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Dear Rabbi Meiselman, *shlita*,

*Shalom u'vracha*, I hope that the Rosh Yeshivah is well.

I am writing to the Rosh Yeshivah concerning the *shiurim* that the Rosh Yeshivah delivered concerning me and my books. Recently I obtained a recording of these *shiurim* and I was stunned to hear the Rosh Yeshivah report information both about myself and my books that was factually incorrect and extremely defamatory. Regardless of the *hashkafic* dispute, I am sure that the Rosh Yeshivah would want to correct false harmful information that was spoken about me. I shall quote the relevant extracts from the *shiurim* and explain why each of them is an inaccurate reflection of my position. (Some are quoted from the series of three *shiurim* delivered to the entire yeshivah, and some are highlighted as quoted from the *va'ad* given on the 19th of Shevat. I must point out that in the latter *va'ad*, the Rosh Yeshivah was working solely from the manuscript of years ago, and the final book is about 90% different.)

I will not spend time discussing the Rosh Yeshivah's disputes with my views concerning the age of the universe, although obviously I must respectfully dispute the Rosh Yeshivah's views. For example, it seems to me that there is factual basis for asserting that the laws of nature have, at least for the most part, functioned in the same way for billions of years, and it is not merely a (false) assumption of scientists, as the Rosh Yeshivah states. I also disagree that it is "absurd" and only "semi-intelligent" to believe that the scientific view concerning the development of the universe conflicts with a simple reading of the Chumash, as the Rosh Yeshivah states. But these are all substantial ideological disputes which are probably futile to debate. There are other issues with which I disagree with the Rosh Yeshivah's judgment of my personality, such as regarding the Rosh Yeshivah's public description of me as an "incompetent nincompoop," but this is likewise probably a waste of time to argue about.

In this letter, I will only discuss the primary focus of the Rosh Yeshivah's *shiurim*, which is to attack my book *The Camel, The Hare And The Hyrax*. To my great surprise, despite the Rosh Yeshivah using this as a basis for determining that I am a *kofe*r, it seems that *every single one* of the Rosh Yeshivah's stated objections is not based on any genuine dispute at all, but rather on a misunderstanding or mischaracterization of my

book. Especially in light of the fact that I only printed 1500 copies of this book, and the majority of people hearing the Rosh Yeshivah's *shiurim* will not independently verify his report of the contents of my book, it is important that the facts be set straight.

(1) The Rosh Yeshivah begins his discussion of my books by talking about my meeting with the Rosh Yeshivah, and introduces this in turn by making a claim about my personal life twelve years ago:

“A certain young man, from Manchester, England, who, when he came to see me a year ago, two years ago, whenever it was – it wasn't a major event in my life so I don't recall exactly what happened – I was not aware that my *mechutan* in Manchester had thrown him out of the yeshivah for inappropriate behavior before he subsequently went to a different yeshivah in this country...”

It shocked me beyond words to hear the Rosh Yeshivah claim that his *mechutan*, Rav Gavriel Knopfler *shlita*, had thrown me of Shaarei Torah in Manchester for inappropriate behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was just the opposite – I left *against* their wishes. As an extremely shy 17 year-old in Shaarei Torah, I was a model of perfect behavior, never missing *davenning*, *sefer* or stepping out of line in any way. When I told the *hanhalah* that I wanted to move to Eretz Yisrael (since my family had just moved there), they placed enormous pressure upon me to persuade me to stay. It was only after my parents intervened that I met with Rav Gavriel Knopfler *shlita* (my first and only meeting with him) and he agreed not to pressure me to stay, although he still tried to persuade me that none of the options I was considering in Eretz Yisrael were suitable.

