

## THE SLIFKIN AFFAIR – ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

By Rabbi Aharon Feldman

Probably the public issue most damaging to the honor of Torah and to its leaders in recent memory is what is known as the Slifkin affair. Rabbi Nosson Slifskin, a talented young man still in his twenties, wrote three books in the past several years in which he attempted to justify certain conflicts between the findings of modern science and parts of the Torah and the Talmud. The author is a fully observant *chareidi* Torah Jew whose intent was clearly *leshem shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven), to defend the honor of the Torah. Nevertheless, in September of last year a public letter banning the books was issued by some of the leading Torah authorities in Israel, and then shortly afterwards a similar ban, signed by many prominent American Roshey Yeshiva, was issued in the United States. The books were banned because they were deemed to contain ideas antithetical to Torah, and therefore forbidden to read because of the Torah commandment, לא תתורו אחריו לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם (“You shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes”) which forbids tempting oneself with matters which might turn one away from the Torah.

The ban was met with resistance by Slifkin who vigorously defended himself on his Internet site on several grounds. First, he argued that there was nothing heretical in his books; his views were based on opinions already offered in the past by the greatest authorities in Jewish history. The ban was based, he claimed, on excerpts of the book taken out of context by extremists who manipulated the signatories, many of whom do not read English, into signing against them. Secondly, the ban was unjustifiably personally cruel to him: it damaged his reputation and caused him to lose his job as a teacher of newcomers to Judaism. Finally, he portrayed the dispute as pro- or anti-science, with himself as a champion of truth and his detractors as uneducated deniers of the discoveries of modern science.

Slifkin’s campaign was eminently successful. In short time, most people were convinced that the ban had no basis or reason, and that Slifkin had been unwarrantedly victimized. His campaign made the signatories appear easily swayed and naive. Easily swayed, because they had relied on the “extremists” and had not sufficiently checked the accuracy of their claims. Naïve, because the tumult over the ban catapulted the books into best-sellerdom. The books had been previously virtually unknown but after the ban began selling by the thousands even at inflated prices – which meant that the ban accomplished nothing.

Blogspots, Internet sites (mostly anonymous) where anyone with access to a computer can express his spontaneous, unchecked and unedited opinion with impunity, became filled with tasteless, derogatory attacks on these authorities, at times to the accompaniment of vulgar caricatures.

As a result, many thoughtful, observant Jews were beset by a crisis of confidence in the judgment of the signatories. This was an extremely vital crisis since these authorities constitute some of the greatest Torah leaders of our generation, authorities upon whom all of the Jewish people rely for their most serious decisions. More important, it threatened to make any of their future signatures on public announcements questionable. The irony of it all is that the books, which had originally been written to

defend the honor of Torah, became one of the most potent vehicles in our times for weakening the authority of Torah.

Since very few matters could be more serious, it is important to examine the issues of this affair and to render them in their proper perspective.<sup>1</sup>

To attain this perspective, the foremost question to be addressed is: do the books contain anything which is antithetical to Torah - in which case the ban was justified, or do they not – in which case the signatories committed a grievous error.

If the books are forbidden and the ban is justified, then the other issues become secondary. The rabbis were asked if the book is permitted to be held in a Jewish home and were obligated to respond, as they are on any other halachic question. Their intention was not to halt the sales of the books, and it was not their concern if, as a result of their ruling, the book would sell more copies. If a rabbi is asked if a certain product is kosher, he is obligated to rule accordingly even if knows that there will be those who will rush out to buy the product for the thrill of eating something forbidden. Also, as unfortunate as is the loss of employment of the author, if his world-view on Torah is incorrect this would indeed disqualify him from teaching newcomers to Judaism.

There are two problematic theses in Slifkin's books which brought about the ban. These are: a) his approach to cosmology (the creation of the world), and b) his approach to the credibility of the Sages. Each of these need to be examined separately.

#### THE COSMOLOGY ISSUE

Most scientists believe that the world is 15 billion years old, and that the human species evolved from lower life forms. The Torah says that it is less than 6000 years and that man was created individually at the end of Creation.

It is quite obvious that the world *appears* older than 6000 years. One needs only look up to the sky and see stars billions of light years away for evidence of this. On the other hand, for a Torah Jew, because his ancestors experienced a revelation by G-d of Torah at Mount Sinai and the Jewish People bears an unbroken tradition of that revelation, there is no doubt that the Torah is true. If so, the appearances which make the world seem older must have some explanation.

