

Relationship of Science to Torah

HaRav Moshe Sternbuch, shlita

Authorized translation by Daniel Eidensohn

בעזה"י ל' בשבט התשס"ה

Some have claimed that I have issued a ruling, that one who believes that the world is millions of years old is not a heretic. This in spite of the fact that our Sages have explicitly taught that the world is no more than 6000 years! Furthermore some have cited isolated statements from traditional commentaries as proof that it is acceptable to believe that the world is very ancient. These assertions are not random but are the result of an agenda to establish the belief that the world is entirely natural. By asserting that the world was created millions of years ago and that it developed very gradually, they are trying to make our holy Torah compatible with the views of scientists that everything that occurs is the result of mechanical natural processes. However the **Ramban (Exodus 13:16)** has clearly expressed the Jewish view: *“A person does not have a portion in the Torah of Moshe unless he believes that everything that happens in this world is miraculous.”* If a person believes in miracles than obviously there can be no doubts and questions at all concerning how the world developed as we will demonstrate.

The truth is that even according to their view that the world is very old, nevertheless at some point they agree that G-d created it. Of necessity this act of creation had to have been unnatural i.e., miraculous occurrence. Nevertheless their concern is to make even this miraculous event as close to nature as possible. In other words, they much prefer to make the world as natural as possible and to minimize the miraculous. Thus they want to minimize the greatness of G-d in the creation of man. This attitude has been explained by the **Brisker Rav** based on a comment of Rashi. **Rashi (Genesis 25:19)** noted that the cynics had claimed that Sarah had become pregnant in her old age from Avimelech and not from her 100 year old husband Abraham. The Brisker Rav pointed out that either way Sarah's pregnancy at the age of 90 was obviously miraculous. The goal of the cynics was to minimize the miracle by claiming that the father was not an old man. We find another expression of this attitude in the Torah when Moshe said that Redemption from Egypt would occur approximately at midnight. The Talmud (Berachos 4a) explains that in fact Moshe knew exactly when the Redemption would occur. However he knew that the cynics — despite all the miracles that occurred in the Redemption — would demean the event if they mistakenly thought it hadn't happened exactly as Moshe had prophesized. Their desire was to minimize G-d's role in this world. Thus it is with these scientists. While they obviously have to admit to the fact of Creation — they want to minimize the role of miracle and maximize the role of nature. This is entirely to minimize the acknowledgment of G-d's power and to move instead in the direction of heresy. They mistakenly think that it is possible to come to understand G-d's activities and wonders.

It is in fact obvious to everyone that man is extremely limited and is not capable of understanding the act of Creation. In other words, why He created it then and not earlier prior to 6000 years ago — or according to their words millions of years. What was the necessity of one time compared to any other? They answer what they can comprehend and the rest they agree they have no answers. We also say that we are merely human and that we do not have the ability to understand everything. However, what we can't understand we rely on our faith. It is obvious that man's thoughts are not comparable to G-d's in the ability to understand Nature. Similarly we acknowledge we can't

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comprehend or adequately explain G-d's ways concerning good and evil in each generation. In these issues we simply rely on our faith in G-d's greatness. In contrast they prefer to explain that man is the product of millions of years of development. As evidence they cite what appears to be ancient bone fragments that have been discovered in Madagascar and other places. Their evidence is total nonsense since prior to the Flood, Nature was totally different than we have today. Prior to the Flood man lived for a 1000 years. This difference in what was normal growth and development makes the bones appear as if they are a million years old. With this type of shaky evidence they want to refute the words of our Sages and undermine the faith that exists amongst the Jewish people. Their main concern is to try to shake the faith in G-d — which has been accepted by us generation after generation. They want to replace this faith with the acceptance that events are determined primarily by the laws of nature.

If you think for a moment, you will readily notice G-d's great wonders. For example there are countless stars which are greater in size than the earth. There are billions of stars like this that G-d placed in the sky that cause one to ask, "Who created them?" In fact they all testify that G-d created them. The **Rambam (Foundation Principles of the Torah 4:12)** stated, "When a person thinks carefully about the nature of the world — from angels to man and other creature — he sees G-d's wisdom in all creatures and the creation. This awareness adds to his love of G-d and consequently his love of G-d becomes very passionate. He also becomes fearful as he recognizes his lowliness and insignificance... He comes to recognize that he is only an embarrassingly insignificant creature." These comments are also of significance regarding the actions of the scientists. They are fully aware of the astounding details of G-d's wisdom in creating the world. Nevertheless they strive to minimize the role of G-d in the creation of man and to say that he is the result of natural processes over the course of millions of years. They do this in order to make our traditions and faith compatible with the worthless views of scientists. They do this despite the fact that there is no clear proof for their views — they are merely conjecture and fanciful guesses.

