

# HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

## SERIES 2: 42 - TORAH, CREATION AND THE AGE OF THE UNIVERSE

### PART 1

#### OU ISRAEL CENTER - FALL 2022

#### A] INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

- 1) Science and Torah both come from God and, **to the extent that they are talking about the same thing**, they should not contradict.
- 2) Historically, up to about 600 years ago there was no perceived intrinsic conflict between science and Torah - physics and metaphysics - see Rambam, Rabbag etc. What caused the split? Roger Bacon (13C England) and others placed the scientific emphasis on empiricism - that **science can only deal with observable phenomena in the natural world** - to the exclusion of logic, metaphysics etc. This puts modern science and Torah on two different paths with different agendas.
- 3) If there an apparent clash between science and Torah there are 3 basic approaches on how to deal with this:-
  - (i) Maybe we have misunderstood the science. We must never regard science as an **absolute** against which Torah must be made to fit. Much (although not all) 21C science will be overturned by the end of the 22C!
  - (ii) Maybe we have misunderstood (willfully or not) what science CAN do. This raises the issue of 'scientism' - the almost religious belief in science as the means of understanding ultimate truth<sup>1</sup>.
  - (iii) Maybe we have misunderstood the Torah. We must assume that Torah is **MUCH** more sophisticated than we think!
  - (iv) Maybe they are both correct but are looking at different questions - science is 'how', Torah is 'why'. They work in different realities.

1. Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership* p. 2

1. For more on scientism and Jewish responses to it, see <https://midreshetrachel.com/judaism-vs-scientism-which-religion-is-more-logical-by-rabbi-shaya-karlinsky/> for a shiur by R. Shaya Karlinsky. The debate between Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins in Time Magazine that R. Karlinsky analyzes in that shiur can be found at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1555132-1,00.html>. Both Dawkins and Collins are scientist of the highest possible acclaim, except that Dawkins is a militant atheist and Collins is a devout Christian. Time Magazine set up a debate between them. One of the most striking exchanges is the following:  
**COLLINS:** *The gravitational constant, if it were off by one part in a hundred million million, then the expansion of the universe after the Big Bang would not have occurred in the fashion that was necessary for life to occur. When you look at that evidence, it is very difficult to adopt the view that this was just chance. But if you are willing to consider the possibility of a designer, this becomes a rather plausible explanation for what is otherwise an exceedingly improbable event - namely, our existence.*  
**DAWKINS:** *.... Physicists have come up with other explanations. One is to say that these six constants are not free to vary. Some unified theory will eventually show that they are as locked in as the circumference and the diameter of a circle. That reduces the odds of them all independently just happening to fit the bill. The other way is the multiverse way. That says that maybe the universe we are in is one of a very large number of universes. The vast majority will not contain life because they have the wrong gravitational constant or the wrong this constant or that constant. But as the number of universes climbs, the odds mount that a tiny minority of universes will have the right fine-tuning.*  
**COLLINS:** *This is an interesting choice. Barring a theoretical resolution, which I think is unlikely, you either have to say there are zillions of parallel universes out there that we can't observe at present or you have to say there was a plan. I actually find the argument of the existence of a God who did the planning more compelling than the bubbling of all these multiverses. So Occam's razor - Occam says you should choose the explanation that is most simple and straightforward - leads me more to believe in God than in the multiverse, which seems quite a stretch of the imagination.*  
**DAWKINS:** *I accept that there may be things far grander and more incomprehensible than we can possibly imagine. What I can't understand is why you invoke improbability and yet you will not admit that you're shooting yourself in the foot by postulating something just as improbable, magicking into existence the word God.*  
**COLLINS:** *My God is not improbable to me. He has no need of a creation story for himself or to be fine-tuned by something else. God is the answer to all of those "How must it have come to be" questions. ....*  
**DAWKINS:** *To me, the right approach is to say we are profoundly ignorant of these matters. We need to work on them. But to suddenly say the answer is God - it's that that seems to me to close off the discussion.*  
**TIME:** *Could the answer be God?*  
**DAWKINS:** *There could be something incredibly grand and incomprehensible and beyond our present understanding.*  
**COLLINS:** *That's God.*  
**DAWKINS:** *Yes. But it could be any of a billion Gods. It could be God of the Martians or of the inhabitants of Alpha Centauri. The chance of its being a particular God .... is vanishingly small ....*

2. Science is about explanation. Religion is about meaning. Science analyses, religion integrates. Science breaks things down to their component parts. Religion binds people together in relationships of trust. Science tells us what is. Religion tells us what ought to be. Science describes. Religion beckons, summons, calls. Science sees objects. Religion speaks to us as subjects. Science practices detachment. Religion is the art of attachment, self to self, soul to soul. Science sees the underlying order of the physical world. Religion hears the music beneath the noise. Science is the conquest of ignorance. Religion is the redemption of solitude.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership* p. 6-7

3. *The meaning of the system lies outside the system. Therefore, the meaning of the universe lies outside the universe.* That was the revolution of Abrahamic monotheism. Monotheism was not a mere mathematical reduction of many gods to one God. That might have economized on temple building, but it would not have transformed the human condition. What did transform it was *the discovery of a God beyond the universe*. This idea, and this alone, has the power to redeem life from tragedy and meaninglessness. .... Myth and science in their different ways tell us how the parts are related. The cannot tell us what the totality means.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership* p. 29-30

4) The basic premise of science - that there are consistent rules of nature and the search to harmonize them and ultimately find a Grand Unified Theory (unifying quantum theory and gravitational theory) - stems from a basic Jewish monotheistic premise - the Unity of God. Polytheism sees the universe as chaotic conflicting forces. Judaism sees conflicts and contradictions as superficial only. Underpinning them are ever simpler foundations, ultimately emanating from one stem - the Etz HaChaim.

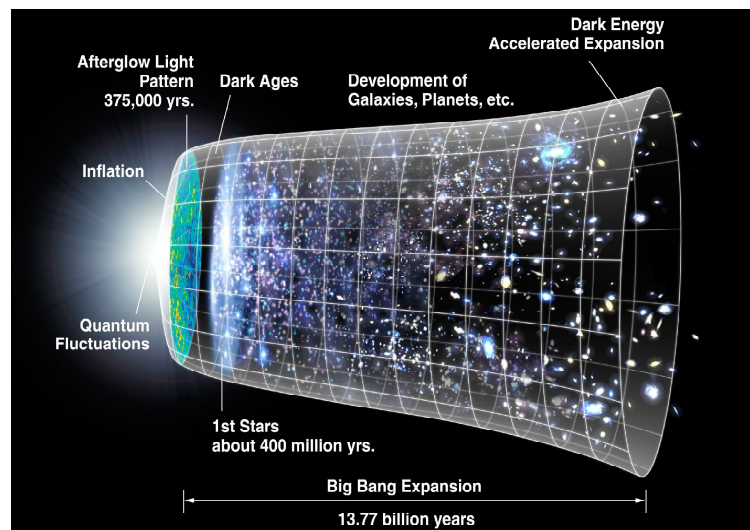
5) It is remarkable that not only does the universe work in a consistent and predictable way, but its methodology is accessible to the human brain through mathematics. Man and the universe appear to be on the same 'wavelength', such that cracking the code of reality is sufficiently complex to attract the greatest human brains yet simple enough for them to succeed enough to keep them interested!

## B] EVIDENCE FOR AN ANCIENT UNIVERSE

1) The Torah states that Adam Harishon was created 5783<sup>2</sup> years ago and the creation of the rest of the universe took 6 days before that. Thus the age of the universe is 5783 years + 6 days.

2) Scientists are unanimous that the universe is much older than that. Current estimates are around 13.799±0.021 billion (10<sup>9</sup>) years. This date is not arrived at through a theoretical construct but by observable evidence from a variety of sources which all validate this estimate.<sup>3</sup>

3) However, the scientific evidence for the age of the universe is based on certain key assumptions<sup>4</sup>, one of which is the 'cosmological principle'.<sup>5</sup>



4. The cosmological principle is usually stated formally as 'Viewed on a sufficiently large scale, the properties of the universe are the same for all observers.' This amounts to the strongly philosophical statement that the part of the universe which we can see is a fair sample, and that the same physical laws apply throughout. In essence, this in a sense says that the universe is knowable and is playing fair with scientists.