In truth, explanations are elusive. Creation does not follow the laws of nature. According to natural law nothing can come into existence *ex nihilo*; therefore by its very definition creation is an act which defies the laws of nature. The apparent age of the universe is based on observations made after the laws of nature came into being, and applying these observations to nature as it existed during the days of Creation is therefore illogical; for perhaps during Creation time passed at a greater speed, or perhaps natural reactions proceeded at a faster pace.

In spite of these considerations, several explanations have been offered by the great commentaries of the previous generations. Basing themselves on Midrashim which say that G-d created many worlds before ours and destroyed them, some say that the earth upon which these worlds were built was not destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the world is as old

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<sup>1</sup>The opinions expressed here are totally and exclusively the personal views of the author and do not reflect those of any body, institution or organization with which he is associated, or those of any of the signatories - with whom this article was not discussed.

<sup>2</sup> *Tiferes Yisrael* in *Derush Ohr Hachayim*, the end of Sanhedrin in the standard edition of Mishnayos. Some vigorously dispute his theory, explaining that the Midrashim refer not to previous physical worlds,

as the first world created while the six days of creation of the Torah refer to our present world. Along the same lines, sources in Kabbala state there are seven cycles in creation and that we are in the third cycle or, some say, in the fifth. *Leshem Shevo VeAchlama*,<sup>3</sup> basing himself on Kabbala, states (without addressing the issue of the age of universe) that each of the 24 “hours” of the day during the days of Creation was at least a thousand times the length of present day hours. In fact, he says, longer “hours” continued, albeit at a reduced pace, until the Generation of the *Mabbul* (Flood). Still others have explained that though there were 24 of our present day hours in each day, but that time flowed at a different, more compressed speed during the days of creation; in other words more events occurred during the course of a day even though a day lasted from the light of one day to that of the next.<sup>4</sup> According to all these explanations, the world could appear to be vastly old and yet would still not be older than the age which the Torah gives it. All of these interpretations do not distort in any way the plain meaning of the Torah.

Slifkin has a totally different explanation. Rather than saying that the six days of creation were literal days, i.e. periods of time extending from the beginning of one day to the next, which is the position of the above explanations and of virtually every commentary on Torah, he posits that they refer to actual 15 billion literal years during which the world evolved from the first Big Bang until the creation of man. The six days of creation, explains Slifkin, do not refer to the real world but are concepts of creation which existed in G-d’s mind.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, there were no six separate acts of creation, as the Torah teaches, but a seamless evolution put into action at the first moment of Creation, a single act which expressed six Divine concepts.

In support of this he cites the Ramban’s statement that all matter was created from an original matter called *hyle* (*hiyuli*).<sup>6</sup> This, however, has no bearing on the issue: the Ramban never said that there were no other acts of creation after the creation of the *hyle*; only that the *hyle* was the material with which the rest of Creation was formed, each on its own day.<sup>7</sup>

Another source given for his theory of Creation is a cryptic statement by Rav E. E. Dessler, cited by Slifkin at least twice, that before man was created the idea of time was meaningless and the idea of “days” is simply man’s way of perceiving this pre-human “time”.<sup>8</sup> Slifkin implies from this his theory that the days did not really occur in the real world.<sup>9</sup> But Rav Dessler is not saying this. All Rav Dessler is saying is that

but rather to spiritual worlds – in which case no record of these worlds would be found in the present world. However, the great halachic authority, the *Maharsham*, in his *Techeylas Mordechai* Sec. I, praises the *Tiferes Yisrael*’s view.

<sup>3</sup> *Sefer De’ah*, Sec II, *Derush* 3, *Anaf* 22, by R. Shlomo Eliashiv, known as the teacher of the Chafetz Chayim in Kabbala and considered to have been the last true master of this body of wisdom. He was the grandfather of R. Yosef Shalom Eliashiv, Shlita, considered by many to be the greatest living authority on Torah law, and one of the signatories to the ban.

<sup>4</sup> R. Shimon Schwab in his *Collected Writings*. This would explain the saying of the Sages that Kayin and Hevel were born immediately after their conception. That which took nine months after the six days of Creation occurred during these days in a few seconds.

<sup>5</sup> *Science and Torah* p. 120, 122.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit* p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> I have learned that Slifkin has subsequently retracted this source.

