

September 11, 2006 – September 17, 2006

RNS

Dear Dr. Ostroff,

I have several very precise questions for Rav Miller, and I would appreciate it if you could obtain precise answers. I do not wish to hear yours or Rabbi Coffe's suggestions as to what Rav Miller might theoretically say; I wish to know his actual responses. I believe that this would achieve clarity for many people who are very confused and involved in dispute as to what Rav Miller's views actually are.

RSC

Dear Rabbi Slifkin הי"ר,

Simcha Coffe here. Dr. Ostroff and I occasionally respond to each other's emails. In this case, I will be responding.

In fulfillment of your above directive, I showed your email to Rav Miller this morning and requested direct answers to your questions. Despite the fact that he is enormously busy, he agreed to respond to some of your questions. The comments I write below are what I gleaned from my interchange with Rav Miller on your behalf.

RNS

1) On what basis are my views concerning Maase Bereishis to be classified as "kefirah"? What are the "fundamentals of faith" that I have contravened?

RSC

The "fundamentals of faith" you have contravened relate to the *mitzvah* of Shabbos. The problem can be summarized in three short paragraphs.

Chazal (Chagiga 12a) state that the name *Shin-Dalet-Yud* represents the idea that during the creative process the universe continued to expand "like two clues of warp" until the end of the creative process at which point Hashem said "*dai*", enough, and established the final limitations of physical law. What emerges from this *maamar chazal* is as follows:

1) There are two exclusive periods in the history of the universe; the "Creation" period and the "post-Creation" period. During the Creation period, as the laws of nature were first being brought into existence, they remained in a constant state of flux. This represented the period of Creation. Subsequently, Hashem said "*dai*" and "reigned in the expansion", that is, he stabilized the laws of nature such that they became static, unchanging.

2) The creative process did not happen all at once. It lasted the entire *sheshes yimey bereishis* and culminated with Shabbos at which point the creative process was permanently suspended and the laws of nature permanently fixed. Shabbos is a commemoration of this idea as the *pasuk* states (Shmos 20:10)... why have I commanded you to keep the Shabbos on the seventh day? "*ki*" because, "*sheshes yamim asa Hashem es hashamayim...vayanch bayom hashevee'ee...al kayn...therefore I have sanctified the seventh day etc. In other words, the "creation process" was not an instantaneous affair but lasted a duration of time referred to as *sheshes yamim* and we celebrate Shabbos on the seventh day to commemorate this event.*

3) There are two ramifications that surface from the above-stated idea. a) The creative process cannot be duplicated in a post-Creation period. b) Attempting to reconcile post-Creation imperatives with the fundamental dynamics of the Creation period is essentially impossible. In Rav Miller's opinion, advancing a theory which contravenes the first ramification by conflating these two distinct periods is considered a fundamental *kefira* in Shabbos whereas attempting to reconcile phenomena which appear to contradict the Torah by positing, say, day-age theories, in opposition to the second ramification, does not constitute *kefira*.

Allow me to explain. When you conclude that "Naturalistic Darwinian evolution is fully compatible with religion" (Challenge of Creation pg. 294) or that "the blind-watchmaker thesis need not be incompatible with G-d" (Science of Torah pg. 193; Challenge of Creation pg. 297) you have in essence contravened the first of the two ramifications above. The reason is because evolution is a purely naturalistic process (albeit guided by G-d) which can, and currently is being duplicated in the post-Creation period. The problem is, ramification (a) states that the creation process is unable to be duplicated via the normal *chukey haTeva* which obtain in the post-Creation period without a specialized *ma'amar Hashem* to activate this process. When we celebrate Shabbos, we are testifying to the idea that the world came about via a unique, meta-natural creative process which is entirely removed from the current *chukey haTeva*. We are affirming that the current laws of nature are entirely inadequate as a means of bringing about the phenomena of the universe.

You see, the role of "*Boreh*" is entirely different than the role of "*Manhig*" in the sense that the very laws of nature, the imperatives which govern the cosmos, space, time, mass, energy, life etc., all this was only able to come into existence via Hashem exercising his role as *Boreh*. Subsequently, He transformed his relationship to the universe from *Boreh* to that of *Manhig* by suspending the creative process and permanently establishing the laws of nature and the fixity of the various species of life on earth. These laws continue to be repeated over and over again but cannot, under any circumstances, be understood within the context of possessing the ability of self-perpetuation. For that, only the role of *Boreh* suffices. Thus, by subscribing to the evolutionary paradigm which utilizes currently understood laws of nature to describe the appearance of all of the species of life on earth, one is contravening the idea that these laws are inadequate as a means of perpetuating life. It is contravening the idea that only Hashem, functioning in His role as *Boreh*, can possibly bring about life whether plant, animal or human. The same issue applies to other theories such as Big Bang cosmology. Since Shabbos was established specifically to commemorate this very idea, by subscribing to origins theories which utilize post-Creation imperatives, we undermine the very essence of Shabbos.

As far as ramification #2 is concerned, Rav Miller feels that if someone wishes to believe that the universe is billions of years old and the six day period of *maaseh bereishis* is six time periods, he is not undermining Shabbos as long as he believes that these billions of years all occurred within the framework of "*Beriah*" which does not utilize currently understood laws of nature and thus cannot be duplicated today. As far as Rav Miller's personal position, he believes in a literal six day creation because he believes in the *messorah* and sees no reason why we must contravene it. This is what he meant by bringing down the *ma'amar Chazal* regarding Kayin and Hevel's birth. Since the very laws of nature themselves were first being formed during the Creation period, any number of ostensibly random violations of those laws was possible. Thus, what looks to us like a billion year universe could conceivably, or

rather, theoretically, have occurred all within this six day period. The actual truth is entirely unknowable because we do not possess a frame of reference by which we can compare (as the *pasuk* in *Iyov* states "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you possess understanding" 38:4) and thus he feels that the best course of action is to simply follow the *messorah*.

The following is a portion of a new letter by Rav Miller. It is based on private notes he made to himself which I subsequently brought to draft quality. He has seen the letter and fully authorizes it. I think it says it all.

ובנוגע למה שכתבנו לענין ששת ימי בראשית, הנה ידוע שהקב"ה בורא ומנהיג עולמו, והנה זמן בריאת העולם נמשך כל ששת ימי בראשית וכמאמרם ז"ל בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם. והנה אלו שרוצים להתאים טעארות של אלו שנקראים חכמי הטבע לאמונתן בששת ימי בראשית לא ימלטו מלכשל בעקרי תורתנו הקדושה שהרי אמונתנו בששת ימי בראשית הוא מעקרי האמונה וכל ענין שביתתנו בשבת הוא להעיד שהקב"ה ברא עולמו ב' ימים וביום השביעי שבת ואמר לעולמו די ואז נחקקו חקי הטבע כמו שאנו רואים היום. אולם יסוד נודע בחכמת הטבע שאם מצד הטבע גרידא יצא דבר כזה א"כ אפשר לאותו דבר לחזור ולהשנות עוד הפעם וא"כ אלו וכדומה, על כרחך שיטתם היא שמצד הטבע יוכל Big Bang Theory המחזיקים להשנות עוד הפעם שהרי מצד חקי הטבע שנוהגים עתה נעשה הדבר מתחילה ואם קרה פעם אחת בהכרח שיש אפשרות לקרות עוד הפעם.

אולם מיסודי אמונתנו הוא שרק ע"י עשרה מאמרות נבראו שמים וארץ, וא"כ מצד חקי הטבע בלי שתוף רצון הקב"ה לשנות ולבראות עולמו כבראשונה נמנע הוא מן המציאות שיברא עוד הפעם... אבל מעקרי האמונה הוא שכשנגמר מע"ב והקב"ה שבת ממלאכתו א"א בשום אופן שיתחדש הבריאה עוד הפעם ע"פ חקי הטבע אם לא ע"י רצונו יתברך ושינוי הנהגתו ממנהיג לבורא. והרוצים לפרש שכל ענין הבריאה היתה אך ורק יש מאין ומאז ועד עתה מתיחס הקב"ה לעולמו רק בתורת מנהיג הרי זה כפירה בששת ימי בראשית אשר אנו מעידים ע"ז בכל שבת.

Ad kan Rav Miller. From here on in I will be using the above representation to answer some of your questions below.