William C. Keel (2007). *The Road to Galaxy Formation* (2nd ed.). Springer-Praxis. p. 2

2. An entirely separate question is how we come to the number 5783 and how this can be substantiated on the basis of a reading of the biblical text and understanding of the chronology of the Second Temple period. For more on this, see <http://rabbimanning.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Missing-168-Years-Part-1.pdf> and <http://rabbimanning.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Missing-168-Years-Part-2.pdf>. For audio see <https://rabbimanning.com/index.php/audio-shiurim/cji/>

3. See Appendix 1 for a list of the types of evidence brought by science.

4. For more on these see Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNMxXxJYg&ab\\_channel=OhrSomayach](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNMxXxJYg&ab_channel=OhrSomayach).

5. The cosmological principle assumes that the universe is both homogeneous and isotropic at large enough scales. Homogeneity means that the same observational evidence is available to observers at different locations in the universe ("the part of the universe which we can see is a fair sample"). Isotropy means that the same observational evidence is available by looking in any direction in the universe ("the same physical laws apply throughout").

5. It is therefore quite impossible to infer from the nature which a thing possesses after having passed through all stages of its development, what the condition of the thing has been in the moment when this process commenced; nor does the condition of a thing in this moment show what its previous condition has been. If you make this mistake, and attempt to prove the nature of a thing in potential existence by its properties when actually existing, you will fall into great confusion: you will reject evident truths and admit false opinions.

Let us assume, in our above instance, that a man born without defect had after his birth been nursed by his mother only a few months; the mother then died, and the father alone brought him up in a lonely island, till he grew up, became wise, and acquired knowledge. Suppose this man has never seen a woman or any female being; he asks some person how man has come into existence, and how he has developed, and receives the following answer: "Man begins his existence in the womb of an individual of his own class, namely, in the womb of a female, which has a certain form. While in the womb he is very small; yet he has life, moves, receives nourishment, and gradually grows, till he arrives at a certain stage of development. He then leaves the womb and continues to grow till he is in the condition in which you see him." The orphan will naturally ask: "Did this person, when he lived, moved, and grew in the womb, eat and drink, and breathe with his mouth and his nostrils? Did he excrete any substance?" The answer will be, "No." Undoubtedly he will then attempt to refute the statements of that person, and to prove their impossibility, by referring to the properties of a fully developed person, in the following manner: "When any one of us is deprived of breath for a short time he dies, and cannot move any longer: how then can we imagine that any one of us has been inclosed in a bag in the midst of a body for several months and remained alive, able to move? .... This mode of reasoning would lead to the conclusion that man cannot come into existence and develop in the manner described.

If philosophers would consider this example well and reflect on it, they would find that it represents exactly the dispute between Aristotle and ourselves. We, the followers of Moses, our Teacher, and of Abraham, our Father, believe that the Universe has been produced and has developed in a certain manner, and that it has been created in a certain order. The Aristotelians oppose us, and found their objections on the properties which the things in the Universe possess when in actual existence and fully developed. We admit the existence of these properties, but hold that they are by no means the same as those which the things possessed in the moment of their production; and we hold that these properties themselves have come into existence from absolute non-existence. Their arguments are therefore no objection whatever to our theory: they have demonstrative force only against those who hold that the nature of things as at present in existence proves the Creation. But this is not my opinion.

**Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed 2:17**

*Maimonides was, in his time, refuting the widely accepted belief that the universe was eternal and had never come into existence. He rejects that position since it presumes that the current observable properties of the universe was always in place at every stage of its development. He suggests a parable of a child raised in a colony of men who is told that the human beings develop in utero. All of his experience - that humans must breath, drink, eat etc - clearly make that theory totally impossible. His mistake is to assume that what he sees now represents that way things are in every place and at every time.*

6. The latest attempt to rattle the foundations of cosmology appeared as a smattering of dots pulled upward into a cosmic sneer. The arc of distant galaxies, which Alexia Lopez presented at the American Astronomical Society's meeting in June, sprawls so far across the sky that it would take 20 full moons to hide it. Spanning an estimated 3.3 billion light-years of space, the smile-shaped structure joined a controversial club: unexpectedly big things. "It's so big that it's hard to explain with our current beliefs," Lopez, one of the astrophysicists at the University of Central Lancashire who identified the galaxy chain, said during the presentation.

Lopez's "Giant Arc" seemed to clash with an idea that has guided astronomy for centuries: that the universe has no conspicuous features. From a zoomed-out perspective, no matter where you are or which way you look, you should see roughly the same number of galaxies pinwheeling around. This assumption, enshrined as the "cosmological principle," has let researchers draw sweeping conclusions about the whole universe based only on what we see from our corner of it. "If that turns out to be wrong, then we have to redo many of our measurements or reinterpret many of our measurements," said Ruth Durrer, a cosmologist at the University of Geneva. As a load-bearing strut of modern cosmology, the cosmological principle has increasingly become a target .....

As astronomers map the universe more precisely, however, a few researchers have started to wonder whether the field has pushed the cosmological principle too far. .... large structures or lopsided features could undermine conclusions about the universe's age, behavior and composition.

**Cosmologists Parry Attacks on the Vaunted Cosmological Principle, Charlie Wood, Quanta Magazine, Dec 13 2021<sup>6</sup>**

6. <https://www.quantamagazine.org/giant-arc-of-galaxies-puts-basic-cosmology-under-scrutiny-20211213/>

**C] RESOLUTIONS: APPROACH 1 - THE 6 'DAYS' ARE NOT MEANT TO BE A CHRONOLOGY****C1] WHY DOES THE TORAH INCLUDE A CREATION NARRATIVE?**

7. **בראשית** - אמר רבי יצחק: לא היה לריך להתחיל את התורה אלא (שמות יב:3) **מִהַרְגֵּשׁ הַיָּד לְכֶסֶם**, שהיא מלוא ראשונה שנלטו בה ישראל. ומה טעם פתח ב'בראשית'?

רש"י בראשית א:א

*The first Rashi on Chumash asks why bother to include the story of Creation at all!? The Torah should have started with the first mitzvah. He is clearly assuming that the Torah is NOT meant merely as a historical account.*

8. **בראשית ברא** - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני. כמו שדרשו רבותינו ז"ל - בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח:33) **רִאשִׁית דְּרַכָּו** ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמיהו ג:3) **רִאשִׁית קְבוּצָתָהּ**. .... וא"ת להורות בה שאלו תחלה נבראו, ופירושו בראשית הכל ברא אלו ... אם כן תמה על עלמך! שהרי המים קדמו, שהרי כתיב ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים. ועדיין לא גלה המקרא צריית המים מתי היתה, הא למדת שקדמו המים לארץ. ועוד שהמים מאש ומים נבראו. על כרחך לא לימד המקרא סדר המוקדמים והמאוחרים כלום.

רש"י בראשית א:א

*The second Rashi on Chumash stresses that the Chumash is NOT coming to give an account of HOW the world was made, but WHY the world was made.*

9. **ברא אלהים** - ולא אמר ברא ה'. שנתחלה עלה במחשבה לבראתו צמדת דין. ראה שאין העולם מתקיים, הקדים מדת רחמים ושתפה למדת דין, היינו דכתיב (להלן ב:7) **צְיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם**.

רש"י בראשית א:א

*The third Rashi on Chumash explains that the account of creation in the first chapter is that which 'rose in God's mind' as one based in strict justice, but the ultimate creation was a blend of din and rachamim. So what does it mean?*

10. The Rambam believed that there were not separate creative acts on 6 days but rather everything was created on one day in a single instant. In the work of Creation there is mention of '6 days' to indicate the **different levels** of created beings according to their natural hierarchy; not that there were actual days, nor that there was a chronological sequence to that which was created in the acts of Genesis .... This is the view of the Rambam which he considered as one of the major secrets of the Creation. He tried to conceal this view .... but .... other commentators .... uncovered his secret and publicized his view.