<sup>8</sup> *Michtav MeEliyahu* Vol IV, p 113 and 114; *loc. cit* p. 128, 130.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit* p 130.

humans perceive the “time” of Creation as “days.” He makes no mention of the days as being Divine concepts.

Furthermore, says Slifkin, although the Torah relates that vegetation came before the luminaries (on the third and fourth days, respectively) and birds came before animals (on the fifth and sixth days, respectively), the actual order of creation follows the view of current scientific opinion, that the luminaries preceded vegetation and that animals preceded birds.<sup>10</sup> Slifkin explains that the Torah refers to G-d’s conceptual plan of creation, not to its actualization. In reality the luminaries and the birds came first; conceptually, in G-d’s mind, the order was reversed.<sup>11</sup>

To explain G-d’s mind, Slifkin suggests that birds and fish are more spiritual than animals since they “fly” through their media of locomotion, and also their habitats are blue (the sky and the sea) which is a more spiritual color.<sup>12</sup> He does not explain why vegetation is more spiritual than the luminaries.

In support of this theory that the actual order of creation did not follow the order written in the Torah, Slifkin applies the principle, *Eyn mukdam u-me’uchar batorah* – “The Torah does not follow a chronological order.”<sup>13</sup> This application borders on the absurd. The Talmud employs this principle only to explain why two separate portions of the Torah do not have to follow a chronological order.<sup>14</sup> In no way can it be employed to uproot the plain meaning of the verses which explicitly give a specific order for creation.

Slifkin goes on to posit that the Theory of Evolution in one form or another is a fact – only mentioning in passing those eminent scientists who have discredited this theory because the discovery of the DNA molecule make it statistically impossible.<sup>15</sup> According to Slifkin, when the Torah says that man was created, it means that the human species evolved until a certain point in time when this species was invested with a Divine spark which made it “human” in our sense of the word.<sup>16</sup> He does not explain why the first woman, who presumably evolved together with man, had to be taken from his side, as the Torah teaches us she was.

These cosmological explanations have no basis in any commentary or Midrash and clearly violate the plain meaning of the Torah. Like the famous archer who painted the targets after the arrows landed and thereby ensured himself a perfect bulls-eye each time, Slifkin uses questionable sources as proofs for his *a priori* belief that the theories of modern science which he cites are indisputable fact.

Interpretations which have no basis in the Written or Oral Torah and which contradict the tradition of the Midrashim and the commentaries are perversions of Torah ideas and may be classified as *megaleh panim baTorah shelo ke-halacha* (distorted interpretations of the Torah) which are forbidden to study. Even if the Torah authorities who signed the ban based their ruling on excerpts which were translated before them, it

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<sup>10</sup> *Loc. cit.* p 119.

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.* p 119

<sup>12</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p.132-3 and Note 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Loc. cit.* p. 131-2.

<sup>14</sup> Pesachim 7b; Sanhedrin 49b.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Professor Alvin Radkowsky, *Encounter*, 1989, p58, AOJS, citing Nobel-prize winning physicist, E.P. Wigner, that the probability of a simple life-form arising spontaneously from primeval “soup” and reproducing itself (as current evolutionary theories have it) is zero, or impossible.

<sup>16</sup> *Science of Torah* p. 179.

would therefore appear that they were not misled. They were perfectly justified in terming his views inauthentic interpretations of Torah.

We will now turn to the second problem in Slifkin's books, his view regarding the credibility of the Sages.

#### THE CREDIBILITY OF THE SAGES

There are many places in the Talmud where statements made by the Sages seem to contradict modern science. The most common are the cures and potions which the Talmud gives for various diseases. Our great halachic authorities have noted the phenomenon that these cures, in the vast majority of cases, do not seem to cure illnesses in our times.

The most widespread explanation offered for this is *nishtanu hatevaim*, "nature has changed" - cures that worked in the times of the Talmud are no longer effective.<sup>17</sup> There are many examples of illnesses and cures, which because of environmental and nutritional differences and physical changes to the body over the years are no longer effective. Another explanation is that we cannot reproduce these cures, either because the definitions or the amounts of the ingredient of these cures are unspecified in the Talmud.<sup>18</sup> It has also been suggested that the cures had their effect on the inner, spiritual level of the affected person, and therefore were effective only for the people of the era of the Sages who were on a higher spiritual level than nowadays but not for later generations when increased physicality did not permit the cures to take effect..