RNS

2) Considering that this is a very sweeping condemnation that applies to thousands of ehrliche Jews who share my views, and it is one that has caused a widespread uproar, why has Rav Miller not to date explained this psak?

RSC

Rav Miller feels that his original letter included an explanation and I feel that my translation and footnotes adequately portrayed his meaning. However, in case the initial explanation was insufficient, Rav Miller is now taking his time to respond to your questions.

RNS

3) Does firmly believing in kefirah make one into a kofer, and if not, why not?

RSC

I asked Rav Miller this question and he responded that as long as the espouser is a 'shogeg', he doesn't have the *din* of a *kofer*. Rav Miller considers you a *shogeg* in the sense that, in his opinion, you are merely confused regarding certain elements of

hashkafa, and thus you, or anyone who follows your *mehalech*, cannot be deemed a *kofer*. (*ad kan* Rav Miller)

I have personally have a source which supports this *psak* and have posted it on the Avodah forum of the Aishdas website, on several occasions, to defend your honour from those who use pejorative terms against you such as *kofer*. Please note: the following presentation is mine, not Rav Miller's.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3:7) categorizes one who believes that Hashem is corporeal as a '*Min*', an apostate. The Ra'avad has some sharp words for the Rambam and, in our version of the Yad, claims as follows (all translations in this paper are my own)

"Why did he (the Rambam) refer to this person as a *Min*? Many who were greater and better than the Rambam followed this idea (the corporeality of G-d) because of what they saw in the verses (of the Torah) and even more so, what they saw in the words of the aggados (of the Talmud) which cause a distortion of attitudes in one's mind (if not learned properly)"

The Kesef Mishneh protests the Ra'avad's sharp words but essentially agrees with him and points to a much tamer version of the Ra'avad's criticism brought down in the Sefer ha'kkarim 1:2. The following are some select portions from that *sefer* which will shed light on Rav Miller's enigmatic *psak*.

"Every Jew must believe that everything stated in the Torah is absolutely true. One who denies something in the Torah while simultaneously being aware that the opinion he is denying is indeed the view of the Torah, is referred to as a 'kofer'... however, one who upholds the laws of Moses and believes in its fundamentals, and when he comes to analyze the Torah from an intellectual perspective or from a perspective of biblical analysis, his study leads him to err and to say that one of the fundamentals of the Torah is not as it would seem, or his study has caused him to err and entirely deny a particular fundamental etc. one like this is not referred to as a kofer. Rather, he is to be included amongst the ranks of the wise and righteous of our nation although he is erring in his study, is inadvertently sinning, and requires atonement".

Later on he writes as follows:

"Even if one believes the exact opposite of one of the fundamentals of the Torah because he is (sincerely) erring in his analysis, it is inappropriate to refer to him as an apostate for this is what the Ra'avad appended when the Rambam wrote that one who corporealizes G-d is referred to as a *min* – '*amar* Avraham, although this (G-d's lack of corporeality) is surely a fundamental, one who believes that G-d possesses a body because he takes the verses of the Torah or the *aggados* literally cannot be referred to as a *min*"

Well, there you have it. A perfectly clear explanation of Rav Miller's *psak* which accounts for a doctrine being *kefira* without its espouser adopting the accompanying "accolade". And although Rav Miller is strongly opposed to your views, to the point where he considers some of them *kefira*, I think it is important to understand that from a *halachic* standpoint, Rav Miller does not consider you a *kofer*.

RNS

4) Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman suggests that the days of Bereishis were each billions of years long. Does Rav Miller consider this view to be kefirah? Is it within the spectrum of acceptable views?

RSC

My presentation above addresses this question. Rav Miller doesn't consider it *kefira* as long as the billions of years are understood to be within the framework of '*Beriah*' as opposed to post-Creation. However he considers it to contravene our *messorah* and sees no reason to have to posit such a shita. Incidentally, can you kindly provide the source for your quote from Rav Hoffman?

RNS

5) Shem Tov, Abarbanel and Akeidas Yitzchak explained that Rambam believed that the six days were not time periods but rather represent a hierarchy of creation. Does Rav Miller consider this view to be kefirah? Is it within the spectrum of acceptable views?

RSC

First of all, I disagree with you regarding the Abarbanel and Shem Tov. Let's take the Abarbanel for example. Although you are correct that the Abarbanel seems to attribute the hierarchy opinion of Creation to the Rambam, this is only his initial impression based on the Ralbag and Narboni. This attribution can be found in the Abarbanel's *pirush* on Chumash Bereishis (1:1) question #9. However, in chapter 2, just after question #42, the Abarbanel retracts his position and says as follows:

"Behold you see that the opinion of the Rav (the Rambam) was not that all of maaseh bereishis was an allegory, rather, only a small part of it (some elements in the second chapter of Bereishis, not the first), and that all which is mentioned [in the Torah] regarding the activity of the six days, from the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all of the phenomena, and the creation of Adam and his wife, up until [the passage of] "v'yichulu", have no allegory whatsoever for everything was [understood as] literal to him and therefore you will see that in this very chapter, #30 in the second section, in all which the Rav has explicated regarding the activity of the six days, he did not make [of maaseh bereishis] an allegory or a hint (pirush tzurayi oh remez) at all; rather, he did the exact opposite, for he made a concerted effort to support the doctrine of creation ex nihilo and [thus] accepted all of the verses literally..." (Abarbanel - Bereishis page 86, second column, 14 lines down)

There are several noteworthy comments.

When the Abarbanel wishes to characterize the 'hierarchal scenario' of creation, he refers to it as *tzurayi* (i.e form, allegory – see for instance bottom of page 85, left column and top of page 86 right column) and thus when he ultimately states "he did not make [of *maaseh bereishis*] an allegory or a hint (*pirush tzurayi oh remez*) at all" he means that the Rambam entirely rejected the hierarchal *pirush*.

Now, you may ask, what gives me licence to adopt the Abarbanel's second presentation and ignore the first? Perhaps I am misinterpreting the latter Abarbanel? To which I would respond that the Abarbanel on his actual *pirush* to the Moreh (Standard Ibn Tibbon edition pg. 64b first column on the bottom) states as much. In fact, he states precisely what Rav Miller says. Here's a translation.

"And the Rav (Rambam) also meant with this to what he stated at the end of chapter 29 and chapter thirty of this *chelek*, and this is that the true *chiddush* (i.e. creation from nothing) is what is described in the verses regarding the six days of creation...and it is entirely literal and therefore the seventh day was the day of rest to demonstrate that after all was completed on the sixth day, nothing more was created...and in order to testify to this great thing, Shabbos was established as the seventh day to hint at and make known that absolutely nothing was created after the sixth day...

However, to answer your question, yes, Rav Miller would feel that such a position is *kefira* in Shabbos and in fact, the Abarbanel himself, when first attributing the hierarchy position to the Rambam, says much worse things. For instance, he says "notwithstanding the Rambam's lofty Torah position, his opinion is clearly a lie" (pg 10 second column four lines from the bottom) and he accuses the Rambam of "contradicting the verses and distorting them" (5 lines later) or he states (pg. 12 second column) "what emerges from all this is the absolute nullification of the Rambam's words and opinions in this matter" and he even says "what will the Rambam answer in front of the *Ribbono shel Olam* when he is asked 'where did you receive the licence to make a *tzura* in some of *maaseh bereishis*' etc." As far as his own *shita*, the Abarbanel quotes the Ramban "and know that the days mentioned in *maaseh bereishis* were, in the creation of the heaven and earth and their offshoots, real days, composed of hours and minutes and they were six, just like the literal meaning of the verses implies..." and then the Abarbanel waxes poetic and states "may my soul die the death of the righteous and may its end be like his (i.e the Ramban's).

RNS

6) Many people have assured me that Rav Miller is a great expert in science. In light of that, I have some questions as to his views on science. Does Rav Miller believe that dinosaurs existed at the same time as man?

RSC

Rav Miller did not want to get into this aspect of the Creation controversy. When I asked him why not, he responded that it was immaterial. As long as one believes that everything was created within the framework of "*Beriah*" as explained above, the belief does not undermine the *ikar* of Shabbos although, as stated, Rav Miller believes in the *messorah*.

