

Slifkin - Coffer Debate

From Toriah.com

The following is a slightly edited version of an ongoing email debate between Rabbi Slifkin of zootorah.org (<http://www.zootorah.org>) and Rabbi Coffer of toriah.org (<http://www.toriah.org>) . The dialogue was initiated by Rabbi Slifkin in an attempt to understand Rav Shlomo Miller's condemnation of his position. Rav Miller's original letter of condemnation, translated and annotated, may be found here (<http://toriah.org/misc/RNS/misc/Rabb-SE-Miller-re-Slifkin-Eng.pdf>) .

In order to facilitate comprehensibility, headers have been used to identify the speaker. **RNS** stands for R' Nosson Slifkin and **RSC** stands for R' Simcha Coffer. The contents of the debate have been separated by date and subdivided by topic. Please note: There were many subsequent emails which took place between October 28 and December 10. These communications had responses from both parties interspersed amongst the comments of the previous emails. Anytime there was a remark added in at a later date, it is indented and inserted in the body of the original text. In order to preserve the natural 'flow' of the dialogue, the reader is encouraged to skip these insertions until reading the entire original comment.

All queries regarding this dialogue may be addressed to the respective parties by clicking on the 'Contacts' tab in the above-noted websites.

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September 11, 2006 – September 17, 2006

Introduction

RNS

Dear Dr. Ostroff,

I have several very precise questions for Rav Miller, and I would appreciate it if you could obtain precise answers. I do not wish to hear yours or Rabbi Coffe's suggestions as to what Rav Miller might theoretically say; I wish to know his actual responses. I believe that this would achieve clarity for many people who are very confused and involved in dispute as to what Rav Miller's views actually are.

RSC

Dear Rabbi Slifkin רבינו,

Simcha Coffe here. Dr. Ostroff and I occasionally respond to each other's emails. In this case, I will be responding.

In fulfillment of your above directive, I showed your email to Rav Miller this morning and requested direct answers to your questions. Despite the fact that he is enormously busy, he agreed to respond to some of your questions. The comments I write below are what I gleaned from my interchange with Rav Miller on your behalf.

Kefirah in the Fundamentals of Shabbos

RNS

1) On what basis are my views concerning Maase Bereishis to be classified as "kefirah"? What are the "fundamentals of faith" that I have contravened?

RSC

The “fundamentals of faith” you have contravened relate to the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. The problem can be summarized in three short paragraphs.

Chazal (Chagiga 12a) state that the name Shin-Dalet-Yud represents the idea that during the creative process the universe continued to expand “like two clues of warp” until the end of the creative process at which point Hashem said “*dai*”, enough, and established the final limitations of physical law. What emerges from this *maamar chazal* is as follows:

- 1) There are two exclusive periods in the history of the universe; the “Creation” period and the “post-Creation” period. During the Creation period, the emerging laws of nature remained in a constant state of flux. This represented the period of Creation. Subsequently, Hashem said “*dai*” and “reigned in the expansion”, that is, he stabilized the laws of nature such that they became static, unchanging.
- 2) The creative process did not happen all at once. It lasted the entire *sheshes yimey bereishis* and culminated with Shabbos at which point the creative process was suspended and the laws of nature permanently fixed. Shabbos is a commemoration of this idea as the *pasuk* states (Shmos 20:10)... why have I commanded you to keep the Shabbos on the seventh day? “*ki*” because, “*sheshes yamim asa Hashem es hashamayim...vayanch bayom hashevee’ee...al kayn...* therefore I have sanctified the seventh day etc. In other words, the creation process was not an instantaneous affair but lasted a duration of time referred to as *sheshes yamim* and we celebrate Shabbos on the seventh day to commemorate this event.
- 3) There are two ramifications that surface from the above-stated idea.
 - a) Inasmuch as the the creative process existed only during the Creation period, it cannot be duplicated using post-Creation period imperatives.
 - b) Attempting to reconcile post-Creation imperatives with the fundamental dynamics of the Creation period is essentially impossible.

In Rav Miller’s opinion, advancing a theory which contravenes ramification (a) by conflating these two distinct periods is considered a fundamental *kefira* in Shabbos whereas attempting to reconcile phenomena which appear to contradict the Torah by positing, say, day-age theories, in opposition to ramification (b) does not necessarily constitute *kefira*.

Allow me to explain. When you conclude that “Naturalistic Darwinian evolution is fully compatible with religion” (Challenge of Creation pg. 294) or that “the blind-watchmaker thesis need not be incompatible with G-d” (Science of Torah pg. 193; Challenge of Creation pg. 297) you have in essence contravened the first of the two ramifications above. The reason is because evolution is a purely naturalistic process (albeit guided by G-d) which can, and currently is being duplicated in the post-Creation period. The problem is, ramification (a) states that the creation process is unable to be duplicated via the normal *chukey haTeva* which obtain in the post-Creation period without a specialized *ma’amar* Hashem to activate this process. When we celebrate Shabbos, we are testifying to the idea that the world came about via a unique, meta-natural creative process which is entirely removed from the current *chukey haTeva*. We are affirming that the current laws of nature are entirely inadequate as a means of bringing about the phenomena of the universe.

To clarify further, the role of “Boreh” is entirely different than the role of “Manhig” in the sense that the very laws of nature, the imperatives which govern the cosmos, space, time, mass, energy, life etc., all this was only

able to come into existence via Hashem exercising his role as Boreh. Subsequently, His relationship to the universe was transformed from Boreh to that of Manhig by the suspension of the creative process and the establishment of the laws of nature and the fixity of the various species of life on earth. These laws continue to exist in their present form but cannot, under any circumstances, be understood as possessing the ability of self-perpetuation. For that, only the role of Boreh suffices. Thus, by subscribing to the evolutionary paradigm which utilizes currently understood laws of nature to describe the appearance of all of the species of life on earth, one is contravening the idea that these laws are inadequate as a means of perpetuating life. It is contravening the idea that only Hashem, functioning in His role as Boreh, can possibly bring about life whether plant, animal or human. The same issue applies to other theories such as Big Bang cosmology. Since Shabbos was established specifically to commemorate this very idea, by subscribing to origins theories which utilize post-Creation imperatives, we undermine the very essence of Shabbos.

As far as ramification (b) is concerned, Rav Miller feels that if someone wishes to believe that the universe is billions of years old and the six day period of *maaseh bereishis* is six time periods, he is not undermining Shabbos as long as he believes that these billions of years all occurred within the framework of *beriah* which does not utilize currently understood laws of nature and thus cannot be duplicated today. As far as Rav Miller's personal position, he believes in a literal six day creation because he believes in the *messorah* and sees no reason to contravene it. This is why he cited the *ma'amar chazal* regarding Kayin and Hevel's birth. Since the very laws of nature themselves were first being formed during the Creation period, any number of ostensibly random violations of those laws was possible. Thus, what looks to us like a billion year universe could have conceivably, or rather, theoretically, occurred all within this six day period. The actual truth is entirely unknowable because we do not possess a frame of reference by which we can compare (as the *pasuk* in *Iyov* states "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you possess understanding" 38:4) and thus he feels that the best course of action is to simply follow the *messorah*.

The following is a portion of a new letter by Rav Miller. It is based on private notes he made to himself which I subsequently brought to draft quality. He has seen the letter and fully authorizes it. I think it says it all.

ובנוגע למה שכתבנו לענין ששת ימי בראשית, הנה ידוע שהקב"ה בורא ומנהיג עולמו, והנה זמן בריאת העולם נמשך כל ששת ימי בראשית וכמאמרם ז"ל בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם. והנה אלו שרוצים להתאים טעארות של אלו שנקראים חכמי הטבע לאמונתן בששת ימי בראשית לא ימלטו מלכשל בעקרי תורתנו הקדושה שהרי אמונתנו בששת ימי בראשית הוא מעקרי האמונה וכל ענין שביתתנו בשבת הוא להעיד שהקב"ה ברא עולמו בו' ימים וביום השביעי שבת ואמר לעולמו די ואז נחקקו חקי הטבע כמו שאנו רואים היום. אולם יסוד נודע בחכמת הטבע שאם מצד הטבע גרידא יצא דבר כזה א"כ אפשר לאותו דבר לחזור ולהשנות עוד הפעם וא"כ אלו וכדומה, על כרחך שיטתם היא שמצד הטבע יוכל להשנות עוד Big Bang Theory המחזיקים הפעם שהרי מצד חקי הטבע שנוהגים עתה נעשה הדבר מתחילה ואם קרה פעם אחת בהכרח שיש אפשרות לקרות עוד הפעם.

אולם מיסודי אמונתנו הוא שרק ע"י עשרה מאמרות נבראו שמים וארץ, וא"כ מצד חקי הטבע בלי שתוף רצון הקב"ה לשנות ולבראות עולמו כבראשונה נמנע הוא מן המציאות שיברא עוד הפעם... אבל מעקרי האמונה הוא שכשנגמר מע"ב והקב"ה שבת ממלאכתו א"א בשום אופן שיתחדש הבריאה עוד הפעם ע"פ חקי הטבע אם לא ע"י רצונו יתברך ושינוי הנהגתו ממנהיג לבורא. והרוצים לפרש שכל ענין הבריאה היתה אך ורק יש מאין ומאז ועד עתה מתיחס הקב"ה לעולמו רק בתורת מנהיג הרי זה כפירה בששת ימי בראשית אשר אנו מעידים ע"ז בכל שבת.

Ad kan Rav Miller. From here on in I will be using the above representation to answer some of your questions below.

Explaining the Psak

RNS

2) Considering that this is a very sweeping condemnation that applies to thousands of ehrliche Jews who share my views, and it is one that has caused a widespread uproar, why has Rav Miller not to date explained this psak?

RSC

Rav Miller feels that his original letter included an explanation and I feel that my translation and footnotes adequately portrayed his meaning. However, in case the initial explanation was insufficient, Rav Miller is now taking his time to respond to your questions.

Kefirah but not a Kofer

RNS

3) Does firmly believing in kefirah make one into a kofer, and if not, why not?

RSC

I asked Rav Miller this question and he responded that as long as the espouser is a '*shogeg*', he doesn't have the *din* of a *kofer*. Rav Miller considers you a *shogeg* in the sense that, in his opinion, you are merely confused regarding certain elements of *hashkafa*, and thus you, or anyone who follows your *mehalech*, cannot be deemed a *kofer*. (*ad kan* Rav Miller)

I personally have a source which supports this *psak* and have posted it on the Avodah forum of the Aishdas website on several occasions to defend your honour from those who use pejorative terms against you such as *kofer*. Please note: the following presentation is mine, not Rav Miller's.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3:7) categorizes one who believes that Hashem is corporeal as a '*min*', an apostate. The Ra'avad has some sharp words for the Rambam and, in our version of the Yad, claims as follows (all translations in this paper are my own)

“Why did he (the Rambam) refer to this person as a *min*? Many who were greater and better than the Rambam followed this idea (the corporeality of G-d) because of what they saw in the verses (of the Torah) and even more so, what they saw in the words of the *aggados* (of the Talmud) which cause a distortion of attitudes in one's mind (if not learned properly)”

The Kesef Mishneh protests the Ra'avad's sharp words but essentially agrees with him and points to a much tamer version of the Ra'avad's criticism brought down in the Sefer halkkarim 1:2. The following are some select portions from that *sefer* which will shed light on Rav Miller's enigmatic psak.