On Friday, I called Rav Gavriel *shlita* to tell him that people were claiming that I had been thrown out of the yeshivah. He said that I was catching him completely by surprise and that he could not begin to imagine where such a “*ta'us muchletes*” could have come from. When I told him that Rav Meiselman had stated it in a *shiur*, he said as far as he recalls he had never even discussed me at all with the Rosh Yeshivah, and he did not know who could have told the Rosh Yeshivah such a thing. He said that he will contact the Rosh Yeshivah to explain that this is an utterly false account. I hope that he has done so.

Since the Rosh Yeshivah stated this false claim about my being thrown out of yeshivah, it has spread far and wide. Even people who don't fully believe it think that there must be some truth to it, which is absolutely not the case. I must request that the Rosh Yeshivah take the necessary steps to rectify this terrible slander of me.

(2) The Rosh Yeshivah then discusses our meeting of several years ago (which occurred when someone showed my manuscript to the Rosh Yeshivah, and the Rosh Yeshivah expressed interest in discussing it with me) and my subsequent mention of the Rosh Yeshivah's name in the book:

“Somehow the author had even quoted me as a partial *haskomoh* for the book which sort of pushed me into a more awkward situation. I assume that its part of the general stupidity of the book rather than outright *sheker*.” (Va’ad of 19 Shevat)

“(he wrote) *ke’ilu* that there’s a point here that I didn’t agree with, a point here that I didn’t agree with - it’s not that not everyone agreed with everything. I agreed with *nothing*.”

I do not remember our meeting well, although I do know that it must have been six years ago, not “one or two years ago” as the Rosh Yeshivah stated. The Rosh Yeshivah himself explicitly states in the *shiur* that it wasn’t a major event in his life so he does not recall exactly what happened. I myself only remember two items from that meeting. One, the Rosh Yeshivah emphatically stressing that etymological explanations of *pesukim* given by the *meforshim* on Chumash do not necessarily relate to halachic definitions. I accepted this point and subsequently incorporated it into my book (it is on page 27). The second item I recall is the Rosh Yeshivah stressing that Chazal could not have believed in spontaneous generation and that Rashi’s interpretation of the Gemara is not correct, and shouting at me that I would have to ask *mehilah* from the Tannaim on Yom Kippur for having stated that they believed in spontaneous generation.

When it came to publishing my very different final version of the manuscript, five years later, I wanted to mention in the acknowledgements all those who had contributed to the book. I recalled that the Rosh Yeshivah had made a valuable point that I had incorporated, and I presumed that there was also other input that I had included in the various re-writes. But I also recalled that the Rosh Yeshivah objected to certain parts of the book. I certainly did not recall that the Rosh Yeshivah had objected to every part of it, nor that the Rosh Yeshivah had gone through the entire book, “step by step by step by step” as the Rosh Yeshivah states, showing what was wrong with every part of it. Again, I would like to respectfully point out that the Rosh Yeshivah also admits that he does not remember the meeting well. Therefore I thought that the appropriate thing to do would be to mention the Rosh Yeshivah’s name, but also to note that I am not claiming that every person listed endorses everything in this work. In addition I specifically mentioned that the people in the list had variously reviewed different versions of the manuscript (i.e. so as not to give anyone aside from the *maskimim* any responsibility for the final version).

I am truly sorry if the Rosh Yeshivah was put into an awkward position as a result, which apparently caused the Rosh Yeshivah to address the issue publicly, but I can promise that I was simply presenting things as honestly as I recalled them. I had no recollection of the Rosh Yeshivah disagreeing with everything, and I knew that I had included at least one significant point that was contributed by the Rosh Yeshivah. I will gladly clarify matters both on my website and in future editions of the book.

“The use of my name by him is just another example of the absolute intellectual dishonesty that this individual has.”

(3) The Rosh Yeshivah does not detail other examples of my “absolute intellectual dishonesty” for which the aforementioned item was “just another example.” This is, of course, an extremely sweeping and damning description of me. The Rosh Yeshivah does not know me at all well, and I would like to state for the record that while everyone has strengths and weaknesses, most people consider that intellectual honesty is one of my strengths. In fact, this is specifically something that was highlighted by the rabbonim who wrote *haskamos* for my books. Even the Rosh Yeshivah’s *chaver* Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb, who subsequently deferred to the Rosh Yeshivah’s opposition to the book, initially complimented me on the honesty that he perceived in it.