It should be mentioned that although Rav Miller has chosen not to address the scientific aspects of your book head on, this does not mean that he feels threatened by the science; he simply feels that the most important thing to tackle at this point is the *kefiradic* aspect of subscribing to the evolutionary paradigm. And although I personally would love to respond to the issues you raise regarding palaeontology and the like, since this email is about Rav Miller's *shittos*, I shall refrain from doing so. However, I would like to note that both Dr. Ostroff and I have much to say regarding both the scientific elements of your books and the Torah sources you quote and are currently in the midst of addressing them.

RNS

7) Approximately how many consecutive generations of dinosaurs does Rav Miller believe to have existed? In the region of one, or in the region of many thousands?

RSC

He does not have an opinion. But as I mentioned, he

- 1) considers it immaterial
- 2) chooses to follow the messorah i.e. 5766.

RNS

8) Based on the different strata of rock in which fossils appear, scientists divide the history of life into several periods. The Cambrian, Ordovician and Silurian featured only aquatic species, most of which are long extinct. The Devonian through Permian periods featured different species such as ammonites and non-dinosaurian reptile-like animals. The Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous each featured different types of dinosaurs. The Pliocene, Miocene, Oligocene, Eocene, and Paleocene each featured different types of mammals. The Pleistocene features still different types of mammals that are now extinct, such as mammoths and sabre-toothed tigers.

Does Rav Miller believe that all these types of animals existed simultaneously, and if so, why are their fossils found in different strata? If they did not exist simultaneously, but at different points during the six days, then in what sense can that period be meaningfully described as six days (i.e. surely if a person were to go back in a time-machine to that period, he would experience the passage of great amounts of time)?

RSC

Ditto.

(I can barely hold myself back from responding but this email is dedicated solely to Rav Miller's *shittos* as per your request)

RNS

9) Rav Miller writes that I denigrate the Sages (presumably referring to when I claim that they erred in certain scientific matters), and that I should instead have followed the ways of the Gedolei Yisrael of all generations who instead said "I do not understand." However the following authorities all stated that the Sages erred in science:

Rav Sherira Gaon, who states that Chazal erred in medicine;
Rambam, who states that Chazal erred in astronomy;
Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, who states that Chazal did not receive science from Sinai and therefore occasionally erred;
Tosafos (Eruvin 76b), who states that some of Chazal erred in basic mathematics;
Maharam Schick, who states that the Gemara in Pesachim shows that the Sages erred in astronomy;
Ridvaz, who states that some of Chazal thought the world to be flat;
Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who states that Chazal mistakenly thought that mice spontaneously generate;
Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, who states that Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam's view is appropriate to adopt;
Rabbi Gedalyah Nadel, who told me personally that Chazal erred in thinking that lice spontaneously generate.

RSC

Rav Miller did not respond in a point by point fashion to your above query and although I personally would like to respond I will dispense my opinions for the time being. What he did say was that you are displaying an improper attitude towards Chazal and when he wrote the words "*reyach minus*" in his first letter, this is what he

was referring to. Rav Miller feels that this attitude towards Chazal is also what caused you to err in the issue of creation.

RNS

To this list I could add many others. This leads me to ask the following questions:

10a) I would like to know whether Rav Miller considers these authorities to have been denigrating the Sages, and if not, then why not.

RSC

As I mentioned, Rav Miller declined to comment on these type questions, at least for now.

RNS

10b) I would also like to know how he reconciles these views with his statement that the Gedolei Yisrael of all generations, when faced with sugyas that are contradicted by science, said that they do not understand and did not say that Chazal erred.

RSC

You are misquoting Rav Miller. He never said anything about *sugyos* which contradict science. He said that if one runs into a *sugya* he doesn't understand, he should say *lo zachisi l'havin* and he brought a *ma'amr chazal* to prove this contention. This is most certainly a time-honored tradition of all *talmeday chachamim* although there might be scattered incidents in the Gemara where we are unable to follow the conclusions of Chazal all the time such as medicine. Besides, he does not consider evolution a 'science' which contradicts any *sugyos* in the *gemara*.

RNS

10c) I would also like to know whether he considers it acceptable for a person to accept the positions of the above authorities, and if not, then why not.

RSC

This question is too broad to answer. I personally have a response for each and every source you quoted but I truthfully don't know what Rav Miller's opinions are and to be honest, he didn't even have enough time to finish reading your entire email. He took most of his time explaining his *shita* regarding the Shabbos issue and then had to get back to the phone to answer *shailos*. If you want my conjecture, perhaps Rav Miller would not consider some of the *shittos* you mention above as *kefiradic* although he may very well differ with them. To be honest, I'd like to focus on the more substantial issues for now. I can always go back to him later for more detailed answers regarding the other issues.

September 20, 2006 – September 21, 2006

RNS

Thank you for obtaining answers to at least some of my questions. Since you mention that a lengthier paper is being prepared, I will wait for that.

RSC

The paper that is being prepared is, for the most part, a general review of the sources you delineate in your books, both Torah and science, whereas Rav Miller's argument is much more focused and deals directly with the *kefira* aspect of the

naturalistic approach to *maaseh bereishis*. Consequently, his *shita* stands independent of any papers Dr. Ostroff or I intend to release. As such, it would be nice to see some sort of response from you regarding this issue for, as you write, there are “thousands of *erliche* Jews” that have adopted your opinions and thus it seems quite urgent that we attempt to arrive at a final determination regarding both the *halachic* and *hashkafic* validity of maintaining your view of *maaseh bereishis* as a process that unfolded naturally using currently understood laws of nature.

RNS

At this stage I will merely point out that you are misunderstanding the Abarbanel. Considering that he explains Rambam's position on the non-chronological sequence with very definitive language, then proceeds to sharply dispute it, it is most unreasonable to think that SIXTY-SEVEN pages later he has decided that Rambam didn't really hold that view at all without explicitly spelling that out.

RSC

Assuming for the time being that you are correct and that the contrast between the first and second quote in the Abarbanel seems inexplicable, why didn't you quote both sources in your book? After all, the Abarbanel says clearly in the second quote that the Rambam did not make a *mashal* or *tzura* of *maaseh bereishis*. Furthermore, the Abarbanel states openly in Moreh Nevuchim (2:31) that the Rambam's opinion is that *maaseh bereishis* is not a *mashal*. Furthermore, he associates it directly with the *mitzvah* of resting specifically on the seventh day as opposed to any other day exactly like Rav Miller's *shita*. I would have expected to have seen all the sources in the Abarbanel quoted, pro and con. This way your readers would be fully apprised of the situation.

However, as it happens, I have a response to your *ikar ta'ana*. You write as follows: “Considering that he explains Rambam's position on the non-chronological sequence with very definitive language, then proceeds to sharply dispute it, it is most unreasonable to think that SIXTY-SEVEN pages later he has decided that Rambam didn't really hold that view at all without explicitly spelling that out.” The problem is, he *does* spell it out, very clearly. On page 85 he revisits the whole literal versus allegorical approach controversy which he discussed in the first *perek*. He then makes a tally of the literalists versus allegorists with Rashi and the Ramban on the right and the Rambam and Ralbag on the left and even revisits his criticism against the Rambam (what will the Rambam answer to Hashem when He asks him how he felt justified in interpreting *maaseh bereishis* as a *mashal* and *tzura*) but then he *qualifies* (as opposed to contradicts) his criticism and states that the Rambam was only making a *mashal* and *tzura* of certain elements in the second *perek* of Bereishis such as the *nachash* or the *eitz ha'daas*. However, as far as *maaseh bereishis* as described in the first *perek* of Bereishis

“the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it [*maaseh bereishis*]... (pg. 86 first column 15 lines up).

Hence, there is no contradiction between the Abarbanel's criticism on page ten and his statements on page 86. He is not being *chozer* from his criticism on page ten; nor is he being *chozer* from his position that the Rambam allegorized certain elements. The only *chazara* pertains to which elements he allegorized. Thus, the juxtaposition of these two sources in the Abarbanel is perfectly reasonable.

The truth is the Abarbanel had no choice in the matter. The Rambam is so clear regarding this issue that it is impossible to think differently. Here are several *mareh mikomos*.