Abarbanel, Commentary on Bereishit, pp 10-11<sup>7</sup>

*The Rambam and the Ralbag explain Bereishit not as a physical description of the creation of the universe but as a theological description of the relative orders of species and creations in the spiritual world.*

11. Creation, by definition, is outside our world and outside our frame of thought. If time exists only as a mode of our thought, then the act of creation is necessarily non-temporal - "above time". Every non-temporal act is interpreted in our frame of thought as an infinite time-sequence. This is the reason why creation is interpreted by scientists as a process of evolution extending over vast aeons of time. Since creation does not take place in time, we must ask why the Torah describes it as taking 6 days. The answer is that the Torah wishes to teach us a lesson in **relative values**. Everything has value only in relation to its spiritual content. Vast physical masses and vast expanses of space and time are of little significance if their spiritual content is small. The whole physical universe exists as an environment to the spiritual life of the human being; this is its spiritual content. When interpreting non-temporal creation in temporal terms, the Torah deliberately contracts the time-scale compared with that which presents itself to the scientist, in order to convey to us the relative insignificance of the material creation compared with the spiritual stature of man.

Rav Dessler, Collected Essays and Notes, London 5719 n. 33

7. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim (2:30) explains that all creation happened in the first instant (which, as we will see below, is also the view of Rashi and Ramban) and the 6 days were a process of distinguishing one thing from the other. The Abarbanel (Spain 15C) gives an explanation of the Rambam's view (although he strongly disagrees with it!). See also the commentary of R. Yitzchak Arama in the Akeidat Yitzchak Bereishit Sha'ar 3 who understands that the Rambam's view was that: "the mention of an order of Creation is not describing the sequence of days; rather to differentiate the status of and to make known the hierarchy of nature. This was [Rambam's] major esoteric doctrine concerning Creation as those who are understanding can discern from that chapter (Guide 2:30) which is devoted to this extraordinary account.

## C2] A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PROCESS OF CREATION

12. יהי מארת וגו' - מיום ראשון נבראו, וברביעי לוח עליהם להתלות זרקיע. וכן כל תולדות שמים וארץ נבראו מיום ראשון, וכל אחד ואחד נקבע זיוס שנגזר עליו. הוא שכתוב את השמים - לרבות תולדותיהם, ואת הארץ - לרבות תולדותיה.

רש"י בראשית א:יז

Rashi here explains (and other commentators agree) that the universe was brought into existence ex nihilo in the very first instant. God's involvement was to subsequently order and develop the world. As such, following the initial creation, the universe was 'rearranged' into its current order - note the different use of the words 'bara' - creation ex nihilo - which is used mostly for the first day, and 'yetzira' or 'asiyah' which were used later.

Note that the word 'bara' is used only for the initial creation and for the subsequent creation of the taninim and of man.<sup>8</sup> Note also that God did not make plant, sea or animal life directly but **commanded the water and ground to bring them out**. Man was created ('bara') directly by God from the ground, but was first introduced by 'na'aseh' - 'let us make'. Who was God addressing?

13. והפשת הנכון צמלת 'נעשה' - הוא מפני שכבר הראית לדעת (לעיל פסוק ה) כי האלהים ברא יש מאין זיוס הראשון לצדו. ואחר כך מן היסודות ההם הנצרכים 'יג' ו'יעשה'. וכאשר נתן צמים כח השרון לשרון נפש חיה והיה המאמר צהם ישראל המים. והיה המאמר צבהמה תולא הארץ. אמר צאדם נעשה - כלומר אני והארץ הנזכרת נעשה אדם, שתוליא הארץ הגוף מיסודיה כאשר עשתה צבהמה וצחיה, כדכתיב (להלן 3:1) ויג' ה' אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה. ויתן הוא יתצרך הרוח מפי עליון כדכתיב (שם) ויפת צאפיו נשמת חיים ...

רמב"ן בראשית פרק א:כו

The Ramban explains that, while the animals and plants were brought into being by the ground and sea, Man was a joint creation by God and the physical world. 'Na'aseh' represents God speaking to the ground. First the physical world produced a physical being 'just as it did with the animals', then God breathed a spiritual soul into this 'animal' to make Man.

14. ויפת באפיו נשמת חיים - נפש חיונית מוכנת לקבל אלם אלוקים .... מכל מקום ויהי האדם לנפש חיה - היה עם כל זה חיה בלעד, צלתי מדברת, עד שנברא בללם וצדמות.

ספורנו בראשית ב:ז

Seforno (16C - Italy) states explicitly that the creation of Adam took place in stages. First he was given the life force of other animals and, in that stage remained a wild animal, unable to speak. Only later was Man given the tzelem Elokim, which enabled him to speak and become a human being with a truly spiritual soul.

15. ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבנו של עולם, מה לילוד אשה בינינו? אמר להן: לקבל תורה בא. אמרו לפניו: חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לך תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנברא העולם, אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם?!

שבת פח:

Chazal refer to '974<sup>9</sup> generations' before the creation of man.

16. Adam was merely the first human being created in the latest cycle. According to these opinions, it would seem that Man already had the physical and mental capacities that we possess as early as 974 generations before Adam, or some 25,000 years ago

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan - Immortality, Resurrection and the Age of the Universe p. 21

17. "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat (va-yoled) a son in his own likeness, in his form" (Gen. 5:3). As regards the words, 'the form of Adam, and his likeness,' we have already stated (Ch. 1) their meaning. Those sons of Adam who were born before that time were **not human in the true sense of the word; they had not "the form of man."**

Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed 1:7

Even after the creation of Adam, humanoids continued to be born who were not truly human in the full spiritual sense.

8. These are, respectively, the jump from plant to animal life and the jump from animal to human.

9. This is based on Tehillim 105:8 which refers to 1000 generations of man. There were 26 from Adam to Sinai, making 974 prior to that.

## D] ALLEGORICAL AND METAPHORICAL READINGS OF BEREISHIT

Metaphor = a short phrase or paragraph that compares two seemingly unrelated things to make a point.

Allegory = a long narrative that uses a seemingly unrelated story to teach a lesson or prove a point.<sup>10</sup>

- To what extent is the creation narrative in Bereishit, and perhaps also the flood narrative in Noach, intended to be read (only) as literal account?
- Even though we will see that it can and should be read on far deeper levels, is it permitted to reject a literal understanding? In other words, is it permitted within Orthodox Jewish thought to suggest that Adam, Chava and Noach did not exist as people but the account in Bereishit is entirely allegorical?
- If this is permitted in the case of Bereishit and Noach, where are the lines to be drawn? If the account of the creation and the flood are intended to be read allegorically, then why not also the accounts of the Avot and of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

### D1] THE LITERALIST PRESUMPTION OF RAV SA'ADIA GAON<sup>11</sup>

18. .... it is a well-know fact that every statement found in the Bible is to be understood in its literal sense except for those that cannot be so construed **for one of the following four reasons**:- .....
- (i) It may, for example, either be rejected by the observation of the senses, such as the statement, *And the man called his wife's name Eve because she was the mother of all living things*, whereas we see that the ox and the lion are not the offspring of womankind ....
- (ii) Or else the literal sense may be negated by reason, such as that of the statement, *“For the Lord your G-d is a devouring fire”* ... now fire is something created and defective, for it is subject to extinction. Hence it is logically inadmissible that God resembles it.
- (iii) ... by an explicit text of a contradictory nature, in which case it would become necessary to interpret the first statement in a non-literal sense ....
- (iv) Finally, any Biblical statement to the meaning of which rabbinic tradition has attached a certain reservation is to be interpreted by us in keeping with this authentic tradition. Thus it has been transmitted to us that the punishment of stripes consists of 39 blows, although the Scripture states *“Forty stripes he may give him”*.
- There exist, then, only these four possible reasons for a non-literal interpretation of the verses of the Sacred Writ, there being no fifth!

Sefer Emunot Vedeot 7:2<sup>12</sup>

19. .... it is not admissible that a verse [of Scripture] be construed in any other than its literal sense except for one of the four reasons mentioned by us previously. Where, however, none of these reasons exists, the verses are to be taken in their explicit meaning. For if it were necessary to construe every verse of Sacred Writ in whatever figurative sense is possible without compelling proof, not a single revealed law would be maintained<sup>13</sup>, since they are all capable of such non-literal interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

Sefer Emunot Vedeot 7:4

10. Metaphor and allegory differ in a number of ways, including:

**Length:** Metaphors are often brief figures of speech, only a handful of words long, while longer metaphors – like extended metaphors – can span several paragraphs. On the other hand, allegories are much longer, often spanning the length of an entire story.

