

The following article was written in response to Rabbi Adlerstein's December 8th, 2009 article filed on *Cross-Currents*. The full text of the original article can be found here: <http://www.cross-currents.com>

Intelligent Design and The "Properly Orthodox"

The term intelligent design is a seeming redundancy. If something is designed, it obviously requires intelligence to design it. What other type of design could there be?

In 1986, Richard Dawkins, one of today's foremost advocates for the Theory of Evolution, wrote: "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." I.e., the endless complexity apparent in the phenomenon of life, although *appearing* designed, was actually a result of random genetic variations assisted by the Darwinian mechanism known as natural selection.

In 1996, The Center for Science and Culture was started. This organization challenged the idea of "apparent design." It claimed that phenomena which evinced highly complex and specified characteristics must actually *be* designed. Its mandate was the support of scientific research developing the scientific theory known as Intelligent Design. Yes, intelligent design is a misnomer. But within context, it refers to the ID movement, which challenges the notion that randomness can produce results with design-like characteristics.

Recently, Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein (YA) wrote:

Many of my friends greeted the ID people with open arms. After all, everyone "knows" that ID people give a hard time to evolutionists, and everyone knows that properly Orthodox people blanch at the very mention of the e-word. So if the ID people give evolutionists a hard time, they must be our friends.

I must say I find this attitude towards the mentality of the so-called "properly Orthodox" not only patronizing, but simplistic. Is a naïve fear of the shared enemy called evolution the only reason orthodox Jews can be appreciative of ID? Has it nothing to do with the fidelity of seriously thinking individuals to a *mesorah* replete with a consensus of Tannaim, Amoraim, and Gaonim and Rishonim who clearly reject the fundamental thesis of a naturally-developing universe? Has it nothing to do with a well-considered evaluation of the scientific material at hand?

YA writes:

As R Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote in the infancy of the theory – well before he could, in all fairness, properly analyze it, but also before over a century of corroborating evidence...

What corroborating evidence? There is none! On the contrary, the lack of transitional fossils *disproves* the theory and affirms the Torah's account. We will return to the writings of Rav Hirsch. But what must now be appreciated is this. The academic establishment's conviction in a non meta-natural depiction of how the world came into being is based on an a priori presumption that no meta-natural depiction can be accepted. In a candid moment, well-known evolutionist Richard C. Lewontin of Harvard University confessed the following: (my highlights)

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, **that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes** to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, **no matter how counter-intuitive**, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, so **we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door**.

YA's thesis is that "it makes no difference to me whether Hashem created the world in six days of miraculous intervention, or telescoped all of the miraculous into some moment preceding Big Bang. As long as the results are attributed to the Will of HKBH, I can live with either scenario, and I don't really need to know which of these – or some other alternative – is correct."

But one really *does* need to know. If the *pesukim* are clear on the matter, and our collective *mesorah* is unambiguous, one actually *needs* to believe that the world developed in six days through processes which transcend the currently operating laws of nature. Hashem created the world in six days of miraculous processes. One *cannot* believe in some alternative explanation.

The meta-natural character of the original development of the world and its inhabitants is manifest in the comments of all the *rishonim*. *Maharal* in *Be'er haGolah* synthesizes the principle as follows:

Know that He, May He be blessed, brought out these creations, all of them, to physical reality during the six days of *Breishis* by Himself, in His Own Glory--not by means of an agent, meaning Nature. Creation was contrary to the way things are after the conclusion of the six days of *Breishis*, wherein Hashem Yisborach conducts His world by means of the agent, i.e., Nature.

Thus, the *mesorah* posits a fundamental distinction between Creation and post Creation laws of nature, and thereby utterly rejects the thesis YA so cavalierly finds satisfactory. This is the same *mesorah* transmitted by the *geonim* and *rishonim* from which loyal Jews learned that creation was *ex-nihilo*, that the *Avos* were historically real people, that Hashem literally enacts miracles, that *yetsias mitzrayim* and *mattan Torah* were historically real events and that the *mitzvos* were not meant allegorically.

Here are the words of R' Samson Rafael Hirsch [bracketed words and emphases added for clarity]:

ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם ... The cause of the existence of heaven and earth does not lie in themselves... and they are not the result of some force working blindly, but the creative work of a lone Creator, Who created them with intention and purpose, ויכלו!

... המעשים היו מותחין והולכים (Bereishis Rabbah 10:5), the matter and forces which had been called into existence were in a state of continuous development – until God called out ויכלו! and set a limit to their development. He acted as שקי – i.e., שומר לעולמו די; ... "Had He not

said to heaven and earth: 'Enough!' they would still today be in a state of continuous development" (ibid. 46:2). ...

