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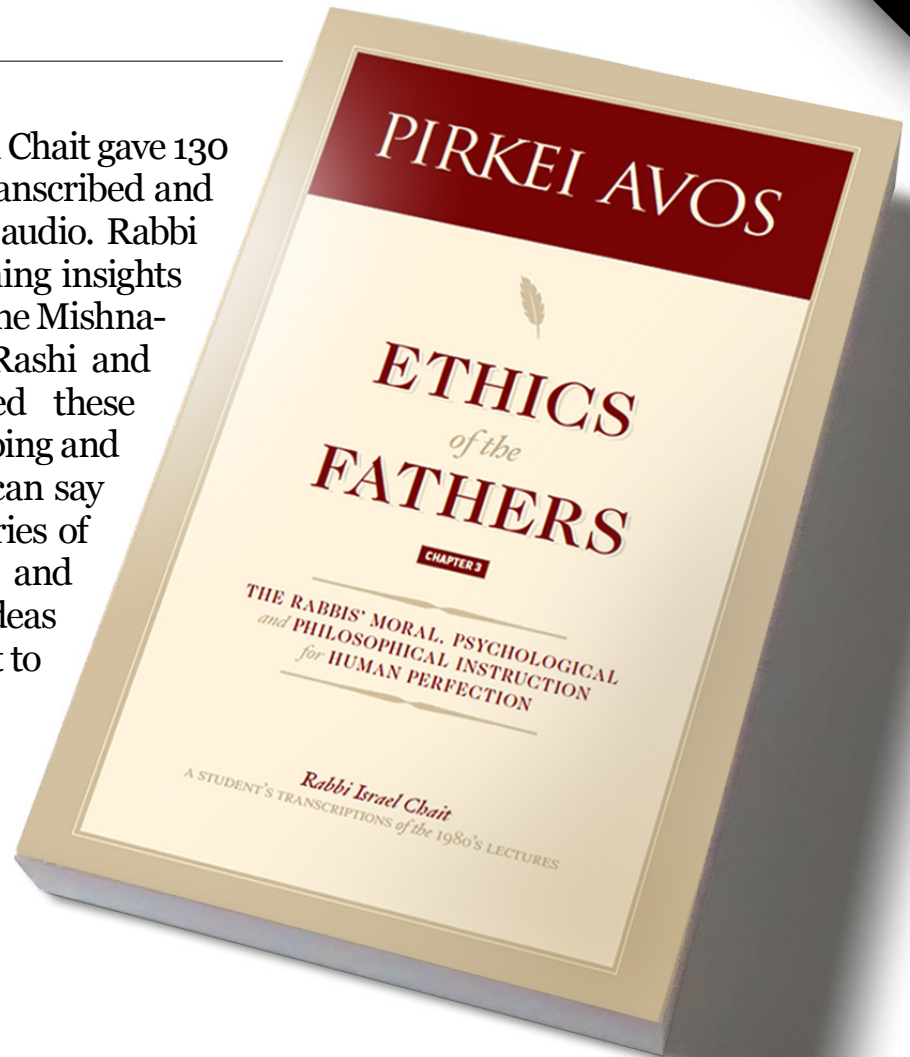
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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Are Jews Superior?

Reader: I was having an email conversation with a Rabbi who believes that the Jewish soul is superior. After many back and forths, he gave me the following parable to show the difference between Jews and non Jews: "The human race is like an army. The Jewish people are the Marines." Is this accurate?

Please take your time. Thank you.

Rabbi: His claim is baseless. In fact, God created the Jewish nation due to the perfection of a Gentile, Abraham. Abraham was not a Jew, but a Noahide, as were all members of the world. God selected Abraham due to his perfection, not due to his ancestors, who were idolaters. God made a nation from Abraham because he defended monotheism, not due to lineage. According to this rabbi, is a Jewish murderer better than a Gentile who saves lives in a hospital? God never "recreated" man since Adam (making a superior model called the Jew); all humans are identical. It is arrogant for Jews to claim that a Jew is superior. And what of a Gentile who converts, of whom God says they follow the same Torah as a Jew? This means the Gentile has the same potential to follow Torah as the Jew. God's anointed kings and messiah descend from Ruth the convert. God commands Jews who are idolatrous or who murder to be killed. Apparently, God favors no one, except the one who follows Him. No one is born perfected. King Solomon says, "Better is the day of death than the day of birth." Ibn Ezra comments: "For only at death can man claim merit to a good life, but at birth, we know not yet how he will turn out." That means that a Jew at birth has no merit. ■