**Content:** Metaphors comprise simple words and phrases – for example, in Shakespeare's line “All the world's a stage,” the key elements are “the world” and “a stage,” which form a simple, sentence-level comparison. Allegories are more complex, typically taking the form of a story with fictional characters and plot points to make a larger comparison across many pages.

**Purpose:** Writers use metaphors, at their most basic, to make a direct comparison between two different things, ascribing a particular quality to the first. By contrast, writers use allegories in more ambitious ways, expressing large, sometimes abstract, or complex ideas or commenting on society through a risky hidden meaning - from <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/metaphor-vs-allegory-explained>.

11. For a broader examination of the issue of Literal and Non-literal Readings of Tanach see my two shiurim on this on <https://rabbimanning.com/index.php/audio-shiurim/cji/>.

12. Emunot Ve'Deot was written in Arabic and later translated into Hebrew. There are in fact two variant versions of the Seventh Treatise and that which most often appears (based on the original Ibn Tibbon translation) is the other one. The English translations here are from the 1948 Rosenblatt edition.

13. This is of course one of the main directions of Christian hermeneutics, which read much of the Tanach in a non-literal manner. Classic Christian hermeneutics sees four levels of meaning in the verses - literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical (mystical). In this way many of the commandments of the Chumash can be re-interpreted in ways that do not impose concrete obligations.

14. Rav Saadia Gaon then gives 5 examples of how legal and narrative passages in Tanach could, incorrectly, have been allegorized due to other verse and proofs. These include reading (i) the law not to light fires on Shabbat as a prohibition to fight armed battles on Shabbat; (ii) the law not to eat chametz on Pesach as a prohibition against adultery; (iii) the narrative of splitting of the Red Sea as a description of how the Bnei Yisrael was caught between two wings of the Egyptian army; and (iv) the account of the stopping of the sun and moon in Yehoshua as a metaphor for the firm establishment of the Jewish government!

20. You surely know that many verses of the holy Law are not to be taken literally. Since it is known through proofs of reason that it is impossible for the thing to be literally so, the translator [Aramaic targum] rendered it in a form that reason will abide. A man should never cast his reason behind him, for the eyes are set in front and not in back<sup>15</sup>!

Maimonides - Letter on Astrology (translated R. Isadore Twersky - A Maimonides Reader (1972) p. 472

21. The view of Saadia (882-942) shared by all the medieval philosophers, is that when a biblical text is incompatible with either reason or observation, that is sufficient evidence that it is to read figuratively, allegorically, poetically or in some other way. Reason and observation, later to become the methodology of science, were regarded as reliable bases of knowledge, and it was taken as axiomatic that the Torah could not conflict with established truth.

The Great Partnership, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, p 353<sup>16</sup>

## D2] INTERPRETING TORAH AS POETRY

22. דבי רבי ישמעאל תנא: (ירמיהו כ"ג) וְכַפְּטִישׁ יִפְצֹץ סֵלַעַ. מה פטיש זה מתחלק לכמה ניצוצות - אף מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים.

סנהדרין לא.

*Torah Shebichtav is multi-layered and permits multiple levels of interpretation. Consider the difference between the Torah understanding of a word ('davar') which is also a 'thing' in itself; almost a 3D object which can be analyzed from different perspectives. Compare this with the Aristotelian (and modern secular) concept of the 'word' ('logos') which is a mere convention to communicate the form of a thing. The secular 'word' is never an intrinsic source of truth.*

23. וְעֵתָהּ כְּתָבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְרָהּ בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה-לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבִנְיַי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

דברים לא"ט

*The Torah calls itself a 'shira' - a poem.*

24. ג. והנה צנדרים (נח) העלו צפי' המקרא כתבו לכם את השירה שהוא כל התורה. והביאו ראיה מסיפוי דקרא למען תהיה לי השירה הזאת לעד .... הא מיהא יש להבין היאך נקרא כה"ת שירה? והרי לא נכתבה בלשון של שירה! אלא ע"כ יש זה טבע וסגולה השירה. שהוא דבור בלשון מליצה. דידוע לכל מבין עם תלמוד דמשונה המליצה מספור פרזי צשני ענינים: בטבע וסגולה: א) דצשיר אין הענין מבואר יפה כמו בספור פרזי. ולריך לעשות הערות מן הלא. דזה החרוז כוון לזה הספור. וזה החרוז כוון לזה. ולא מיקירי דרוש. אלא כך הוא טבע השיר אפי' של הדיוט. ומושכל עוד דמי שידוע טבוב ענין שהביא לידי מליצה זו שנתחבר עליו מתוק לו אור לשון של השיר ודקדוקה הרבה יותר מלאיש שאין לו ידיעה מתכונת הענין, ורק צא להתבונן מן המליצה תורף הענין. ומזה עלול הוא להשערות צדויות מה שלא הי' מעולם ולא לזה כוון המשורר. כך הוא טבע כל התורה שאין הספור שזה מבואר יפה. אלא יש לעשות הערות ופירושים לדקדוקי הלשון. ולא נקרא 'דרוש'. אלא כך הוא פשט המקרא .... ב) דצשיר יש סגולה לפארה צרמזים מה שאינו מענין השיר. כמו שנהוג לעשות ראשי החרוזים צדוך א"צ או שם המחבר. וסגולה זו מיוחדת במליצה ולא בספור פרזי. וידוע דסגולה זו מכרחת הרבה פעמים להמחבר לעקם את הלשון כמעט. רק כדי שיחלו ראשי החרוזים צאות הנדרש לו. ודבר זה ממש היא בכל התורה כולה. שמלצד הענין המדובר בפשט המקרא, עוד יש בכל דבר הרבה סודות וענינים נעלמים אשר מחמת זה צא כמה פעמים המקרא בלשון שאינו מדויק כ"כ. וכ"ז אינו רק צתורה הקדושה אלא בכל מקראי קדש ....

קדמת העמק - הקדמת הנצי"ב לספר העמק דבר ס' ג

*The Netziv (R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin - 19C) understands that we are required to read the verses of the Torah with the same nuance and sophistication that we bring to the reading of poetry!*

- As with the analysis of all literature, a major hermeneutical question must be how to decide when a meaning attributed to a text is authentic. What is the relevant test to ascertain the meaning of any text? Is it: (i) the intention of the author (ii) the understanding of the initial readership for whom the text was written (iii) the objective understanding of any other group of people reading that text in the future, even though that could not have been anticipated that the time of writing<sup>17</sup> or (iv) the subjective understanding of any individual reading that text at any time, even though that is almost certainly not what the author, or maybe most other people, would understand?

15. Prof. Menachem Kellner in *Science in the Beit Midrash* p. 234 uses this passage to argue that "To all intents and purposes, science becomes our measure for understanding the Torah." It does not seem however that the passages he quotes support this thesis. The Rambam explicitly allows for supernatural miracles in explaining verses literally. Also the translation Prof. Kellner brings of this source (ibid p. 245 n30), whilst supportive of his thesis, may not be faithful to the original.

16. Rabbi Moshe Meiselman (Torah, Chazal and Science p. 272) strongly disagrees with Rabbi Sacks on this point. He does not regard the guidelines of Rav Saadia to include scientific knowledge. He questions whether science is based on reason as much as on 'subjective factors'. Nevertheless, in response to Rabbi Meiselman, whilst it is certainly true that some scientists have personal agendas, and not everything labelled 'science' is clearly established objective fact with some issues remaining theoretical, it cannot be denied that most of science is fundamentally objective and grounded in reason.

17. Consider what is an authentic reading of the US Constitution. Must the rights granted be interpreted in the context of the intentions of the original Founding Fathers or can they be given a 21st century meaning, even though we are certain that the 18th century authors would have objected totally to such an interpretation.