The ending of creation, **the cessation of [the meta-natural process activated during the Creation week of] the formation of new creations** – in a word: the present Sabbath of creation – is a greater revelation of the Creator than the very existence of heaven and earth. If, as the materialistic outlook on the world has taught throughout the ages, the origin of the world was due to physical causes not founded on thought and free will; if the world originated from forces of nature that are inherent in the world – why, then, has there been a Sabbath in creation for thousands of years? **Why have these forces ceased to function and to produce with great power new creations? Why has the cause – which still exists – ceased producing the effect? What has put an end to its creative power? We see that for generations upon generations creation has ceased,** and Sabbath has reigned in the world. This teaches us that **the present Sabbath was preceded by purposeful, all-powerful [unique and no-longer in-effect] creative activity,** and that the universe is not a physical result of blind forces of nature, but a moral work of a Creator endowed with supreme wisdom, free will, and unlimited power.[i] ...

Thus, ויכלו protests against any materialistic world view that denies the existence of a free Creator. ויכלו attests to the creation of the world by a free, wise, and almighty God. (Gen 2.1)

Rav Hirsch, following the *mesorah* transmitted to us through *Chazal* and *rishonim*, makes it abundantly clear that the message of Shabbos goes beyond the rejection of an eternal universe, beyond the rejection of blind forces of nature generating the world we have. It rejects as well the idea that the only meta-natural act by G-d in Creation was an initial creation of a primordial world in which He instilled the laws of nature present today that generated the world as we have it. Shabbos is meant to testify that up until the point of *va'yechulu*, a unique Creative process was in progress--a process that did not cease after the first moment of Creation, but continued until the Shabbos of *Maaseh Breishis*; and a process that did not continue after that Shabbos. The natural processes we have today are not the ones that produced the world and inhabitants we know.

YA writes:

Believing in six literal days makes it much easier to follow the verses of the first chapter of Bereishis – but leaves so much of the observed world, as seen by multiple disciplines, unexplained.

These blanket and unsupported assertions are not helpful. An adherence to a "young earth" scenario, as per our *mesorah*, is perfectly congruous with the observed phenomena of our universe and can be easily explained using purely scientific terms (as opposed to silly rationalizations like "there were no such things as dinosaurs etc")

My preference is to leave them unexplained, rather than offer some of the explanations I have heard people propose, which I can only regard

as well-intentioned silliness, guaranteed to drive young people off the *derech* should they ever study real science.

I disagree. I personally have been involved in *kiruv* for many years. My experience is that young, well informed and sincere students who are presented with the truth are not driven off the *derech*.

YA remarks:

How to choose? If you have no occasion to ever step over the threshold of modern science, there would seem to be little reason to abandon the plain meaning of the opening of Bereishis. This seems to be the message of quite a few Gedolei Torah who live in communities in which science simply doesn't figure. Their advice should be vigorously heeded.

Some clarification is in order. The message of the Gedolei Torah is this. Klal Yisrael has experienced countless forms of opposition to its *mesorah* over the ages. Our nation was accused of "not having stepped over the threshold of science" during the times of, say, the Greek monarch Antiochus Epiphanes too. The Jewish nation successfully battled against the prevailing Grecian influence then just as now it needs to rebuff the prevailing culture and ideology of the surrounding *goyim*.

For others, there is no compelling reason to choose at all. We live with many valid and opposing options in other areas of Jewish life, including halacha and just about any daf in Shas. We don't need answers to all questions. It should be satisfying to some people to be able to hedge their bets. Their formulation might be expressed this way: Maybe the evolutionists are right; maybe they are not.

The above position is highly tenuous. Would these "others" be entitled to discard, say, *shaatnez* because we live with "opposing options in other areas of Jewish life"? What about the Oneness of Hashem? How about *kashrus*? Is the historical reality of the exodus from Egypt merely a discretionary belief in Judaism?

I agree that we don't need answers to all questions. But certain questions possess "answers" that are categorically immutable. They are indispensable to our faith. Maaseh Bereishis as depicted in the very opening of the Torah falls squarely in this category.

Either way, I feel comfortable getting up in the morning and shouting, "Mah rabu ma'aseheh Hashem...!"

With all due respect, Rabbi Adlerstein may wish to reconsider his comfort level. Shouting "*mah rabu*" is a serious thing. In fact, it is the primary function of a Jew (Yehudi – one who praises). Shouting *mah rabu* (sincerely) is an expression of a deep-seated awareness that the endless wisdom and plan and purpose apparent in the *beriah* can only be attributed to Hashem. Anyone who believes that natural causes can account for the endless phenomenon of our universe is an insincere "shouter". Saying that God front-loaded the imperatives of the universe such that they would naturally culminate in our present day universe is meaningless. It applies a pre-conceived notion (the belief in a Creator) to the universe rather than concluding the notion from an empirical observation of the universe.