Against these explanations, there is another opinion which Slifkin uses explicitly and implicitly in his books. This theory goes as follows. The Sages based their wisdom on the medical knowledge of their times. This would seem perfectly legitimate, for why should they not rely on the experts of their time on issues not directly addressed by the Written or the Oral Law? Therefore, when subsequently medicine indicates that these cures are ineffectual, there would be nothing disrespectful in asserting that the scientific knowledge of antiquity available to the Sages was flawed..

This approach is mentioned by many eminent authorities in Jewish history. Rav Sherira Gaon<sup>19</sup> mentions it with respect to cures. R. Avraham, son of the Rambam, mentions it with respect to all science and the Rambam with respect to astronomy. *Pachad Yitzchok*<sup>20</sup> says that statements in the Talmud which seem to uphold spontaneous generation are incorrect, even though we do not change any laws based on their words. Rav Shmshon Refael Hirsch applies this argument to animals mentioned in the Talmud which do not seem to exist nowadays. Finally, a conversation with R. Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler recorded by Rabbi Aryeh Carmel indicates a somewhat similar approach.<sup>21</sup>

This approach (henceforth, that of R. Avraham) is used often by Slifkin to explain many difficulties he has with the Sages' statements.<sup>22</sup> With it he explains why we have no

<sup>17</sup> *Tosafos s.v.kavra* to Moed Katan 11a, and many other places.

<sup>18</sup> *Teshuvos Chavos Yair* No. 234.

<sup>19</sup> Of the Geonic era..

<sup>20</sup> By Rav Yitzchak Lampronti in *Pachad Yitzchak*, entry "Tzeydah."

<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Aryeh Carmel, citing an informal conversation with Rav Dessler, in a footnote to *Michtav MeEliahu* IV p. 355 that the Sages never erred in the final halacha, although they may have erred in the reason they gave for it.

<sup>22</sup> It is a recurring theme of his book, *Mysterious Creatures*, where he assumes that the Sages relied on various legends of antiquity.

record of certain animals mentioned in the Talmud, and why certain rules of the Sages regarding animals seem to have exceptions. Because they based themselves on the information available at their time, they simply made a mistake.

This theory, more than the first, has caused the most misunderstanding. How could Slifkin be faulted for espousing a view stated by giants of previous generations?

The answer to this question is that although these giants did indeed espouse this view, it is a minority opinion which has been rejected by most authorities since then.

In *Lev Avraham* Dr. Abraham Abraham-Sofer,<sup>23</sup> discusses why the cures mentioned in the Talmud should not be relied upon in actual practice. As above, he explains that either a) the cures worked for the Sages but not for us; or b) following R. Avraham, that the Sages erred when they thought that these cures work. In a note to a later edition of this work, the world famous authority R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach asked to add the following comment: “The principal explanation is the other views; that which is written “when the Sages spoke etc.” [R.. Avraham’s view], should be mentioned in the name of *yesh omrim*.”<sup>24</sup> This means that the view of R. Avraham is a minority opinion which only “some say.”

Ten years later, a scholar,<sup>25</sup> about to publish a book on the topic of Torah and health, asked R. Shlomo Zalman how an opinion held by such giants of Jewish history be relegated to the position of *yesh omrim*? Rav Auerbach responded in a letter stating that he did not remember his sources (it was ten years later), but he believes one source to be that it is the accepted opinion of *poskim* that we rely on the medical opinion of the Sages to violate Shabbos even though according to modern medical opinion the cures are ineffectual and we are violating Shabbos unnecessarily. Thus, for practical purposes we reject the view of R. Avraham.

There are other sources that this opinion is only one which “some say.” In countless places where the commentaries, whether *Rishonim* or *Acharonim* (Early or Later Authorities), are faced with a contradiction between the science of their times and a statement of the Sages, they commonly apply the principle, *nishtanu hateva'im* (“nature has changed”).<sup>26</sup> Had they held R. Avraham’s view, they would have simply explained that the Sages erred in following whatever was the medical or scientific opinion of their times.

The Rivash,<sup>27</sup> the Rashba<sup>28</sup> and the Maharal<sup>29</sup> write, as well, that it is forbidden to say that the Sages erred in matters of science.