“Every Jew must believe that everything stated in the Torah is absolutely true. One who denies something in the Torah while simultaneously being aware that the opinion he is denying is indeed the view of the Torah, is referred to as a '*kofer*'... however, one who upholds the laws of Moses

and believes in its fundamentals, and when he comes to analyze the Torah from an intellectual perspective or from a perspective of biblical analysis, his study leads him to err and to say that one of the fundamentals of the Torah is not as it would seem, or his study has caused him to err and entirely deny a particular fundamental etc. one like this is not referred to as a *kofer*. Rather, he is to be included amongst the ranks of the wise and righteous of our nation although he is erring in his study, is inadvertently sinning, and requires atonement”.

Later on he writes as follows:

“Even if one believes the exact opposite of one of the fundamentals of the Torah because he is (sincerely) erring in his analysis, it is inappropriate to refer to him as an apostate for this is what the Ra’avad appended when the Rambam wrote that one who corporealizes G-d is referred to as a *min* – ‘*amar Avraham*, although this (G-d’s lack of corporeality) is surely a fundamental, one who believes that G-d possesses a body because he takes the verses of the Torah or the *aggados* literally cannot be referred to as a *min*”

Well, there you have it. A perfectly clear explanation of Rav Miller’s *psak* which accounts for a doctrine being *kefira* without its espouser adopting the accompanying “accolade”. And although Rav Miller is strongly opposed to your views, to the point where he considers some of them *kefira*, I think it is important to understand that from a *halachic* standpoint, Rav Miller does not consider you a *kofer*.

RNS

4) Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman suggests that the days of Bereishis were each billions of years long. Does Rav Miller consider this view to be *kefirah*? Is it within the spectrum of acceptable views?

RSC

My presentation above addresses this question. Rav Miller doesn’t consider it *kefira* as long as the billions of years are understood to be within the framework of ‘Beriah’ as opposed to post-Creation. However he considers it to contravene our *messorah* and sees no reason to have to posit such a *shita*. Incidentally, can you kindly provide the source for your quote from Rav Hoffman?

RNS

It's in his commentary to the chumash p. 48

The Abarbanel

RNS

5) Shem Tov, Abarbanel and Akeidas Yitzchak explained that Rambam believed that the six days were not time periods but rather represent a hierarchy of creation. Does Rav Miller consider this view to be *kefirah*? Is it within the spectrum of acceptable views?

RSC

First of all, I disagree with you regarding the Abarbanel and Shem Tov. Let’s take the Abarbanel for example. Although you are correct that the Abarbanel seems to attribute the hierarchy opinion of Creation to the Rambam, this is only his initial impression based on the Ralbag and Narboni. This attribution can be found in the Abarbanel’s *pirush* on *chumash* Bereishis (1:1) question #9. However, in chapter 2, just after question #42,

the Abarbanel retracts his position and says as follows:

"Behold you see that the opinion of the Rav (the Rambam) was not that all of *maaseh bereishis* was an allegory, rather, only a small part of it (some elements in the second chapter of Bereishis, not the first), and that all which is mentioned [in the Torah] regarding the activity of the six days, from the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all of the phenomena, and the creation of Adam and his wife, up until [the passage of] "v'yichulu", have no allegory whatsoever for everything was [understood as] literal to him and therefore you will see that in this very chapter, #30 in the second section, in all which the Rav has explicated regarding the activity of the six days, he did not make [of *maaseh bereishis*] an allegory or a hint (*pirush tzurayi oh remez*) at all; rather, he did the exact opposite, for he made a concerted effort to support the doctrine of creation ex nihilo and [thus] accepted all of the verses literally..." (Abarbanel - Bereishis page 86, second column, 14 lines down)

There are several noteworthy comments.

When the Abarbanel wishes to characterize the ‘hierarchal scenario’ of creation, he refers to it as *tzurayi* (i.e. form, allegory – see for instance bottom of page 85, left column and top of page 86 right column) and thus when he ultimately states “he did not make [of *maaseh bereishis*] an allegory or a hint (*pirush tzurayi oh remez*) at all” he means that the Rambam entirely rejected the hierarchal *pirush*.

Now, you may ask, what gives me licence to adopt the Abarbanel’s second presentation and ignore the first? Perhaps I am misinterpreting the latter Abarbanel? To which I would respond that the Abarbanel on his actual *pirush* to the Moreh (Standard Ibn Tibbon edition pg. 64b first column on the bottom) states as much. In fact, he states precisely what Rav Miller says. Here’s a translation.

“And the Rav (Rambam) also meant with this to what he stated at the end of chapter 29 and chapter thirty of this *chelek*, and this is that the true *chiddush* (i.e. creation from nothing) is what is described in the verses regarding the six days of creation...and it is entirely literal and therefore the seventh day was the day of rest to demonstrate that after all was completed on the sixth day, nothing more was created...and in order to testify to this great thing, Shabbos was established as the seventh day to hint at and make known that absolutely nothing was created after the sixth day...”

However, to answer your question, yes, Rav Miller would feel that such a position is *kefira* in Shabbos and in fact, the Abarbanel himself, when first attributing the hierarchy position to the Rambam, says much worse things. For instance, he says “notwithstanding the Rambam’s lofty Torah position, his opinion is clearly false” (pg 10 second column four lines from the bottom) and he accuses the Rambam of “contradicting the verses and distorting them” (5 lines later) or he states (pg. 12 second column) “what emerges from all this is the absolute nullification of the Rambam’s words and opinions in this matter” and he even says “what will the Rambam answer in front of the Ribbono shel Olam when he is asked ‘where did you receive the licence to make a *tzura* in some of *maaseh bereishis* etc.” As far as his own *shita*, the Abarbanel quotes the Ramban

“and know that the days mentioned in *maaseh bereishis* were, in the creation of the heaven and earth and their offshoots, real days, composed of hours and minutes and they were six, just like the literal meaning of the verses implies...”

and then the Abarbanel waxes poetic and states “may my soul die the death of the righteous and may its end be

like his (i.e the Ramban's).

Dinosaurs and the Geologic Column

RNS

6) Many people have assured me that Rav Miller is a great expert in science. In light of that, I have some questions as to his views on science. Does Rav Miller believe that dinosaurs existed at the same time as man?

RSC

Rav Miller did not want to get into this aspect of the Creation controversy. When I asked him why not, he responded that it was immaterial. As long as one believes that everything was created within the framework of *beriah* as explained above, the belief does not undermine the *ikar* of Shabbos although, as stated, Rav Miller believes in the *messorah*.

It should be mentioned that although Rav Miller has chosen not to address the academic aspects of your book head on, this does not mean that he feels threatened by the science; he simply feels that the most important thing to tackle at this point is the *kefradic* aspect of subscribing to the evolutionary paradigm. And although I personally would love to respond to the issues you raise regarding palaeontology and the like, since this email is about Rav Miller's *shittos*, I shall refrain from doing so. However, I would like to note that both Dr. Ostroff and I have much to say regarding both the scientific elements of your books and the Torah sources you quote and are currently in the midst of addressing them.

RNS

7) Approximately how many consecutive generations of dinosaurs does Rav Miller believe to have existed? In the region of one, or in the region of many thousands?

RSC

He does not have an opinion. But as I mentioned, he

- 1) considers it immaterial
- 2) chooses to follow the *messorah* i.e. 5766.

RNS

8) Based on the different strata of rock in which fossils appear, scientists divide the history of life into several periods. The Cambrian, Ordovician and Silurian featured only aquatic species, most of which are long extinct. The Devonian through Permian periods featured different species such as ammonites and non-dinosaurian reptile-like animals. The Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous each featured different types of dinosaurs. The Pliocene, Miocene, Oligocene, Eocene, and Paleocene each featured different types of mammals. The Pleistocene features still different types of mammals that are now extinct, such as mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers.

Does Rav Miller believe that all these types of animals existed simultaneously, and if so, why are their fossils found in different strata? If they did not exist simultaneously, but at different points during the six days, then in what sense can that period be meaningfully described as six days (i.e. surely if a person were to go back in a time-machine to that period, he would experience the passage of great amounts of time)?

RSC

Ditto.

(I can barely hold myself back from responding but this email is dedicated solely to Rav Miller's *shittos* as per your request)

Reyach Minus

RNS

9) Rav Miller writes that I denigrate the Sages (presumably referring to when I claim that they erred in certain scientific matters), and that I should instead have followed the ways of the Gedolei Yisrael of all generations who instead said "I do not understand." However the following authorities all stated that the Sages erred in science:

Rav Sherira Gaon, who states that Chazal erred in medicine;

Rambam, who states that Chazal erred in astronomy;

Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, who states that Chazal did not receive science from Sinai and therefore occasionally erred;

Tosafos (Eruvin 76b), who states that some of Chazal erred in basic mathematics;

Maharam Schick, who states that the Gemara in Pesachim shows that the Sages erred in astronomy;

Ridvaz, who states that some of Chazal thought the world to be flat;

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who states that Chazal mistakenly thought that mice spontaneously generate;

Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, who states that Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam's view is appropriate to adopt;

Rabbi Gedalyah Nadel, who told me personally that Chazal erred in thinking that lice spontaneously generate.

RSC

Rav Miller did not respond in a point by point fashion to your above query and although I personally would like to respond I will dispense with my opinions for the time being. What he did say was that you are displaying an improper attitude towards *chazal* and when he wrote the words "*reyach minus*" in his first letter, this is what he was referring to. Rav Miller feels that this attitude towards *chazal* is also what caused you to err in the issue of creation.

RNS

To this list I could add many others. This leads me to ask the following questions:

10a) I would like to know whether Rav Miller considers these authorities to have been denigrating the Sages, and if not, then why not.

RSC

As I mentioned, Rav Miller declined to comment on these type questions, at least for now.

Lo Zachisi L'havin

RNS

10b) I would also like to know how he reconciles these views with his statement that the Gedolei Yisrael of all generations, when faced with sugyas that are contradicted by science, said that they do not understand and did

not say that Chazal erred.

RSC

You are misquoting Rav Miller. He never said anything about *sugyos* which contradict science. He said that if one runs into a *sugya* he doesn't understand, he should say *lo zachisi l'havin* and he brought a *ma'amr chazal* to prove his point. This is most certainly a time-honored tradition amongst all *talmeday chachamim* although there might be scattered incidents in the *gemara* where we do not necessarily follow the conclusions of *chazal* such as medicine. Besides, he does not consider Evolution a 'science' which contradicts any *sugyos* in the *gemara*.

RNS

10c) I would also like to know whether he considers it acceptable for a person to accept the positions of the above authorities, and if not, then why not.

RSC

This question is too broad to answer. I personally have a response for each and every source you quoted but I truthfully don't know what Rav Miller's opinions are and to be honest, he didn't even have enough time to finish reading your entire email. He took most of his time explaining his *shita* regarding the Shabbos issue and then had to get back to the phone to answer *shailos*. If you want my conjecture, perhaps Rav Miller would not consider some of the *shittos* you mention above as *kefiradic* although he may very well differ with them. To be honest, I'd like to focus on the more substantial issues for now. I can always go back to him later for more detailed answers regarding the other issues.

September 20, 2006 – September 21, 2006

Request for Clarification

RNS

Thank you for obtaining answers to at least some of my questions. Since you mention that a lengthier paper is being prepared, I will wait for that.

RSC

The paper that is being prepared is, for the most part, a general review of the sources delineated in your books, both Torah and science, whereas Rav Miller's argument is much more focused and deals directly with the *kefira* aspect of the naturalistic approach to *maaseh bereishis*. Consequently, his *shita* stands independent of any papers Dr. Ostroff or I intend to release. As such, it would be nice to see some sort of response from you regarding this issue for, as you write, there are "thousands of *erliche* Jews" that have adopted your opinions and thus it seems quite urgent that we attempt to arrive at a final determination regarding both the *halachic* and *hashkafic* validity of maintaining your view of *maaseh bereishis* as a process that unfolded naturally using currently understood laws of nature.