1. When the Rambam discusses the grammatical connotation of the word *va'yanch* in the *dibra* which relates to Shabbos (Shmos 20:10), the Rambam states as follows [please note: all translations in this email are my own]: "[and the grammatical context of the word *vayanach*] is that [Hashem] caused reality to perpetuate in the state that it existed on the seventh day. In other words, every single day of the six days saw a process which caused new events to come into existence, [a process] which transcends the fixed nature which currently obtains in the universe in general (Moreh - Kapach ed. pg. 111).
2. Along the same lines, the Rambam writes: "From amongst the things that you must very much contemplate is that it (the Torah) mentions the creation of man in the six days of creation and it states "He created them male and female". It concludes [the episode of] all of creation and states "And the heavens and earth were completed and all of their hosts". After this it relates another beginning to the creation of [Adam and Chava and states that] Chava [came] from Adam, and it mentions the tree of life and tree of knowledge, and the story of the snake and what occurred, and it makes (i.e. establishes) that all this occurred after Adam was placed in Gan Eden. All of the wise men, may their memory be blessed, concur that this episode occurred on the sixth day [of creation] and that nothing will change after the six days of creation, and therefore none of the things from amongst those we mentioned [above] are distant (i.e. farfetched) because the laws of nature were not crystallized as of yet." (Moreh 2:30 - Kapach ed. pg. 236)
3. The Rambam states in Moreh Nevuchim that every episode related in the Torah is there for one of two purposes. Either it is there to reinforce a *hashkafa* which relates to one of the fundamentals of the Torah, or it appears in the Torah as a form of *tikun olam*, a societal infrastructure which facilitates harmony amongst mankind. If so, asks the Rambam, what is the purpose of all the generations listed between Adam haRishon and Avraham Avinu? Here's the Rambam's response: "Since it is a fundamental doctrine of the Torah that the world is newly created and that the first [human] creation was Adam and that the time which elapsed from Adam to Moshe is approximately 2,500 years...etc." and the Rambam goes on to explain that anyone viewing such a diversified world with so many inhabitants belonging to so many different cultures speaking so many different languages spread out over such large geographical locations, might doubt the recentness of creation and the fact that initially, only one man was created. Therefore, the Torah goes out of its way to list the specific generations which unfolded from Adam to Moshe, who their leaders were, what occurred to them, and that they originally all spoke one language as one would expect from a society which descended from one lone man (Moreh 3:50 - Kapach ed. pg 400)
4. When the Rambam discusses the mitzvah of *shemitta* and *yovel*, he identifies the precise historical year this mitzvah first took place as follows: "When did they first start to count? 14 years after they entered the land...7 years they were involved in conquering, seven years in dividing up the land...it therefore turns out that on the two thousandth, five hundred and third year from the

Rosh Hashana of *molad Adam haRishon*, being the second year of creation (the first 5 days of creation were the last 5 days of the first virtual year of creation - see Rosh haShana 8a Tosfos s.v. Litkufos), they started to count. (Hilchos Shemitta v'Yovel 10:2)

5. "*Adam haRishon* was commanded to keep six *mitzvos*...an additional one was added to *Noach*...until *Avraham* came who was additionally commanded on *milah* and *davened tefilas shacharis*. *Yitzchok* separated tithes and added another prayer towards sundown. *Yaakov* added *gid haNasheh* and *davened maariv*. In Egypt, *Amram* was commanded in some additional *mitzvos* until *Moshe* came at which point the Torah was completed by him. (Hilchos Milachim 9:1)
6. "Man was created alone in order to teach the world that whoever destroys [i.e. kills] a human life, it is as if he destroyed the entire world; and whoever maintains a human life, it is as if he maintained the entire world. Behold, all of mankind is created in the form of *Adam haRishon* and yet each person's countenance is dissimilar from his friend's. Therefore, each and every person can say, 'the world was created specifically for me'". (Hilchos Sanhedrin 12:3)
7. "The geographical location of the *mizbeach* was extremely precise; its location is never to be altered...It is a tradition in the hands of all that the place Dovid and Shlomo built the *mizbeach* in Goren Arvinah is the same place that *Avraham* built the *mizbeach* to which he tied *Yitzchok*. It is the place which *Noach* built upon when he exited the ark. It is the *mizbeach* which *Kayin* and *Hevel* offered upon and *Adam haRishon* sacrificed a korban when he was created. And from there he was created. Our sages have said, 'Adam was born from the dust located at the place of his atonement'". (Hilchos Beis haBechira 2:1-2)

I could go on but I'm sure you get my point.

Rabbi Slifkin, in the spirit of friendly Torah debate, I'd like to ask you a question.

I've read your books and if I understand correctly, your *shita* is that *maaseh bereishis* as described in the Torah did not occur within a historical context and in fact, did not occur at all from a physical standpoint (Science of Torah pg 106. The Challenge of Creation pg's 109, 130). Furthermore, elements of *maaseh bereishis* such as an historical Adam and Chava are also to be understood allegorically (Challenge of Creation pg 339-340). The Rambam seems to be one of the primary pegs upon which you hang your allegorical hat (Challenge pgs 108-110) and in fact you spend several pages detailing the Rambam's ostensible approach to chronological sequencing regarding *maaseh bereishis* (Challenge pg 189-192).

My question is: how can you possibly reconcile your *shittos* with the *mareh mikomos* I outlined above whilst using the Rambam for support?

September 25, 2006 – October 27, 2006

RNS

Regarding Rav Miller's charge - this is something new that I have never heard before. I have some questions on it. If I have understood you correctly, Rav Miller is

saying that it is heretical to posit that any processed post-Creation are the same as any processes during creation.

RSC

That's not exactly correct. There could very well have been contemporary processes which existed during the Creation period too. For instance, I imagine some form of gravity existed during *maaseh bereishis*. Otherwise, the cows really would have been jumping over the moon. And although one could argue that Hashem maintained all physical processes in an entirely miraculous fashion, I see no reason to assume that all processes which were initiated during *maaseh bereishis* must have been different than processes which exist today. What Rav Miller means is that the Creative force, referred to as '*maamar Hashem*', was the force which caused all of these processes to materialize and that this force no longer exists in the post-Creation period. If you and I jumped into a time machine and took a trip back to, say, the sixth day of creation just before Adam haRishon was created, I imagine we would probably see a fully formed planet teeming with life. We would probably see the sun shining, the wind blowing, the trees beginning to blossom, and if we didn't watch our step, might find ourselves being chased down by a T-Rex or being eyed from above by a hungry Pterodactyl. However, at the same time, we would probably be subjected to all kinds of weird experiences as the Creative force continued to generate new processes and the universe continued to "expand". The bottom line is, it's just impossible to know precisely what was going on during *maaseh bereishis* because we lack an absolute frame of reference which would enable us to make definitive statements.

RNS

Does this mean that scientific theories as to how the sun, moon and earth were formed (regardless of the time duration) are by definition heretical, since such processes are said to still occur?

RSC

This is a tricky question. The answer is yes and no. Yes it would be heretical to theorize that the sun, the moon and the earth formed due to naturalistic processes which exist today. No it would not be heretical to posit theories about the unfolding of the cosmos if one claimed that they are not able to be duplicated in a post-Creation scenario. However, the latter claim is bordering on the incoherent and thus meaningless. All theorists today utilize contemporary scientific principles to trace a *naturalistic* pathway from the Big Bang down to sliced bread. I know of no scientist who claims that he is merely advancing a possible scenario for the unfolding of the cosmos while simultaneously maintaining that this scenario is entirely inimitable from the standpoint of contemporary science. Thus, anyone aligned with origins type theories is, for all intents and purposes, aligned with *kefira*.

RNS

And does it mean that it is heretical (as opposed to merely mistaken) to believe in the current or recent spontaneous generation of animals from dirt, since according to the peshat of Bereishis, that is what happened on the sixth day of Creation?

RSC

No it would not. However, before I answer your question, I'd like to make a slight digression. There are two elements to your question above. The first is your *ikar kasha*, which is, if the Creative process no longer exists, is it *kefira* to postulate the existence of spontaneous generation which, seemingly, would be a function of the Creative force. The second element of your question is your ostensible differentiation

between spontaneous generation and any other biological system which draws its existence and nourishment directly from the earth. And although this has nothing to do with Rav Miller's *shita* per se, I'd like to discuss it for a couple of paragraphs.

When distinguishing between the concept of *neis* and *teva*, Rav Dessler invokes some compelling imagery to illustrate his point. Suppose we took a corpse, buried it in a grave and waited until it decomposed and turned to dust. After some time, we would open the grave only to find a fully-grown human being which had developed from the earth by means of the remains of the old one. Surely we would refer to this as a *neis* akin to *techiyas haMeisim*. However, when we observe plant life growing from the ground, we refer to this as *teva*. Why should this be? Horticulturists don't know *why* organic material sprouts from the ground when seeds are planted, they just know that it does. Why are we any more surprised that it would work with humans?