“The Torah was given to a group of people who were living in area of the world where you had camels all the time. So that the Torah would be given for 3500 years and people would be saying something about a camel that doesn’t happen to be true about a camel, obviously any normal intelligent person would decide that there’s something wrong. So this gentleman here says; so we’ll understand where he’s coming from and where his mistake is - the reason why I want [to say this] is that I don’t want everyone screaming that [the Gedolim] are just a bunch of wild maniacs; so he says, No, a camel – its not true. It says *uparsah ainenu mafris*, it doesn’t have a split hoof. But he says it does. So then we’ve got a problem.” (19 Shevat)

(4) I cannot imagine where the Rosh Yeshivah thought that I wrote that the Torah was incorrect in writing that the camel lacks a split hoof. I specifically explained how the Torah’s disqualification for the camel’s foot can be understood in two ways (based on Rashi and Rashbam), both of which are zoologically accurate.

“It says the *shafan*... it says that it is a *maaleh gerah*... then he says, it’s not true.” (Va’ad of 19 Shevat)

(5) I wrote that according to zoological definitions of rumination, the hyrax does not ruminate. I then discussed how other aspects of hyrax anatomy or behavior can nevertheless be described as *maaleh gerah*. My approach in raising this question and suggesting these answers is identical to that of *Torah Sheleimah*, *Sichas Chullin*, and others who have studied this topic. I certainly did not write that the Torah’s statement is not true, *chas ve’shalom!*

“Then the *chazir*, it has a split hoof and doesn’t chew its cud. So that, he says at least the Torah got one out of four (*laughter in background*).... At least the Torah got 25% right. That’s the basic thesis of this book.” (Va’ad of 19 Shevat)

(6) In this *shiur*, the Rosh Yeshivah states that he is quoting from my manuscript of six years ago, rather than the final book. This early manuscript was not intended for publication, and was aimed solely at outreach workers who use this topic to prove the divinity of Torah. The final book was *vastly* different from the earlier draft. The basic thesis of the book is not to say that the Torah was only 25% right. It is to show how *all* these *pesukim*, despite being seen by many critics as reasons to doubt or deny the Torah, can nevertheless be resolved (although they cannot be used as proof of the Torah's divinity). I exert great effort to show how this is the case. This is a book that seeks to prove that the Torah is entirely *right*. I cannot understand how the Rosh Yeshivah can characterize it as a book that seeks to show how the Torah is mostly wrong.

(7) The Rosh Yeshivah states that “this gentleman bases his position (that Chazal could have been mistaken in science) on Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam,” but that “as a matter of fact, anyone who has done more learning,” will know that it is also in the *Teshuvos HaGeonim*. Yet I myself also quoted the *Teshuvus HaGeonim* in both *Mysterious Creatures* and *The Camel, The Hare And The Hyrax*. Surely the Rosh Yeshivah will therefore agree that this gratuitous insult concerning the extent of my studies was misplaced.

(8) In the *va'ad* of 19<sup>th</sup> Shevat, the Rosh Yeshivah criticizes my discussion of the terms *mafris parsah* and *maaleh gerah* based on the etymological explanations of the *meforshim*, because these are not relevant to the *halachic* definitions (which are based on *Torah sheBaal Peh*). But this was only in the early draft that was submitted to the Rosh Yeshivah for his comments, and which I subsequently corrected in the final edition! Surely, now that the Rosh Yeshivah knows that I corrected this in the final edition, he will admit that it was unfair to publicly criticize me for it.

