

<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n083.shtml#02>

Date: Sun, 29 Aug 2004 07:15:36 +0300

From: Zoo Torah <zoorabbi@zootorah.com>

Subject: [Re: Age of the Universe](#)

Those people who accept the evidence that the universe is several billion years old have suggested several ways of reconciling this with the conventional Jewish calendar. On this list, it has been mentioned that based on Ramban, the billions of years can be inserted after the first of the six days, and acc. to Dr. Schroeder, the six days can equal fifteen billion years. Another commonly heard approach is that of Prof. Aviezer, that six days can be six time periods.

Unfortunately, as I think I may have mentioned already (I'm losing track!) none of these proposed solutions actually work. The reason is that even if the overall time span is solved, the events of the six days of Bereishis still cannot be correlated with the history of the universe that we know. For example, Bereishis lists all flying creatures as having developed before all land animals, which the fossil record shows not to be the case. Bereishis also lists the plants as having come about before the luminaries, which was also not the case. Other difficulties become apparent when examining the pesukim carefully. (Schroeder and Aviezer have suggested solutions to some of these difficulties, but these simply cannot be read into the pesukim.)

For this reason, it seems to me that the only viable approach is that of Rav Dessler, who explains that the six days are six sefiros, representing modes of "Divine power" used in creation, and do not refer to periods of time at all or even necessarily to a chronological sequence. Bereishis would therefore represent a spiritual hierarchy of creation, rather than a description of a physical process. This is an approach from a universally accepted talmid chacham (the mashgiach of Ponovezh!) which is the only one to solve all the scientific difficulties without distorting the pesukim in any way.

Kol tuv Nosson Slifkin www.zootorah.com

<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n099.shtml#08>

Date: Sat, 11 Sep 2004 22:37:03 +0300

From: Zoo Torah <zoorabbi@zootorah.com>

Subject: [RE: The Age of the Universe \(Rav Nadel zt"l and Adam\)](#)

I earlier wrote wrote

> He [Rav Nadel zt"l] also

> held that man was not literally created from dirt but rather

> evolved from another creature.

To which R' Jonathan Ostroff replied:

>This does not have support in Chazal and the Rishonim (see the "aside"
>below).

Several other people have made the same point. But Rav Nadel's opinion was that one does not need support for a specific position; he believed that we have clear support from Rambam for the principle that one may allegorize when there is great cause to do so. (As he points out, just like the Rishonim held that the days were 24 hours but many now hold differently. And, as I added, just as we do not have support from Chazal or Rishonim for saying that the hare's "maale gerah" refers to cecotrophy but most find this acceptable.)

>1. Did Rav Nadel actually "hold" of this opinion, or did he merely say
>that such an opinion is not "kefira"?

He actually held of it, due to the scientific evidence and the license that he felt was granted by the Rambam.

RJO often refers to RSN; I assume this is a typo and he means RNS (i.e. me) and I will correct this accordingly.

>Current evolutionists state that modern man appeared at least 30,000
>years ago and that "by 12,000 years ago, and possibly earlier, modern
>humans had spread from northeastern Asia
> across the Bering Land Bridge to
>northwestern North America, and hence rapidly throughout the Americas"
>(Futuyma, 1998). I originally took this also to be the opinion of RNS,
>but am awaiting his clarification.

When I wrote "The Science of Torah," I was of the opinion that these were not considered humans in the Torah sense i.e. they did not possess a neshamah. Rav Nadel provides a much more satisfactory explanation - that Hashem put the neshamah in man as soon as man evolved (i.e. however many tens of thousands of years ago), that the account of Gan Eden deals with the "significant representatives" of mankind, and that the date 5764 is from the *end* of the events in Gan Eden.

>2. Did Rav Nadel believe that Adam lived
> (having had biological hominid
>parents) and died more than 12,000 years ago having evolved via common
>descent over millions of years through various living transitional
forms?

