

Response to Rav Moshe Shapiro And Critique of Afikei Mayim

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Although it is over three years since three of my books were banned as heretical, and the controversy over the ban has largely died down, there are still some people who continue to be agitated about it. I have noticed that these are often people with a connection to Rav Moshe Shapiro, *shlita*.

- A few months ago, I was introduced to someone in a *shul* and we began talking about the ban just before *mincha*. After *mincha*, I went over to him to correct him on some details, and he screamed aloud in front of everyone, “I don’t want to hear anything that you have to say! When you get up to *Shamayim*, we’ll see if you know as much as Rav Moshe Shapiro!”
- Another stranger wrote to me a few weeks back and introduced himself as a *talmid* of Rav Moshe Shapiro. He attempted to explain Rav Moshe’s position and to convince me of its merits. This appeared strange, coming three years after Rav Moshe had publicized his letter. Furthermore, his explanation was clearly completely at odds with what Rav Moshe actually wrote.
- Shortly afterwards, I was invited to speak in several *shuls* in New York. I discovered that there had been strong protests against these invitations... by a disciple of Rav Moshe. This was notwithstanding the fact that I had already spoken at these *shuls* a year earlier, with no fuss caused, and I was due to speak about utterly *pareve* topics.
- A well-known spokesperson for the *charedi* world recently came out in support of the ban, publicly defending Rav Moshe’s stance. This was despite the fact that for months after the ban, he had told me that he was devastated by it, that he temporarily ceased teaching about the merits of the *charedi* world, and that he said that he was appalled to discover that his rebbe of fifteen years now considered him to be a heretic. The same person claimed that the Gedolim were only objecting to the dangers of where the rationalistic approach can lead – whereas they were clearly objecting to modern science and claiming that the positions of various Rishonim and Acharonim were *kefirah*.

These recent events compounded other strange phenomena that I had already observed years earlier about Rav Moshe’s disciples:

- Some of the people who invested most effort into writing lengthy denunciations of my books were people with absolutely no interest in the topic of Torah and science and no expertise in it. In some cases, they were even people who had formerly been supportive of my approach. One had attended the book launch for the one of the books, and listened attentively as I addressed his students at his Shabbos table about the topic. Another had enthusiastically recommended one of my books on his website (which was still on his website when he issued his condemnations of me!). All these people were disciples of Rav Moshe Shapiro, or claimed to be disciples of his.
- One popular educator, claiming to be a *talmid* of Rav Moshe, gave a public *shiur* attacking my writings. In particular, he focused on a statement of mine that the Talmudic account of Moshe Rabbeinu being ten *ammos* tall should not be taken literally. He denounced this as being unacceptable. Yet this is precisely the view of Maharal, and, as I suspected, when someone asked Rav Moshe about this topic, Rav Moshe adopted the Maharal's approach. So here was someone proclaiming to be representing Rav Moshe in condemning me, yet for a matter in which it was I who was adopting Rav Moshe's approach rather than he!
- A long-time *talmid* of Rav Moshe who was formerly supportive of my works, turned against me. He wrote to me that he had become convinced by Rav Moshe that even though there was no *kefirah* per se in the books, their overall tone was wholly inappropriate. Yet Rav Moshe was very clearly of the view that the position of Chazal's fallibility in science was genuinely bona fide *kefirah*!

All this suggests that Rav Moshe Shapiro's opposition to my books, and that of his disciples, needs explanation beyond that of others' opposition to my books. After all, most other people in this story have already lost interest in the topic or have resigned themselves to disagreement. But with several of Rav Moshe's disciples, it often appears that they simply can't come to terms with something – either his opposition, my maintaining my views, or their own feelings on the matter. Furthermore, it has become clear that many people, even disciples of Rav Moshe, do not properly understand his position and appreciate its uniqueness. They are entirely unaware of how his approach differs from Rav Elyashiv in some critical ways and from others, such as Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel, in other fundamental ways. (Note that when I speak of Rav Moshe's disciples, I am not referring to 25 year old yeshivah students, but rather to senior rabbis who are professional educators.)