(9) We now come to the primary focus of the Rosh Yeshivah's *shiur*, the topic of the *shesuah*. The Rosh Yeshivah introduces this section with saying that this will explain “more than anything else, what the problem with this guy is.” The Rosh Yeshivah, in quoting my reasons as to why *shesuah* seems to mean “split,” as Targum Onkelos translates it, rather than referring to a type of animal, as the Gemara states, interjects the list by pointing out that I am giving “all the reasons why Chazal were wrong.”

“Here, he's even taking on how Chazal were *darshening pesukim*... this gentlemen, in his mid-twenties, already understood that Chazal were wrong. This is a basic *mehalech* in why, what's wrong with this book.”

“I when I think about this individual... whether there is a retraction or there isn't a retraction from Rav Elyashiv, he is a *kofer* or he isn't a *kofer*... in my gut I believe he is.

But I'm not – I'm not saying it, I'm not posting it. Why do I believe he is? ...The Rambam brings that one of [the categories of *kofer*] is *hamakchish maggideha*.... Someone who comes along and begins to question, 'Well I really don't see, it's not *pshat* in *pasuk* what Chazal say, Rashi, when he's giving *peshat* – that's really not *pshat* in how the *pesukim go*' – is very close, he's playing brinkmanship with *makchish magideha*."

"Anyone who decides that a *maamar Chazal* is not really what the *passuk* is talking about... someone who's saying that about Chazal's understanding of a *passuk* ... he's lacking a basic understanding of what *Torah sheBaal Peh* is."

"The essential problem with this author is that he knows it all. And now he is sitting on a Beis Din, judging Chazal *darshening* a *passuk* this way, Chazal *darshening* it that way, Chazal's logic is good, Chazal's logic is wrong..."

This, which the Rosh Yeshivah explains at length to be the primary example of why I am a *kofer*, and to be a reason why I am an *azzus panim*, is based on a complete misunderstanding of what I wrote. I never for a moment would dream of saying that Chazal learned *peshat* wrong in this *passuk*. (If that is what I had thought, and that there is therefore no such thing as a *shesuah*, I would not have dedicated the end of chapter eleven to exploring the identity of the *shesuah*.) All I was saying is that it is not the simple *peshat* in the Torah – rather, it is *Torah sheBaal Peh*-based *peshat*. The Rosh Yeshivah himself later notes that Onkelos, who explains *shesuah* as meaning "fully split," is giving *peshat* in the *passuk* divorced from *Torah sheBaal Peh*, whereas Rashi, quoting the Gemara, is giving *peshat* based on *Torah SheBaal Peh*. Since Rashi, in explaining the word *shesuah*, is basing himself on the Gemara, I think it is therefore difficult to use this to prove the divinity of Torah to someone who does not yet accept the authority of *Torah sheBaal Peh* (and which is why Rashi in *Chullin* does not explain the Gemara's proof to be based on the *shesuah*). It seems that I am far from alone in understanding that Rashi is giving *Torah sheBaal Peh*-based *peshat* rather than *pashut peshat*, since every English translation of the Chumash that I have seen – ArtScroll, Rav Hirsch, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, and so on – all translate *shesuah* as "completely split" rather than as a type of animal. They were surely not saying that Chazal were wrong, or that Chazal didn't know how to learn *peshat* in a *passuk*, and neither was I.

(10) There are comments about my personal knowledge and beliefs, which the Rosh Yeshivah makes in passing, that I would also like to clarify:

"Guys like this always assume that the Rashbam did not believe in *Torah SheBaal Peh*."

I cannot even begin to imagine how the Rosh Yeshivah determined that I think that the Rashbam did not believe in *Torah SheBaal Peh*. I did not write anything at all about the Rashbam which would remotely lead in this direction.

There is, what's called in the world of philosophy - which this gentleman, busy with zoology, is not aware of - the proof of design.

(11) I do not know why the Rosh Yeshivah interjects this part of the discussion with a seemingly gratuitous insult to me, but I would like to correct it. I am indeed aware of the proof of design; the first part of my book *The Science of Torah*, which I presume that the Rosh Yeshivah has not read, is entirely dedicated to a discussion of it.