The Abarbanel and the Rambam

The Abarbanel

RNS

At this stage I will merely point out that you are misunderstanding the Abarbanel. Considering that he explains Rambam's position on the non-chronological sequence with very definitive language, then proceeds to sharply dispute it, it is most unreasonable to think that SIXTY-SEVEN pages later he has decided that Rambam didn't really hold that view at all without explicitly spelling that out.

RSC

Assuming for the time being that you are correct and that the contrast between the first and second quote in the Abarbanel seems inexplicable, why didn't you quote both sources in your book? After all, the Abarbanel says clearly in the second quote that the Rambam did not make a *mashal* or *tzura* of *maaseh bereishis*. Furthermore, the Abarbanel states openly in Moreh Nevuchim (2:31) that the Rambam's opinion is that *maaseh bereishis* is not a *mashal*. In addition, he associates it directly with the *mitzvah* of resting specifically on the seventh day as opposed to any other day exactly like Rav Miller's *shita*. I would have expected to have seen all the sources in the Abarbanel quoted, pro and con. This way your readers would be fully apprised of the situation.

However, as it happens, I have a response to your *ikar ta'ana*. You write as follows:

“Considering that he explains Rambam's position on the non-chronological sequence with very definitive language, then proceeds to sharply dispute it, it is most unreasonable to think that SIXTY-SEVEN pages later he has decided that Rambam didn't really hold that view at all without explicitly spelling that out.”

The problem is, he does spell it out, very clearly. On page 85 he revisits the whole literal versus allegorical approach controversy which he discussed in the first *perek*. He then makes a tally of the literalists versus allegorists with Rashi and the Ramban on the right and the Rambam and Ralbag on the left and even revisits his criticism against the Rambam (what will the Rambam answer to Hashem when He asks him how he felt justified in interpreting *maaseh bereishis* as a *mashal* and *tzura*) but then he qualifies (as opposed to contradicts) his criticism and states that the Rambam was only making a *mashal* and *tzura* of *certain* elements in the second *perek* of Bereishis such as the *nachash* or the *eitz ha'daas*. However, as far as *maaseh bereishis* as described in the first *perek* of Bereishis

“the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it [*maaseh bereishis*]... (pg. 86 first column 15 lines up).

Hence, there is no contradiction between the Abarbanel's criticism on page 10 and his statements on page 86. He is not being *chozer* from his criticism on page 10; nor is he being *chozer* from his position that the Rambam allegorized certain elements. The only *chazara* pertains to which elements he allegorized. Thus, the juxtaposition of these two sources in the Abarbanel is perfectly reasonable.

Seven Unambiguous Quotes from the Rambam

The truth is the Abarbanel had no choice in the matter. The Rambam is so clear regarding this issue that it is impossible to think differently. Here are several *mareh mikomos*.

1. When the Rambam discusses the grammatical connotation of the word *va'yanach* in the *dibra* which relates to Shabbos (Shmos 20:10), the Rambam states as follows:

“[and the grammatical context of the word *vayanach*] is that [Hashem] caused reality to perpetuate in the state that it existed on the seventh day. In other words, every single day of the six days saw a process which caused new events to come into existence, [a process] which transcends the fixed nature which currently obtains in the universe in general (Moreh 1:67 - Kapach ed. pg. 111).

2. Along the same lines, the Rambam writes:

“From amongst the things that you must very much contemplate is that it (the Torah) mentions the creation of man in the six days of creation and it states “He created them male and female”. It concludes [the episode of] all of creation and states “And the heavens and earth were completed and all of their hosts”. After this it relates another beginning to the creation of [Adam and Chava and states that] Chava [came] from Adam, and it mentions the tree of life and tree of knowledge, and the story of the snake and what occurred, and it makes (i.e. establishes) that all this occurred after Adam was placed in Gan Eden. All of the wise men, may their memory be blessed, concur that this episode occurred on the sixth day [of creation] and that nothing will change after the six days of creation, and therefore none of the things from amongst those we mentioned [above] are distant (i.e. farfetched) because the laws of nature were not crystallized as of yet.” (Moreh 2:30 - Kapach ed. pg. 236)

3. The Rambam states in Moreh Nevuchim that every episode related in the Torah is there for one of two purposes. Either it is there to reinforce a *hashkafa* which relates to one of the fundamentals of the Torah, or it appears in the Torah as a form of *tikun olam*, a societal infrastructure which facilitates harmony amongst mankind. If so, asks the Rambam, what is the purpose of all the generations listed between Adam haRishon and Avraham Avinu? Here's the Rambam's response:

“Since it is a fundamental doctrine of the Torah that the world is newly created and that the first [human] creation was Adam and that the time which elapsed from Adam to Moshe is approximately 2,500 years...etc.”

and the Rambam goes on to explain that anyone viewing such a diversified world with so many inhabitants belonging to so many different cultures speaking so many different languages spread out over such large geographical locations, might doubt the recentness of creation and the fact that initially, only one man was created. Therefore, the Torah goes out of its way to list the specific generations which unfolded from Adam to Moshe, who their leaders were, what occurred to them, and that they originally all spoke one language as one would expect from a society which descended from one lone man (Moreh 3:50 - Kapach ed. pg 400)

4. When the Rambam discusses the *mitzvah* of *shemitta* and *yovel*, he identifies the precise historical year this *mitzvah* first took place as follows:

“When did they first start to count? 14 years after they entered the land...7 years they were involved in conquering, seven years in dividing up the land...it therefore turns out that on the two thousandth, five hundred and third year from the Rosh Hashana of *molad* Adam haRishon, being the second year of creation (the first 5 days of creation were the last 5 days of the first virtual year of creation - see Rosh haShana 8a Tosfos s.v. Litkufos), they started to count". (Hilchos Shemitta

v'Yovel 10:2)

5. The Rambam on *sheva mitvos binei Noach*.

“Adam haRishon was commanded to keep six *mitzvos*...an additional one was added to Noach... until Avraham came who was additionally commanded on *milah* and *davened tefilas shacharis*. Yitzchok separated tithes and added another prayer towards sundown. Yaakov added *gid haNasheh* and *davened maariv*. In Egypt, Amram was commanded in some additional *mitzvos* until Moshe came at which point the Torah was completed by him". (Hilchos Milachim 9:1)

6. The Rambam quoting *chazal*.

“Man was created alone in order to teach the world that whoever destroys [i.e. kills] a human life, it is as if he destroyed the entire world; and whoever maintains a human life, it is as if he maintained the entire world. Behold, all of mankind is created in the form of Adam haRishon and yet each person’s countenance is dissimilar from his friend’s. Therefore, each and every person can say, ‘the world was created specifically for me’”. (Hilchos Sanhedrin 12:3)

7. The Rambam on the geographical significance of the altar.

“The geographical location of the *mizbeach* was extremely precise; it’s location is never to be altered...It is a tradition in the hands of all that the place Dovid and Shlomo built the *mizbeach* in Goren Arvinah is the same place that Avraham built the *mizbeach* to which he tied Yitzchok. It is the place which Noach built upon when he exited the ark. It is the *mizbeach* which Kayin and Hevel offered upon and Adam haRishon sacrificed a *korban* when he was created. And from there he was created. Our sages have said, ‘Adam was born from the dust located at the place of his atonement’”. (Hilchos Beis haBechira 2:1-2)

I could go on but I’m sure you get my point.

Rabbi Slifkin, in the spirit of friendly Torah debate, I’d like to ask you a question.

I’ve read your books and if I understand correctly, your *shita* is that *maaseh bereishis* as described in the Torah did not occur within a historical context and in fact, did not occur at all from a physical standpoint (Science of Torah pg 106. The Challenge of Creation pg’s 109, 130). Furthermore, elements of *maaseh bereishis* such as an historical Adam and Chava are also to be understood allegorically (Challenge of Creation pg 339-340). The Rambam seems to be one of the primary pegs upon which you hang your allegorical hat (Challenge pgs 108-110) and in fact you spend several pages detailing the Rambam’s ostensible approach to chronological sequencing regarding *maaseh bereishis* (Challenge pg 189-192).

My question is: how can you possibly reconcile your *shittos* with the *mareh mikomos* I outlined above whilst using the Rambam for support?

September 25 – October 19, 2006

Something New

RNS

Regarding Rav Miller's charge - this is something new that I have never heard before. I have some questions on it. If I have understood you correctly, Rav Miller is saying that it is heretical to posit that any processed post-Creation are the same as any processes during creation.

RSC

That's not exactly correct. There could very well have been contemporary processes which existed during the Creation period too. For instance, I imagine some form of gravity existed during *maaseh bereishis*. Otherwise, the cows really *would* have been jumping over the moon. And although one could argue that Hashem maintained all physical processes in an entirely miraculous fashion, I see no reason to assume that all processes which were initiated during *maaseh bereishis* must have been different than processes which exist today. What Rav Miller means is that the Creative Force, referred to as '*maamar Hashem*', was the force which *caused* all of these processes to materialize and that this process is no longer in force in the post-Creation period. If you and I jumped into a time machine and took a trip back to, say, the sixth day of creation just before Adam haRishon was created, I imagine we would probably see a fully formed planet teeming with life. We would probably see the sun shining, the wind blowing, the trees beginning to blossom, and if we didn't watch our step, might find ourselves being chased down by a T-Rex or being eyed from above by a hungry Pterodactyl. However, at the same time, we would probably be subjected to all kinds of weird experiences as the Creative Force continued to generate new processes and the universe continued to "expand". The bottom line is, it's just impossible to know precisely what was going on during *maaseh bereishis* because we lack an absolute frame of reference which would enable us to make definitive statements.

Definition of Heretical**RNS**

Does this mean that scientific theories as to how the sun, moon and earth were formed (regardless of the time duration) are by definition heretical, since such processes are said to still occur?

RSC

This is a tricky question. The answer is yes and no. Yes it would be heretical to theorize that the sun, the moon and the earth formed due to naturalistic processes which exist today. No it would not be heretical to posit theories about the unfolding of the cosmos if one claimed that they are not able to be duplicated in a post-Creation scenario. However, the latter claim is bordering on the incoherent and thus meaningless. All theorists today utilize contemporary scientific principles to trace a naturalistic pathway from the Big Bang down to sliced bread. I know of no scientist who claims that he is merely advancing a possible scenario for the unfolding of the cosmos while simultaneously maintaining that this scenario is entirely inimitable from the standpoint of contemporary science. Thus, anyone aligned with origins type theories is, for all intents and purposes, aligned with *kefira*.

Heretical versus Mistaken**RNS**

And does it mean that it is heretical (as opposed to merely mistaken) to believe in the current or recent spontaneous generation of animals from dirt, since according to the peshat of Bereishis, that is what happened on the sixth day of Creation?

RSC

No it would not. However, before I answer your question, I'd like to make a slight digression. There are two elements to your question. The first is your *ikar kushya*, which is, if the Creative Process no longer exists, is it *kefira* to postulate the existence of spontaneous generation which, seemingly, would be a function of the Creative Force. The second element of your question is your ostensible differentiation between spontaneous generation and any other biological system which draws its existence and nourishment directly from the earth. And although this has nothing to do with Rav Miller's *shita* per se, I'd like to discuss it for a couple of paragraphs.