25. **אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו.** אמר רב כהנא כד הוינא בר תמני סרי שנין והוה גמירנא ליה לכוליה תלמודא, ולא הוה ידענא דאין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו עד השתא!!

שבת סג.

*Chazal nevertheless express a principle that אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו - a verse never loses its 'pshat' meaning. Should this be seen as an imperative to retain a literal reading of Tanach? Does this rule always apply or are there exceptions?*

26. גמ'. ת"ר: (דברים כה:ו) **וְהָיָה הַבְּכוֹר׃ ..... יָקוּם עַל-שֵׁם אָחִיו** - לנחלה. אתה אומר לנחלה, או אינו אלא לשם: יוסף - קורין אותו יוסף, יוחנן - קורין אותו יוחנן? נאמר כאן יקום על שם אחיו, ונאמר להלן (בראשית מו:ו) **עַל שֵׁם אָחִיהֶם יִקְרָאוּ בְּנֵהֶלְתָּם**. מה שם האמור להלן נחלה אף שם האמור כאן לנחלה .... אמר רבא: אף על גב דבכל התורה כולה **אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו**, (רשי - ואף על גב דדרשינן ליה לדרשא מידי פשוטו מיכו לא נפיק לגמרי) הכא אתאי גזרה שוה אפיקתיה מפשטיה לגמרי!

יבמות כד.

*Chazal here outline the exception that proves the rule! All verses have a pshat, expect for this one concerning yibum, where the verse requires the first child of the levirate marriage to take the 'name' of his uncle - the deceased husband. This does not mean the actual name but the inheritance. Chazal explain that this negates the pshat of this verse, yet all other verses DO have a pshat!*

27. דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם

בבא מציעא לא:

*Nevertheless, Chazal also expressed a principle that the Torah speaks in the language of humans. Thus the wording of Torah is not simply a technical, legal text but carries the characteristics of human literature - emphasis and stylistic structures. This may well also include metaphor and allegory.*

28. ר' יהודה אומר: המתרגם פסוק כצורתו - הרי זה בדאי. (ר' חננאל בן שמואל - פירוש אס יתרגם אותו כפשטיה דקרא מתרגם שקר והבל, דאין ראין לתרגם אותו, אלא כמו שתרגמו אנקלוס).

קידושין מט.

*R. Yehuda teachers (in Tosefta Megila 3 :41) that to translate a verse literally is often to distort it.*

29. ורבינו חננאל פירש המתרגם פסוק כצורתו - כגון (שמות כד:י) **וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** [תרגום אנקלוס - וחזו ית יקר אלהא דישראל]. דמתרגם וחזו ית אלהא דישראל, הרי זה בדאי. דשכינה ממש לא ראו, כדכתיב (שמות לג:כ) **כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְקָוּ**.

תוספות שם ד'ה המתרגם פסוק כצורתו

*Rabbeinu Chananel quotes the example of the zekeinim 'seeing God' at Sinai. In fact, they did NOT see God, but his glory.*

### D3] THE TORAH OF BEREISHIT - HISTORY, ALLEGORY & SYMBOL

30. **והנחש.** "הוא שטן הוא יצר הרע" - רב הוזק עם מעוט היותו נראה. כי אמנם יקרא הדבר צשם איזה דומה לו, כמו שנקרא המלך 'אריה', כאמרו (ירמיהו ד:ז) **עֲלֶה אֲרִי' מִסְּבִלּוֹ** ויקרא האויבים המזיקים 'נחשים לפעוים' אשר אין להם לחש כאמרו (ירמיהו ח:יז) **פִּי הַגִּנִּי מִשִּׁלַּח צִבְּרִים נְחָשִׁים לְפַעְעֵימַי אֲשֶׁר אֵין-לָהֶם לִתְשׁ וכו'.** ועל זה הדרך קרא צבא המקום את הילר הרע המחטיא 'נחש', צביותו דומה לנחש אשר תועלתו צמליאות מועט מאד ונזקו רב עם מעוט הראותו.

ספורנו בראשית ג:א

*The Seforno understands that the 'snake' in the account of Gan Eden is not an actual snake but an allegory for the evil inclination/the Satan.*

31. (א) **והנחש י"א כי האשכ היתכ מצינה ויודעת לשון החיות ויפרשו ויאמר הנחש צרמיזה.** ואחרים אמרו שהוא שטן. ואיך לא יראו סוף הפרשה? כי איך ילך השטן על גחון? ואיך יאכל עפר? ומה טעם לקללת (בראשית ג:טו) **הוא ישופך ר'אש?** .... והישר צעיני שהם **הדברים כמשמעם.** והנחש היה מדבר, והיה הולך צקומה זקופה, והשם דעת צאדם שם צו. והנה הפסוק העיד כי היה ערום מכל חית השדה, רק לא כאדם.

אבן עזרא בראשית ג:א

*The Ibn Ezra strongly rejects an allegorical explanation and explains the snake literally - as a walking, talking animal.*



32. Before we open the Torah however, let us consider how to read it. As a subject of philological or antiquarian research? As corroboration for antediluvian or geological hypotheses? In the expectation of finding revelations of esoteric mysteries? Certainly not! As Jews we will read this book - as a book tendered to us by God in order that we learn from it about what we are and what we should be during our earthly existence. We will read it as 'Torah' - literally instruction - directing and guiding us within God's world and among humanity, making our inner self come alive.

Rav S.R. Hirsch - 19 Letters, Letter 2

33. All that the Torah recounts of matters relating to the period before the completion of creation is conveyed to us by Moshe from the mouth of God in terms of concepts which we can grasp. Just as one attempts to give a blind man some idea of that which he cannot see by making use of analogies with the sense of touch and so forth, so does the Torah present to us that which is essentially spiritual in a material guise, with some points of similarity and analogy to the spiritual message, so that we may be able to grasp it to the best of our ability.

Michtav Me'Eliyahu Vol II p151

34. Everyone knows that here, if anywhere, is the realm of parable, allegory and allusion. In these most profound matters people are willing to accept that the true meaning lies on the mystical plane, far above what is apparent to the superficial eye. .... People do find difficulty however in holding within one spiritual context two apparently conflicting approaches to creation. On the one hand, there are their previous simpler, and in a sense less demanding, thought-patterns, in which creation is characterised by sudden discontinuities. On the other, there is the unfamiliar but increasingly popular conception of the gradual unfolding of all things within an evolutionary context. .... The essential need of the hour is therefore an educational effort to propagate the broader view, the grander and more refined conception that we have alluded to above. The coarser-textured faith, in the unrefined form in which it is so often presented, can no longer maintain its position.

Rav Avraham Isaac Hacoen Kook - Orot Hakodesh p559

35. The account given in Scripture of the creation is not, as is generally believed, intended to be in all its parts literal .... The literal meaning of the words might lead us to conceive corrupt ideas and to form false opinions about God, or even entirely to abandon and reject the principles of our faith. It is therefore right to abstain and refrain from examining this subject superficially and unscientifically.... It is, however, right that we should examine the Scriptural texts by the intellect, after having acquired a knowledge of demonstrative science and of the true hidden meaning of prophecies

Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed, 2:29<sup>18</sup>

36. Now, on the one hand, the subject of creation is very important, but on the other hand, our ability to understand these concepts is very limited. Therefore, God described these profound concepts, which His Divine wisdom found necessary to communicate to us, using allegories, metaphors, and imagery<sup>19</sup>. The sages put it succinctly: 'It is impossible to communicate to man the stupendous immensity of the creation of the universe. Therefore the Torah simply says, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (Bereishit 1:1). But they pointed out that the subject is a deep mystery, as Solomon said, *It is elusive and exceedingly deep; who can discover it?* (Kohelet 7:24). It has been outlined in metaphors so that the masses can understand it according to their mental capacity, while the educated take it in a different sense.

Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed, Introduction<sup>20</sup>

37. *Comment:* Maimonides holds that the entire creation narrative is an allegory not to be understood literally. Its true meaning is disclosed by the findings of natural science, though we will never be fully able to unravel its secrets.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Great Partnership p354

18. Translation by R. Lord Jonathan Sacks, The Great Partnership p 354. In this translation, unlike the following one, he uses the Friedlander translation verbatim.