SCIENCE

the World's Age

Biblical & Scientific Harmony

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Although no Torah source demands such belief (belief is demanded only when proof is available) there are some Jews who defend the 5779-year-old age of the universe. It appears they equate the date of Adam's first day on Earth to the Big Bang; Adam and the Big Bang occurring just 5 days apart, according to their view. However, while the timespan from Adam's "completion" to the present totals 5779 years (calculated by birthdates and lifespans in Torah), Maimonides taught that we are not to understand all parts of the six days of creation literally:

First, the account given in Scripture of the Creation is not, as is generally believed, intended to be in all its parts literal. For if this were the case, wise men would not have kept its explanation secret, and our Sages would not have employed figurative speech [in treating of the Creation] in order to hide its true meaning, nor would they have objected to discuss it in the presence of the common people. (Maimonides, "Guide", book ii, chap. xxix)

One errs when suggesting that the six days of creation prior to Adam's completion were each 24-hour periods, since the sun was not set in its position until the fourth "day," whatever "day" means, nor do we have knowledge of Earth's rotation at that date.

Jews defending the 5779-year-old universe theory find themselves in conflict with scientists dating the universe at 14 billion-years-old. Scientific thought measures a star's distance from Earth and thereby ages the universe accordingly: a star seen at 1 million light years away means the universe

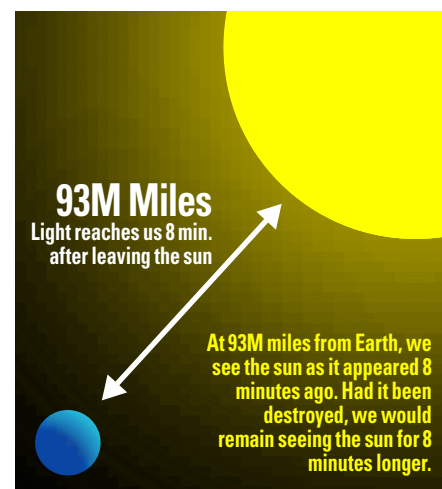
must be at least 1 million years old, old enough for that star light to reach us. These Jews evade the problem saying when God created stars, He created their light already reaching Earth, removing the need for an old universe. Does God deceive man this way? Does God create the impression that star light traveled for millions of years, making the universe only "appear" millions or billions of years old, if the universe is truly only 5779 years old? Does God lie?

Chullin 60a quotes Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: "All works of creation were created in their full height." Rashi (Ibid) explains that God created creations in their ultimate chosen form, meaning their targeted perfected design. Man's ultimate design is not a 6 pound dependent infant, but an independent 6-foot-tall adult, precisely how Adam existed when his creation process completed, a process which could have taken years or millennia—Darwin not discounted. "In their full height" refers to the few creations clearly identified as being created in a mature form, like Adam who spoke and procreated with his wife, which could not have occurred had he been created as a 1-day-old infant. The trees from which Adam could and could not eat of too must have been fully formed trees, mature enough to bear fruit. But Torah itself opposes that all creations were formed in completed states. God clearly says He created the world in a "chaotic" state (Gen. 1:2). Additionally, had creations other than man been created in their completed form, we would not read that it was required that God "gathered all the waters to one location and revealed dry land" (Gen. 1:9). This means Earth is not yet complete. Nor would we read God created a

firmament, as that should have been part of Earth's "completed form." Genesis 2:5 says, "herbs and grasses were not yet in the Earth and did not yet sprout." Again, many creations were clearly not created in full maturity.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's words are specific, "All works of creation were created in their full height." He does not say all works of creation were created in an "aged form," but in their "full height," referring to man and trees: creations whose mature states are measured in height. But they were not "old" trees, and Adam was only a day old, although maturely tall. The mistake is extrapolating to "age" when Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi spoke only of "form." Thus, suggesting God created "old stars" and "starlight in travel" is not warranted by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's words.

Such a claim states, in other words, that God lies to man. For when scientists measure the distance of a star to be 1 million light years from Earth, they deduce that seeing that star is proof that the universe existed long enough for that star's light to reach us: the universe existed for at least 1 million years. Light travels at a limited speed (186,000 MPS), and it takes time to arrive at a given location. Had the sun been created right now, at 93,000,000 miles from Earth, we would not see the sun's creation for another 8 minutes.