He takes Adam in the earlier pesukim as referring to mankind in general, just like when Hashem says "Let us make man in our image" it refers to mankind in general - we are all in the image of Hashem. He believed that mankind in general appeared as you describe. But he takes later references to Adam as referring to a specific person.

>(As an aside, there is an unusual shita, mentioned in Torah Shlema
>(1:738), for the special creation of Adam HaRishon from a clump of
earth
>on yom ha-shisi. G-d caused the clump of earth to rapidly move through
>various stages, some of these stages similar to that of an animal,
>until the final human was fully formed. This would be the flip side of
>Darwin/Haeckel's "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" and might perhaps
>undermine parts of RNS's argument above. This human had no parents and

>would not necessarily leave prehistoric fossils. I am assuming that
>Rav Nadel did not mean this shita, but rather that of Darwinian common
>descent over billions of years).

Fascinating! I will look this up. Agreed, this might undermine part of my argument (re. accounting for some anatomical aspects of man), but not others (e.g. Hashem working through natural means). Rav Nadel did not refer to this, as he describes prehistoric man as being our physical ancestors.

Kol tuv
Nosson Slifkin

<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n099.shtml#09>

Date: Sat, 11 Sep 2004 22:37:03 +0300

From: Zoo Torah <zoorabbi@zootorah.com>

Subject: [RE: The Age of the Universe \(Rav Nadel zt"l on Gan Eden\)](#)

I [i.e. Nossen Slifkin] wrote earlier
> I have a question for you, by the way:
> Where exactly is Gan Eden ...

To which R' Jonathan Ostroff responded:
>I originally took this to mean that RNS did not
> believe in a historical
> Gan Eden, but I hasten to add that I leave it to RNS to clarify for
>himself.

I am grateful for this opportunity! I certainly did not mean to deny its existence, merely to point out that the conventional literal understanding of the entire episode has considerable difficulties. I.e. with regard to identifying a specific geographical location linked by four rivers from which man was banished and can never return, and leading on to considering the snake, etc. Those who take the snake literally might want to look at the photograph of a fossil legless snake at <http://tinyurl.com/6djs2>, dated to approximately fifty million years ago. Was this snake descended from the snake in Gan Eden? I guess they will say the dating is wrong, but there's a tremendous amount of research backing it up.

RJO continues:

>Rabbi Slifkin has access to the transcripts of
> Rav Nadel's shiur whereas
> we do not. Two questions come to mind.
>1. Did Rav Nadel agree that, as a historical matter, Adam HaRishon was
>expelled from Gan Eden approximately 5764 years ago?

Yes, but it is not yet clear to me if he holds that this was a specific person (as he holds is the nature of the Adam who gave birth to Kayin) or a generic term for a group of people (as he understands "Adam" in several earlier instances). (I think the latter fits in better with what he is saying.)

>2. Does RNS agree that there was a historical Gan Eden from which Adam >HaRishon was expelled approximately 5764 years ago?

I repeat that I do not yet know what to think about this matter; I am still digesting Rav Nadel's explanation, and trying to solve the problem of pinpointing its location. I would appreciate help with this.

Kol tuv,
Nosson Slifkin

<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n092.shtml#22>

Date: Wed, 08 Sep 2004 00:26:44 +0300

From: Zoo Torah <zoorabbi@zootorah.com>

Subject: [RE: The Age of the Universe \(historical Gan Eden/Adam HaRishon\)](#)

I am pleased that R' Jonathan Ostroff has retracted his incorrect assertions concerning my positions. He has now asked me several good questions about Adam HaRishon and Gan Eden. The truth is that my views on these matters are currently not settled, primarily as a result of two revelatory sources that came to light for me recently. One is the Ralbag that I posted yesterday. The other is an extraordinary shiur by Rav Gedalyah Nadel z"l of which I was privileged to see a transcript today. Rav Nadel was a talmid muvhak of the Chazon Ish with impeccable credentials as a gadol b'Torah. I was refused permission to distribute a translation of the transcript, which will soon be edited and published by the transcriber, but I can tell you of R' Nadel's basic approach, which I have also heard of in the past (in his name) from several people and of which I heard snippets from Rav Nadel himself on one occasion). I have been very careful to record his approach with great accuracy.