In this monograph, I will attempt to shed light on various aspects of this issue. I will also be responding to *Afikei Mayim* – specifically, to the section entitled *Likkutei Kedushas HaTorah* printed at the beginning of *Afikei Mayim* on Shavuos. This book was compiled by Rabbi Reuven Schmeltzer, who formally represented Rav Moshe in the campaign against my books, as a response to my books. It was written in

consultation with Rav Moshe, and it bears an enthusiastic endorsement and foreword from Rav Moshe. I will be making passing references to it, and then dedicating a full section to responding to it.

For people who will be fuming at my chutzpah in what I write here – indeed, at my chutzpah in even daring to explain why I do not accept Rav Moshe’s position – let’s just get it out of the way: Fine, if these things define one as *chutzpadik*, then you can call me a *chutzpadik* person. The question, though, is not whether I write with *chutzpah*, but whether I espouse *kefirah*. I ask readers to focus on the correct issue. It always amazed me when people felt that if they could prove that I had *chutzpah*, it legitimized the Gedolim condemning the positions that I quoted as being *kefirah*! Unfortunately, the situation of Rav Moshe’s disciples – their devotion and awe for him conflicting with their discomfort with his position – means that they often seem to find a need to personally discredit me in order to reassure themselves that their unquestioning allegiance to him is justified. I hope that in reading this, people will focus on the correct issues.

Rav Moshe’s Letter

As noted, many of Rav Moshe’s disciples, in defending his stance, make claims about his position which are at complete odds with what he actually wrote. For this reason it is beneficial to begin with the letter that he wrote, sent to one of the people who wrote a *haskamah* for one of my books, and subsequently publicized. Here it is in translation:

Several extracts from Slifkin’s books were read before me in a verbatim translation, and the words shake the heart of anyone who trembles at the word of God – words of absolute heresy regarding the truth of Torah, and renunciation of its sages. The matter is terrible, for the matter outwardly appears as though, Heaven forbid, this thing is permitted, and place has been given to allow these things to enter our community, Heaven forbid. This was certainly done completely by mistake; but it is a situation where there is desecration of God’s Name, and these books are the books of heretics. It is just as our master the Maharal wrote about the book *Me’or Einayim* which was released in his generation; study his words in *Be’er Shishi* of the book *Be’er HaGolah* (and the books of the aforementioned are similar in their heresy to the book *Me’or Einayim*): “Cursed is the day on which these things were exposed and revealed. A person who does not know how to understand the words of the Sages, even one thing from their minor statements... how did he not fear to speak of the Sages, and he speaks of them as though they are people in his generation, his friends... And furthermore these words were put into print... they are worthy of being burned like the books of heretics, and they are even worse than them, and they were printed as though they are holy books... But our complaint is this – that one cannot find a person who is protesting that things such as this were put into print...” – see there further for many things that emerge from a burning heart and were stated with holy fire, until the end of his words: “And may He save the seed of the remnant of Israel, that such a breach

should no longer be found amongst us, giving honor and glory to strangers.” Heaven forbid to bring these books into the homes of those of Israel that possess complete faith, and heaven forbid for Torah students to look at them; they are *muktzeh*, and it is even forbidden to move them on Shabbos. It is clear that due to error, and utter oversight, and mistake, these things did not undergo proper review, and it was agreed to print them. Please, please, I beg of you to check the matter and see what is readily apparent, that this is an accidental ruling of idolatry.

Some people claimed to me that Rav Moshe does not really believe my books to be heresy, and/or that his main objection is that I am too young to write books about such lofty matters. Yet this is obviously not his objection. He is very clear about his view of my books: they are “absolute heresy,” “worthy of being burned,” and “idolatry.” His phrase, “they are *muktzeh*, and it is even forbidden to move them on Shabbos” seems to mean that not only are they figuratively *muktzeh*, but they are even literally *muktzeh* on Shabbos.