Had the sun suddenly exploded right now, we would still see the sun as normal for another 8 minutes, until the explosion's light reaches our eyes. Vision refers to light reflecting or emanating from an object and reaching our eyes. We don't see a thing as it is in real time, but as it was when light left it. When we see a star that is 1 million light years from earth, our vision of that star right now is how it appeared 1 million years ago; real time-travel

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

into history. It is quite fascinating, but true.

Therefore, if God does not tell us as that He created things mature—as He did regarding man and trees—there are no grounds to suggest that He created the light from stars reaching Earth together with a star’s creation, obviating millions of years necessary for that light to arrive there from deep space. And scientists are correct to deduce the universe’s age as billions of years old. Again, numerous Torah verses cited above teach that many creations were in fact not created in mature or completed states. We are told that Adam talked, named animals, procreated and trees bore fruit. But we are not told that God created stars together with their light already reaching Earth. Had God done so and did not disclose this to man, God lied by creating a phenomenon man would certainly misinterpret. This is akin to suggesting another incorrect notion that Jews share. Jews say, although dinosaurs never truly lived or roamed our planet, that God planted dinosaur bones in the Earth. Scientific man will certainly determine those bones prove a previously living being, and not assume they were only fabrications. Such ludicrous claims make God deceptive; God forbid. Parenthetically, a rabbi sated that the phrase “taninim gedolim” (great creatures, Gen. 1:21) might refer to dinosaurs.

The rule must be that we trust God. When He reveals that He created something in a mature state, we accept that. And when we derive proofs of dinosaurs—relying on bones, fossils and carbon 14 dating—God wants man to accept that truth as well. God does not fabricate a history that never occurred with falsified evidence to mislead man.

There is no Torah problem suggesting a 14-billion-year-old universe. The six “days” of creation were not 24-hour periods. Again, the sun was not in position until “day” 4. No Torah edict asks man to reject his senses; the converse is true: Moses teaches us to recall Sinai, what our eyes saw, and not distrust our senses:

But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live... (Deut 4:9)

We are asked to trust our senses on many occasions (Exod. 19:4, 20:19, Num. 15:39, Deut. 29:1). And trusting one’s senses without also using reason is not what Moses means. When Moses reminds the Jews “you saw no form, only a voice,” he intends man to deduce as well, that the source of the voice on Sinai’s fiery peak must be divine, as nothing Earthly exists in fire:

The Lord spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no shape—nothing but a voice. (Deut 4:12)

Senses and reason must work together. For if we see a magician make an elephant vanish, we must use reason to determine the truth: a trap door exists on the stage.



We are not to follow senses alone and accept that magicians can make anything invisible or remove its existence. Scientists too follow senses and reason and prove that seeing a distant star means that star’s light traveled for millions of years, and the universe’s age must be at least that old. Maimonides wrote the following:

If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory [eternity of the universe], the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions.” (Guide, book II, chap. XXV, pg. 200 Friedlander paperback edition.)

Maimonides means that nothing trumps proof. A Torah verse too would have to be reinterpreted with evidence against its literal meaning. Had Torah openly stated that the universe is 5779 years old, it must be reinterpreted based on scientific fact dating it at 14 billion years old. However, Torah only says intelligent man is that old, not the rest of the universe. Thus, Torah poses no opposition to science on this point.

If, however, we distrust our senses and our mind, we must be consistent and disregard ever seeing the star, its light, or ever seeing the Torah. You see, once senses and reason are disregarded, we know nothing and should not offer any opinion. ■



PARSHA

Our True Pride

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's parsha, Beha'alotcha, describes the state of the Jews as they completed their wilderness tasks and prepared for the imminent conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Things begin on a high note, as seen in Moshe's enthusiastic invitation to his father-in-law, Yitro, to join him in the invasion and settlement of the land that Hashem had promised to the Jews. "Come with us," Moshe exhorted him, "And it shall be...that the goodness with which Hashem shall benefit us, we will do good to you."

According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, this was an auspicious moment. He asserts that, had Moshe led the Jews into Israel, he would have been anointed as Moshiach (the Messiah) and built the Beit Hamikdash, which would have endured forever. There would have been no exile and dispersion, and the course of Jewish history would have been totally different.

But things did not work out that way. Even Moshe could not anticipate what lay just around the corner. Suddenly, the great leader was beset by a series of rebellions that culminated in the fatal incident of the spies. This brought the forward movement of the Jews to a halt and delayed the conquest for 40 years.