Scientists — even those who are described as religious — are ashamed that we don't agree with the views of the leading scientists that man is descended from the apes. They rush to find isolated statements of our Sages, rabbis and commentaries that seem consistent with contemporary scientific view. This attempt to make Judaism consistent with science occurs in spite of the fact that the idea that man came from the apes is itself utterly shocking. Nevertheless it is totally acceptable to these scientists. They will accept anything that enables them to avoid acknowledging that G-d created man with His wisdom. Therefore they use misleading and distorted citations from Torah literature to claim justification for such scientific beliefs in the words of our Sages.

Regarding this strategy, it is important to candidly acknowledge that in a number of instances the Torah itself seems to contradict principles of our faith. For example in Genesis (1:26): G-d said, "Let us make man in our image." The verse is stated in the plural grammatical form. That implies that the G-d did not make man by Himself but rather with other entities! We also find such anthropomorphic expressions in the Torah such as "the hand of G-d" (Exodus 9:3) — which seems to say that G-d has a physical hand. **Rav Chaim Brisker** explained that G-d knew that there would always be heretics who would cite verses in the Torah to try and prove the validity of their deviant thoughts.

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If they didn't have these particular verses they would find others. Therefore G-d wrote the Torah without concern whether the verses would be misused to justify heresy. In fact the reason that G-d describes the creation of man in the plural form is to teach us the importance of consulting with others. We should always seek advice and feedback — even from people who are less knowledgeable and wise. G-d felt it was important to convey this message in this way even though it might provide heretics with “proof” for their false theories. We thus learn an additional important lesson — that we are not obligated to constantly worry that the heretics will take verses out of context and thus have a false faith. No matter how the Torah would be expressed, they would still find “proofs” for their views.

Our faith is based on the traditions that have been passed down through the generations. The **Rambam (Foundations of the Torah 8:1)** states that the validity of our faith is not because of miraculous signs. Rather it has been validated by the fact that the Jewish people witnessed the awesome events of the Revelation of Sinai with their own eyes and ears. The **Rambam (Foundations of Torah 9)** goes into detail concerning this matter. Furthermore the **Rambam (Laws of Disobedience 2:2)** states that even a custom which has been accepted by the Jewish people under the guidance of the sages — should be considered equivalent to a ruling of the Sanhedrin itself. This is true even if the custom doesn't have a clear origin. Therefore a person who violates such an accepted custom violates the Torah prohibition of not disobeying the rulings of the Sanhedrin. If a mere custom is viewed as equivalent to an explicit ruling of the Sanhedrin and therefore can not be rejected, then surely the accepted view of the age universe can not be disregarded. This required acceptance of the traditional age of the universe is all the more obvious since every man and woman and child knows that the world was created 5765 years ago. An additional reason why we must accept the traditional age of the universe is that the calendar system is based on this fact. Consequently a person who casts doubts on this accepted tradition — even if he is widely respected person by the Jewish people — must be carefully investigated. This is because is possible that he might have doubts concerning the foundation principles of faith — like the academic scholars. It has already become established by the rulings of the great rabbis throughout the generations, that if a person has doubts concerning faith — he is to be considered as a non-believer. That is the halacha.

The obvious truth is that the order and nature of creation is concealed. For example, how did man come to inhabit all the continents and islands in the ocean — thousands of years ago? However we who have the Torah, know that G-d scattered man to all the lands of the earth after the Generation of Dispersion. In contrast, the scientists have no answer to this question. The fact is that the scientists have decided - without having faith - to establish answers. Nevertheless even with all their genius and knowledge, they are unable to resolve many questions. It is necessary to acknowledge that G-d created the world and man and that man has limited understanding. As a general rule, G-d gives His creatures the amount of intelligence they need to survive — but not more. Just as an animal only has enough intelligence to avoid danger, similarly man was given enough intelligence for the needs of live in this world. However our intellect is not adequate to determine the exact nature of the world, how this world is connected to the higher spiritual realms and surely it is insufficient to comprehend the nature of the higher worlds.