19. Friedlander English translation: "allegorical, figurative, and metaphorical language". Pines English translation: "parables and riddles and in very obscure words". Ibn Tibbon classic Hebrew translation, R. Kappach and R. Aviner translations: במשלים בחידות ובדברים סתומים מאד. Schwartz academic translation: במשלים בחידות ובדברים סתומים מאד. R. Moshe Meiselman calls out R. Sacks, quite correctly, on his use of the word 'imagery' for 'satum' which R. Meiselman reasonably calls 'plain wrong'. (R. Sacks clearly consciously changed this from the Friedlander translation, which he was otherwise following.) However, R. Meiselman also makes a broader argument that the Rambam NEVER intended the literal meaning of Bereishit to be negated but merely 'expanded' by a deeper meaning. R. Meiselman writes that the Rambam is clear that exclusively allegorical interpretation is permissible only in the *Navi* not the *Chumash*, and even there with important limitations. See Torah, Chazal Science Chapters 29 and 30. R. Meiselman brings proof from the explicit wording of the Guide, but does not address the issue of esotericism in the Guide and the Rambam's explicit warning that he would make unclear or even misleading statements in his text.

20. Translation by R. Lord Jonathan Sacks, The Great Partnership p 353.

38. .... the story of Noah and the Flood at first glance seems rather equivocal. Its location prior to the stories of the Patriarchs, where one might say real history begins, would appear to suggest that the story of the Flood belongs to those early developments in the history of man which are at best only hinted at.

R. Shubert Spero, *The Biblical Stories of Creation, Garden of Eden & The Flood: History or Metaphor*, Tradition 33.2 (1999)

39. .... biblical history ... is not meant as a scientific record of what happened but serves as a religious guide to understand the events that are recorded. As such, the internal consistency of the Torah is what yields meaning, not its accordance with external historical annals or archaeological findings.

A corollary of the challenge of chronology in Genesis is the logical implausibility of some of what it describes in its narrative. Let me be clear - I am *not* discussing here things that the Torah describes as miraculous. Miracles are an essential component of the Torah's message that God, as Creator, reserves the right to intervene when it is deemed necessary for reasons that only He determines. ....

What does seem odd, however are twenty generations of apparently average people with life spans four to twenty times what might be considered normal - and for the Torah to present that as unexceptional, not as resulting from divine intervention. Similarly, the speaking serpent in the Garden of Eden is presented as if it were normal for snakes to speak [footnote: as distinct from Balaam's donkey, which is described as an act of God].

What this suggests is that there is an early period described in the Torah which is unlike our own, in which miraculous events were so much the norm that they are not even described as such. Whether such a period actually existed or is used as a metaphor is less important than the fact that the description of that period is designed to lead us to conclude that it is an otherworldly time, what I would call a *pre-historic* period in which regular rules do not apply. Attempts to rationalize its irrational elements only distort it and distract from its core messages. ....

As Genesis eases us out of the pre-historic era (beginning with Noah's children), life spans are halved, then halved again .... The shortening of life spans signals the transition into the second era, the patriarchal period, or what I might call the era of *proto-history* - including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This era is marked by individuals about whom we know quite a bit and whose development we can trace over the course of many chapters. Although their life spans are double the norm, their lives look remarkably similar to our own, with the rare exceptions of divine communications and intervention.

But these figures are not just regular people; they are prototypes for a nation. .... These individuals are the forefathers of the nation - real people whose lives have cosmic significance. It is because they are more than individuals that the Torah ascribes to them lives which are double our own. Those life spans are a literary device used by the Torah to indicate that they are archetypes who lay the foundations for a character of those who would follow them. ....

Finally, we have the *historical* era, in which people live normal life spans and are just people, not prototypes or archetypes. .... These 'regular' people are introduced to us towards the end of Genesis, namely Joseph and his brothers .... They mark the transition from the proto-history of the Patriarchs to the historical period of the Bible beginning in Exodus.

R. Dr. Zvi Grumet, *Genesis - From Creation to Covenant* (Maggid 2017) p xix-xxi

40. I believe that a certain compromise can be reached between Ibn Ezra and Sforno. Sforno is correct that these narratives have substantial metaphorical weight; the creation is not merely a historical event, but reflects a fundamental approach to reality. .... Yet these primeval stories are not merely theological allegory. If this were the case, its allegorical nature would presumably have been more obvious. And, with the exception of the Eden narrative, there are no scenes of a fantastical nature. These narratives function on the premise that they actually took place.

The solution lies in a simple semantic substitution with great implications: rather than the term 'parable' or 'allegory' (*mashal*), the appropriate term to use is 'symbol' (*semel*). Unlike a parable, which dissipates with interpretation, the literary symbol remains substantial, adding another layer of significance on top of the literal meaning of the text. ... while these narratives take place on earth, they *also* have heavenly counterparts. Each historical event, and each element of these narratives, express certain abstract concepts as well. ....

Our task is to navigate these stories by walking the fine line between symbol and reality, which is to appreciate the symbolic interpretation as a convenient, sometimes obvious solution, while recognizing the historic reality that the narrative seeks to illuminate. The boundary between symbol and reality is diaphanous ....

R. Dr. Yonatan Grossman, *Creation - The Story of Beginnings* (Maggid 2019) p 7, 9

41. אין לנו שום נפ"מ תור אם באמת היה בעולם המציאות של זהב, שהתענג אז האדם על רב טובה גשמית ורוחנית, או שהוחלה המציאות שבפועל מלמטה למעלה, מתחתית מדרגת ההויה עד רומה, וכך היא הולכת ומתעלה. אנו צריכים רק לדעת שיש אפשרות גמורה שהאדם, אפילו אם יתעלה במעלה גדולה ויהיה מוכן לכל כבוד ועונג, אם ישחית דרכו יוכל לאבד כל אשר לו, ויוכל להרע לעצמו ולתולדותיו עד דורות רבים מאד. וזה הלימוד יוצא לנו מהעובדא של מציאות אדם בגן עדן וחטאו וגירושו .... וכשאנו באים לידי מדה זו, אין אנו נזקקים עוד ללחום דוקא נגד הציור המתפרסם בין החוקרים החדשים, וכאשר אין אנו נוגעים בדבר נוכל לשפוט משרים, ועתה נוכל לבטל את החלטותיהם במנוחה במדה זו שהאמת תורה לנו את דרכה. .... ובכלל זהו כלל גדול במלחמת הדעות, שכל דעה הבאה לסתור איזה דבר מן התורה, צריכים אנו בתחילה לא דוקא לסתור אותה, כ"א לבנות את ארמון התורה ממעל לה, ובזה הננו מתרוממים על ידה, ובעבור ההתרוממות הזאת הדעות מתגלות

רב קוק, אגרות הראיה - קלד (163-164)

*Rav Kook writes<sup>21</sup> that there is no practical difference if the origin of mankind was a utopic existence in Gan Eden, or billions of years of evolution from microbes. The narrative of Gan Eden teaches us how the greatest humans can fall to the lowest depths if they lose direction. Rav Kook advocates for a more sophisticated and calmer approach towards science. Rather than seeing it as a heretical force, we should have the confidence of a deeper understanding of Torah so that we can engage science effectively and expose its moral and ethical challenges.<sup>22</sup>*

42. RD: I want to know if you think it's [the Akeida] literally true!  
 RJS: Well, first of all I think that story is a protest against the belief throughout the ancient world that parents own their children .... and I think G-d is saying ..... 'no Jew owns his or her child'... And that is what I am reading from all these stories. These things happened but they didn't happen as mere facts. They happened as morally instructive lessons .....

Conversation between Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks and Richard Dawkins, BBC pre-Rosh Hashana broadcast - September 2012<sup>23</sup>

#### D4] IS GAN EDEN A PHYSICAL PLACE?

43. גן עדן - אמר ריש לקיש: אם בארץ ישראל הוא - בית שאן פתחו (רש"י - שפירותיו מתוקין מכל ארץ ישראל). ואם בערבא - בית גרם פתחו. ואם בין הנהרות הוא - דומסקנין פתחו.

עירובין יט.