On later occasions, Rav Moshe clarified why he believes the books to be heresy. According to Rav Moshe, when Chazal are building a law or concept in Torah, it is heretical to claim that they are doing so based on a mistaken scientific belief. Such a claim would mean, according to Rav Moshe, denying the truth of Torah. (Later we shall explore Rav Moshe’s approach in more detail.)

Azariah de Rossi’s Me’or Einayim

Rav Moshe compares his role to that of the Maharal condemning Azariah de Rossi’s *Me’or Einayim*. There are several rejoinders to be made to this comparison.

First, *Me’or Einayim* was far more radical a work than my books. It contained drastic new approaches to topics that had until then been untouched. My books, on the other hand, are simply discussions of classical sources – albeit sources of which Rav Moshe is unaware, or rates as forgeries.

Second, Maharal actually read *Me’or Einayim*. Rav Moshe did not read any part of my books, but merely had some extracts read to him in translation. Those who spoke with him suspect that he was given a very flawed impression of the books, and that his translators were zealots who did not even possess skills of reading comprehension. One Rosh Yeshivah told me that Rav Moshe had been told that my books say that “one should be skeptical of Chazal” – the original statement in my book was very different.¹ Now, I do not doubt that even if Rav Moshe would have read my books, he would still have opposed them. Still, I do think that his opposition would have been greatly lessened. I am sure that Rav Moshe is unaware of the extent to which I presented his favored approach – that of Maharal – in my books.

Third, when Maharal condemned de Rossi’s approach to difficulties in the Gemara, he accompanied it with a presentation of his own approach to solving

¹ See *Mysterious Creatures* pp. 53-54.

these difficulties, in *Be'er HaGolah*. Rav Moshe, on the other hand, is not presenting any alternate approach to the specific problems addressed by my books, merely making sweeping and vague statements about the supremacy of Divine wisdom.

Fourth, while Rav Moshe gives the impression that the condemnation of *Me'or Einayim* was unequivocal, nothing could be further from the truth. Subsequent to Maharal's condemnation, *Me'or Einayim* was still cited approvingly by many Torah works, including *Magen Avraham*, *Kenesses HaGedolah*, *Yad Melachi*, *Be'er Sheva*, *Toldos Adam*, and even by the Maharal's own disciples, such as Rabbi Yom Tov Lippman Heller in *Tsafos Yom Tov* and Rabbi Dovid Gans in *Nechmad V'Na'im*.

However, my puzzlement at Rav Moshe's comparison of my books to *Me'or Einayim* was resolved with the publication of *Afikei Mayim*. There it states that the letters of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on these topics are written in the style of Azaryah De Rossi's *Me'or Einayim*! Now, if Rav Hirsch's writings can be compared to *Me'or Einayim*, I am in good company.

How can Slifkin think of challenging Rav Moshe?

In their defenses of Rav Moshe, his *talmidim* – or people who are trying to attain that title – speak at length of his brilliance and Torah knowledge. It is as though they think that I am challenging that. Let me make it clear: I have nothing but the utmost respect for Rav Moshe's brilliance and Torah knowledge. I attended many of his *shiurim*, both his public ones and those for closed forums. I have quoted his teachings many times in my writings and lectures, and I continue to do so. The fact of our enormous dispute in one area does not prevent me from enthusiastically conveying his teachings in other areas. (This attitude will doubtless come as a surprise to many of my opponents, who would never think of quoting approvingly from someone with whom they have such an ideological dispute!)

My great respect for Rav Moshe, however, merely serves to underscore the difficulty that many people have in comprehending how I could have the gall to challenge his verdict on my works. As the man screamed at me in *shul*, "When you get up to *Shamayim*, we'll see if you know as much as Rav Moshe Shapiro!" I certainly don't delude myself into thinking that I possess even a small fraction of Rav Moshe's Torah knowledge! One may justly wonder how, then, I can possibly think that I can maintain my stance in the face of his condemnation? For many people, the idea of judging my position based on evaluating its merits – judging something by its content, rather than by who said it – is an overwhelming task here. They simply cannot get over the hurdle of the disparity between Rav Moshe and myself.

