

A Letter of Admonishment Regarding N. Slifkin's Opinions

By HaRav Shlomo Miller Shlita

Translated and Annotated by R. Simcha Coffey

The following is a letter written by HaRav Shlomo Miller Shlita, the *rosh kollel* and *av beis din* of the Kollel Avreichim of Toronto. The letter was written in *loshon hakodesh*. Accordingly, its colloquial form has been maintained wherever possible in an attempt to preserve its original flavor.

The additions found in this paper between brackets or parentheses are entirely those of the annotator and are not to be imputed to the author of this letter. Please note that in order for this letter to meet the space limitations of Yated, more extensive explanatory material had to be eliminated. For the original version of this letter with expanded notations, kindly visit www.torih.org

Objection against the Opinions of N. Slifkin

As is well-known, the books authored by Slifkin have already been banned by the gedolei Yisroel. When I initially came in contact with his writings, I sensed an aura of heresy emanating from them. Indeed, upon further investigation I discovered that his opinions on the six days of creation are definitely heretical. Furthermore, they are boorish in content; he fails to comprehend that all of the laws of nature which prevail today were first established at the end of the six days of creation when Hashem terminated the creative process as represented by the day of Shabbos when "He said to His world, enough" (*Chagigah 12a*).

In reality, the laws of physics which existed during the six days of creation have no parallel to those which we perceive today. Our sages have already stated, "two arose on the bed and four descended" meaning that the birth of Kayin and Hevel happened immediately after their conception on the sixth day of creation (*Sanhedrin 38b*). Thus, Slifkin's opinions in these matters are absolute heresy.

[In other words, Creation is not a process that finds expression in current laws of physics and thus cannot be defined by it. During the sheyshes yemei bereishis, the laws of nature were entirely different from those that exist today. This is self-evident from the Torah and can be gleaned from Chazal. Furthermore, this has been the collective mesorah of all Jews throughout the ages and in fact was uncontested even by gentiles. When a Jew makes kiddush on Friday night, he is specifically proclaiming the truth of this idea and rejecting that of Slifkin's approach. It is evident from Torah and Chazal that the period of creation ended when the first Shabbos came and therefore any claim that present laws of nature can duplicate the order of creation is refuting a basic principle of the Torah and Chazal and is thus an espousal of kefirah.]

The truth is that he has followed the ways of those who scoff at the sages, like the

maskilim who ridiculed the exegeses (*droshos*) of our sages while considering themselves all-knowing, assuming that only they were able to understand the precise meaning of words in *loshon hakodesh*. Until the Malbim *ztvk"l* appeared and composed an incredible work on *Toras Cohanim* to clarify the words of our sages based on the deepest, most fundamental imperatives of *loshon hakodesh* thereby demonstrating the wonders of Hashem's Torah and the profound grasp of biblical grammar which our sages possessed.

So too in our time, Slifkin advances questions against our sages from current theories and in place of honoring the words of our sages, he denigrates their opinions. If he encounters a question for which he possesses no answer, it would behoove him to say "I have not merited to understand the words of the sages" just as all of our great scholars have done through the ages whenever they encountered a question on a subject in Talmud; "for it is not a thing that is lacking from you" (*Dvarim 32:47*) and our sages comment, "for if it is lacking, it is from you" (Cf. *Rashi ad loc*) who lack the ability to comprehend. If we approach the Torah and its sages with awe and humility, then we will traverse confidently and not stumble in the fundamentals of our religion as Slifkin has done; the *Rambam's* words at the end of the laws of *me'ilah* (*Hilchos Me'ilah 8:8*) are well known: "one's thought processes in Torah should not be the same as his thoughts in mundane matters", see there the remainder of his pleasant words.

Words of Encouragement and Support for those who were influenced by Heresy

The *Haggadah* delineates the question of the *rasha*: "of what purpose is this work to you?" (*Shmos 12:26*) [*He says "to you" thereby excluding himself. By excluding himself from the community of believers, he denies fundamentals. Therefore blunt his teeth and tell him:*] "It is because of this that Hashem did for me when I went out of Egypt" (*Shmos 13:8*), and the author of the *Haggadah* comments "for me, but not for him — had he been there, he would not have been redeemed". The commentaries note that the answer given in the Torah is "and you shall say it is a Passover offering to Hashem" (*Shmos 12:27*) which differs from the answer in the *Haggadah*. The commentaries explain that when one hears words of heresy, one should not contend with them, however to ourselves, we should respond with words of encouragement, "and you shall say" (*Ibid.*), but not to him, "it is a Passover offering etc." (*Shmos 12:27*)

Therefore, I have decided to expound upon some matters in order to strengthen the hearts of those who have been exposed to heretical doctrines which claim that our holy Torah is contradicted by the knowledge of scientists; on the contrary, "delve into it, and delve into it, for all is encompassed within it" (*Avos 5:22*).

[There are obviously some differences in Weltanschauung between certain groups in Orthodox Jewry. Rabbi Miller is aware of this. He is also aware that unfortunately there are certain elements that will spare no effort in maligning Orthodox leadership in an attempt to undermine their words. Just as the teachings of the Haggadah are meant for us but are not directed towards the wicked due to their unwillingness to acknowledge them, so too, the comments in the letter are directed only towards people who are open-minded

and are willing to listen as opposed to those who choose to maintain pre-conceived notions. The latter group invariably fall prey to spurious depictions of Orthodox dogma effectively eliminating their partiality and thus their ability to countenance the pronouncements made by gedolei Yisrael.]