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Concerning the time of the creation of the universe and its development into its present form, it is important to know that time does not exist at all in Heaven. That is what the ancient commentators have explained. The Vilna Gaon noted that when the Torah states that “In the beginning G-d created”, it means that He created in this world “beginning” i.e., time. The scientists have only recently discovered that time has a different meaning in the realm of the stars and galaxies. Nevertheless they still don’t understand that there is no time at all in Heaven, just as they don’t have any true understanding of creation. This ignorance has led them to the ridiculous and nonsensical idea that man developed from the apes. This absurdity is so firmly accepted by them that they view with contempt anyone who doesn’t accept their ideas. They scornfully insist that such a person is primitive and backwards since he doesn’t understand their views.

Those Jewish scholars who agree with the views of the non-Jews and heretics that the world is millions of years old, rationalize that early man was primitive and lacked the ability to read and write. In fact they view early man as similar to the animals. However our view is totally the opposite. When we look back in history to those early generations, we can go from the Gra to the Arizal, the Arizal to the Ramban, the Ramban to the Gaonim, the Gaonim to the Amoraim, the Amoraim to the Tannaim, the Tannaim to the Men of the Great Assembly, to the prophets and then to the holy Patriarchs. Following this path one sees clearly that we are actually descended from angelic men – not beasts as they assert. Consequently we must give praise to the Master of All who has separated us from them and their views — they who live like animals to satisfy their lusts. G-d made the separation by giving us His holy Torah. The Torah enables us to be attached to the upper spiritual worlds even while we are in this material world. Through the Torah we are able to fulfill G-d’s Will in this world.

There is an astounding observation relevant to these issues. Modern scientists have absolutely established that the earth rotates every day. The rotation indicates that there is a power which causes the rotation. That power is our G-d, blessed be His name. If the scientists would reflect for a moment about this they would come to agree with the words of our Sages. Our Sages have taught us that G-d did not just create the world but is constantly creating it. He did not just form light but is constantly forming it and darkness. Consequently creation would not continue to exist without the continually renewal in obedience with G-d’s command (Psalms 119:89): Forever, O L-rd, Your word is established in Heaven. It is only these scientists who deny the dominion of G-d because of their desire — similar to that of the Biblical Generation of Dispersion — to be like G-d and to have His understanding.

This attitude is the reason why today there are astounding advances in science such as space travel and many other things that we benefit in our daily lives — while at the same time many suffer from terrible illnesses. The negative consequence of not being guided by the Torah, is that man is totally dominated by his lusts like the animals and he is even worse. His animalistic behavior has resulted in the HIV-Aids epidemic. There are other illnesses which have been caused by the lack of satisfaction and meaning in life. Unfortunately, due to our many sins, numerous of our youth have been pulled into these things. These scientists view that they are saving mankind while in fact there is no difference between “modern” man and the animals. It is only in fulfillment of G-d’s

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Torah that man find the reason for life and the truth wealth — even though it involves many trials and difficulties.

Let me return to where we started. I do not know whether all those who accept the view of the scientists — that the world is very ancient — are heretics. However I do know that only heretics have such views against our Sages — who are fully accepted by us. I want to note in addition that those who accept that the world is ancient, also prefer to hear and accept the words of the scientists. Furthermore these people mistakenly think they have found support for their views amongst our traditional sources. In fact, however, we are obligated to always give precedent to Daas Torah. These are the accepted mainstream Torah views expressed in the Talmud as well as the writings of the great rabbis through the ages. Only those views which have been widely accepted are valid – and not minority views that have been rejected or ignored. Only after we fully accept the Torah understanding of an issue, can we consider the words of the scientists and accept that which is compatible with the words of our sages.

Furthermore having scientific writings in your house, that are incompatible with the Torah, violates the prohibition (Deuteronomy 4:26): “Do not bring disgusting things in your house.” Simple calculations from the Bible concerning the generations from Adam lead to the clear conclusion that the world is less than 6,000 years old. Having such heretical scientific books in the home causes much troubles to those who possess them and it is obligated to get rid of them. Furthermore the author of such unacceptable scientific writings must retract such views and subordinate himself to the authority of contemporary rabbinical authorities — according to what has been traditionally accepted. G-d willing, I hope to offer an expanded explanation of these issues when I publish the fourth volume of my work, “Know What to Reply.” G-d should help that His promise will be fulfilled (Zechariah 14:9), “G-d will be the King over the entire world. On that day G-d will be one and His name one.” Amen!