When distinguishing between the concept of *neis* and *teva*, Rav Dessler invokes some compelling imagery to illustrate his point. Suppose we took a corpse, buried it in a grave and waited until it decomposed and turned to dust. After some time, we would open the grave only to find a fully-grown human being which had developed from the earth by means of the remains of the old one. Surely we would refer to this as a *neis* akin to *techiyas haMeisim*. However, when we observe plant life growing from the ground, we refer to this as *teva*. Why should this be? Horticulturists don't know why organic material sprouts from the ground when seeds are planted, they just know that it does. Why should we be any more surprised that it would work with humans?

The truth is, this idea applies equally to all branches of science. Just as horticulturists can't tell you why the earth responds to the genetic material in a seed, or why items like apples and bananas appear from the earth in the first place, zoologists can't tell you why cows or sheep which ingest nothing more than grass and water are capable of producing milk, meat, leather, wool and a host of other materials that are entirely unrelated to grass. Any of the principles outlined in the most advanced scientific textbooks are nothing more than descriptions of processes based on empirical observation; they can never presume to reveal the *reason* why these principles function. (Actually, you made a similar point in Challenge chapter two when discussing aspects of the universe such as its order, its ability to be expressed in mathematical terms, its beauty and its sheer comprehensibility. You write "We take order for granted. We have been brought up with concepts of laws of nature. To us, it is obvious that the universe should make sense. But Einstein considered it "miraculous" that the universe evinces order".)

Rav Dessler answers that in truth, there is no difference. *Teva* is actually a *neis* (or, to paraphrase Rav Dessler's classic terminology, "a manifestation of Hashem's Ratzon as expressed in His *hanhaga* of the *beriah*); the difference is, *teva* is the Ratzon Hashem we are accustomed to whereas *neis* is the Ratzon Hashem we are not accustomed to (MME Vol. 1 - pg.177).

Now, getting back to your *ikar kushya*, as far as I'm concerned, it really has nothing to do with spontaneous generation per se because all life systems are equally miraculous. Your question can be asked about any of the phenomena of the universe. Why do trees grow? Why do plants come out of the ground? Why does the solar system function etc. All of these elements are discussed in *maaseh bereishis* and thus your question applies equally to all of them i.e. why are they not a contradiction to the idea that the Creative force of *maaseh bereishis* no longer exists in the post-Creation period?

However, in view of what we've been saying all along, the answer to your question is simple. The reason why (the apparently erroneous notion of) spontaneous generation (or any current process for that matter), has nothing to do with *maaseh bereishis* is because during *maaseh bereishis* Hashem, acting in the role of Boreh, first *initiated* such laws. He first caused them to come into existence from a prior state of non-existence. These laws

simply didn't exist before Hashem decreed that they should. So for instance, when Hashem created the law that apple seeds, when planted in the ground, should cause the earth to yield apple trees, the genetic information encoded on the DNA helix of an apple seed can now act as a means for the production of apples. However, before Hashem decreed that the earth should respond to the DNA apparatus in the seed, one could plant seeds '*fun heint biz morgen*' and nothing would happen. The same applies to spontaneous generation. If let's say *kinim min ha'ipush* was actually true, then we would say that obviously Hashem initiated a law during the *sheshes yimey bereishis* which allowed for lice from dirt. However, and here's the main point, there is *absolutely no parallel whatsoever* between the process of *kinim min ha'ipush* and the *maamar* Hashem of "*vayomer Elokim, tadshey ha'aretz desheh*" (Bereishis 1:11) or "*vaYomer Elokim totzey ha'aretz nefesh chaya*" (Bereishis 1:24) because **whereas the latter two are commands by Hashem to initiate the process, the former example is 'merely' the ongoing *dvar* Hashem (*l'olam Hashem d'varcha nitzav bashamayim – Tehilim 119*) to perpetuate a pre-existing process via the agency of '*teva*', a euphemism which really refers to the *Ratzon Hashem* as expressed in His role as *Manhig*.**

Incidentally, this explains the Rambam's *shita* in Pirkey Avos. The Rambam holds that all miracles which occur in *teva* were pre-programmed during the period of *maaseh bereishis*. In view of Rav Miller's explanation, this Rambam is *lichtig*! Of course all miracles must be pre-programmed; the Creative process was permanently suspended with the *amirah* of *Dai*, enough. Consequently, nothing new can possibly materialize during the post-Creation period.

RNS

I would be interested to hear your answers to these two questions.

RSC

Rabbi Slifkin, I think I've done the best I possibly can to elucidate Rav Miller's *shita*. I hope my presentation was satisfactory. Incidentally, I don't expect you to agree with me at this point (although I can't think of anything that would delight me more). My primary issues at this time are

- a) That you understand Rav Miller's concern
- b) I've been sufficiently clear in presenting his *shita*.

Kiddush and 24 Hour Days

RNS

The essential objection sounds no different to that of the Lubavitcher Rebbe regarding why he believed it to be *kefirah* to say that the six days were longer than 24 hours. Rav Carmell's answer, on p. 182 of my book, would be equally applicable.

RSC

This is incorrect. Rav Miller's point has nothing to do with the Lubavitcher Rebbe's point although both are equally valid. The Lubavitcher Rebbe's point is that the *sheshes yimey bereishis* must mean literal days as opposed to periods because otherwise, why do we celebrate Shabbos on the seventh day. Rav Miller does not treat this idea directly although he certainly does relate to the *sheshes yimey bereishis* as six days, not periods. Rav Miller's point is that even if we were to accept the various day-age theories out there, it could only be within the context of a Creation period scenario. Any theory which utilizes contemporary laws of nature as a means of describing the unfolding of nature is *kefira*, plain and simple. So, although both the Lubavitcher Rebbe

and Rav Miller may both reject reinterpreting *sheshes yimey bereishis* as time periods, they do so for different reasons. The Lubavitcher Rebbe does it based on his estimation of the literal meaning of the word *yom* and his argument that it undermines the Torah's injunction of keeping *bidavka* the seventh *day* of the week as a commemoration of Shabbos, whereas Rav Miller rejects it because all such theories are invariably accompanied by naturalistic explanations of the unfolding of the universe thus contravening the primary message of Shabbos.

Incidentally, when I first translated Rav Miller's initial letter, I introduced the concept of Kiddush in the footnotes and claimed that Kiddush was a testimony to six literal days and also to Rav Miller's approach of meta-naturalism versus naturalism. At the time, there was a ten page refutation of my paper issued by several professors which appeared on your site and other places. One of their issues was this quote from Rav Aryeh Carmell *ztz'l* which you make reference to. I am currently in the midst of composing a response to their refutation and have already completed my response to this particular issue. I'd like to take this opportunity to address Rav Carmell's quote so here's a snippet cut and pasted from my incipient paper.

Kidusha di'bey Shimsha – The Significance of Va'Yechulu

- Quote -

AKA (stands for Aaron, Klafter, Annonymous)

With regard to the claim that kiddush is a rejection of any approach that takes the six days as longer than regular days, Rabbi Aryeh Carmell responds to this in Challenge as follows (page 259):

...Others however do not feel that there is any force in this argument. The true nature of God's creative activity during the six days and the sense in which He can be said to have 'rested on the seventh day' must remain forever beyond our comprehension, whether the days are taken literally or metaphorically. It is reasonably clear that the Torah wishes to convey that the six weekdays and Shabbat correspond to some basic structures of reality, and it can make no difference to the concept of Shabbat whether God's 'activity' or 'inactivity' is expressed in relation to days, sephiroth, or other spiritual constructs.

RSC

With all due respect to Rabbi Carmell, I disagree. (Please note: when I mention "due respect", I am not pandering. I mean it with the greatest sincerity. Rabbi Carmell [*ztz'l*] is the one most responsible for bringing the works of Rav Eliyahu Dessler to the public and as such, my awe, reverence and gratitude to him know no bounds. Nonetheless, I do not feel obligated to refrain from voicing my opinion.)

Everyone is aware that the reciting of *va'yichulu* on Friday night has the *din* of *hagadas eidus*. That is why we stand when we say it and why we must say it with someone else simultaneously. We are not indulging in some superficial and meaningless ritual; *hagadas eidus* has clearly defined parameters. As any judge or lawyer will tell you, in order for testimony to possess any significance it must be unambiguous. If "six days" is entirely nebulous, if it is entirely open to interpretation, one person may be testifying that the world is billions of years old while the other is testifying to a literal six day creation while a third might be testifying that *maaseh bereishis* is a spiritual fairy tale *chs'v*. The notion is absurd. There must be one universal meaning that all Jews can adopt in order for *va'yichulu* to be considered a significant *hagadas eidus*. Saying that six days relates to

some inconclusive construct effectively renders *va'yichulu* meaningless.

- End Quote -

Intellectual Honesty

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

Well, apparently this view was not shared by Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman, Rav Aryeh Carmell and others. (Nor by the Rambam, who held that the six days were not time-periods at all). Presumably they all felt that it is fine if each person attests to it according to his own understanding of it. Just as people have different understandings of what it means that Hashem redeemed us from Egypt with a strong hand. Besides, the main point is that people are attesting that Hashem made the entire universe, not exactly how He did and how long it took.

I am sure that you appreciate that in the same way as you are entitled to dispute Rav Carmell and follow Rav Miller, I am entitled to dispute Rav Miller and follow Rav Carmell.

Note to reader: The following was originally one long response but has been sub-divided here in four separate categories

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

It's not an issue of being entitled to hold like Rav Miller versus Rav Carmell. I am maintaining a *shakla v'tarya* with *you* and attempting to reach a proper understanding of the truth. Right now I care only about one thing; *your* opinion, and how it interfaces with sources I outline from *chazal* and *rishonim*. Accordingly, I want to point out three things.

The Rambam and Sheshes Yimey Bereishis

First of all, I can't let your comment of "Nor by the Rambam, who held that the six days were not time-periods at all" slip by without protesting. I won't revisit the multitude of sources I delineated in this communication other than to mention that I consider responses such as "it is well known that there are numerous contradictions between the Yad and the Moreh, reflecting the different contexts in which they were written. And regarding the seeming contradictions in the Moreh itself - Rambam himself, in his introduction, states that there will be seemingly conflicting statements" (made by you earlier in this dialogue) to be entirely inadequate. Even if you were correct, it could never apply to such a clearly and repeatedly stated *shita* of the Rambam.

Yetzias Mitzrayim

Second of all, I don't understand what you mean by "Just as people have different understandings of what it means that Hashem redeemed us from Egypt with a strong hand". If you are referring to the Ra'avad who argues with the Rambam regarding anthropomorphism, the Ra'avad never meant to say that someone has the right to understand *yitziyas mitzrayim* in that fashion *chs'v*. He merely meant to negate the Rambam's classification of *min* regarding this belief. The belief of *yitziyas mitzrayim* most certainly must be understood in a universal fashion amongst all Jews.

Meta-Natural Fiat

Third, you mention “Besides, the main point is that people are attesting that Hashem made the entire universe, not exactly how He did and how long it took”. I would like to point out that this is precisely what we’ve been speaking about all along. You may believe this to be so but Rav Miller and others understand the main point to include the understanding that the universe and all its imperatives could not have unfolded naturally but rather must have been created via a meta-natural fiat of an infinite Creator. This applies whether you hold that *sheshes yimey bereishis* took six days or was all created instantly. Thus, although you may wish to contest this point, it doesn’t rate an offhanded ‘besides’.