The truth is, this idea applies equally to all branches of science. Just as horticulturists can't tell you why the earth responds to the genetic material in a seed, or why items like apples and bananas appear from the earth in the first place, zoologists can't tell you why cows or sheep which ingest nothing more than grass and water are capable of producing milk, meat, leather, wool and a host of other materials that are entirely unrelated to grass. Any of the principles outlined in the most advanced scientific textbooks are nothing more than descriptions of processes based on empirical observation but they can never presume to reveal the reason *why* these principles function. (Actually, you made a similar point in Challenge chapter two when discussing aspects of the universe such as its order, its ability to be expressed in mathematical terms, its beauty and its sheer comprehensibility. You write "We take order for granted. We have been brought up with concepts of laws of nature. To us, it is obvious that the universe should make sense. But Einstein considered it "miraculous" that the universe evinces order".)

Rav Dessler answers that in truth, there is no difference. *Teva* is actually a *neis* (or, to paraphrase Rav Dessler's classic terminology, "a manifestation of Hashem's *Ratzon* as expressed in His *hanhaga* of the *beriah*); the difference is, *teva* is the *Ratzon* Hashem we are accustomed to whereas *neis* is the *Ratzon* Hashem we are not accustomed to (MME Vol. 1 - pg.177).

Now, getting back to your *ikar kasha*, as far as I'm concerned, it really has nothing to do with spontaneous generation per se because all life systems are equally miraculous. Your question can be asked about *any* of the phenomena of the universe. Why do trees grow? Why do plants come out of the ground? Why does the solar system function etc. All of these elements are discussed in *maaseh bereishis* and thus your question applies equally to all of them i.e. why are they not a contradiction to the idea that the Creative force of *maaseh bereishis* no longer exists in the post-Creation period?

However, in view of what we've been saying all along, the answer to your question is simple. The reason why (the apparently erroneous notion of) spontaneous generation (or any current process for that matter), has nothing to do with *maaseh bereishis* is because during *maaseh bereishis* Hashem, acting in the role of *Boreh*, first *initiated* such laws. He first caused them to come into existence from a prior state of non-existence. These laws simply didn't exist before Hashem decreed that they should. So for instance, when Hashem created the law that apple seeds, when planted in the ground, should cause the earth to yield apple trees, the genetic

information encoded on the DNA helix of an apple seed can now act as a means for the production of apples. However, before Hashem decreed that the earth should respond to the DNA apparatus in the seed, one could plant seeds '*fun heint biz morgen*' and nothing would happen. The same applies to spontaneous generation. If let's say *kinim min ha'ipush* was actually true, then we would say that obviously Hashem initiated a law during the *sheshes yimey bereishis* which allowed for lice from dirt. However, and here's the main point, there is *absolutely no parallel whatsoever* between the process of *kinim min ha'ipush* and the *maamar* Hashem of "*vayomer Elokim, tadshey ha'aretz desheh*" (Bereishis 1:11) or "*vaYomer Elokim totzey ha'aretz nefesh chaya*" (Bereishis 1:24) because **whereas the latter two are commands by Hashem to initiate the process, the former example is 'merely' the ongoing *dvar* Hashem (*I'olam Hashem d'varcha nitzav bashamayim* – Tehilim 119) to perpetuate a pre-existing process via the agency of '*teva*', a euphemism which really refers to the *Ratzon* Hashem as expressed in His role as *Manhig*.**

Incidentally, this explains the Rambam's *shita* in Pirkey Avos. The Rambam holds that all miracles which occur in *teva* were pre-programmed during the period of *maaseh bereishis*. In view of Rav Miller's explanation, this Rambam is *lichtig*! Of course all miracles must be pre-programmed; the Creative process was permanently suspended with the *amirah* of *Dai*, enough. Consequently, nothing new can possibly materialize during the post-Creation period.

RNS

I would be interested to hear your answers to these two questions.

SC

Rabbi Slifkin, I think I've done the best I possibly can to elucidate Rav Miller's *shita*. I hope my presentation was satisfactory. Incidentally, I don't expect you to agree with me at this point (although I can't think of anything that would delight me more). My primary issues at this time are

- a) That you understand Rav Miller's concern
- b) I've been sufficiently clear in presenting his *shita*.

RNS

The essential objection sounds no different to that of the Lubavitcher Rebbe regarding why he believed it to be *kefirah* to say that the six days were longer than 24 hours. Rav Carmell's answer, on. p. 182 of my book, would be equally applicable.

SC

This is incorrect. Rav Miller's point has nothing to do with the Lubavitcher Rebbe's point although both are equally valid. The Lubavitcher Rebbe's point is that the *sheshes yimey bereishis* must mean literal days as opposed to periods because otherwise, why do we celebrate Shabbos on the seventh *day*. Rav Miller does not treat this idea directly although he certainly does relate to the *sheshes yimey bereishis* as six days, not periods. Rav Miller's point is that even if we were to accept the various day-age theories out there, it could only be within the context of a Creation period scenario. Any theory which utilizes contemporary laws of nature as a means of describing the unfolding of nature is *kefira*, plain and simple. So, although both the Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rav Miller may both reject reinterpreting *sheshes yimey bereishis* as time periods, they do so for different reasons. The Lubavitcher Rebbe does it based on his estimation of the literal meaning of the word *yom* and his argument that it undermines the Torah's injunction of keeping *bidavka* the *seventh*

day of the week as a commemoration of Shabbos, whereas Rav Miller rejects it because all such theories are invariably accompanied by naturalistic explanations of the unfolding of the universe thus contravening the primary message of Shabbos.

Incidentally, when I first translated Rav Miller's initial letter, I introduced the concept of Kiddush in the footnotes and claimed that Kiddush was a testimony to six literal days and also to Rav Miller's approach of meta-naturalism versus naturalism. At the time, there was a ten page refutation of my paper issued by several professors which appeared on your site and other places. One of their issues was this quote from Rav Aryeh Carmell *ztz'l* which you make reference to. I am currently in the midst of composing a response to their refutation and have already completed my response to this particular issue. I'd like to take this opportunity address Rav Carmell's quote so here's a snippet cut and pasted from my incipient paper.

Quote

Kidusha di'bey Shimsha – The Significance of Va'Yechulu

AKA (stands for Aaron, Klafter, Anonymous)

With regard to the claim that kiddush is a rejection of any approach that takes the six days as longer than regular days, Rabbi Aryeh Carmell responds to this in Challenge as follows (page 259):

...Others however do not feel that there is any force in this argument. The true nature of God's creative activity during the six days and the sense in which He can be said to have 'rested on the seventh day' must remain forever beyond our comprehension, whether the days are taken literally or metaphorically. It is reasonably clear that the Torah wishes to convey that the six weekdays and Shabbat correspond to some basic structures of reality, and it can make no difference to the concept of Shabbat whether God's 'activity' or 'inactivity' is expressed in relation to days, sephirot, or other spiritual constructs.

SC (me)

With all due respect to Rabbi Carmell, I disagree. (Please note: when I mention "due respect", I am not pandering. I mean it with the greatest sincerity. Rabbi Carmell [ztz'l] is the one most responsible for bringing the works of Rav Eliyahu Dessler to the public and as such, my awe, reverence and gratitude to him know no bounds. Nonetheless, I do not feel obligated to refrain from voicing my opinion.)

Everyone is aware that the reciting of *v'yichulu* on Friday night has the din of *hagadas eidus*. That is why we stand when we say it and why we must say it with someone else simultaneously. We are not indulging in some superficial and meaningless ritual; *hagadas eidus* has clearly defined parameters. As any judge or lawyer will tell you, in order for testimony to possess any significance it must be unambiguous. If "six days" is entirely nebulous, if it is entirely open to interpretation, one person may be testifying that the world is billions of years old while the other is testifying to a literal six day creation while a third might be testifying that it is a spiritual fairy tale *chs'v*. The notion is absurd. There must be one universal meaning that all Jews can adopt in order for *v'yichulu* to be considered a significant *hagadas eidus*. Saying that six days relates to some inconclusive construct effectively renders *v'yichulu* meaningless.