(12) The Rosh Yeshivah discusses at length the topic of identifying kosher animals, and refers to my consumption of locusts at the *halachic seudah* of three years ago which was described in the *Jewish Observer*. The Rosh Yeshivah speaks of my "arrogance and contempt" in following the Yemenite mesorah instead of Ashkenazi practice not to eat locusts. Yet I am sure that when the Rosh Yeshivah discovers the facts of the situation, he will reconsider his view. Although I extensively studied both the topic of kosher locusts and of adopting the mesorah of another community, which led me to believe that it was permissible, I did not rely on my own understanding of the matter. I did what anyone ought to do in my situation – I asked a *shaylah* to my *posek*, a *talmid chacham* of high standing. He took time to investigate it carefully and then *paskened* that I may eat them. (My colleague Rabbi Dr Ari Zivotofsky also asked a *shaylah* to one of the Gedolim in Yerushalayim and received the same *psak*.) Surely the Rosh Yeshivah would agree that I cannot be described as possessing "contempt and arrogance" for asking a *shaylah* and following the *psak*!

(13) The Rosh Yeshivah then discusses my arguments that the *arneves* is a hare. I wrote that although one text of the Gemara refers to Ptolemy's mother as having the Greek name of the *arneves*, and another refers to his wife instead, perhaps the correct version is that it refers to his father, who was called Lagos, which is Greek for "hare." The Rosh Yeshivah sarcastically comments that:

"not only is this gentleman a zoologist, he's also a Greek scholar and a historian, and none of us were smart enough to figure this out... you need to say that Chazal were so stupid that they didn't know history..."

Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman and Rav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog both say that there is no doubt whatsoever that the Gemara is referring to Ptolemy Lagos, who was named after his father Lagos. I merely suggested that in light of there being different texts in the Bavli and Yerushalmi, maybe there is a textual inaccuracy and that the correct version is that it was his father. I cited *Etz Yosef* who states that the father and brothers of Ptolemy, as well as the mother, were known as *Lagos*. Thus, I was not saying that Chazal made a mistake, but rather that there were copying errors in the transmission of the Gemara to us, as happens on many occasions.

(14) When I wrote that the Ibn Ezra's endorsement of Arabic names as an indication of an animal's identity *supports* our *mesorah* that the *arneves* is a hare, the Rosh Yeshivah comments about me that:

“he wants to create problems rather than solve them.”

Since the Rosh Yeshivah does not dispute the identification of the *arneves* as the hare, I do not understand this objection. I am also dumbfounded as to how the Rosh Yeshivah can issue what seems to be a general characterization of my work in this way. The explicit goal of my books is to solve difficult questions that many people have been asking for a long time and to which they have not yet received adequate answers. I can show the Rosh Yeshivah many dozens of letters that I received from readers who were grateful for having had their pre-existing questions answered by my books.

(15) I then discuss the objection, raised by many skeptics (for whom my book is partially targeted), that how could the Torah have been referring to the rabbit's behavior of cecotrophy if for most of history, people did not know that rabbits engage in this. The Rosh Yeshivah criticizes this because it does not matter if people do not understand the Torah at all times, as long as it is ultimately true. Yet I myself presented this as a response to this objection!

(16) The Rosh Yeshivah then discusses the problem raised in my book that the llama appears to present an exception to the Torah's exclusive list of animals with one kosher sign. The Rosh Yeshivah states that it is not a problem because the Torah's system of classification does not need to follow the scientific classification, implying that I should have written this as a solution. But this is indeed precisely what I myself explain in the book, on pages 60-68! (I then gave reasons as to why it may not be an adequate answer; I did not hear the Rosh Yeshivah discuss any of these reasons.)