Intelligent Design and the Awareness of Hashem

While I’m at it, I’d like to mention my own personal *shita* in this matter. If one maintains that the world is able to unfold via naturalistic pathways, he has effectively written Hashem out of the *beriah*. Richard Dawkins and Douglas Futuyma observe (i.e. see) precisely the same laws of nature as you do and come to the inexorable conclusion that the universe is godless. What gives you, or anyone, the right to introduce Godliness into a scenario which can be entirely imputed to chance? The answer is, nothing! It is only when one studies the phenomena of nature, all of the phenomena of nature, and detects the endless wisdom and kidliness in all of their components, that one can then detect the presence of a Creator from His creations. By adopting the *shita* that the world evolved via naturalistic means which Hashem was somehow manipulating in the background, one severely compromises the ability of mankind to reach an awareness of Hashem from His *beriah*. Even if one firmly declares his belief in a supernal Creator, if he ignores the open testimony of the *beriah*, his declaration amounts to nothing more than a preconceived notion based on personal belief. Avraham Avinu didn't have any pre-conceived notions; he perceived the *ba'al habira* from the *bira* by empirical observation of limitless design and the concordant (and obviously correct) conclusion of a limitless Designer.

Since our ultimate *tachlis* is the awareness of Hashem, and one of the fundamental ways of attaining this awareness is through studying the *beriah*, adopting your *shita* effectively undermines the entire *tachlis haBeriah*. As a leading *posek*, Rav Miller is zeroing in on the *halachic* aspects of adopting your *shita*. I, on the other hand, am not concerned as much about the *halachic* ramifications as I am regarding the *hashkafic* drawbacks and as such, I see the elimination of the facility of awareness from an observation of the *beriah* as the most egregious element of adopting your suggestions.

Abarbanel Revisited

RNS

Regarding the Abarbanel - the reason why I did not quote the latter extract is that I think it has absolutely no bearing on the subject and does not indicate any retraction or modification of his views. (Incidentally, I erred in describing this later extract as sixty-seven pages after the first - I was referring to the same page as you, which is SEVENTY-seven pages after the first.)

Let's review the Abarbanel on p. 10.

- 1) Abarbanel says that Rambam believed in the non-chronological sequence of days.
- 2) He says that Rambam considered this to be one of his great secrets.
- 3) He says that Rambam tried to conceal this view with ingenuity.

- 4) He says that Ralbag, Narvoni and others revealed his secret.
- 5) He then says that although Rambam was tremendously great, this view is sheker v'chazav.
- 6) He then attacks this view at length
- 7) He concludes by saying that he believes that he has disproved Rambam's position.

According to your view, that Abarbanel did not believe Rambam to possess this view, and that it is "impossible to believe otherwise", let's see how these points look:

- 1) False and defamatory statement.
- 2) False and bizarre statement.
- 3) False and bizarre statement.
- 4) I have no idea how you would reinterpret this one
- 5) Very mean of him to describe Rambam as writing sheker v'chazav if he didn't really believe that to be the case
- 6) and 7) With all these objections, it would only be appropriate to point out that he didn't ultimately believe this to be Rambam's position.

Considering that Abarbanel -

- (a) had tremendous respect for Rambam,
 - (b) sought to defend him wherever possible (e.g. in the pages you mention),
 - (c) considered the idea of the days being non-chronological to be extremely wrong,
 - (d) pointed out that numerous commentators on Rambam had revealed this to be his position
 - (e) stated that Rambam had tried to conceal it with great ingenuity
- it is absolutely absurd to think that Abarbanel would criticize Rambam for this view and would not say that it wasn't actually Rambam's view at all, contrary to how all the other commentaries understood Rambam.

RSC

Well, that's quite a compelling presentation. Unfortunately, there is one 'small' problem with it.

I am reminded of a story with, I believe, R' Chaim Volozhiner. There was a woman who approached a *beis din* in Eastern Europe claiming that her husband was dead and that she was requesting an official *psak* from *beis din* so that she could remarry. After due deliberation, the *beis din* concluded that the *agunah* indeed had a right to remarry and outlined the reasoning for their *psak* in a lengthy *teshuva*. They sent their *teshuva* to R' Chaim but he refused to accept their conclusions. After much correspondence, R' Chaim was forced to admit that their did not seem to be a flaw in their reasoning and yet he maintained his position and refused to endorse the *beis din's psak*. A few days later, the erstwhile husband appeared safe and sound. R' Chaim commented wryly to his *talmidim*: "Isn't it amazing? The *beis din* composed what seemed like an incontrovertible edifice of advanced *pilpul* and yet one plain man came along and destroyed their entire construct in one fell swoop".

Your line of reasoning above seems unassailable. The problem is, along comes the Abarbanel and *says* that he is being *chozer*.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

NO HE DOES NOT!

He describes Rambam in a way that you INTERPRET as meaning that he is being chozer. But he does not SAY that he is being chozer. That would mean that he would use a lashon of "I retract from xyz" or

similar. But he does not say anything like that. So all my objections above are still in place.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

The Abarbanel doesn't have to say "I am being *chozer*"! He criticizes the Rambam for allegorizing *maaseh bereishis* precisely the same way he originally criticized him and then states that he will now be *milamed zchus* on him. If he is being *milamed zchus*, his is obviously being *chozer* from something, right? Well, all we have to do is look at the next two lines and read that the *chazara* pertains to the fact that the Rambam only allegorized the episode of the *nachash* and Chava coming from Adam's side etc. which appears in the second *perek* of Bereishis as opposed to allegorizing anything which appears in the first *perek* of Bereishis. It has nothing to do with my 'interpretation'. Just read the words!

On page 86, the Abarbanel revisits the exact same criticism of the Rambam that he had for him on page 10. He claims that the Rambam has nothing to answer before Hashem when he is asked why he chose to make an allegory of some *pesukim* and not of others. He also warns against allegory because it is like a leprosy which will spread to the rest of the Torah and cause one to allegorize even the *mitzvos* of the Torah etc. So, for all intents and purposes, we can cut out the 75 pages between pg. 10 and page 86.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

I have no idea what you mean by that last statement.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Simple. You wrote "Considering that he explains Rambam's position on the non-chronological sequence with very definitive language, then proceeds to sharply dispute it, it is most unreasonable to think that SIXTY-SEVEN pages later he has decided that Rambam didn't really hold that view at all without explicitly spelling that out." What you mean to say is that it unreasonable to assume such a gap (67 pages) between the Abarbanel's original *shita* and his *chazara* without the Abarbanel specifically spelling out that he is referring to his original *shita*. It is this *ta'annah* which I am addressing.

We are now holding on page 10, right back where we started from. Just after he revisits his criticism of the Rambam, the Abarbanel states as follows:

"Before I begin, I wish to be *milamed zchus* on the Rav (Rambam) and all those who maintain his approach in that which they interpreted the *parsha* in an allegorical fashion (*derech tziyuri v'hamshelayi*) and it (the *limud zechus*) is that as far as the commands and laws of the Torah are concerned, it never entered their minds to allegorize the verses G-d forbid because anything [appearing in the Torah] which is associated with an action (a *maaseh*) was accepted by them and their progeny to keep and to do. And so too, in the episode of *maaseh bereishis* which occurred during the six days, the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it inasmuch as the belief of *chiddush haOlam* is accepted amongst our nation. However, when discussing the episode of the Trees of Gan Eden, the formation of Woman from the [Adam's] side, and the episode of the Snake, it did enter their minds to reinterpret the verses etc."

We see two things here. Firstly we see that the Abarbanel was *chozer* from characterizing the Rambam as taking the *pesukim* of *perek* aleph in Bereishis allegorically. And second of all, we gain insight into the difference between the first and second *perek* of Bereishis. The first, claims the Abarbanel, is akin to a regular *mitzvah ma'asis* because since *chiddush haOlam* is a *yesod* which is universally accepted by our nation, it has the *din* of

a *mitzvah ma'asis*. Thus, just as the Rambam would never allegorize a *mitzvah*, so too, he would never allegorize any of the *pesukim* in *perek aleph* of Bereishis. On the other hand, the story of the *nachash* is not one of the *yesodey haEmuna* and thus the Rambam felt he had licence to allegorize it if necessary.

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

Again, in light of the fact that Abarbanel did earlier (on p. 10) ascribe this view to Rambam, and he attested that other commentaries had revealed this to be Rambam's true view, and he said that Rambam had ingeniously tried to conceal this view, it makes no sense that he would now believe that Rambam never actually held such a view after all, without addressing what he had said earlier.

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

Look, I'm no expert on the style of the Abarbanel. *Ein lee ela ma she'eini ro'os*. If you have a *kasha* on the Abarbanel's style, so be it. But it doesn't detract from the plain meaning of his words here. I have spoken to several people regarding this issue and I understand that this could very well be characteristic of the Abarbanel's style of writing. I could have mentioned this to you before but I chose not to because I can't back it up sufficiently. But even a cursory reading of the first 100 pages of the Abarbanel on *chumash* Bereishis reveals a unique style of writing which needs to be taken into consideration when determining precisely his meaning. But once again, I am not appealing to "writing styles" as a proof to my reading of the Abarbanel; only the plain meaning of his words, as is my *derech* to argue in all of the words of the *rishonim*.

RNS

What, then, is going on with pages 85+? The answer is that Abarbanel is addressing Aristotelian-type allegories which are a million miles from pshat. When you quote the statement of Abarbanel that "the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it..." you have omitted the end of the sentence! The full sentence is as follows: "the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it in that the belief in *chiddush ha-olam* (the non-Aristotelian view of the world) is accepte with our nation." That is what he is stressing that Rambam did not allegorize. The non-sequential order of days is small fry that doesn't affect things so much - Rambam still maintains that Hashem created everything.

RSC

That's a wild assertion! If all the Abarbanel meant to do was to be *sholel* from the Rambam the adoption of Aristotelian *kadmus*, why does he say that the Rambam didn't allegorize any of the verses of the six days of *maaseh bereishis*? Why does the Abarbanel go out of his way to contrast the first and second *perek* of Bereishis?

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

Perhaps because he held that the non-chronological six days was not "allegory." It was merely a different pshat.

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

Now it's my turn. I have no idea what you are talking about.

Why does he need to introduce his whole *shtikel* Torah about non-allegorizing of *mitzvos ma'asiyos*? Why doesn't the Abarbanel simply say that the Rambam didn't hold of *kadmus* and thus allegorizing of the *pesukim*

is just a 'small fry' issue? I'm sorry but your reading simply doesn't fit into the words of the Abarbanel. Just a couple of lines later he states

"Behold you see that the opinion of the Rav (the Rambam) was not that all of *maaseh bereishis* was an allegory, rather, only a small part of it (some elements in the second chapter of Bereishis, not the first), and that all which is mentioned [in the Torah] regarding the activity of the six days, from the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all of the phenomena, and the creation of Adam and his wife, up until [the passage of] "*va'yichulu*", have no allegory whatsoever for everything was [understood as] literal to him and therefore you will see that in this very chapter, #30 in the second section, in all which the Rav has explicated regarding the activity of the six days, he did not make [of *maaseh bereishis*] an allegory or a hint (*pirush tzurayi oh remez*) at all;

How can the Abarbanel possibly be any clearer than that? He openly states that the Rambam did not allegorize any of the *pesukim* from Bereishis straight through *va'yechulu*. And what about the Abarbanel I quoted to you in the Moreh (2:31). The Abarbanel states there that *chiddush* occurred each and every single day of *maaseh bereishis*. What must be understood is that when the Abarbanel refers to *chiddush haOlam* in our context here, he is not referring merely to Creation ex-nihilo. He is referring to *chiddush* as expressed in the entire *parsha* of *maaseh bereishis* from the first *pasuk* straight through *va'yechulu*. Any other reading of the Abarbanel seems, to me, to be self serving.