The first point to bear in mind is that while many people would like to characterize this as Rav Moshe Shapiro vs. Natan Slifkin, that is simply not the case. My views in these matters are identical to those of my mentor, Rav Aryeh Carmell z"l. My approach is that of Rav Hirsch and Rav Herzog, whom, as we shall

see later, Rav Moshe likewise opposes. It is the approach of Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam and others, of which Rav Moshe does not admit. There are dozens and dozens of Rishonim and Acharonim who took a different approach to these topics than Rav Moshe; Rav Moshe has not addressed these sources. Thus, the fact that Rav Moshe is a vastly greater *talmid chacham* than myself is irrelevant; the position that he is opposing is held by figures far greater than myself.

(Of course, it is also true that this issue is a matter of fundamental approach, which is therefore not related to how much one has studied. The fact that Rav Moshe has learned much, much more Gemara than me does not in and of itself mean that his approach to Chazal is correct. To give an example, while a physician knows much more about anatomy than the average layman, that doesn't mean that the layman necessarily ought to accept the physician's verdict on Western versus Eastern medicine; such matters depend on one's general approach. Rationalists study Torah with a very different approach than mystics, which is why Rambam's conclusions about various topics differed greatly from others. Someone who is a rationalist may not possess a fraction of Rambam's Torah knowledge, but will still reach the same conclusions as him on certain topics, such as regarding the inefficacy of magic, in contrast to someone following the mystical approach.)

Having said that, I will explain why I feel my Rebbeim to be correct in this matter and why I am confident about defending my books.

I. The Scientific Edge

There are two areas in which I feel that I possess a certain edge over Rav Moshe. The first is that my positions in these matters are those of the global scientific community, whereas I do not believe that Rav Moshe is knowledgeable about these areas of science, since his views on these matters are disputed by the *entire global community* of physicists, geologists, paleontologists, anthropologists, biologists, etc.

Several months before the ban on my books, a Rosh Kollel who is a *talmid* of Rav Moshe asked him for his views on dinosaurs etc. Rav Moshe responded that he believed that the world is only 5764 years old and that scientists have gotten everything wrong. This Rosh Kollel, who is a devoted *talmid* of Rav Moshe, nevertheless saw no reason for him to adopt this view. He explained to me that "Rav Moshe does not know science, and why should he?" A similarly realistic description of Rav Moshe was sent to me by another long-time disciple of his, now a Rosh Yeshivah in the US and an opponent of my works, who admitted that "He has read philosophy, but not science. He has a cursory acquaintance with science." This should not come as a surprise; after all, Rav Moshe is renowned for his dedication to Torah study, not as being someone who went to college or who spends time on secular disciplines.

Yet other disciples of Rav Moshe made the most astounding claims about his secular knowledge. To the surprise of many, it became clear that many of Rav

Moshe's *talmidim* believe not only that he is brilliant and vastly knowledgeable (to which I would certainly agree), but that his vast knowledge includes the full array of scientific disciplines, is all-encompassing, and that he is, to all intents and purposes, actually infallible. One disciple of his wrote that "philosophers and scientists seek his opinion on *all* areas of knowledge." I am quite sure that philosophers and scientists seek his opinion on questions relating to Torah. But I am equally sure that no paleontologist has ever sought his opinion on how to interpret a fossil, that no biologist has ever sought his opinion on how to understand the function of a part of an animal's anatomy, that no geologist has ever sought his opinion on the nature of a rock formation. When I made this point in a public document, one popular educator reacted in horror that I was claiming that Rav Moshe doesn't know science! I fail to understand why these people think that they are honoring Rav Moshe with such claims; the reason why he does not know these disciplines is that he has dedicated his life to Torah study rather than science! It seems clear to me that Rav Moshe would be embarrassed to have people making such claims about him. Apparently, though, making such claims is part and parcel of the extraordinary attitude that many of Rav Moshe's disciples have towards him: that he is effectively infallible, and therefore also effectively omniscient.