The troubles began with the mitonenim, a group of people who grumbled about the conditions they had to endure in the Wilderness. This was soon followed by the provocation of the Safsuf, who complained about the diet of manna that Hashem miraculously provided for the people.

The Torah describes how easy it was to obtain this food. "The people would stroll and gather it, and grind it in a mill or pound it in a mortar and cook it in a pot or make it into cakes, and its taste was like the taste of dough kneaded with oil." Incredibly, the people spurned this perfectly designed sustenance that satisfied all their nutritional needs.

Instead, they were seized with a yearning for

meat and longingly recounted the idyllic condition they enjoyed in Egypt where they "sat by the fleshpots" and consumed "fish (free of charge), cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic."

The people's sinful behavior profoundly affected Moshe. Instead of defending and praying for them, as he had done in seemingly worse situations, he expressed his frustration and desire to be relieved from his leadership.

Moshe begged Hashem to exempt him from this impossible responsibility, uttering words that seem strange and require elucidation. He said to Hashem, "Why have you done evil to your servant; why have I not found favor in Your eyes that You place the burden of this entire people upon me? Did I conceive this entire people or did I give birth to it, that You say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling, to the Land that You swore to its forefathers?'" How are we to understand these words?

Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that the sin of the "complainers" was worse than that of the Golden Calf, because this represented a descent into instinctual lusting and pleasure seeking. The manna, by contrast, represents the Jewish lifestyle of Holiness, marked by discipline, self-restraint and adhering to boundaries in the pursuit of pleasure. The complainers wanted to remove all barriers to desire, to be free to live a life of endless indulgence, not only regarding food, but other carnal gratification as well.

Moshe realized that his style of leadership as the teacher of the Jewish people was no longer viable. The nation had regressed to the level where they needed "nursing mothers" who would work with them on a personal, emotional basis to slowly wean them away from their sensual "addictions" and gradually raise them to a higher plane.

Moshe recognized that he was unsuited for this and could not carry this burden alone. In response to Moshe's heartfelt plea, Hashem

appointed a group of seventy distinguished elders to share the task of leadership with him.

But something was lost which could not be replaced. This generation would not be able to enter the Promised Land. Of course, officially the verdict would come as a result of the sin of the spies, but the seeds of dissent had already been planted. The Divine plan for the Jews who left Egypt to attain the complete redemption by entering Eretz Yisrael, with Moshe at their head, would not be realized.

That was not only a personal tragedy for Moshe. It meant that he would not become Moshiach or redeem Israel and the world. Instead, the course of human and Jewish history would be marked by all the strife, hatred, and massive destruction that we have known and which still prevails.

It is important for us to learn the lessons of parshat Beha'alotcha, for the Jews are anointed as G-d's teachers of mankind. To do so, we must represent not only the true ideas of Torah, but its lifestyle of kedusha (holiness), which is rooted in modesty, restraint and acceptance of limitations in the realm of sexual behavior, as well.

The prophet Balaam noticed this beautiful characteristic of the Jewish people. He said, "How goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel." This is the true national pride of the Jewish People. (And not the false one that was recently paraded in Yerushalayim and is currently on display in Tel Aviv.) May we merit to reflect the genuine holiness of Am Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom ■

P.S. Have you finished reading the essays in Eternally Yours: Genesis and are feeling a bit sad that you no longer have thought-provoking material to look forward to reading on Shabbat?