(17) The Rosh Yeshivah then briefly addresses one of the main issues of my book, which is that there seem to be further exceptions to the Torah's list, i.e. the capybara and kangaroo. The Rosh Yeshivah dismisses these difficulties in a few moments, speaking off-handedly about their being *sheratzim*, but in my book I explain why this explanation does not seem to be viable. The Rosh Yeshivah does not actually explain why these animals do not pose a problem. I would appreciate it if the Rosh Yeshivah can provide an explanation.

If you begin that you know everything, that there's nothing else to be discovered, and therefore we have to say that Chazal made mistakes, the Torah made mistakes - this is incredible *gaavah*.



(18) I certainly did not claim that I know everything. I described the basis for each of my zoological statements and assessed the degree of reliability in all significant cases. I would like to hear a detailed explanation as to what exactly the Rosh Yeshivah disputes in any of these statements and assessments.

And, much more importantly, I *certainly* did *not* write that the Torah made mistakes. And with the topic of the four animals, I did not even write that Chazal made mistakes.

Is this man a *kofer*, is he not a *kofer* – I believe the following things to be true. There's a statement here, he says, Chazal's logic is flawed. Now a person who can tell me that Chazal's logic in understanding *pesukim* (with regard to making a proof from the exclusivity of the list) is flawed... a *makhish maggideha*, the Rambam believes is a *kofer be'ikkar*.

(19) *I did not write that Chazal's logic was flawed.* Rather, I wrote that people have misunderstood what Chazal meant and have not followed Rashi's explanation.

Number two... here's a gentleman who, in all the arrogance of the twenty-first century, comes and says "well let's just evaluate how smart Chazal were. Let's just evaluate how much Chazal understood the Torah *shebiksav*... anyone who moves into such a posture has a very deep problem with his entire approach to Yiddishkeit.

(20) Where did I write anything at all about deficiencies in the "smartness" of Chazal? (In *Mysterious Creatures*, I quoted the views of Rishonim regarding how much they relied on information provided by others, but the Rosh Yeshivah himself states that this is not a deficiency in how smart they were.) Where did I write anything at all about Chazal misunderstanding the Torah *shebiksav*?

(21) The Rosh Yeshivah then says that the reason why people develop such an approach is due to the lack of having a Rav. I do not know on what basis the Rosh Yeshivah is giving the impression that I have not had a Rav. *Baruch Hashem*, I have always had valued rabbonim who have guided me in all my studies. I would also like to point out that this book received a glowing endorsement from Rav Belsky *shlita* who is widely acknowledged as an expert in *Chullin* and who read the entire book cover-to-cover. In addition, Rav Aharon Feldman *shlita* read through many drafts of the manuscript, including the final draft, and even wrote a *haskamah*; he ultimately decided not to support the book only because I could not guarantee that it would only be read by the yeshivah world, and he was concerned that it would embarrass outreach workers who use this topic as a proof.

In summary, almost every single one of the Rosh Yeshivah's stated objections to my book, on the basis of which the Rosh Yeshivah calls me an arrogant *kofer*, is something *that is not in the book*. I do not doubt that there are genuine issues of disagreement between us. But I must respectfully request that the Rosh Yeshivah publicly clarifies the misrepresentations of my work, as well as the false statements about myself.

Finally, I would like to share something that may be of interest to the Rosh Yeshivah. The Rosh Yeshivah repeatedly endorses the position of Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam and others that, albeit in a small number of cases, not everything in Chazal was derived from their knowledge of Torah, and some of it they got from the scientific knowledge of their time and may contain errors. I personally have no objection to this; but the Rosh Yeshivah may be interested to know that Rav Aharon Feldman had repeated discussions with Rav Elyashiv *shlita* about this, and he told me that Rav Elyashiv's position is that it is *never* legitimate to take such a position today, and that it can be termed *kefirah*.

I look forward to the Rosh Yeshivah's response, and I hope that this can be resolved quickly and satisfactorily.

Sincerely,

Nosson Slifkin