End Quote

RNS

Regarding the Abarbanel - the reason why I did not quote the latter extract is that I think it has absolutely no bearing on the subject and does not indicate any retraction or modification of his views. (Incidentally, I erred in describing this later extract as sixty-seven pages after the first - I was referring to the same page as you, which is SEVENTY-seven pages after the first.)

Let's review the Abarbanel on p. 10.

- 1) Abarbanel says that Rambam believed in the non-chronological sequence of days.
- 2) He says that Rambam considered this to be one of his great secrets.
- 3) He says that Rambam tried to conceal this view with ingenuity.
- 4) He says that Ralbag, Narvoni and others revealed his secret.
- 5) He then says that although Rambam was tremendously great, this view is sheker v'chazav.
- 6) He then attacks this view at length
- 7) He concludes by saying that he believes that he has disproved Rambam's position.

According to your view, that Abarbanel did not believe Rambam to possess this view, and that it is "impossible to believe otherwise", let's see how these points look:

- 1) False and defamatory statement.
- 2) False and bizarre statement.
- 3) False and bizarre statement.
- 4) I have no idea how you would reinterpret this one
- 5) Very mean of him to describe Rambam as writing sheker v'chazav if he didn't really believe that to be the case
- 6) and 7) With all these objections, it would only be appropriate to point out that he didn't ultimately believe this to be Rambam's position.

Considering that Abarbanel -

- (a) had tremendous respect for Rambam,
 - (b) sought to defend him wherever possible (e.g. in the pages you mention),
 - (c) considered the idea of the days being non-chronological to be extremely wrong,
 - (d) pointed out that numerous commentators on Rambam had revealed this to be his position
 - (e) stated that Rambam had tried to conceal it with great ingenuity
- it is absolutely absurd to think that Abarbanel would criticize Rambam for this view and would not say that it wasn't actually Rambam's view at all, contrary to how all the other commentaries understood Rambam.

RSC

Well, that's quite a compelling presentation. Unfortunately, there is one 'small' problem with it.

I am reminded of a story with, I believe, R' Chaim Volozhiner. There was a woman who approached a *beis din* in Eastern Europe claiming that her husband was dead and thus she was requesting an official *psak* from *beis din* so that she could remarry. After due deliberation, the *beis din* concluded that the *agunah* indeed had a right to remarry and outlined the reasoning for their *psak* in a lengthy *teshuva*. They sent their *teshuva* to R' Chaim but he refused to accept their conclusions. After much correspondence, R' Chaim was forced to admit that their did not seem to be a flaw in their reasoning and yet he maintained his position and refused to endorse the *beis*

din's psak. A few days later, the erstwhile husband appeared safe and sound. R' Chaim commented wryly to his *talmidim*: "Isn't it amazing? The *beis din* composed what seemed like an incontrovertible edifice of advanced *pilpul* and yet one plain man came along and destroyed their entire construct in one fell swoop".

Your line of reasoning above seems unassailable. The problem is, along comes the Abarbanel and *says* that he is being *chozer*. On page 86, the Abarbanel revisits the exact same criticism of the Rambam that he had for him on page 10. He claims that the Rambam has nothing to answer before Hashem when he is asked why he chose to make an allegory of some *pesukim* and not of others. He also warns against allegory because it is like a leprosy which will spread to the rest of the Torah and cause one to allegorize even the *mitzvos* of the Torah etc. So, for all intents and purposes, we can cut out the 75 pages between pg. 10 and page 86. We are now holding on page 10, right back where we started from. Just after he revisits his criticism of the Rambam, the Abarbanel states as follows:

"Before I begin, I wish to be *milamed zchus* on the Rav (Rambam) and all those who maintain his approach in that which they interpreted the *parsha* in an allegorical fashion (*derech tziyuri v'hamshalayee*) and it (the *limud zechus*) is that as far as the commands and laws of the Torah are concerned, it never entered their minds to allegorize the verses G-d forbid because anything [which appears in the Torah] which is associated with an action (a *maaseh*) was accepted by them and their progeny to keep and to do. And so too, in the episode of *maaseh bereishis* which occurred during the six days, the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it inasmuch as the belief of Chiddush haOlam is accepted amongst our nation. However, when discussing the episode of the Trees of Gan Eden, the formation of Woman from the [Adam's] side, and the episode of the snake, it did enter their minds to reinterpret the verses etc."

We see two things here. Firstly we see that the Abarbanel was *chozer* from characterizing the Rambam as taking the *pesukim* of *perek aleph* in Bereishis allegorically. And second of all, we gain insight into the difference between the first and second *perek* of Bereishis. The first, claims the Abarbanel, is akin to a regular *mitzvah ma'asis* because since Chiddush haOlam is a *yesod* which is universally accepted by our nation, it has the *din* of a *mitzvah ma'asis*. Thus, just as the Rambam would never allegorize a *mitzvah*, so too, he would never allegorize any of the *pesukim* in *perek aleph* of Bereishis. On the other hand, the story of the *nachash* is not one of the *yesodey haEmuna* and thus the Rambam felt he had licence to allegorize it if necessary.

RNS

What, then, is going on with pages 85+? The answer is that Abarbanel is addressing Aristotelian-type allegories which are a million miles from *pshat*. When you quote the statement of Abarbanel that "the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it..." you have omitted the end of the sentence! The full sentence is as follows: "the Rav [Rambam] did not compose an [allegorical] interpretation and did not veer from the literal interpretation of the *pesukim* as the Torah describes it in that the belief in chiddush ha-olam (the non-Aristotelian view of the world) is accepted with our nation." That is what he is stressing that Rambam did not allegorize. The non-sequential order of days is small fry that doesn't affect things so much - Rambam still maintains that Hashem created everything.

SC

That's a wild assertion! If all the Abarbanel meant to do was to be *sholel* from the Rambam the adoption of Aristotelian *kadmus*, why does he say that the Rambam didn't allegorize *any* of the verses of the six days of *maaseh bereishis*? Why does the Abarbanel go out of his way to contrast the first and second *perek* of Bereishis? Why does he need to introduce his whole *shtikel* Torah about non-allegorizing of *mitzvos ma'asios*? Why doesn't the Abarbanel simply say that the Rambam didn't hold of *kadmus* and thus allegorizing of the *pesukim* is just a 'small fry' issue? I'm sorry but your reading simply doesn't fit into the words of the Abarbanel. Just a couple of lines later he states

"Behold you see that the opinion of the Rav (the Rambam) was not that all of maaseh bereishis was an allegory, rather, only a small part of it (some elements in the second chapter of Bereishis, not the first), and that all which is mentioned [in the Torah] regarding the activity of the six days, from the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all of the phenomena, and the creation of Adam and his wife, up until [the passage of] "v'yichulu", have no allegory whatsoever for everything was [understood as] literal to him and therefore you will see that in this very chapter, #30 in the second section, in all which the Rav has explicated regarding the activity of the six days, he did not make [of maaseh bereishis] an allegory or a hint (pirush tzurayi oh remez) at all;

How can the Abarbanel possibly be any clearer than that? He openly states that the Rambam did not allegorize any of the *pesukim* from Bereishis straight through *va'yechulu*. And what about the Abarbanel I quoted to you in the Moreh (2:31). The Abarbanel states there that Chiddush occurred each and every single day of *maaseh bereishis*. What must be understood is that when the Abarbanel refers to Chiddush haOlam in our context here, he is not referring merely to Creation ex-nihilo. He is referring to Chiddush as expressed in the entire parsha of *maaseh bereishis* from the first *pasuk* straight through *va'yechulu*. Any other reading of the Abarbanel seems, to me, to be self serving.

As far as your comments regarding the bizarre behaviour of the Abarbanel, I don't see it as such a problem although I do admit it seems a bit weird. You see, the first time around, the Abarbanel wanted to make a strong point of rejecting allegory in *maaseh bereishis*. Since he understood that the Ralbag and Narboni attributed the allegorical approach to the Rambam and relied on him for its validity, he used the Rambam as the outlet for all of his irritation against the *shita* of allegory without necessarily making an attempt to determine if the Rambam himself was indeed allegorizing. Later on, as he was writing his *pirush*, perhaps he made a *bedika kapdanis* and decided that the Ralbag and Narboni were wrong and thus he presented his final opinion of what the Rambam was really saying. No mystery here.

RNS

Incidentally, I certainly don't see how you describe this explanation of Rambam as "unthinkable" when, at the very least, even you must surely concede that Abarbanel is saying that Ralbag, Narvoni and others learned Rambam this way.