*Leshem Shevo Ve-achlama*<sup>30</sup> writes:

The main thing is: everyone who is called a Jew is obligated to believe with complete faith that everything found in the words of the Sages whether in *halachos* or *agados* of the Talmud or in the Midrashim, are all the words of the Living God, for

<sup>23</sup> P. 60. This is a work on medicine and Halacha, by Dr. Avraham Avraham-Sofer, a noted *chareidi* Israeli physician who was in constant consultation with R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

<sup>24</sup> *Ib.* p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Lerner of Jerusalem.

<sup>26</sup> *Hishtanus Hateva'im*, by Rabbi Neria Moshe Gutel, lists these places, Slifkin suggests (p. 207, Note 1) that R. Moshe Feinstein uses the principle of *nishtanu hateva'im* as a euphemism for R. Avraham’s opinion. This is too brazen an absurdity to require refutation..

<sup>27</sup> *Teshuvos Harivash* No. 447.

<sup>28</sup> *Toras Habayis, Mishmeres Habayis, Bayis 4, Shaar 1.*

<sup>29</sup> *Be'er Hagolah* “*Be'er Hashishi*.”

<sup>30</sup> *De'ah*, Sec. II, *Derush 4, Anaf 19, Siman 7* (p. 160). See Note 3.

everything which they said is with the spirit of God which spoke within them, and “the secret of God is given to those who fear Him (סוד ה' ליראי).” This is just as we find in Sanhedrin 48b that even regarding something which has no application to Halacha and practical behavior, the Talmud asks regarding [the Sage] Rav Nachman, “How did he know this?” and the reply given is [that he knew this because] “The secret from God is given to those who fear him....”<sup>31</sup>

The Chazon Ish, considered by many to be the *posek acharon* (final Torah authority) for our times, writes in his “Letters”<sup>32</sup> that “our tradition” is that the *shechita* of someone who denies the truth of the Sages whether in the Halacha or Aggada (the non-halachic parts) of the Talmud is disqualified just as is someone who is a heretic. He adds that experience has shown that those who begin questioning the truth of the Sages will ultimately lose their future generations to Torah.<sup>33</sup>

Why does mainstream opinion reject R. Avraham’s opinion? This is not because they considered the Sages greater scientists than their modern counterparts. Rather, they believed that, unlike R. Avraham’s view, the source of *all* the knowledge of the Sages is either from Sinaitic tradition (received at the Giving of the Torah) or from Divine inspiration. That they were in contact with such sources is undeniable. How else could we explain numerous examples where the Sages had scientific information which no scientist of their time had? How were they so precise in their calculations of the New Moon? How did they know that hemophilia is transmitted by the mother’s DNA, a fact discovered relatively recently?<sup>34</sup> How did they know that “a drop exudes from the brain and develops into semen”<sup>35</sup> without having known that the pituitary gland, located at the base of the brain, emits a hormone which controls the production of semen. None of this could have been discovered by experimentation. Either they had a tradition directly teaching them these facts, or they knew them by applying principles which were part of the Oral Torah regarding the inner workings of the world. Thus they knew the precise cycle of the moon; they knew that there was a relationship between the coagulation of blood and motherhood; and they knew that there was a relationship between the brain and male reproduction.

Furthermore, the Talmud is not a mere compilation of the sayings of wise men; it is the sum total of *Torah -she-be-al-peh*, the Oral Torah which is the interpretation of the Written Torah. It is, then, the word of G-d, for which reason we are required to make a

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<sup>31</sup> This applies where the Sages are stating a fact, not where their intention is allegorical. Ramchal (*Maamar al Hagados*) says the Sages employed scientific pronouncements to convey veiled mystical truths but were not necessarily true in themselves. It does not appear that the *Leshem* or the other opinions would disagree with this.

<sup>32</sup> Section I, Letter 15.

<sup>33</sup> None of these opinions apply this approach to the words of the *Rishonim* or *Acharonim*; only to the Sages. They would not apply as well to passages in the Sages which are allegorical.

<sup>34</sup> It is forbidden to circumcise a child whose brothers have died from bleeding after his circumcision, *מרו אחיו מחמת מילה*, because of a danger that he too might die. Since the brothers died from what we know now as hemophilia, and we are afraid that this condition is hereditary. Since this prohibition applies only to a maternal brother, the Sages knew that hemophilia is inherited through the mother, a fact discovered relatively recently.

