

From: owner-avodah@aishdas.org
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Date: Tue, 04 Nov 2003 19:49:17 +0200
From: Zoo Torah <zoorabbi@zootorah.com>
Subject: RE: Basics for Philosophical discussions

RHM wrote that he spoke to two Talmidei Chachamim who said that it is "near apikorsus" to allegorize things that were not allegorized by Chazal. I must confess that I was very surprised by this. Only two people? I know of dozens of respected Rabbanim who would call this outright apikorsus (not just "near" apikorsus), and I am sure there are hundreds more. There are thousands of people who consider it apikorsus to say that the world is billions of years old. Yet you will find this widely believed and taught in the frum world.

Fortunately, we have precedent for post-Chazal allegorization of the Torah. Rambam is one example. Rav Saadia Gaon states that if something in the Torah is contradicted by external sources, it can be taken allegorically. There is no justification or precedent for allegorizing halachic parts of Torah, or narratives that are not contradicted by metzius, such as Yetziyas Mitzrayim or Avraham Avinu. That can involve apikorsus. But the Mabul is different, and it falls squarely into Rav Saadia Gaon's category.

It is very easy to dismiss an explanation as apikorsus if one does not understand the reasons why that explanation is being offered. In this case, we are talking about utterly overwhelming evidence from many different fields of knowledge (unlike the case with those who tried allegorizing Avraham Avinu). Contrary to what RHM believes, it is not simply a lack of evidence in favor of a global flood. It is a world of evidence against it. A global flood as traditionally understood would have left a spectacularly devastating effect upon the environment. Yet we find no sign of any such thing. Instead, we find that plant, animal and human life continued uninterrupted throughout the period. This is positive and conclusive evidence that there was no global catastrophe. You can choose to deny this and believe in some gigantic conspiracy of evil scientists. But you can't expect everyone else to take this position.

The people on Avodah presenting this view are not yechidim. The scientific evidence is not novel or debated (except by fundamentalist Christians). Almost everyone with an understanding of the sciences, frum or not frum, will tell you the same thing. Ask around! And the Talmidei Chachamim that I have consulted with have therefore independently concluded, as difficult as it is, that the Mabul must either have been a very localized event or entirely allegorical. It's a pity that they wouldn't let me state their names, as they

are universally respected. Nobody would dream of calling them apikorsim, or even near-apikorsim.

Several people have published these ideas, such as Shubert Spero in Tradition (who allegorizes it entirely) and Gerald Schroeder in The Science of God (who says it was very localized); I personally don't teach this in public (and I consider Avodah to be a relatively private forum). But over the years I have received many questions, often from prospective BTs, who have been disturbed by this problem. If told that they have to choose between accepting a global flood or being an apikorus, they are still unable to deny what they know of factual reality. Should we tell them that they cannot be admitted into the ranks of Torah Jews, or should we tell them that there are Talmidei Chachamim, basing themselves on precedents in the Rishonim, who permit allegorization in this case?

Nosson Slifkin