Now, the American Rosh Yeshivah who admitted to me that Rav Moshe does not possess expertise in science proceeded to argue that this is irrelevant; since Rav Moshe possesses expertise in Torah, if he says that Torah prohibits a certain belief, then it must be false. History, however, proves otherwise. There have been numerous Gedolei Torah over the centuries who have made pronouncements about the natural world based on their Torah knowledge and who have proven to be mistaken. The most famous example is Rav Yaakov Reischer, author of *Shevus Yaakov*, described by the Chida as one of the two greatest halachic authorities of his era. He wrote the following:

...How can we learn from the works [of gentile scientists]? Their basic principles are built upon the premise that the world is round, which stands in contrast to the meaning of the passage in our Talmud... (*Shailos U'Teshuvos Shevus Yaakov* 3:20)

This is simple and incontrovertible proof that a person's expertise in Torah does not necessarily mean that if he claims that the Torah prohibits a belief about the natural world, that belief must be false.

(Astonishingly, *Afikei Mayim* approvingly cites this statement from *Shevus Yaakov*! I find it impossible to accept that Rav Moshe believes the world to be flat. I do not know Rabbi Schmeltzer and cannot comment on whether he believes this, but I am mystified as to how this statement of the *Shevus Yaakov* can be approvingly cited.)

This alone does not account for why I do not accept Rav Moshe's condemnation of my work. For a major area of the dispute has nothing to do with Rav Moshe's knowledge of science, but instead his view that Chazal's statements have nothing to do with science in the first place. I will now address this point separately.

II. Openness to different views

Probably the primary objection that Rav Moshe has to my books is my claim that Chazal occasionally made statements about the natural world which were based on beliefs of the natural world that have since become outdated. Rav Moshe's objection to my claim is not necessarily that these statements of Chazal's are scientifically accurate, but rather that Chazal were not speaking about the world of science. Instead, Rav Moshe believes, Chazal were referring to metaphysical aspects of reality – the *pnimiyus*, inner depth, of the matter. Spokesmen for Rav Moshe therefore state that I, as a young and far less knowledgeable person, am simply unaware of the great depths of Chazal's statements.

My response is quite simply that there have been many dozens of Torah giants over the centuries who have taken a different approach. According to these Torah scholars, Chazal were indeed making statements about the natural world, and these statements are therefore subject to refutation. That which Rav Moshe presents as the deeper meaning of Chazal's words would, according to these other authorities, simply be an invented layer of depth.

And here lies what I believe to be the grounds for me to feel confident in my position against Rav Moshe's objections. I have no problem admitting that there have been many Torah giants who have taken a different approach than mine, and who believed Chazal to be scientifically infallible. But Rav Moshe simply does not acknowledge that there have been Torah giants who take a different approach than his. This may well be a result of his much greater investment in the topic; as one famous Lakewood Rosh Yeshivah wrote to me, "An *adam gadol* and *talmid chacham* who has been *moser nefesh* for eighty years to learn *Shas* and *Poskim* countless times (with no knowledge of, or interest in, the goings-on of secular academia) will not be receptive to the idea that there are words in the Gemara that are not true!" Since Rav Moshe has spent decades constructing profound frameworks around the presumed deeper meaning of Chazal's sacrosanct words, he is naturally passionately opposed to the position that these words are nothing more than the scientific assessments of people living a long time ago. There is a long history of people with such passion concluding that writings of Rishonim which oppose their view must be forgeries – conclusions which are not supported by the evidence.

In other words, had Rav Moshe said, "Yes, it's true that Rambam and many others wrote that Chazal erred in science, but here is why you may not adopt their view, or why your approach is different from theirs" – I would have responded differently. (Rav Elyashiv's position was that of course there were authorities who took this view, but it is not an appropriate approach for the *charedi* community – something that I respected and accepted, which is why I republished my books in such a way as not to target that community.) But when people claim that no reliable authority ever wrote that Chazal made scientifically inaccurate statements, this indicates that they are too passionate about the issue to evaluate the situation accurately.