<sup>35</sup> Source from Kabbala works cited many places, as in *Kehillas Yaakov* (by the author of *Melo Haro'im*), *Erech Holada*.

*birchas hatorah* (a blessing) before we study it, which we do not make before studying other wisdoms. As the *Leshem* cited above says, if even regarding matters which are not related to halacha, the Sages say, *sod Hashem liyerav*, “G-d reveals the secrets of nature to those who fear him,” then certainly there must have been *siyata dishmaya* (Divine assistance) and even *ruach hakodesh* (a Divine spirit) assisting the Sages in their redaction of the Oral Law. It is therefore inconceivable, to these opinions, that G-d would have permitted falsities to have been transmitted as *Torah She-be-al-peh* and not have revealed His secrets to those who fear Him.

One of the most powerful reasons why R. Avraham’s opinion was rejected by most opinions, is the introduction of the wisdom of Kabbalah of the Ari Zal in the sixteenth century. This cast the Sages in another dimension. Before then, many authorities had held that the esoteric wisdom described in the Talmud as *Ma’aseh Breyshis* and *Ma’aseh Hamerkava* was science and philosophy. After the introduction of Kabbalah it became clear that these were the *Sefer HaYetzira*, the *Zohar* and the *Tikkunim*.<sup>36</sup> This was accepted by the overwhelming majority of Torah scholars since then. Kabbala made it clear that when the Sages spoke, they based themselves on their knowledge of the mysteries of creation.<sup>37</sup> This would give them an accurate knowledge of matters of natural science as well.

In any event, R. Avraham’s opinion is a minority opinion, one of many which have fallen by the wayside in the course of the centuries and which we do no longer follow. Thus, on the issue of the credibility of the Sages as well, the signatories to the ban were correct in terming Slifkin’s books as perversions of the correct approach to the Sages’ words.

R. Yosef Shalom Eliashiv, a signatory to the ban, was asked: if he considers Slifkin’s approach wrong how could so many earlier authorities have held it? He answered: “They were permitted to hold this opinion; we are not.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, they were authorities in their own right qualified to decide matters of Jewish law. We are not permitted to do so.<sup>39</sup> We are enjoined to follow the majority opinion and our tradition as to how we are to approach Torah.

Can an individual on his own decide to follow the minority opinion? No more than he is permitted to do so in any matter of Jewish law<sup>40</sup> and certainly not in matters

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<sup>36</sup> See *Leshem Shevo Veachlama*, *ib.* where he discusses this change wrought by Kabbalah.

<sup>37</sup> This is constantly seen in the writings of the Vilna Gaon who, besides being a towering authority on Halacha, consistently shows how the Talmud’s statements are based on the secrets of Kabbala.

<sup>38</sup> Conversation with the author. Since we are not permitted to follow Slifkin’s views, R. Eliashiv believes that they can be rightfully categorized as heresy (*apikorsus*) as the ban’s wording had it. I believe this is because they diminish the honor and the acceptability of the words of the Sages, which has the status of *apikorsus*.

<sup>39</sup> It also explains why Rav Eliashiv, in the above conversation with the author, said that one cannot rule that Slifkin is a heretic (*apikores*) even though the views he espoused have the status of heresy, as in the previous note. My understanding of his opinion is that Slifkin did, after all, intend to give a correct interpretation of the Torah and he did follow, at least, a minority opinion. Nevertheless, Rav Eliashiv added, “Even if he is one of the *lamed vov tzadikim*, these books may not be taken into a Jewish home.”

<sup>40</sup> It should be pointed out that the principle, the majority opinion rules, applies equally to ideas as well as to practical halacha. Beliefs, besides falling under certain commandments, affect a Jew’s status with respect to various laws and are therefore also part of practical halacha.

which determine our basic approach to *Torah she b'al peh* which is the domain of the *poskim* (recognized decisors of halacha) of the Jewish people.

What about the conflicts between science and the Talmud which Slifkin raised? Like all difficulties in our Torah studies, we are obliged to seek solutions. However, the solutions have to be within the parameters of the true interpretation of the Torah and of the proper honor to the Sages. The fact that we are faced with a problem does not permit us to compromise our obligation as to how to properly approach Torah.<sup>41</sup> In the meantime we can be sure of one thing: the answers which Slifkin proposed are not the right ones.

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<sup>41</sup> There are cogent answers to the questions which Slifkin raised but these will of necessity, G-d willing, have to be the subject of another article.