*Chazal appear to understand that there is indeed a physical place on Earth which is Gan Eden, although its location is unclear. Presumably, it is also not possible to find it simply by looking on a map, or Chazal would have been able to check where it was around Beit She'an!*

44. אצל גן עדן הוא מקום דשן צדודר הארץ מרובים צו המימות והאילנות. יגלהו ה' לצני אדם צעתיד ויורה להם את דרכו ויתענגו צו. ואולי ימלאו צו למחים ופלאים מאד שתועלתם גדולה והנחתם מרובה זולת אלו הידועים אללנו...

פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם מסכת סנהדרין פרק י משנה א

*In the commentary on the Mishna, the Rambam describes Gan Eden as a physical place containing plant life very different to that elsewhere on Earth.*

45. Another noteworthy saying is this : "And the Lord God took the man, i.e., raised him, and placed him in the Garden of Eden," i.e., He gave him rest. The words "He took him," "He gave him," have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence.

Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed, 2:30

*His position in the Guide is unclear. Eden is a metaphor for the enlightened state of man, but is it also a physical place?*

46. ודע והאמן כי גן עדן צארץ, וצו עץ החיים ועץ הדעת ומשם ילא הנבר ויפרד לארבעה ראשים הנראים לנו, כי פרת צארלנו וצוגולנו, ופישון הוא נילום מלרים, כדברי הראשונים. אצל כאשר הם צארץ כן יש צשמים דצרים יקראו כן.

רמב"ן בראשית ג'כב

*The Ramban writes explicitly that Gan Eden is a physical place with a spiritual counterpart. Nevertheless, in the mystical worldview, the physical and the spiritual are less clearly defined.*

21. This is one of a number of letters written by Rav Kook to Dr. Moshe Seidel, who often consulted with him on philosophical and ideological issues.

22. See also Dr. Yoram Hazony analysis in *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, particularly Chapter 2 - 'What is the Purpose of the Hebrew Bible?'. Hazony contrasts the 'New Testament', which presents itself as witness or testimony of crucial events in history which revealed the message of Christianity, with the Tanach. This never presented itself as a 'Testament' of specific historic events which 'prove' a new revealed truth. Our perspective of the Tanach as the 'Old Testament' is colored by Christian thought.

23. Minutes 17:48 - 20:44, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipDdd1SISoM&feature=youtu.be>

A fuller version of this debate can be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=roFdPHdhgKQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roFdPHdhgKQ). The debate on literalism can be found between minutes 14:12 and 24:40.

D5] HISTORICAL EVENTS THROUGH THE LENS OF A DEEPER TEXT

47. Both the Flood and the Tower of Babel are rooted in actual historical events, even if the narrative is not couched in the language of descriptive history. Mesopotamia had many flood myths, all of which testify to the memory of disastrous inundations, especially on the flat lands of the Tigris-Euphrates valley (See Commentary of R. David Zvi Hoffman to Genesis 6 [Hebrew, 140] who suggests that the Flood may have been limited to centres of human habitation, rather than covering the whole earth). Excavations at Shurupak, Kish, Uruk and Ur – Abraham’s birthplace – reveal evidence of clay flood deposits. Likewise the Tower of Babel was a historical reality. Herodotus tells of the sacred enclosure of Babylon, at the centre of which was a ziqqurat or tower of seven stories, 300 feet high. The remains of more than thirty such towers have been discovered, mainly in lower Mesopotamia, and many references have been found in the literature of the time that speak of such towers “reaching heaven.”
- However, the stories of the Flood and Babel are not merely historical, because the Torah is not history but “teaching, instruction.” They are there because they represent a profound moral-social-political-spiritual truth about the human situation as the Torah sees it. They represent, respectively, precisely the failures intimated by Paul Johnson. The Flood tells us what happens to civilization when individuals rule and there is no collective. Babel tells us what happens when the collective rules and individuals are sacrificed to it.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks - Individual and Collective Responsibility<sup>24</sup>

48. The story naively read is fascinating, with a didactic plot and a cast of characters that includes a tragic hero, a beguiled woman, a villainous talking serpent, and trees with wondrous powers. But what impels the reader to seek here another level of meaning? What makes him think that here the Torah intended something additional? Once again, the point of departure is the presupposition that the Torah is a book of instruction. Therefore, any text which, if taken literally, does not instruct but mystifies and obfuscates, signifies that one should look beyond the literal. A “tree” whose fruit bestows “knowledge of good and evil” or eternal life cannot be a “real” tree in the sense in which we know it. A “garden” in which the snake has an agenda and speaks persuasively cannot be our kind of garden. Also, it is not immediately apparent what is the nature of the “knowledge of good and evil” that man acquires after eating of the forbidden fruit. .... In short, the failure of the language to instruct, if taken literally, leads us to think of the possibility of metaphor. The characters and events are to be interpreted in a symbolic way. This story seems to be dealing with the origin and nature of evil in man and seeks to explain how it is that man and woman, the special creations of a moral and benevolent God, soon find themselves in a hostile environment with vital needs unprovided for. In a pre-philosophical age, the solution to such an extremely difficult theological problem could only be suggested and alluded to by means of this literary device called metaphor.

Note here an important difference between the story of the Garden of Eden and the sentence in Deuteronomy 1:28. In the case of the latter, should a reader believe the text to be saying that the fortifications of the cities of Canaan did indeed touch the heavens, he is simply wrong. However, in the text of the Garden, an entire story in the form of a metaphor is involved. This means that the story and what it stands for resemble each other in certain ways. Thus, even if a reader believes that these were real trees or, believing them to be symbols, does not know what they symbolize, he may still be said to have learned something positive.

He now understands that some kind of disobedience on the part of early man brought him to his present predicament. Regarding this type of metaphor, therefore, the literal meaning, although not complete, is not misleading and the full intended meaning may be partially deciphered and grasped in degrees.

Rabbi Shubert Spero, *The Biblical Stories of Creation, Garden of Eden and The Flood: History of Metaphor, Tradition* Volume 33.2 (1999)<sup>25</sup>

24. Available on the OU website at [https://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/individual\\_and\\_collective\\_responsibility/](https://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/individual_and_collective_responsibility/)

25. Available from Bar Ilan University at <https://www.lookstein.org/professional-dev/bible/biblical-stories-creation-garden-eden-flood-history-metaphor/>

D6] WHERE ARE THE LINES OF ORTHODOXY AND HERESY?

49. In summary then, how is the believer to understand the literary character of these three pivotal stories in Genesis whose texts continue to engage us as we reread them in the light of scientific discoveries and philosophic refinement? The story of Creation as contained in the first 31 verses of Genesis is an historical description, in common-sense language, of what happened during that singularity. However, in view of the unique nature of the event and the fact that some of the findings of science are counterintuitive, the terms used must be “stretched” considerably so that the text may accommodate the discoveries of cosmology. We are given this description of how God created the world in order that we may learn “His way” in nature and history, which is a way of guided evolution. Once we know this, we can discern and appreciate His kindness in the past and try to detect the direction towards which He beckons in the future.
- The story of the Garden of Eden is a metaphor in which object-language is being used to express a content for which language as such is really inadequate. It is an attempt to say something about the nature of man, the origin of evil and to explain the difficult condition of man on earth. Thinkers continue to wrestle with the story and search the text for insights into these perplexing theological questions.
- The story of the Flood is a metaphor structured as an analogy to tell us about all the destructions and extinctions which occurred in the prehistoric past. It is a story about the survival of the deserving and of those aspects of the universe (the climate, stability and flora and fauna) which are prerequisite for man’s development on earth, materially, socially and culturally. It also explains why the rest of the biblical story takes place in the Fertile Crescent. Most important, it tells of a divine covenant with man, in which the stability and regularity of nature is guaranteed.