People who spend time in the science classroom or the research lab cannot be expected to sit calmly at the 50 yard line, watching the action on both sides. The language of biology is the language of evolution, and it has been that way for decades. People tend to invest themselves in what they spend their time doing. It is natural to expect that they will not or cannot be expected to function as intellectual aliens within their disciplines. Rejecting evolution for them is the equivalent of asking a frum geographer to join the Flat Earth Society.

Three things. First, you're short-selling the Jewish people. There is no need to worry. Jews have a backbone. That's how we lasted for over 3000 years.

Second, there are thousands of scientists today who question the adequacy of evolutionary theory to explain the complexity of our universe. Yes, most of them are convinced that evolution somehow happened despite difficulties attempting to explain how. But this weakness alone should encourage those who know from the *mesorah* that Maaseh Breishis happened as the *mesorah* describes it. As for the overwhelming majority of academia who insist that one cannot deny that the universe is eons old and that it developed naturally through evolution...it'll pass. It'll pass just as idol worship, once a global phenomenon, passed. After all, the language of biology was theologically slanted for thousands of years. Indeed, as Rabbi Adlerstein writes, the certitude evinced by current day academics regarding a God-less universe is only a few decades old. It'll pass.

Third, I am personally familiar with many individuals who have spent time in science classrooms and have gotten through relatively unscathed. If one is not a fighter, the path of least resistance is obvious: just keep quiet. Biology students are not expected to stand up and protest their professor's views. There is no need for one to feel like an alien just because one's professor is convinced of an opposing view. There are countless frum professionals with pre-graduate requirements in science, such as doctors, dentists, psychiatrists and even professors, who deny evolution and get along in their fields quite well, thank you very much.

As others have pointed out, the argument YA makes for embracing a Divinely driven evolution—namely, that it is necessary in order to minimize the student's tension while in the classroom—is disingenuous. Is avoidance of tension sufficient cause to compromise the validity of our collective *mesorah* in this matter? Is this what this is all about? What about fidelity to our *mesorah*? What about truth?

What about Jewish students whose professors tell them that belief in miracles is preposterous, that old-fashioned ideas of morality are silly, that belief in G-d is inane, that archeological evidence disputes the events recorded in the Torah, that only the self-deluded could believe that the Torah was literally dictated to Moses by G-d? Is it only in science class that our students are faced with teachings that oppose their *mesorah*?

We are a stiff-necked people. We will not bow to the *isms* of the times. We will not bow to the culture and ideology of the time. We will not bow to ANYTHING that is counter our *mesorah*. That's why we lasted so long. I see no reason, scientific or otherwise, to do so in this case. If there happens to be some youth who go lost, it is a tragedy. But this does not justify a perversion of our *mesorah*. Other methods

must be sought. For one, as previously mentioned, a properly trained person can be *mikarev* our youth with the truth as opposed to being *mirachek* them.

Rabbi Adlerstein further posits that embracing ID gains us little because we are thereby only “substituting one unpopular alternative to the industry standard (ID) for another unpopular one (the old creationism)?” On the other hand, he argues,

A frum evolutionist could believe that everyone else’s understanding of how evolution happened (again, other than the Divine role in setting it up) is correct. The ID supporter has to believe that they all are laboring under a misconception. Natural selection alone cannot and did not do the trick. This moves the ID supporter to the margins of accepted scientific thought, or beyond them. Speaking purely practically, why should we put ourselves there?

Speaking practically, why not?! I mean it seriously: Why not? What precisely are we to be worried about? You know, I can’t resist making a comment here. The frum Christians (the proponents of “old creationism”) have been on a campaign to support the literal meaning of the bible verses for as long as Darwinism has been around. They have poured oceans of ink and cut down forests of trees to support the Torah’s account. *We* should be doing this. They’re not worried about “being at loggerheads” with popular thought. They’re not worried about “gaining little.” What are we afraid of? What are we running away from? What is this fear but an unfortunate fulfillment of the verse, “*v’nastem, v’ein rodef eschem*”, *you shall flee, yet no one is pursuing you...*

So when Stephen Meyer of the Discovery Institute addressed an early morning meeting of LA rabbonim, I challenged him with this very pragmatic question. (A few weeks before, I had challenged David Berlinski with the same question, and found him agreeing with me!)

I admire Berlinski’s erudition. Furthermore, I am grateful for his contribution in clarifying the imperatives associated with Intelligent Design. However, Berlinski is, after all, an agnostic. It is not surprising that he will agree that we “shouldn’t put ourselves there,” because he himself does not acknowledge G-d’s existence, and certainly feels no need to promote the opposing teachings of our *mesorah*. But Rabbi Adlerstein and I should! We *are* convinced! For better or for worse, we are “there”. Our collective *mesorah* puts us squarely on the “margins of accepted scientific thought”, whether we like it or not. Our role is to be a light unto the nations, not a mirror.

Simcha Coffe