I will now proceed to elaborate upon this theme.

Example #1: Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam

I must admit that when I first learned of Rav Moshe's condemnation of my work, I was very intimidated. For all my rationales, it was hard to shake the feeling that, bottom line, Rav Moshe is an extraordinary genius and *talmid chacham*, so maybe he's right! But when I learned of Rav Moshe's attitude towards Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam's discourse on Aggadata, my confidence returned.

While there have been many dozens of authorities who stated that Chazal relied upon the potentially errant science of their era, the most famous is Rabbeinu Avraham ben haRambam. His discourse on Aggadata was therefore the first thing that defenders of my books raised with the Gedolim. Some, such as Rav Elyashiv, acknowledged that Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam took this approach, but nevertheless stated that it is an approach that they wish to prohibit in their community. But Rav Moshe would not even acknowledge that Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam took this approach, and denounced it as a forgery produced by the *maskilim*! He made this claim to many people, over a long period of time, including at a semi-public session in London. The same claim was made by Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Ohr and a signatory to the ban on my books, in a letter dated Kislev 5765.

Is there any basis to this claim? A well-known rabbi who is writing a doctoral dissertation on Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam responded that this allegation of forgery is "absolutely silly, if not worse." In 1974, Rabbi Elazar Hurvitz published fragments from the Cairo Genizah of Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam's essay in its original Judeo-Arabic (dating possibly back to the 14th century), along with an overview of the various manuscripts available and their citations by other Torah authorities. Parts of Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam's essay are quoted in Hebrew translation by 16th century authors, including R. Vidal Tzarfati in the introduction to his *Imrei Yosher* commentary on Midrash Rabbah and R. Avraham Ibn Migash in his *Kevod Elokim*. There are similarities between the essay and some of Rabbeinu Avraham's other writings; significantly, Rabbeinu Avraham writes in his *Milchamos Hashem* that the Jewish sages conceded to the gentile sages regarding the path of the sun at night. It is also completely consistent with Rambam's own views.

Afikei Mayim argues that the manuscript's authenticity is in doubt in light of the fact that the 1836 publication of a Hebrew translation includes a fraudulent signature at the end of it, and that various manuscripts contain differences. But this is simply nonsense. The differences in the manuscripts reflect obvious kabbalistic additions from the copyist, Rabbi Avraham Eilburg of Braunschweig. The various manuscripts of Hebrew translations that exist, some dating from the 16th century, are all fundamentally the same – a fraudulent signature that was added to one of them does not undermine the manuscript's authenticity. Thus, we have multiple

copies of the manuscript from different sources, some dating as far as the fourteenth century, which are all fundamentally similar, which are entirely consistent with the other writings of Rabbeinu Avraham and his father Rambam, and which have been repeatedly published and widely accepted as being Rabbeinu Avraham's view (even by those who strongly disputed the actual position) without anyone batting an eyelash. Then all of a sudden, following the ban on my books, some non-specialists claim that a recent *maskil* substantially changed the text! Many have disputed Rabbeinu Avraham's approach, but I do not know of anyone who claimed that he never wrote it; Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach wrote that he does not know if anyone is even entitled to dispute it.

On other occasions, Rav Moshe was quoted as saying that sources such as Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam are not the *mesorah*. If this means that they are not the accepted approach in the *charedi* yeshivah world today, I do not deny that. But with regard to whether they are part of the *mesorah* – part of a legitimate tradition handed down through the generations – Rav Yitzchak Herzog, a rebbe of Rav Elyashiv, writes that “the attitude of the orthodox Jew towards the scientific matter embedded in this colossal mass of Jewish religious learning may be best summed up in the words of R. Abraham Maimuni, the great son of the greatest codifier of Jewish law and the foremost Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages...” Certainly many authorities, including Rav Hirsch and Rav Aryeh Carmell, have been of the opinion that it was very much part of the *mesorah*. It has been traditionally printed in the *Ein Yaakov* and quoted in dozens of other works, even in the ArtScroll Schottenstein Talmud, and was recently cited approvingly in a *Yated Ne'eman* article about Rabbeinu Avraham.