Until 400 years ago scientists were not aware that the light which appears to radiate from planets is not inherent light but rather light reflected from the sun. Then Galileo appeared and demonstrated that the light emanating from the "shining" planet Venus is merely reflected light. However, to my mind, this observation can already be gleaned from our sages who referred to this planet by the term "*nogah*" (*Shabbos 156*). The word "*nogah*" (shining) differs from the word "*or*" (light) as the Malbim has explained in his commentary on the verse in *Chavakuk 3:4*, "and *nogah* will be similar to *or*". The *Malbim* writes that *nogah* is a term that denotes an object that does not possess inherent light but rather emits a reflected light just as the moon [*and other planets such as Venus*] receives the light of the sun and subsequently reflects its rays. Thus, the fact that our sages have assigned the term "*nogah*" to the planet Venus demonstrates that they understood that this planet did not possess inherent light. If so, we see that knowledge discovered by scientists 400 years ago was already known to our sages over 2000 years ago.

[See the commentary of the Gra in Aderes Eliyahu on the verse in Chavakuk 3:4 who interprets the posuk in the same manner. Malbim himself brings several proofs from all over Tanach to demonstrate the grammatical accuracy of this point.]

Regarding the essence of light, scientists first thought that light was composed of particles i.e. the Corpuscular Theory of Light. Later, they showed that light was emitted in waves i.e. the Wave Theory of Light. A hundred years ago, scientists demonstrated that light does possess particle like qualities and subsequently scientists proposed the Quantum Theory that sometimes light appears as waves and sometimes as particles.

[This is referred to as the Wave-particle duality. The modern, theoretical resolution to of the wave-particle paradox is described by the theoretical framework of quantum mechanics.]

Now behold, the *Yad Halevi* [*Shailos uTshuvos Yad Halevi written by R' Yitzchok Dovid haLevi Bamberger b. 1808*], written by the *av beis din* of Wurtzberg, has written that the word "*or*" has its roots in the word "*yaroh*" (to fling) and denotes the flinging of light particles. There is another word which denotes light "*niharah*", see *Iyov 3:3*: "*v'al tofah alav niharah*". To my mind, this word has its roots in the word "*nahar*" (river) which signifies the concept of waves [*i.e. something which flows as opposed to something possessing particulate qualities*]. If so, these two grammatical representations of the word "*or*" represent the two differing forms of the phenomenon of light respectively.

[The intent here is to show that the words of Tanach and Lashon haKodesh, which are the words of Hashem, may represent concepts that were unknown until present times. It does not mean to imply that Chazal were aware of these concepts.]

The Gra's words in *Aderes Eliyahu* (Breishis s.v. *Bara*) are also noteworthy and are brought down in his name in the book *Giviey Gvia Hakesef* (written by one of the talmidei haGra, *Rav Binyomin Rivlin*) as follows; darkness is not an absence of light but rather a creation unto itself as it states "who forms light and creates darkness" (*Yeshaya 45:7*) Darkness is the substance upon which light operates. In this area the scientists err

*[The following is a quote from The Emperor's New Mind (Roger Penrose, Oxford University Press, 1990 page 385) in a section titled "Quantum Magic and Quantum Mystery:" I have made no bones of the fact that I believe that the resolution of the puzzles of quantum theory must lie in our finding an improved theory... But even if one believes that the theory is somehow to be modified, the constraints on how one might do this are enormous. Perhaps some kind of 'hidden variable' viewpoint will eventually turn out to be acceptable. But the non-locality that is exhibited by the EPR type experiments severely challenges any 'realistic' description of the world that can comfortably occur within an ordinary space-time — a space-time of the particular type that has been given to us to accord with the principles of relativity — so I believe that a much more **radical change** is needed [emphasis not in the original]*

by not taking into account what the Gra has written [*with respect to choshech*]. Based on these theories, it might be possible to resolve the conundrums that plague Quantum Theory and to comprehend the existence of Non-Local Reality which is evident from Bell's Theorem

[John S. Bell (1928-1990) was a physicist who became well known as the originator of Bell's Theorem, regarded by some in the quantum physics community as one of the most important theorems of the 20th century.]

However, these theories have still not been fully clarified as yet. I have stepped outside my normal boundaries to expound upon things that are essentially unnecessary for Torah Jews who believe in the Torah and in its sages. But the truth is that in today's climate, it is necessary to make known that we have no concept whatsoever of the greatness of our sages or the veracity of their words.

[Notes: In addition, there are other pesukim which indicate that choshech is a positive creation such as "ey zeh haderch yishkon or v'choshech ey zeh mikomo" (Iyov 38:19) or "yada mah bachashocha unihora imey sharya" (Daniel 2:22). For a kabbalistic view of these two pesukim, please see the opening maamar of Maseches Atzilus - Ya'areshyah ben Yoseph Pasach and the perush Ginzey Miromim by R' Yitchok I. Chaver, a talmid of R' Menachem Mendel of Shklov who was one of the premier talmidim of the Gra. Rav Miller states, "vehachoshech hu hachomer she'olov poeles yitziras ha'or" Apparently he understands the creation "choshech" as the underlying substratum of all reality and thus light is, in some unknown way, an effect on the substratum of choshech. When he writes "In this area the scientists err by not taking into account what the Gra has written" he simply means that the scientists are erring because of their unawareness of the concept of choshech discussed in the writings of the Gra]