Rabbi Shubert Spero, *The Biblical Stories of Creation, Garden of Eden and The Flood: History of Metaphor*, Tradition Volume 33.2 (1999)

50. To the Editor: Rabbi Shubert Spero’s article (Tradition 33:2, Winter 1999) is problematic regarding several essential points. He fails to show the basis, in traditional Judaism, for accepting a modern derasha and discarding the traditionally accepted literal meaning of the Torah. Doesn’t his approach contradict the principle that *ein mikra yotsei midei peshuto* (Shabbat 63a), that the obvious meaning cannot be rejected? Typically, derashot are additional perspectives for understanding the text rather than replacements. With respect to the Flood, one would have expected some clear justification from traditional sources of his rejection of Hazal when in conflict with science. This is especially troubling as he is dealing with an entire section of the Torah, and not just with aggadic statements ..... So long as R. Spero does not produce a satisfactory response to these questions, I fail to see why his theory should be taken as a valid Torah position, let alone accepted as true.

R. Daniel Eidensohn, *Letters to the Editor*, Tradition 34.1 (2000)

51. To the Editor: There seems to be an inherent contradiction on the cover of Tradition Vol. 33:2, Winter 1999. The subtitle reads, “A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought”, and yet the title of the first article, by Rabbi Shubert Spero, asks if the stories of the Garden of Eden and the Flood were metaphors – hardly Orthodox Jewish Thought. Furthermore, the article itself seems to conclude that indeed they were metaphors. .... Unfortunately, R. Spero’s article is based on an obsequious acceptance of the latest theories of evolution and cosmology as absolute truth. Such faith is unwarranted for, as many writers have recently shown, these theories are based on meager information and massive conjectures. The only absolute faith which a Jew should have is in the truth of the Torah, within the bounds of legitimate interpretation based on Hazal and rishonim. Sadly, this seems to have been neglected by R. Spero.

Yitzchak HaCohen, *Letters to the Editor*, Tradition 34.1 (2000)

52. Finally, in a personal note to Mr. Hakohen: While I am prepared to accept mussar from anyone, it would be more helpful if it zeroed in on my true weaknesses. Happily, “an obsequious acceptance of the latest theories of evolution and cosmology as absolute truth” is not one of them, nor does anything I have written over the last 52 years reflect such a belief. What is truly sad is that so many of our literalists do not realize that in their holy zeal to save the Torah for Orthodoxy they are actually darkening the light of the Torah and distorting its truth. And that is not a metaphor.<sup>26</sup>

R. Shubert Spero, *Response to Letters to the Editor*, Tradition 34.1 (2000)

26. See also <http://www.rationalistjudaism.com/2016/09/the-rambam-and-rav-on-allegory-in.html?m=1>

53. In summary of this section, we have identified some of the limits of pure non-literal interpretation of Scripture from an Orthodox perspective. First, one may not interpret any passage which directly asserts any of the four principles mentioned above purely non-literally<sup>27</sup>. Second, while many Scriptural passages do not directly assert any of these principles, those principles are nonetheless exhibited by or implicitly contained within those passages. So, pure non-literal interpretation of *all* such passages undercuts Orthodox Judaism. Third, the *extensive* or *pervasive* application of pure non-literal interpretation to the Scriptural accounts that exhibit the four principles undermines the Orthodox notion that the Scriptures as a whole constitute the literary basis for the acceptance of those principles. Finally, let us remember that this article leaves open the possibility of other limits on non-literal interpretation beyond what has been claimed here. If other principles beyond those four which I have identified were established, and if those principles are asserted directly in any Scriptural text, then it would follow that those Scriptural texts must also be taken literally.

In conclusion, let us return to Sa'adyah's argument and the literalist preference discussed in Section I. Recall that according to the literalist preference, *one must always take Scripture literally, unless one has good reason not to do so*. Sa'adyah asserts that pure non-literal interpretation of the narrative portions of Scripture inevitably results in pure non-literal interpretation of the legal portions of Scripture. We now understand how Sa'adyah might have made this connection, though it does not support the literalist preference in quite the way that Sa'adyah claimed. Pure non-literal interpretation of certain key specific narrative passages directly undercuts the theological and literary basis for the observance of Halakhah. In addition, the argument herein also supports a modified, weaker version of the literalist preference; namely, that *one should aim to avoid too much non-literal interpretation*. Extensive use of pure non-literal interpretation undermines the Orthodox conception of the Scriptures as the literary and epistemic basis of Orthodox commitment. Still, this modified version is flexible, because it does not specify, for each and every passage in Scripture, whether it must be taken literally. Furthermore, this modified version is more flexible than the standard version, because it does not relegate pure non-literal interpretation to strictly a second resort. Rather, it views pure non-literal interpretation as a legitimate mode of exegesis, which, like any mode of interpretation, should be used with care, good sense, and a familiarity with the talmudic and rabbinic sources, in order to derive the full meaning of the Scriptures from an Orthodox perspective.

Joshua L. Golding, *On the Limits of Non-Literal Interpretation of Scripture from an Orthodox Perspective*, *Torah Umadda Journal* (10/2001) pp 37-59.

54. Wherever heretics have gone astray, the true answer lies at hand. This applies not only to the text of the Torah but also to emotional trends and intellectual movements. The self-same arguments and lines of thought which lead to the ways of God-denial, lead in their essence, if we search out their true origin, to a higher form of faith than the simple conceptions that we entertained before the apparent breakdown. ... For evolution itself, moving upwards coordinately and undeviatingly from the lowest to the highest, demonstrates most clearly a pre-vision from afar - a pre-set purpose for all existence.

R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook - *Orot Hakodesh* p565

In Part 2 we will be'H examine 6 other ways in which Orthodox thinkers have reconciled the apparent contraction between the scientifically accepted age of the universe and the Biblical account of creation. There are:

- That the world was created looking older than it really was.
- The the world looks old because of the cataclysm of the flood.
- The the world looks old because there were prior creations before ours which were destroyed.
- That the 6 days of creation ran at a different speed to the rest of history.
- That the 6 'days' of creation were never intended to be 24 hour periods but could be much longer, or shorter, time periods.
- That the 6 days of creation were real days from the perspective relevant at the time of creation but, given the expansion of space and time since then, these days now retrospectively look to us to be much longer.

27. These are:

- 1) There is a God who is supremely powerful, intelligent and good; God knows our most intimate thoughts and actions, and He manages our destiny in response to what we do.
- 2) God has chosen the people of Israel from all the nations, and has formed an everlasting covenant with them. The fate of Israel depends on how they relate to God.
- 3) God has given the Written and the Oral Torahs to the people of Israel; the Torah contains a certain way of life which God has commanded upon Israel.
- 4) God has given the Torah to the people of Israel (at least partly) in order to manifest or express His presence among them.

## **APPENDIX**

### **SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE BROUGHT TO VERIFY THE AGE OF THE UNIVERSE**

- (i) The observable existence of galaxies billions of light years away. Assuming the constancy of the speed of light, these galaxies existed billions of years ago.
- (ii) Radioactive dating of elements found in rocks, particularly using rubidium and strontium (Rb-87 decays into Sr-87 with a half-life of 47 billion years). When applied to rocks on the surface of the Earth, the oldest rocks are about 3.8 billion years old. When applied to meteorites, the oldest are 4.56 billion years old. This is understood to be the age of the Solar System.
- (iii) Measuring the luminosity of old star clusters gives ages of around 12 billion years.
- (iv) Measuring the cooling of white dwarf stars gives an age for our galaxy, the Milky Way, of around 9.5 billion years .
- (v) On a more theoretical basis, the observable expansion of the universe (seen by red-shift in the more distant stars) can be extrapolated using the Hubble Constant to a point of the original Big Bang about 15 billion years ago.
- (vi) Measured erosion and accumulation of rock and space dust on the moon indicate an age of around 4-4.5 billion years.
- (vii) Different eras evident from rock strata show that different types of species existed at different times - fossils of aquatic creatures in today's mountain ranges, different dinosaurs at different times.
- (viii) Dendochronology - tree rings - show chronologies going back up to 12,000 years.
- (ix) Ice cores (laid down every year) show layers going back over 100,000 years.
- (x) Varve analysis - sediment layers laid down yearly at the base of lakes - show histories of tens of thousands and in some cases millions of years.
- (xi) Huge stalactites, stalagmites and columns in the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico.
- (xii) Thickness of coral reefs.
- (xiii) Reversals of the Earth's magnetic poles as evidenced by the Atlantic Sea bottom.
- (xiv) Erosion of the Grand Canyon.