RSC

Okay. I admit it may have been a bad choice of words but what I meant to say is that from the perspective of logic, it is unthinkable to imagine that the Rambam would state on seven different occasions that Adam haRishon was a real person and

expect someone to accept the idea that the Rambam really didn't hold there was an Adam HaRishon.

RNS

I also did not see you address Shem Tov and Akeidas Yitzchak.

RSC

Both Shem Tov and Akeidas Yitzchak are enigmatic, the former more so than the latter.

Shem Tov – Whereas in your quote (Challenge page 189-190) Shem Tov seems to subscribe to the idea that the Rambam allegorized *maaseh bereishis*, shortly after he states as follows:

"And from this [we understand that which] our sages have said that Adam and Chava were born united, back to back, the allusion here being that although maaseh bereishis is all literal (kulo ki'mashma'o), it also encompasses deeper allusions that man is composed of substance and form etc." (pg. 61)

This is only one of several quotes from the Shem Tov which would seem to indicate that the Shem Tov understood the Rambam as taking *maaseh bereishis* literally, albeit *in addition* to a 'deeper' allegorical understanding. Truthfully, I am currently undecided regarding the Shem Tov.

Akeidas Yitzchak – After outlining what the Akeidas Yitzchak feels is the Rambam's interpretation of *maaseh bereishis*, he states as follows:

And behold the Rav the Moreh there required [for the purpose of] repair and completion of his [posited] order [of creation] to say something, and this is what he says: quote Rambam - 'and what you must know is that the sages have already explained that the grass and trees which Hashem caused to sprout from the earth indeed occurred after He caused the rain to descend upon them and that which it states [in the Torah] that 'a mist rises from the earth' is indeed [the Torah relating] the chronological event which preceded [the verse] 'let the earth bring forth grass' etc. and to this (the former verse) Onkeles translates 'a cloud ascended from the earth' and this is understood from the verse 'and the trees were still not on the earth and the grass had not yet sprouted' etc. this is clear ... end quote Rambam. Behold he (the Rambam) needed to establish that the category of rain, which is the accomplishment of the second day to his mind, possessed a temporal precedence to the category of growth which is the accomplishment of the third day. And he (the Rambam) explicated this accordingly and entertained no doubt in the matter. And the wonder is that he accepted the testimony of one verse which states 'and the trees were still not on the earth and the grass had not yet sprouted', despite the fact that he did not need to feel compelled by this verse to explain as he did, as shall be demonstrated in its place, while [simultaneously] rejecting the testimony of several verses which repeat 6 times regarding the order of creation, 'and it was night, and it was day' etc." (pg. 41)

The Akeidas Yitzchak seems to be struggling with what appears to him as contradictory messages in the Rambam.

My purpose in pointing out these discrepancies is to demonstrate that even those who interpreted the Rambam allegorically were confounded by apparent

inconsistencies which indicated the reverse. Personally I feel that your smattering of quotes is tenuous for three reasons:

- a) They are opposed by commentaries such as Abarbanel and Crescas and fly in the face of the simple *mashmaus* of the seven quotes I provided directly from the Rambam.
- b) The very *miforshim* which represent the Rambam's view of *maaseh bereishis* in a non-literal form personally reject allegory in *maaseh bereishis*
- c) Akeidas Yitzchak and Shem Tov are insufficient indications of the Rambam's true opinion as evidenced by the quotes above.

And although category b) does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of adopting the *shita* of allegory vis-à-vis the Rambam, it certainly seems logical to say that if we can align the Rambam's *shita* with these *miforshim*, it would behoove us to do so. As far as I'm concerned, no far-fetched reconciliation is necessary as I've demonstrated from my seven quotes from the Rambam. They (the *miforshim* and the Rambam) all hold precisely the same thing.

Notwithstanding the above, I realize that I have not conclusively demonstrated the impropriety of your personal usage of allegory in the advancement of your suggestion that science and Torah can be reconciled by interpreting *maaseh bereishis* in a non-literal fashion. I am merely pointing out that I feel you have insufficient support from the Rambam to question our collective long-standing *messorah* and advance your allegorical approach to *maaseh bereishis* in its stead. As you mention so eloquently in your book (Challenge 130-131), "It cannot be stressed enough that this should not be taken as a free licence for anyone to interpret Torah in whichever way they see fit. One must exercise extreme caution in any such interpretation. There must be sufficient cause for doing so especially if the new interpretation is highly innovative or far-reaching in its implications"

However, all this is really moot as I have a much stronger objection to your personal use of allegory regarding *maaseh bereishis*. None of the *rishonim*, including the Rambam, understood the unfolding of the universe (i.e. *maaseh bereishis*) in terms of billions of years. Even if we were to adopt the allegorical approach, it simply means that the universe was created instantly rather than six physical days. Recent Creation is not anywhere contested amongst *chazal* and *rishonim* and thus, as *chazal* say, "*davar she'bichlal, v'yatza lee'don b'davar chadash, ein licha bo ela chidusho bilvad*". You simply cannot extend the allegorical approach beyond its usage as you have no precedence to do so. The very sources you quote all claim a recent Creation. By the way, Rav Miller's distinction between meta-natural Creation versus naturalistic machination would, in my opinion, still apply.

Incidentally, especial pleading to an 'obviously' ancient universe due to 'incontrovertible' scientific 'evidence' such as transitional fossils, dendrochronology and ice cores (Challenge pg. 149) is, I feel, wholly untenable. There is absolutely no branch of science which comes close to conclusively demonstrating an ancient universe. I would be glad to discuss this with you during the course of this debate. Initially this dialogue was commenced by you for the purpose of comprehending Rav Miller's *psak* regarding your *shita* however I think our interchange has exceeded its original parameters. I encourage you to broach any academic (Torah or science) topic you wish as a topic of discussion between us.

RNS

With regard to your questions from other statements in Rambam - it is well known that there are numerous contradictions between the Yad and the Moreh, reflecting the different contexts in which they were written. And regarding the seeming contradictions in the Moreh itself - Rambam himself, in his introduction, states that there will be seemingly conflicting statements! As Abarbanel pointed out, this approach to the six days was one of Rambam's great secrets which he concealed with ingenuity. It seems that Crescas missed it. If you want to understand how Abarbanel, Narvoni, Shem Tov, and Akeidas Yitzchak deduced that this must have been Rambam's view, I suggest that you study Sara Klein-Braslavy's book.

RSC

I have studied the relevant parts of her book and truthfully, I am unimpressed. She does precisely the same you do with the Abarbanel i.e. ignore his mitigating comments on page 86 (page 248 in her book – Hebrew Edition), quotes Narboni (page 246) and Shem Tov (page 247 - different quote than yours) etc. To her credit, she qualifies her usage of the Shem Tov on page 249 but the thrust of her *mehalech* is identical to yours. Frankly, quoting her doesn't do much for me. I would much quicker accept the opinion of a Mir Yeshiva graduate and *talmid chacham*, one who ostensibly possesses far more initiation in *all* of the Rambam's works as opposed to just the Moreh, than a Jewish academic. You are short-selling yourself by attempting to argue via an appeal to authority.

RNS

This answers your question that "I would have expected to have seen all the sources in the Abarbanel quoted, pro and con. This way your readers can be fully apprised of the situation." But since you apparently do believe that one should cite all sources, pro and con, to fully apprise readers of the situation, then I have some questions for you. On your website, why do you only have letters from Rabbonim who oppose my work, and not letters from those who support my work, such as Rav Aryeh Carmell z"l and Rav Malinowitz shlita? And why do you only make mention of sources supporting your approach, and not of those supporting a different approach, such as Rav Dovid Hoffman and Rav Herzog? I would have expected to have seen all the sources quoted, pro and con. This way your readers can be fully apprised of the situation.

RSC

You're comparing apples and oranges. I don't expect you to quote sources which are in direct opposition to your *shita* just as you shouldn't expect me to quote people like Rav Herzog who are in direct opposition to my *shita*. What I do expect though is that if you quote someone who supposedly supports your position in one place and apparently rejects it in another, the ethical thing to do is mention both places. Nevertheless, at this point I consider the absence of the appropriate sources merely an error of omission. However, if you do not put up some clarification regarding the Abarbanel on your website, I'm afraid the error of omission evolves (pun intended) into an act of commission.

