's own Talmud students.

During the time that I was a member of his Talmud class as an undergraduate at Yeshiva during 1968-9, Rav Aharon would often quote from various classical literary sources during the course of his presentations, something that I particularly admired, but also felt did not "register" all that much with most of my fellow students.

The essential dismissal of his citations from, e.g., Milton, Locke and James, took on even sharper focus, when, during a Sabbatical in Israel twenty years later, I attended his weekly Shiurim at the Gruss Institute in Jerusalem, a Kollel for YU Semicha students (candidates for Rabbinic ordination). When R. Aharon would, as his wont, cite some great secular thinker, I noted that the students would often look at one another and smile, saying, things like "There he goes again," in a respectful, but clearly dismissive fashion. To my mind, this indicated that while they deeply respected and recognized R. Aharon's extraordinary breadth of knowledge and powers of analysis, it was his Torah erudition that they cared about, not the dimension of his thinking regarding the giants of Western culture, which I certainly continue to believe, contributed mightily to his overall spiritual personality and Weltanschaung.

I believe that a similar phenomenon could be observed with respect to R. Aharon's father-in-law, R. Soloveitchik, Z"L. The Rav's broad understanding of subject areas that included philosophy, literature, and theology were never broached within the context of the Semicha classes that I attended, and one only became apprised of the extent of his familiarity with these subject areas while listening to various talks that he gave to other groups, or reading particular sets of his writings.

If even the students exposed to great individuals like the Rav and R. Aharon, were inspired to emulate only their Torah learning, but not also their broad familiarity with secular ideas and culture, it seems to me that it should not come as a surprise why Torah uMadda has not become the sine qua none of Modern Orthodox American Jewry.

[AB- site editor] **Now my dialectic kicks in again. I wonder how this might have been the fault of the Torah uMadda followers themselves?** In the 1990's, there were several score of rabbis and teachers who advocated Torah uMadda ready to ascend to the leadership positions that they assumed were destined to be theirs. What happened? Were they too introvert and cerebral? Were they just lacking political and leadership skills? Was the Torah that they were teaching irrelevant? Or did they just think that the future was already theirs so they did not have to fight for spiritual control of the community? I know many rabbis who are not comfortable with either the current YU Orthodoxy or with Open Orthodoxy and yearn for their 1986 or 1994 Torah uMadda vision. Do the answers above give clues to the change?

Modern Orthodox Jewish Education (my voice)

Maybe Jack Bieler's article below may help. It is his 2008 "Vision of a Modern Orthodox Jewish Education" (Mandel Leadership Institute) where he offers an ideal vision of a day school education. I would like my readers who are educators to read it. It is a wonderful essay that did not get the attention it deserved. First, he advocates an integrated approach like Hirsch's Frankfort HS, in which the general studies teachers such as biology, English, and history are able

to be religious Jews who can model integration. Second, education should be a midwifing of the students to find their own selves and voices, not worksheets and memorization.

Bieler gives eight aspirations of an integrated education that includes moral education, God in our lives, religion as part of broader culture and civilization, contribution to the quality of the wider culture, the need for spiritual reflection, to understand that answers will not come from fixed halakha but from creating an overall philosophy, theology and worldview that will develop within the student an almost instinctual awareness as to how to act, reflection on rote practice, and to combat the natural human tendency to differentiate oneself from other- both Jewish and non-Jewish- through constantly being on guard against socially disruptive isolationist tendencies. The list is part Hirschian, part Victorian, and part similar to the vision of the Catholic intellectual tradition. This is a great list that educators should think about.

Bieler advocates directly dealing with the question of theology, faith, morality, issues raised in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and religious experience to which he suggests to integrate the sociology, psychology and history of religion in general and poetic literature exploring the relationship between God and man and the nature of authority. He also advises to bring in the arts and media, contemporary issues, and moral education. This is different than those who want to talk about how the Modern Orthodox greats of the past read Western books; this is an approach for integration in the future. (Also notice how different this vision of education is than the recent turn to Neo-Chassidus, outreach, enthusiasm and emotionalism).

5) Vision of a Modern Orthodox Jewish Education (Bieler's voice- selections from a 34 page article)

[M]ost Modern Orthodox institutions inherently are more likely to be figuratively "schizophrenic" and literally compartmentalized with respect to their educational vision. Asserting that equal attention must be paid to both Judaic and general studies has proven to be extremely problematic from the perspective of some if not all stake-holders in these institutions, i.e., subject matter specialists, teachers, students and the general community. To find educational theorists, instructors, students and parent bodies who embody and adhere to the educational ideal referred to as Torah uMadda (Torah and Knowledge/Science) and Torah Im Derech Eretz (Torah and the ways of the World) has not only proven difficult in the past, but has become increasingly so as religious movements in general have taken a rightward turn.