As far as your comments regarding the bizarre behaviour of the Abarbanel, I don't see it as such a problem although I do admit it seems a bit weird. You see, the first time around, the Abarbanel wanted to make a strong point of rejecting allegory in *maaseh bereishis*. Since he understood that the Ralbag and Narboni attributed the allegorical approach to the Rambam and relied on him for its validity, he used the Rambam as the outlet for all of his irritation against the *shita* of allegory without necessarily making an attempt to determine if the Rambam himself was indeed allegorizing. Later on, as he was writing his *pirush*, perhaps he made a *bedika kapdanis* and decided that the Ralbag and Narboni were wrong and thus he presented his final opinion of what the Rambam was really saying. No mystery here.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Without ever saying that Ralbag and Narboni were wrong in their explanation of Rambam, and without making any reference to the fact that he himself had earlier accepted their approach????!!!!

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

I guess so. Just read his words my friend. Just read his words. He *says* that the Rambam did not allegorize *perek aleph* of Bereishis at all, from *bereishis bara* to *va'yechulu*. You can twist and turn every which way but loose from this statement. Any estimation of the Abarbanel's odd writing style must necessarily take a back seat to this consideration.

Rabbi Slifkin, I sense that you and I will not see eye to eye on this Abarbanel. And although I have no problem continuing to discuss this Abarbanel with you, perhaps we should just agree to disagree. It's up to you.

RNS

Incidentally, I certainly don't see how you describe this explanation of Rambam as "unthinkable" when, at the very least, even you must surely concede that Abarbanel is saying that Ralbag, Narvoni and others learned Rambam this way.

RSC

Okay. I admit it may have been a bad choice of words but what I meant to say is that from the perspective of logic, it is unthinkable to imagine that the Rambam would state on seven different occasions that Adam haRishon was a real person and expect someone to accept the idea that the Rambam really didn't hold there was an Adam HaRishon.

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

I have no idea what you are talking about. We were talking about the non-chronological sequence of days, not the historicity of Adam HaRishon.

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

The 'seven different occasions' I quoted you from the Rambam all refer to the Adam haRishon which is mentioned in *maaseh bereishis*. But if the episode of *maaseh bereishis* is non-chronological (i.e. allegorical), then any mention of Adam haRishon in said event is non historical, no? Am I missing something?

Shem Tov and Akeidas Yitzchak**RNS**

I also did not see you address Shem Tov and Akeidas Yitzchak.

RSC

Both Shem Tov and Akeidas Yitzchak are enigmatic, the former more so than the latter.

- Shem Tov -

Whereas in your quote (Challenge page 189-190) Shem Tov seems to subscribe to the idea that the Rambam allegorized *maaseh bereishis*, shortly after he states as follows:

“And from this [we understand that which] our sages have said that Adam and Chava were born united, back to back, the allusion here being that although *maaseh bereishis* is all literal (*kulo ki'mashma'o*), it also encompasses deeper allusions that man is composed of substance and form etc.” (pg. 61)

This is only one of several quotes from the Shem Tov which would seem to indicate that the Shem Tov understood the Rambam as taking *maaseh bereishis* literally, albeit in addition to a 'deeper' allegorical understanding. Truthfully, I am currently undecided regarding the Shem Tov.

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

In that quote, the allegorical meaning does not conflict with the literal meaning, so they can both exist. But in the quote I brought, Shem Tov says explicitly that the six days were NOT a chronological sequence of time. He is not enigmatic at all - he is perfectly clear about this.

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

You may be correct but then why does the Shem Tov have to say that *masseh bereishis* is all *kulo kimashmao*? This is one of the reasons I consider the Shem Tov enigmatic but like I told you before, I am willing to let the Shem Tov issue slide. I only bring *ra'ayos* from sources that are perfectly clear. Concurrently, I don't think you have a right to cite the Shem Tov as a conclusive *ra'aya* to your view of

what the Shem Tov's *shita* was regarding the Rambam. Whatever the case, I already mentioned (see here #Davar Shebichlal, Viyatza Lidon Bidavar Chadash) that this whole issue is, in my opinion, irrelevant, because even if the Rambam was to allegorize *maaseh bereishis*, it is based on his understanding of *chazal*. He still holds of a recent creation and Rav Miller's distinction of natural versus meta-natural still applies. You simply cannot use the Rambam to support your suggestion of a 'billions of years old' naturally evolving universe which contradicts every known source in *chazal* and *rishonim*.

- Akeidas Yitzchak -

After outlining what the Akeidas Yitzchak feels is the Rambam's interpretation of *maaseh bereishis*, he states as follows:

"And behold the Rav the Moreh there required [for the purpose of] repair and completion of his [posited] order [of creation] to say something, and this is what he says:

'and what you must know is that the sages have already explained that the grass and trees which Hashem caused to sprout from the earth indeed occurred after He caused the rain to descend upon them and that which it states [in the Torah] that 'a mist rises from the earth' is indeed [the Torah relating] the chronological event which preceded [the verse] 'let the earth bring forth grass' etc. and to this (the former verse) Onkeles translates 'a cloud ascended from the earth' and this is understood from the verse 'and the trees were still not on the earth and the grass had not yet sprouted' etc. this is clear ...'

Behold he (the Rambam) needed to establish that the category of rain, which is the accomplishment of the second day to his mind, possessed a temporal precedence to the category of growth which is the accomplishment of the third day. And he (the Rambam) explicated this accordingly and entertained no doubt in the matter. And the wonder is that he accepted the testimony of one verse which states 'and the trees were still not on the earth and the grass had not yet sprouted', despite the fact that he did not need to feel compelled by this verse to explain as he did, as shall be demonstrated in its place, while [simultaneously] rejecting the testimony of several verses which repeat 6 times regarding the order of creation, 'and it was night, and it was day' etc." (pg. 41)

The Akeidas Yitzchak seems to be struggling with what appears to him as contradictory messages in the Rambam.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

No he is not. He is raising a *kashya* on Rambam's *pshat*; he is not suggesting that Rambam did not hold of this *pshat*.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

This is not true. The *kushya* the Akeidas Yitzchak is raising amounts to an inherent *stira* in the Rambam himself, not a *kushya* on the Rambam's *pshat*. And although you are correct that the Akeidas Yitzchak himself does not dismiss his opinion of the Rambam's interpretation of *maaseh bereishis*, once you have a *stira* in the Rambam, what do you really have? As the Akeidas Yitzchak concludes, if the Rambam accepted the idea that the rain possessed a temporal precedence to plant growth, it is impossible to understand how he could reject open *pesukim* which state *va'yehi erev veyehi boker* etc. – "zeh lo *yitachein bishum panim*" – (Akeida page 41)

My purpose in pointing out these discrepancies is to demonstrate that even those who interpreted the Rambam allegorically were confounded by apparent inconsistencies which indicated the reverse.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

See above. That is simply not true.

Personally I feel that your smattering of quotes is tenuous for three reasons:

a) They are opposed by commentaries such as Abarbanel and Crescas and fly in the face of the simple *mashmaus* of the seven quotes I provided directly from the Rambam. :

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

They are not opposed by Abarbanel, as I earlier explained. In fact they were QUOTED by Abarbanel! And nowhere does he say that they got it wrong.

As for Crescas - it would only be significant if he can be shown to be aware that others revealed this hidden meaning, and that he then rejected it. But since he makes no mention of it at all, presumably he just didn't notice it.

b) The very *miforshim* which represent the Rambam's view of *maaseh bereishis* in a non-literal form personally reject allegory in *maaseh bereishis*.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

So there is a machlokes. You can side with them if you want, but Rambam is certainly a great authority himself.

c) Akeidas Yitzchak and Shem Tov are insufficient indications of the Rambam's true opinion as evidenced by the quotes above.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

See my responses above.

And although category (b) does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of adopting the *shita* of allegory vis-à-vis the Rambam, it certainly seems logical to say that if we can align the Rambam's *shita* with these *miforshim*, it would behoove us to do so.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

If they are criticizing his view, obviously he can't be reconciled with them! They all respected Rambam, and if they felt that they could have said that Rambam isn't actually saying this *pshat*, they would have certainly done so!

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Agreed. But that doesn't mean that I can't reconcile their *shittos* with the Rambam's *shita* despite their protests. As you know, I feel that the seven sources in the Rambam which I supplied you with represent incontrovertible evidence to his non-allegorizing of *maaseh bereishis*. If any of the above *meforshim* would come to life and prove me wrong, I would gladly accept. Otherwise, I am forced to make *shalom* between their personal *shittos* of *maaseh bereishis* and the Rambam's *shita* which I hold is identical to theirs.

As far as I'm concerned, no far-fetched reconciliation is necessary as I've demonstrated from my seven quotes from the Rambam. They (the *miforshim* and the Rambam) all hold precisely the same thing.

Notwithstanding the above, I realize that I have not conclusively demonstrated the impropriety of your personal usage of allegory in the advancement of your suggestion that science and Torah can be reconciled by interpreting *maaseh bereishis* in a non-literal fashion. I am merely pointing out that I feel you have insufficient support from the Rambam to question our collective long-standing *messorah* and advance your allegorical approach to *maaseh bereishis* in its stead. As you mention so eloquently in your book (Challenge 130-131), "It cannot be stressed enough that this should not be taken as a free licence for anyone to interpret Torah in whichever way they see fit. One must exercise extreme caution in any such interpretation. There must be sufficient cause for doing so especially if the new interpretation is highly innovative or far-reaching in its implications"

Davar Shebichlal, Viyatza Lidon Bidavar Chadash

Despite my ostensible concession above, I have a much stronger objection to your personal use of allegory regarding *maaseh bereishis* which, I feel, will hammer home my point. None of the *rishonim*, including the Rambam, understood the unfolding of the universe (i.e. *maaseh bereishis*) in terms of billions of years. Even if we were to adopt the allegorical approach, it simply means that the universe was created instantly rather than six physical days. Recent Creation is not anywhere contested amongst *chazal* and *rishonim* and thus, as *chazal* say, "*davar she'bichlal, v'yatza lee'don b'davar chadash, ein licha bo ela chidusho bilvad*" (Shevuos 25:b). You cannot extend the allegorical approach beyond its accepted usage because you have no precedence to do so. The very sources you quote all claim a recent Creation. By the way, Rav Miller's distinction between meta-natural Creation versus naturalistic machination would, in my opinion, still apply.

Incidentally, especial pleading to an 'obviously' ancient universe due to 'incontrovertible' scientific 'evidence' such as transitional fossils, dendrochronology and ice cores (Challenge pg. 149) is, I feel, wholly untenable. There is absolutely no branch of science which comes close to conclusively demonstrating an ancient universe.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Well, I am sure that you realize that the global community of scientists disagrees with you on this one.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Most certainly. And I'm sure you realize that many of the tenets of Judaism are contested by the vast majority of people today. Does this mean that you will be renouncing your Judaism? Numbers don't mean anything. Truth does. Hashem never makes the truth easy to attain but it is always readily available if one chooses to exercise his free will to acquire it.].

I would be glad to discuss this with you during the course of this debate. Initially this dialogue was commenced by you for the purpose of comprehending Rav Miller's *psak* regarding your *shita* however I think our interchange has exceeded its original parameters. I encourage you to broach any academic (Torah or science) topic you wish as a topic of discussion between us.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

I don't see any point in us arguing on the science, all this stuff is already on line at talk.origins and true.origins. I can't imagine what either of us would have to add to what's already online.

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

I'll get back to you on this comment in several weeks *bl'n*.