In brief, he stated that it is preferable that the Torah be literal, but when one's intellect or evidence forces one to reject the literal meaning, one can generally interpret things allegorically, and especially with maase Bereishis. He also pointed out that the issues which forced Rambam to allegorize things in the Torah are not the same as the issues that confront us; we have new challenges from science that it is impossible to simply reject. Nevertheless, the principles set out by Rambam regarding allegory remain the same. Thus, even though the Rishonim understood the six days of Bereishis as 24 hour days, we have reason to interpret them differently. Rav Nadel z"l felt that it is foolish to reject that which is proven from many branches of science. He further stated that when the Torah speaks of Adam, it sometimes refers to one particular person, sometimes to various people, and sometimes to mankind as a whole. He also held that man was not literally created from dirt but rather evolved from another creature. But he held that Gan Eden was a physical location.

Much of this doubtless sounds shocking to some people and may lead them to question Rav Nadel's stature as a great Torah scholar. I invite them

to read his obituary at
<chareidi.shemayisrael.com/archives5764/shelach/SHL64arnadel.htm>,
which, I think most of you will agree, places him beyond such
questioning. Rav Nadel's position certainly gives a lot of food for
thought (although he is essentially just giving the logical application
of Rambam's principles), and it seems that it would help answer a lot
of questions that have been raised here lately. Personally, I need to
think about his words a lot more, and I am far from resolving my own
conclusions on the matter.

Kol tuv Nosson Slifkin

<http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n101.shtml#03>

Date: Mon, 13 Sep 2004 17:38:31 -0400

From: "Jonathan Ostroff" <jonathan@yorku.ca>

Subject: [Age of the Universe \(Haskamos to the Science of Torah by RNS\)](#)

Rabbi Nossen Slifkin wrote on Avodah (13:9):

>I do not accept that Ralbag only has validity if backed up by Chazal,
>and Ralbag apparently didn't think so either. Rav Nadel's position
>is that Rambam (and, by the same token, Ralbag) give us a license to
>allegorize when there is necessary cause,
> such as overwhelming scientific
> evidence. My specific allegory in my sefer
> has askamos from Rav Aryeh
> Carmell, Rav Sholom Kamenetzky, and Rav Mordechai Kornfeld, shlita.

I asked Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky Shlita whether his letter in the sefer
could be taken as expressing agreement with Rabbi Slifkin's approach.

Rabbi Kamenetsky has given me permission to forward his response to
Avodah. It is addressed to me by my Hebrew name ("Yoel").

September 13, 2004

Dear R' Yoel,

Thank you for the note. My name does appear in his book and a careful
reading of the askomo will show that I gave no askomo on the content.
What impressed me about the book is its science. The uninitiated
unlettered Jew often finds that the responses he gets when he questions
the seeming incompatibility between science and Torah (l'havdil) are
lacking. The science in the book is impressive, but I do not agree with
the positions he takes in the Torah. True, he has "unconventional"
sources that would lend some credibility to the theories he proposes,
but I see these as "suggestions" (based on somewhat spurious
understandings of unconventional sources) that are to allow the
uninitiated to feel that he can begin learning Torah, and see for
himself that the issues are irrelevant. More than anything else, RNS
should be lauded for trying his best to defend the Torah against a
group of apikorsim that are bent on mocking Torah and disseminating
science as the "proof" that Torah is false, Rachmono litzlan. But to

say that these theories have credibility as Torah positions was not my intent in my letter of approbation. I agree with Rabbi Bechofer and there is no such thing as scientific evidence which is "incontrovertible".

Respectfully,
Sholom Kamenetsky