Example #2: Rav Hirsch

A similar situation occurred with Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch's letters on this topic. Rav Hirsch writes that Chazal's knowledge of science was not transmitted to them from Sinai and was obtained from the non-Jewish scholars of their era. He gives the example of the Mishnah's ruling concerning a mouse that grows from dirt. Whereas Rav Moshe would say that such a creature must have existed in some form, Rav Hirsch states that Chazal relied on the (mistaken) reports of the Roman naturalists that such a creature existed and issued a ruling for it. As with Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, Rav Moshe repeatedly denounced the Hirsch letters as forgeries.

Rav Moshe's claim was based on the fact that the letters from Rav Hirsch were unsigned and were not written in his handwriting. However, Professor Mordechai Breuer, the greatest expert on Rav Hirsch in our day, noted to me that it was the custom for family members to make copies of correspondence. He laughed when I told him that there were people claiming the letters to be forgeries. In this case, it was possible to prove the authenticity of the letters. Rav Hirsch's letters were part of a lengthy exchange with Rabbi Hile Wechsler, and Rabbi Wechsler's original

handwritten letters are extant. To maintain a belief that the Hirsch letters were forged, one would have to claim that somebody was consistently intercepting the letters that Rabbi Wechsler was sending, and was writing responses in a style and handwriting that fooled Rabbi Wechsler into thinking that he was corresponding with Hirsch and continuing the correspondence! The Wechsler letters prove beyond doubt that that the Hirsch letters are genuine.

A friend of mine in Bayit Vegan brought this to Rav Moshe's attention. Much later I heard that when someone else asked Rav Moshe about Rav Hirsch's letters, Rav Moshe no longer claimed that the letters were forgeries and replied instead that "Rav Hirsch is not from our Beis HaMidrash." Now I do not have a problem with this statement per se. Rav Moshe is entitled to choose which Torah personalities he ideologically associates with. My objection is that, in opposing my work, Rav Moshe does not announce himself as opposing the Hirschian school, but only of opposing Slifkin. Of course, at the time that Rav Moshe wrote his letter, he was still under the impression that the Hirsch letters were forgeries. Still, now that he knows otherwise, I am hopeful that it will become known that I am following the approach of Rav Hirsch, even if he is not in Rav Moshe's Beis HaMidrash.

Example #3: Rain and the Maharsha

The Gemara cites a dispute regarding the origins of the water in clouds:

Rabbi Yochanan said: "The clouds are formed from the upper waters, as it says, '...with the clouds of the Heaven' (Daniel 7:13)." Reish Lakish said: "The clouds are formed from the lower waters, as it says, 'He causes vapor to ascend from the ends of the earth' (Tehillim 135:7)." (*Taanis* 9a)

Rav Moshe Shapiro has a beautiful explanation of this dispute, in which Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish are not arguing about the physical source of water molecules in the clouds, but rather about where the essence of the rain comes from — whether it is a spiritual gift from the heavens or merely a physical process. If man performs the will of his Creator, the rain that falls is of spiritual essence, which will also be expressed in its abundant quantities, and its falling at the most useful times. But if man does not perform the will of Hashem, then the link between heaven and earth is not created, and the rain that falls will be solely of a physical nature. It will consist only of evaporated water, with no higher spiritual essence.

This is the explanation of the Gemara that I heard from Rav Moshe, and that I quoted in my book *Seasons of Life*. However, Maharsha has a different explanation:

"Their dispute rests upon the opinions of the scientists, according to the [natural] philosophers... one should explain this according to the simple meaning."