Sara Klein-Braslavy

RNS

With regard to your questions from other statements in Rambam - it is well known that there are numerous contradictions between the Yad and the Moreh, reflecting the different contexts in which they were written. And regarding the seeming contradictions in the Moreh itself - Rambam himself, in his introduction, states that there will be seemingly conflicting statements! As Abarbanel pointed out, this approach to the six days was one of Rambam's great secrets which he concealed with ingenuity. It seems that Crescas missed it. If you want to understand how Abarbanel, Narvoni, Shem Tov, and Akeidas Yitzchak deduced that this must have been Rambam's view, I suggest that you study Sara Klein-Braslavy's book.

RSC

I have studied the relevant parts of her book and truthfully, I am unimpressed. She does precisely the same you do with the Abarbanel i.e. ignore his mitigating comments on page 86 (page 248 in her book – Hebrew Edition), quotes Narboni (page 246) and Shem Tov (page 247 - different quote than yours) etc. To her credit, she qualifies her usage of the Shem Tov on page 249 but the thrust of her *mehalech* is identical to yours. Frankly, quoting her doesn't do much for me. I would much quicker accept the opinion of a Mir Yeshiva graduate and *talmid chacham*, one who ostensibly possesses far more initiation in *all* of the Rambam's works as opposed to just the Moreh, than a Jewish academic. You are short-selling yourself by attempting to argue via an appeal to authority.

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

Okay, well find a *talmid chacham* who doesn't have a religious bias in insisting that *maase Bereishis* must be literal, and see what he does with all these sources!

Apples and Oranges

RNS

This answers your question that "I would have expected to have seen all the sources in the Abarbanel quoted, pro and con. This way your readers can be fully apprised of the situation." But since you apparently do believe that one should cite all sources, pro and con, to fully apprise readers of the situation, then I have some questions for you. On your website, why do you only have letters from Rabbonim who oppose my work, and not letters from those who support my work, such as Rav Aryeh Carmell z"l and Rav Malinowitz shlita? And why do you only make mention of sources supporting your approach, and not of those supporting a different approach, such as Rav Dovid Hoffman and Rav Herzog? I would have expected to have seen all the sources quoted, pro and con. This way your readers can be fully apprised of the situation.

RSC

You're comparing apples and oranges. I don't expect you to quote sources which are in direct opposition to your *shita* just as you shouldn't expect me to quote people like Rav Herzog who are in direct opposition to my *shita*. What I do expect though is that if you quote someone who supposedly supports your position in one place and apparently rejects it in another, the ethical thing to do is mention both places. Nevertheless, at this point I consider the absence of the appropriate sources merely an error of omission. However, if you do not put up

some clarification regarding the Abarbanel on your website, I'm afraid the error of omission evolves (pun intended) into an act of commission.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

As discussed I feel that the Abarbanel is absolutely unequivocal.

Actually, I always make it clear that there are authorities who dispute my approach, and I would expect you to do the same. It is entirely inappropriate for you or anyone else to condemn my works without admitting that there were great talmidei chachamim who took this approach.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Shtey teshuvos badavar.

First of all, you wrote an entire book outlining your sources. I, and other people, who are attacking your *shittos* are doing so on the assumption that people have read your book or are at least aware of the controversy related to your writings. I am not writing for anyone who merely wishes to align himself politically with one side or the other. Those who unquestioningly follow the *gedoley* Yisrael need not read my responses to your *shittos* and those who unreservedly follow your *shittos* will surely not be swayed by my arguments. I am writing for those who are confused and honestly wish to discover the truth. As such, the assumption is that they will read both sides of the debate exhaustively.

Second, and most important, I believe that the vast majority of sources quoted in your books are misrepresented. That's precisely what we are arguing about! And for the smattering of quotes that I might concede to (all post-evolutionary quotes by the way, nothing from *chazal*, *rishonim*, or even from the *gedoley ha'acharonim*), I feel you never would have written an entire book outlining your suggestions regarding Creation and science. So, as far as I'm concerned, admitting that there were a few *talmidey chachamim* who were misled by the insane theories of the evolutionists serves only to obfuscate.

Tit for Tat

RNS

Rabbi Coffer, in the spirit of friendly Torah debate, I'd like to ask you a question. How can you possibly say that it is "impossible" to think that Rambam possessed this view, in light of the fact that Abarbanel, Shem Tov, Narvoni and Akeidas Yitzchak all ascribe this view to Rambam? I would like to suggest my own answer to this question. It seems clear that you believe that the belief in a literal six days is a very, very important part of Judaism, and that you have made teaching this into your own personal mission. So perhaps you would simply be unable to accept under any circumstances that Rambam could have held differently? After all, since you do believe that Rambam was a tremendous Gaon and tzaddik, you presumably consider it impossible that he would subscribe to heretical views. In which case there is no point in our debating this issue. (In contrast, I would have no problem if it somehow turned out that this was not Rambam's view; I presented this approach in *The Science Of Torah* even before knowing that it was Rambam's view.) Unless you can give me reason to think otherwise, this debate would appear to be futile, from my perspective.

RSC

Rabbi Slifkin, with all due respect, I have no intention on engaging you in a tit for tat and I certainly do not feel obliged to supply you with reasons as to why discussing *hashkafic* issues with me is not futile. I'll let you decide that for yourself. Suffice to say that you have a lot more invested here than I do. If anyone has a *negius*,

it's not me. Yet, not once did I accuse you of intellectual bias; I expect the same treatment from you. In your initial email, you made mention of the fact that you and Rabbi Student are reasonable people and if Dr. Ostroff and I attempted to explain Rav Miller's *shita*, you would attempt to understand. I took you at your word and ask that you take me at mine. I too am not an unreasonable person although I might have *negius'in*. All human beings have ulterior motives; but if this is to be the deciding factor in determining the truthfulness of an argument, no academic dispute would ever be possible. The assumption is that both parties are *mivakshey emes* and both parties will be honest enough to put aside their personal *negius* and concede the truth if proven wrong. If you do not believe me to be a *mivakesh emes*, then you have no business debating with me at all. I hope this is not the case.

Distortion or Truth?

RNS

One more point. While I have no interest in challenging the material on your website, I do want to protest your mischaracterization of my position. The website claims that The Challenge of Creation says that Rambam denies the existence of Adam as a historical figure. That is false. Here are the quotes that you bring - I have bolded the parts that you have apparently not noticed:

Rambam understood the six days of creation to be describing a conceptual hierarchy of the world rather than a historical account of Creation. ... [Rambam] believed that **most of** the account of Adam in Genesis is not a historical account of an individual but instead a portrayal of the role of man in the world

Thus the **early** references to "Adam" are speaking about the fundamental nature of man in general, rather than referring to a particular person who fathered Cain and Abel.

Putting all this together with the Rambam's and Ralbag's explanation of the six days, it would seem that, according to this approach the first three chapters of Genesis are **for the most part** speaking about the archetypical nature of man and his life in this world rather than a historical account of a particular person's life

I would appreciate it if you would correct this distortion of my position.

RSC

I'm sorry but I do not perceive any distortion here. I have read your book carefully and I can illustrate, via exhaustive quotations from same, that any balanced reader would come to the conclusion that you are suggesting, as a means of reconciling the scientific chronology of the universe with Torah, that *maaseh bereishis* as depicted in the first *perek* of Bereishis is not an historical account, including the creation of Adam haRishon. It is superfluous to demonstrate this however, if you challenge me (no pun intended), I will gladly capitulate with a list of quotes.

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

The fact that the creation of him (Adam) is not literal does not mean that he did not exist!!!!

RSC (*October 28 - December 10th*)

If he was not literally created, how can he literally exist? Unless you are referring to some future creature who coincidentally possessed the same name as the Adam haRishon depicted in *maaseh bereishis*. I consider this gibberish

RSC

I kind of feel silly dictating to an author what his position is so why don't we do the following. Let's clear the air between us by addressing the following questions.

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

I will just point out that I am here attempting to explain Rambam's view:

1) Do you feel that any of the references to 'Adam' in Bereishis 1 are historical and if so, which ones?

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Yes, I think that Rambam did take some of them literally. For example, his fathering Cain and Abel.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

But Cain and Abel were not mentioned in the first *perek* of Bereishis. So you still haven't answered my question. Which references in Bereishis 1 are literal?

2) Do you feel that the Rambam understood *maaseh bereishis*, as depicted in the first *perek* of Bereishis, as an historical description or not?

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Not at a literal level. But this has nothing to do with your mischaracterization of my position vis-a-vis Adam.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Sure it does. You just mentioned in your last answer that you believe that certain references to Adam in Bereishis 1 are literal and now you are saying that the Rambam felt that nothing in Bereishis 1 is literal. I'm not mischaracterizing your position. I am simply confused as to precisely what your position actually is.

3) If you feel the Rambam understood *maaseh bereishis* as depicted in the first *perek* of *parashas* Bereishis as an allegorical description, precisely when did the Torah switch from an allegorical Adam to an historical one?

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Apparently right after the expulsion from Gan Eden.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Apparent to whom? A naïve reading of the *chumash* would certainly not yield such an explication. Besides you are contradicting yourself. In Challenge (page338) you write that whenever the Torah writes *ha-adam*, it is referring to mankind as opposed to an individual named Adam. The problem is, the story of Adam fathering Cain and Abel begins with the word "*v'Ha'Adam...*" and I'm sure even you would not claim that 'mankind' fathered Cain and Abel.

In any case, it would seem from here that you feel that the first three *perakim* of Bereishis are entirely allegorical as the transition between the expulsion of Adam from Gan Eden and his fathering of Cain and Abel occurred at the beginning of *perek dalet*. This is precisely how Dr. Ostroff and I understood your *shita* from your book and this is apparently how you are presenting it here. Thus, it still seems to me that the above quotes on toriah are not a mischaracterization. However, I am still honestly confused regarding your *shita*.

4) Assuming you feel that the allegorical Adam depicted in the Torah eventually switched to an historic one, do you have *any sources whatsoever* supporting such a contention or signifying precisely when this transformation in the Torah took place?

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Yes, I have the sources in my book discussing that Rambam held Gan Eden etc. to be an allegory, and there are no sources indicating that he felt Cain and Abel to be an allegory; plus Rambam seems to have held that Adam was the ancestor of mankind.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

I have a *kasha*. In your book you write as follows: “When G-d says “Let us make man,” it does not mean, “Let us make an individual named Man”, but rather “Let us make mankind.” This can therefore be taken to refer to the original evolution of Homo sapiens, many hundreds of thousands of years ago. When Homo sapiens arrived on the scene, and attained the capacity for spiritual relationship with G-d, man was thereby created. The Adam who gave birth to Cain and Abel was a different person”. Subsequently, you go on to reconcile this approach with the Rambam and the Ralbag.

My *kasha* is, how are you now maintaining in the Rambam that the Adam who fathered Cain and Abel was also the ancestor of all mankind? Have you changed your mind?

5) Assuming you feel that the first *perek* of *parashas* Bereishis is allegorical, do you feel this, along with purported scientific evidence, gives one licence to controvert our mainstream tradition regarding the unfolding of the universe or not?

RNS (October 28 - December 10)

Of course! In the same way as our mainstream tradition regarding the miraculous nature of the rainbow and the earth standing still was controverted by scientific evidence.

RSC (October 28 - December 10th)

Neither one of these statements is true (as I shall go on to demonstrate).