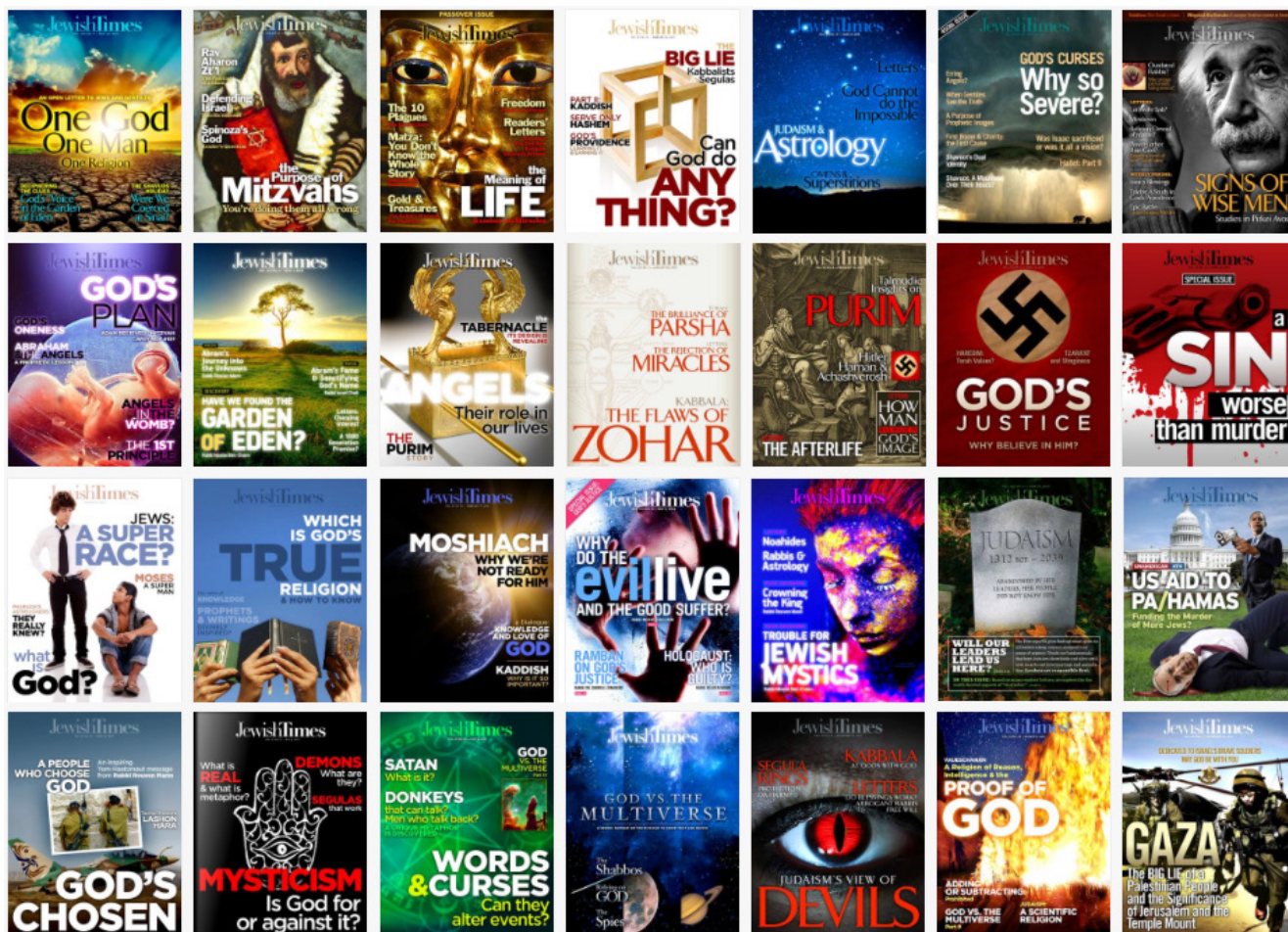
Good news, because Eternally Yours: Exodus is now available. The articles offer a new and original perspective on the weekly parsha that will encourage you to think and enhance your appreciation of Torah and enjoyment of Shabbat.

Titles include "No Good Deed Goes Unpunished," "Reclaiming One's Dignity," "Love Is Not All You Need," "Saw You At Sinai," "The True Test of Piety," "Betrayal," and many more. The book on Exodus can be obtained at <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and the book on Genesis is available at <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis>.

Additionally we are assiduously at work preparing the next volume in the Eternally Yours series, Bamidbar and hope to have it ready soon.

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WHAT MADE GOD?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

When seeing a beam of light hitting a wall at our right, it is not sensible to say that the beam coming from the left travels backwards infinitely, with no light source. With no source, the beam could not exist. Thus, there must be some flashlight, laser or source of light at the beginning of the beam. However far back it goes, it must have a source of origin.

The same applies to creation. It is illogical to say that the universe was created by God, and God was created by Z, and Z was created by Y, and Y

by X, ad infinitum. This suggests that there is no cause for everything. Nothing can exist without a cause. Just as we arrived at the source for the beam of light, we must arrive at a first cause for all that exists. And that first cause is not preceded by anything. Although we don't understand God's existence, an existence independent of all else, the alternative of an endless series of things creating the next thing, is impossible.

We accept the astonishing over the impossible and say that God exists, not preceded by anything. ■

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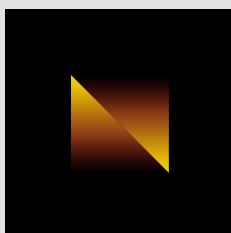
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