RNS

Rabbi Coffey, in the spirit of friendly Torah debate, I'd like to ask you a question. How can you possibly say that it is "impossible" to think that Rambam possessed this view, in light of the fact that Abarbanel, Shem Tov, Narvoni and Akeidas Yitzchak all ascribe this view to Rambam? I would like to suggest my own answer to this question. It seems clear that you believe that the belief in a literal six days is a very, very important part of Judaism, and that you have made teaching this into your own

personal mission. So perhaps you would simply be unable to accept under any circumstances that Rambam could have held differently? After all, since you do believe that Rambam was a tremendous Gaon and tzaddik, you presumably consider it impossible that he would subscribe to heretical views. In which case there is no point in our debating this issue. (In contrast, i would have no problem if it somehow turned out that this was not Rambam's view; I presented this approach in The Science Of Torah even before knowing that it was Rambam's view.) Unless you can give me reason to think otherwise, this debate would appear to be futile, from my perspective.

RSC

Rabbi Slifkin, with all due respect, I have no intention on engaging you in a tit for tat and I certainly do not feel obliged to supply you with reasons as to why discussing *hashkafic* issues with me is not futile. I'll let you decide that for yourself. Suffice to say that you have a lot more invested here than I do. If anyone has a *negius*, it's not me. Yet, not once did I accuse you of intellectual bias; I expect the same treatment from you. In your initial email, you made mention of the fact that you and Rabbi Student are reasonable people and if Dr. Ostroff and I attempted to explain Rav Miller's shita, you would attempt to understand. I took you at your word and ask that you take me at mine. I too am not an unreasonable person although I might have *negius'in*. All human beings have ulterior motives; but if this is to be the deciding factor in determining the truthfulness of an argument, no academic dispute would ever be possible. The assumption is that both parties are *mivakshey emes* and both parties will be honest enough to put aside their personal *negius* and concede the truth if proven wrong. If you do not believe me to be a *mivakesh emes*, then you have no business debating with me at all. I hope this is not the case.

RNS

One more point. While I have no interest in challenging the material on your website, I do want to protest your mischaracterization of my position. The website claims that *The Challenge of Creation* says that Rambam denies the existence of Adam as a historical figure. That is false. Here are the quotes that you bring - I have bolded the parts that you have apparently not noticed:

Rambam understood the six days of creation to be describing a conceptual hierarchy of the world rather than a historical account of Creation. ... [Rambam] believed that **most of** the account of Adam in Genesis is not a historical account of an individual but instead a portrayal of the role of man in the world

Thus the **early** references to "Adam" are speaking about the fundamental nature of man in general, rather than referring to a particular person who fathered Cain and Abel.

Putting all this together with the Rambam's and Ralbag's explanation of the six days, it would seem that, according to this approach *the first three chapters of Genesis* are **for the most part** speaking about the archetypal nature of man and his life in this world rather than a historical account of a particular person's life

I would appreciate it if you would correct this distortion of my position.

RSC

I'm sorry but I do not perceive any distortion here. I have read your book carefully and I can illustrate, via exhaustive quotations from same, that any balanced reader would come to the conclusion that you are suggesting, as a means of reconciling the scientific chronology of the universe with Torah, that *maaseh bereishis* as depicted in Bereishis 1 is not an historical account, including the creation of Adam haRishon. I feel it is superfluous to demonstrate this however if you challenge me (no pun intended), I will gladly capitulate with a list of quotes. I kind of feel silly dictating to an author what his position is so why don't we do the following. Let's clear the air between us by addressing the following questions.

- a) Do you feel that any of the references to 'Adam' in Bereishis 1 are historical and if so, which ones?
- b) Do you feel that the Rambam understood *maaseh bereishis*, as depicted in Bereishis 1, as an historical description or not?
- c) If you feel the Rambam understood *maaseh bereishis* as depicted in Bereishis 1 as an allegorical description, precisely when did the Torah switch from an allegorical Adam to an historical one?
- d) Assuming you feel that the allegorical Adam depicted in the Torah eventually switched to an historic one, do you have *any sources whatsoever* supporting such a contention or signifying precisely when this transformation in the Torah took place?
- e) Assuming you feel that Bereishis 1 is allegorical, do you feel this, along with purported scientific evidence, gives one licence to controvert our mainstream tradition regarding the unfolding of the universe or not?

If these questions are answered by you, I believe we will have a clearly delineated line indicating our respective approaches and thus eliminate any future misunderstanding. If subsequent to your response it becomes clear that the toriah site has misrepresented your views, the errant quotes will be removed.

I await your response

RNS

P.S. I am still waiting to see the email where I allegedly cut off the dialogue with Dr. Ostroff.

RSC

I had occasion to speak with Dr. Ostroff today and I brought up your issue with him. Here's what I understand from his response.

You and he maintained a dialogue on the Aishdas/Avodah website in the Summer of 2004 (about the appropriateness of your approach) prior to the ban on your books. You made a claim regarding a *haskama* you received from Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky:

Avodah (vol. 13 no. 99): "My specific allegory in my sefer has *haskamos* from Rav Aryeh Carmell, Rav Sholom Kamenetzky, and Rav Mordechai Kornfeld, shlita".¹

which prompted Dr. Ostroff to post the following letter from Rabbi Kamenetsky (Vol 13 no 101, September 13, 2004).

¹ <http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n099.shtml#10>

Dear R' Yoel,

Thank you for the note. My name does appear in his book and a careful reading of the *haskomo* will show that I gave no *haskomo* 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 (*I'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 Kamenetsky²

Subsequently, you wrote to Dr. Ostroff as follows:

"Likewise, I believe you may have caused me some personal harm by publicizing the letter from Rav Sholom shlita. You might wonder what could possibly be wrong with doing so. Of this I will say no more at this point, but if you think about the potential circumstances under which he wrote it, you might think of reasons why it was inappropriate.

You may feel that you want to make some sort of public apology for either or both of these errors. Unfortunately this could even make things worse, by drawing more attention to the entire matter. The problem with this matter, as one Rosh Yeshivah told me privately, is that there are zealots who tend to overreact when it is discussed, and therefore it must be handled with great care."

To which he responded (on 18, September 2004) as follows³:

"I would have thought that the onus would be on you to retract your statement that your allegories had the *haskama* of Rabbi Kamenetsky, now that we see that he disagrees with your representation of his position.

Since you accuse me of wronging you and "*adam karov leatzmo*", I consulted with my Rav (Rabbi Shlomo Miller Shlita) who is the Rosh Kollel of the Lakewood Kollel here in Toronto.

Rabbi Miller told me to tell you in his name that it was a *mitzva* to publicize Rabbi Sholom Kamenetsky's letter. The Tanna Rabbi Shimon Haamsoni retracted on all his *derashos* when he came to "*es Hashem Elokecha tira*" and he stated that just as he received reward for *darshening* so he will be

² <http://www.aishdas.org/avodah/vol13/v13n101.shtml#03>

³ See <http://zootorah.org/controversy/account.html> (accessed 27 Oct. 2006). As at the current date, Rabbi Slifkin's account omits these details and starts with what happened, as he sees it, on September 21, 2004

rewarded for retracting. As Rabbi Kamenetsky writes, there are some good things in your books, but he cannot agree with the positions you have taken on the Torah.

If you would like to speak this over in more detail by phone, or when you visit NY after Succos, please be in touch.

With friendship Jonathan"

Subsequent to the aforesaid interchange, Dr. Ostroff has not received any communication from you regarding this matter. In fact, I understand you dropped off the Avodah forum entirely after his aforementioned post to Aishdas.

Furthermore, I understand that Rabbi Jacoby, of JEP Toronto, approached you when you were here and offered to broker a meeting between you and Rabbi Miller (including Dr. Ostroff) and you were unresponsive. You claim on your site that you were advised by "two Canadian rabbis who had prior experience with Rabbi Jacoby and/or Rabbi Miller that the agenda would be anything but dialogue. Instead, they warned, the goal of the meeting would undoubtedly be to browbeat me into submission rather than an open discussion to try to resolve our differences constructively. According to them, this is what had transpired in the past. They both strongly advised me against the meeting. Since at the time I was very emotionally overwrought by the controversy, I took their advice..."

Well, as you write, you "took their advice" which means that you chose to refuse communication with your Torontonians critics. I imagine the above is a pretty clear explanation of Dr. Ostroff's claim that you cut off dialogue with him.