

Foreword

by Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Many of our Sages and leaders through the generations have had the luxury of “preaching to the choir.” Their constituents, followers, disciples, and students lived in the same intellectual world as they did, were willing to accept the teachings of their mentors without serious question, and indeed lived lives in which they were not exposed to ideological frameworks at odds with those of their master. However, throughout the ages, some of our leaders have had to cope with constituencies which did question them. These constituencies were exposed to different cultural and philosophical influences, often at odds with the core teachings of these great men. And so these men stepped forward courageously and often at the risk of their own reputations, to provide direction for those who were lost and answers to those who were puzzled, and even guidance and words of gentle rebuke to those who were rebellious and hostile.

The heroes of the latter category include Saadia Gaon and Rambam. In the post enlightenment era, the need for approaches modeled by Rabbeinu Saadia and Rambam, approaches which dealt head-on with challenges from outside normative Judaism, increased many times over. And great men among us rose to these new challenges, including men of great fame such as Rabbis Mayer Leibush Malbim, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Abraham Isaac Kook, Eliyahu Dessler, and Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and less known thinkers to whom Rabbi Slifkin’s book introduces us, such as Rabbi Gedalia Nadel.

THE CHALLENGE OF CREATION

Today, too, there are leaders among us who are blessed with constituencies that are not exposed to ideologies alien to traditional Judaism, or who are oblivious, intentionally or otherwise, to the challenges of these alien systems. Fortunate are these leaders, for they can continue to teach and preach what they see as the unadulterated and pure message of the Torah. However, there are those among us who are confronted daily with Jews whose exposure to the culture and philosophy of our times stimulate probing and consuming questions about Judaism. Some of these Jews come from the ranks of the non-observant who wish to draw closer to Torah and mitzvos but who find it difficult to integrate the thought system with which they have grown up with the teachings of the Torah to which they are newly introduced. But also among these individuals are those who have been steeped from birth in a traditional education and in a traditional understanding of Torah but who are now confronted, either through formal secular education, general reading, or discussions with those in their everyday environment, with new challenges of doubt and perplexity.

The greatest merit of Rabbi Slifkin's newly revised and expanded edition of his earlier work *The Science of Torah*, entitled *The Challenge of Creation*, is that it faces squarely many of the questions which trouble even the most devout of our brethren who allow themselves to think seriously about the implications for the religion they revere of the science they learned in school. Recommending to those who are thus troubled that they desist from such questions is futile, and has disastrous spiritual consequences, which include disillusion with our tradition, paralyzing doubt, and painful inner conflict. Most tragically, suppressing these questions prevents the opportunity to discover depths of Torah that the questioner may not ever have imagined or anticipated.

This work demonstrates that grappling with issues such as evolution, the age of the universe, the literalism of our sacred texts, miracles, *hashgacha pratis*, and the scientific world view in general can result in a new appreciation of the breadth and depth of our Torah, which indeed has seventy facets and is more profound than the depths of the sea. Seekers, whether new to Jewish observance or born into the Orthodox fold, will find in this work a model of honest confrontation with serious challenges. *The Challenge of Creation* spells out these challenges articulately, analyzes

them keenly, and refers to impeccable and authoritative traditional sources to address them.

Rabbi Slifkin's work has engendered controversy in the past, and no doubt will continue to do so. This is to be expected, because the issues he deals with are sensitive, and many will find his approach provocative. It is to be hoped, however, that those who choose to disagree with Rabbi Slifkin will do so politely and intelligently, as befits Torah scholars and men of good will. The issues discussed in this book deserve debate and discussion, but also deserve thoughtfulness and reasoned responses.

Rabbi Slifkin is to be commended for his contribution to our abiding faith, as well as for his courageous intellectual honesty. Hopefully others, similarly motivated and equipped with comparable erudition and Fear of Heaven, will continue along the trail he has blazed.

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