Es Kashti Nasati Be'anan versus Greek Naturalism

The Ramban (Bereishis 9:12) never mentions that he is controverting our mainstream traditions by adopting the Greek scientific approach to rainbows. He is merely stating that *al pi pashtus*, the *pasuk* of "zos os ha'bris" would *seem* to indicate that Hashem first implanted the rainbow in the sky after the *mabul* but the *metzius*, demonstrated by the Greeks and easily able to be duplicated by a layman, led the Ramban to propose an alternate *pshat* in the *pesukim* in order to accommodate for the scientific reality. Furthermore, states the Ramban, upon further reflection the *pesukim* indicate that the rainbow always *did* exist. The *pasuk* states, "*es kashti nasati*" which indicates that Hashem *alrerady put a pre-existing* rainbow in the sky beforehand, i.e. during *maaseh bereishis*.

V'ha'aretz L'olam Omedes versus The Copernican Revolution

As far as the world standing still, I challenge you to categorically demonstrate that our mainstream ‘tradition’ (i.e. passed down from Sinai and unequivocally adopted by *chazal*) has been that of an immobile earth. There is

a *sefer* called Mevo haShemesh which brings countless *ra'ayos* from *pesukim* that the world is static but, in my opinion, they can all be countered by stating "*dibra Torah bi'lashon binei adam*".

Besides, even if you did prove that our mainstream tradition is that the world is static, I would have no problem with this as I have already argued in the past that subsequent to Einstein's theory of Relativity, a Copernican view is no more valid than a Ptolemaic one. Here's a debate I was involved with on Avodah a while back which will prove my point.

Avodah Archives - Volume 16 : Number 161 - Thursday, March 16 2006

On March 6, 2006, Eli Turkel wrote:

Simcha writes: You seem more confident than Albert Einstein. I admit that astronomers today maintain a heliocentric universe but AE maintained that there are no absolute frames of reference in space and thus, although we may be using heliocentric models to calculate the motion of the heavenly bodies, who knows...maybe the earth is kavua?

(To which Eli Turkel responds)

This theory was discarded because it required epicycles of increasing complexity instead of nice elliptical orbits. Though in theory the sun could go around the moon I would not want to write the computer program for NASA for the trajectory of their rockets using that assumption. In the real world out there the earth circles the sun

On March 7, 2006, Joe Socher wrote:

1. This is just a historical nitpick (which is something I am much more comfortable doing) Relativity of motion depending frames of reference is Galilean Relativity and not Einsteinian, no? (E.g., dropping a cannon ball from a crow's nest in the mast of a ship: it travels solely vertically in relation to the ship, but moves horizontally in relation to the Earth).

2. The scientific point (or maybe meta-scientific), however, is this: we have a unified theory of motion and forces among bodies that explains falling apples, the movement of the Earth around the Sun, the moon around the Earth, the moons of Jupiter, the travel plans of spacecraft, etc. etc. etc. all with basically the same few formulae of modern physics. We do not have any such general explanation motion that will include a Ptolemaic (or any other geocentric) model. You can't divorce Astronomy from Physics.

And on March 7, 2006, David Guttmann wrote:

That would be preferable to coming up with sometimes embarrassing arguments trying to deny reality. That argument on heliocentrism is one of them. *Ossur leomro uleshomo'o* because it is sheker.

And finally, on March 7, Marty Bluke wrote:

Here is 1 article which deals with the issue Evolution Pages (http://www.evolutionpages.com/pink_unicorn.htm) Also see Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_geocentrism) where Geocentrism is considered pseudoscience.

(The following was my response)

Well, that's quite a line-up of dissenters. Especially salient is the allegation that my argument is sheker. Nevertheless, I must respectfully disagree however, before I begin, I would like to make an important point. The Modern Geocentric view must be distinguished from Ptolemy's view of geocentrism. Whereas Ptolemy was animated by scientific considerations, the majority of people who subscribe to the Modern Geocentric view do so due to their religious convictions. Never once did I state my own personal belief. As far as I'm concerned, and notwithstanding the viewpoint of the author of Mevo haShemesh, I don't know what the proper Torah viewpoint is. I can hear it both ways. I am merely discussing the scientific aspects of geocentrism, not its religious trappings.

Now, let's begin with Marty's Wikipedia article.

Quote

"The geocentrist views are held in the awareness that essentially all modern scientists agree that there is no evidence that the universe has any center. Philosophically, since the concepts of center and absolute motion are not clearly defined and no evidence distinguishing any motion of the earth from motion of the universe is available, geocentrism in and of itself cannot be falsified and is therefore not a scientific theory."

OK. So far we have seen that science is in agreement that there is no evidence that the universe has any center. This eliminates both the Ptolemaic and the Copernican view of the universe. We have also seen that technically speaking, Geocentrism is non-falsifiable. The obvious implication is that Geocentrism is possible as a model of the universe. Everything stated here supports what I have been saying thus far but in case one suspects that I am reading too much into the above quote, let's keep going.

Quote

"In the framework of general relativity, the formulation of the laws of physics is identical in all frames of reference, even in rotating and accelerating frames."

Quote

"If general relativity is true, then there is no way to prove that the Earth is not the immobile center of a non-inertial universe (see equivalence principle). An idea that is not falsifiable may be true, but it is not a scientific theory."

Well, I think this proves that I interpreted the above quote properly. The bottom line is, a Copernican view of the universe is no less egregious than a Ptolemaic one. You certainly cannot refer to this argument as sheker as it is universally accepted by any scientist worth his salt. Adopting one view over the other is merely a matter of convenience. It is possible that RET is correct regarding the computer program which calculates the trajectories of rocket ships but this is only because it happens that in this case it is more convenient to use the sun as the fixed frame of reference. There are many textbooks written on Spherical Astronomy which take the earth for granted as a fixed frame of reference. If one wishes to know where to point his telescope at night to see a particular planet, he uses the earth as the fixed frame. If one wishes to calculate sunrise and sunset, the earth is the fixed frame etc. etc. It's all a matter of convenience nothing more.

But just in case any readers are not convinced by Wikipedia, Dr. Ostroff graciously supplied me with a slam-dunk quote by Hans Reichenbach

"The relativity theory of dynamics is not a purely academic matter, for it upsets the Copernican world view. It is

meaningless to speak of a difference in truth claims of the theories of Copernicus and Ptolemy; the two conceptions are equivalent descriptions. What had been considered the greatest discovery of western science since antiquity, is now denied its claim to truth" [P217]

"... the idea of simplicity cannot be used to decide between the Ptolemaic and Copernican conceptions ... " [P219]

Hans Reichenbach. The Philosophy of Space and Time. Dover 1958.

And in case the reader is not sure who Hans was, check out Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/r/reichenb.htm>)

- End Avodah post -

RSC

If these questions are answered by you, I believe we will have a clearly delineated line indicating our respective approaches and thus eliminate any future misunderstanding. If subsequent to your response it becomes clear that the toriah site has misrepresented your views, the errant quotes will be removed.

RNS (*October 28 - December 10*)

I look forward to that happening.

I await your response

(Note to reader: Rabbi Slifkin *did* respond and his comments were interspersed above amongst the questions along with Rabbi Coffer's response.)

Cutting off Dialogue

RNS

P.S. I am still waiting to see the email where I allegedly cut off the dialogue with Dr. Ostroff.

RSC

I had occasion to speak with Dr. Ostroff today and I brought up your issue with him. Here's what I understand from his response.

You and he maintained a dialogue on the Aishdas/Avodah (<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/>) website prior to the ban on your books. The communication between you related to the appropriateness of your approach to *maaseh bereishis* and other Torah issues. During the course of conversation you made the following claim (<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n099.shtml#10>) regarding a *haskama* you received from Rav Shalom Kamenetsky:

"My specific allegory in my sefer has askamos from Rav Aryeh Carmell, Rav Sholom Kamenetzky, and Rav Mordechai Kornfeld, shlita".

This prompted Dr. Ostroff to post the following letter (<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n101.shtml#03>)

from Rabbi Kamenetzky.

Dear R' Yoel,

Thank you for the note. My name does appear in his book and a careful reading of the haskomo will show that I gave no haskomo on the content. What impressed me about the book is its science. The uninitiated unlettered Jew often finds that the responses he gets when he questions the seeming incompatibility between science and Torah (l'havdil) are lacking.

The science in the book is impressive, but I do not agree with the positions he takes in the Torah. True, he has "unconventional" sources that would lend some credibility to the theories he proposes, but I see these as "suggestions" (based on somewhat spurious understandings of unconventional sources) that are to allow the uninitiated to feel that he can begin learning Torah, and see for himself that the issues are irrelevant. More than anything else, RNS should be lauded for trying his best to defend the Torah against a group of apikorsim that are bent on mocking Torah and disseminating science as the "proof" that Torah is false, Rachmono litzlan. But to say that these theories have credibility as Torah positions was not my intent in my letter of approbation. I agree with Rabbi Bechofer and there is no such thing as scientific evidence which is "incontrovertible".

*Respectfully,
Sholom Kamenetsky*

Subsequently, you wrote Dr. Ostroff as follows:

“Likewise, I believe you may have caused me some personal harm by publicizing the letter from Rav Sholom shlita. You might wonder what could possibly be wrong with doing so. Of this I will say no more at this point, but if you think about the potential circumstances under which he wrote it, you might think of reasons why it was inappropriate.

You may feel that you want to make some sort of public apology for either or both of these errors. Unfortunately this could even make things worse, by drawing more attention to the entire matter. The problem with this matter, as one Rosh Yeshivah told me privately, is that there are zealots who tend to overreact when it is discussed, and therefore it must be handled with great care.”

To which he responded as follows:

“I would have thought that the onus would be on you to retract your statement that your allegories had the haskama of Rabbi Kamenetsky, now that we see that he disagrees with your representation of his position.

Since you accuse me of wronging you and "adam karov leatzmo", I consulted with my Rav (Rabbi Shlomo Miller Shlita) who is the Rosh Kollel of the Lakewood Kollel here in Toronto.

Rabbi Miller told me to tell you in his name that it was a mitzva to publicize Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky's letter. The Tanna Rabbi Shimon Haamsoni retracted on all his derashos when he came to "es Hashem Elokecha tira" and he stated that just as he received reward for darshening so he will be rewarded for retracting. As Rabbi Kamenetsky writes, there are some good things in your books, but he cannot agree with the positions you have taken on the Torah.

If you would like to speak this over in more detail by phone, or when you visit NY after Succos, please be in touch.

With friendship Jonathan”

Subsequent to the aforesaid interchange, Dr. Ostroff has not received any communication from you regarding this matter. In fact, I understand you dropped off the Avodah forum entirely after his aforementioned post to Aishdas.

Furthermore, I understand that Rabbi Jacoby, of JEP Toronto, approached you when you were here and offered to broker a meeting between you and Rabbi Miller (including Dr. Ostroff) and you were unresponsive. You claim on your site that you were advised by

“two Canadian rabbis who had prior experience with Rabbi Jacoby and/or Rabbi Miller that the agenda would be anything but dialogue. Instead, they warned, the goal of the meeting would undoubtedly be to browbeat me into submission rather than an open discussion to try to resolve our differences constructively. According to them, this is what had transpired in the past. They both strongly advised me against the meeting. Since at the time I was very emotionally overwrought by the controversy, I took their advice...”

Well, as you write, you “took their advice” which means that you chose to reject any contact with your Torontonians critics.

Furthermore, after contacting you at home, the Canadian Jewish News (<http://www.cjnews.com/viewarticle.asp?id=10016&s=1>) wrote as follows:

Rabbi Slifkin added that he stopped his online communication with Ostroff “when the pressures of the ban began.”

I imagine the above is a pretty clear explanation of Dr. Ostroff’s claim that you cut off dialogue with him.

Retrieved from "http://www.toriah.com/wiki/index.php?title=Slifkin_-_Coffer_Debate"

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