My favorite metaphor describing a teacher's role in the educational process is "midwifery." The underlying assumption driving such a metaphor is that the educational process is essentially student-centered. The teacher's primary preoccupation is to help the student find himself, his voice, his aptitude, his passion in religious and secular disciplines and activities. To achieve such an aim, the instructor must undertake to expose his disciple to all sorts of materials and ways of thinking in order that the student can ultimately discover what "resonates" within him, what will elicit within himself a powerful response and substantive intellectual curiosity, how he might become drawn to maximize his own unique potential, talents and skill set.

A philosophical commitment to Modern Orthodoxy from my perspective includes the following assumptions:

1. a) an awareness of an ongoing, personal involvement with God in both our individual lives as well as in all aspects of human history;
2. b) the sensibility that Judaism is part and parcel of the broadest possible understanding and conceptualization of human civilization and therefore by definition can be harmonized, at least to some degree, with many, if not most, of its widely-held perspectives and values;
3. c) the assumption that human beings while not inherently inclined to act evilly, nevertheless require explicit moral guidance and development in order for them to transcend natural human self-absorption and self-interest in order to rise to the highest levels of personal spiritual idealism and interpersonal altruism;
4. d) the belief that even an observant Jew must strive to make a significant contribution to the general quality of life of his fellow citizens, including members of non-Jewish society;
5. e) the premise that specifically because all human beings, including observant Jews, are intended to participate in a meaningful manner within the greater society, they will be exposed and attracted to innumerable activities that can potentially easily sidetrack them from devoting appropriate time to the sort of spiritual reflection and growth that would allow them to realize their spiritual potentials.
6. f) the awareness that participation within general human society will entail encountering manifold situations that are not clearly delineated within the Codes of Jewish law and other primary texts of our tradition. Therefore in order for the Modern Orthodox Jew to act consistently in accordance with Jewish values and tradition in situations that are either unprecedented or where he does not have the time to be able to direct inquiries to Halachic authorities, he will have to possess a sense of not only how to carry out individual Commandments, but also the overall philosophy, theology and worldview that underlie these Commandments, which in turn will develop within him an almost instinctual awareness as to how to act Jewishly a times when no authoritative religious guidance is available to him;
7. g) the concern that because traditional Jewish observance consists of behaviors that often entail daily multiple repetitions, in order for the individual to maintain a sense of freshness and vitality with respect to his religious practices, it is important for him to strive to constantly reflect upon these practices, seeking new insights, perspectives and intents in order that at least internally and spiritually, each repetition will ideally constitute a constantly rejuvenating and evolving approach to expressing one's commitment to the Divine;and
8. h) the realization that in order to combat the natural human tendency to differentiate oneself from others in order to achieve distinctiveness and a personal sense of identity, traditional Jews often perceive their religious observance as setting themselves apart not only from non-Jews, but also from their less observant co-religionists. Since Modern Orthodoxy emphasizes the value of recognizing the commonality that Jews share in terms of their history, origins and values, regardless of religious orientation, it becomes necessary to constantly be on guard against socially disruptive isolationist tendencies that would create barriers between the members of the Jewish people;

Examples of such interdisciplinary, integrated issues might include:

1. The sociology, psychology and history of religion in general and Judaism in particular;
2. Poetic literature of various cultures exploring the relationship between God and man;
3. Theories regarding Creation, Intelligent Design and evolution;
4. The implications of the concept of infinity from religious, mathematical, philosophical and scientific perspectives;
5. The history of authority and kingship in religious and general thought. humanistic study of the highest order. Examples of such materials might include:
6. Biblical, Midrashic and Talmudic depictions of general human nature as well as individuals who either rose or fell when confronted by existential moral dilemmas;
7. Literature that foreshadowed, was produced or influenced by the Mussar Movement;
8. Classics of world literature, historical accounts and diaries, as well as contemporary media such as film, music, drama, TV programs, etc. in which situations present themselves that are morally challenging;
9. The depiction of contemporary events in the press, on the internet, in journals that center on ethical conundrums;
10. Inviting religious personalities to make presentations regarding the moral issues that they have had to deal with in their professional lives, as well as the types of problem-solving in which they had to engage in order to attempt to resolve these challenges.