Now I am not saying that Maharsha's explanation is correct and Rav Moshe's explanation is false. I do not know how one could determine which is correct. But I do not see that as being relevant. The question is not whether Maharsha's explanation is correct; it is whether Maharsha's explanation is a legitimate

alternative approach to this passage in the Gemara. Can one say that there is no inner meaning to this debate in the Gemara, and that it is a scientific dispute, in which case it can ultimately be resolved by scientific methodology, which will show that one view is incorrect?

(At this point, it would no longer surprise me if people attempted to argue that Maharsha is not disputing the inner meaning that Rav Moshe describes, and he is merely explaining the outer meaning of the Gemara. Such an approach, however, is forced in the extreme. First of all, if Maharsha were to believe that there is also a deeper meaning, his commentary would be *ikkar chassar min hasefer*, thoroughly misleading people. Second, Maharsha is not one to shy away from giving a deeper meaning to the Gemara where he believes one to exist, and furthermore he explicitly states here that this passage should be explained according to its simple meaning.)

Now, contrary to many of my supporters, I believe that Rav Moshe would be absolutely entitled to claim that Maharsha is horribly perverting the true meaning of the Gemara. That does not mean that I would agree with him; Maharsha's explanation may be incorrect, but I would not see it as theologically offensive. Nevertheless I would maintain that Rav Moshe is entitled to deem it that way. What I object to is the lack of any acknowledgement that the view of Maharsha, and others like him, even exist; the claim that my approach is something unique to Azaryah de Rossi and myself.

Maharal – Traditionalist or Innovator?

Rav Moshe's approach to Chazal is based upon the great Maharal of Prague. In his writings, and especially in *Be'er HaGolah*, Maharal explains how Chazal cannot be disproved by science because Chazal were never speaking about science. Chazal spoke about metaphysical essences, not material phenomena.

It is certainly not my place to pass judgment on this approach. As it happens, I believe that this approach has much to offer and I believe it to be a satisfactory approach to understanding many sections of the Gemara. It is an approach that I utilize on many occasions in my books, although in some other cases it seems forced.

But the critical point is this. Rav Moshe presents the Maharal's approach as the only approach that exists. The truth of the matter, however, is that not only is Maharal's approach far from the only approach in the history of Torah scholarship – it is an innovation that did not even attain popularity until quite recently. None of Maharal's works were reprinted until almost two centuries after his passing, and in some circles today, such as Lakewood, the writings of Maharal are still frowned upon.

What is so unusual about Maharal's approach? In brief, Maharal's innovations lie in three areas.

First is his insistence on the inviolate character of aggadic material. Contrary to popular belief today, the Geonim and Rishonim did not consider that all aggadatas are authoritative; the list of those who considered it possible to reject aggadata includes Rav Saadiah Gaon, Rav Sherira Gaon, Rav Shmuel bar Chofni, Rav Hai Gaon, Rav Shmuel HaNaggid, Rav Nissim ben Yaakov, Rav Yehudah HaLevi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Rambam, Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, Rav Yechiel of Paris, Ramban, Rav Hillel ben Shmuel, Me'iri, and Rav Yeshayah de Trani II. Maharal, on the other hand, wrote that “anyone who says that the aggados are not words of Torah like the rest of Torah from Sinai forfeits his share in the World to Come... All words of Agaddah are the wisdom of Torah.” (A must-read on this topic is Rabbi Chaim Eisen’s article, “Maharal’s *Be’er ha-Golah* and His Revolution in Aggadic Scholarship — in Their Context and on His Terms,” in *Hakirah* vol. 4. The reader must study this article for a full explication of the aforementioned sources). Maharal disputed Azariah de Rossi’s citation of Rav Sherira Gaon and suggested that it was a forgery; Rabbi Eisen notes that Maharal apparently did not have access to the complete manuscript.

The second revolutionary aspect of Maharal’s approach lies in his method of non-literal interpretation. There was a long tradition of reading Chazal as speaking in metaphor and allegory, but Maharal instead explained them as referring to real inner spiritual essences. For example, with the Gemara’s statement that Moshe Rabbeinu was ten *ammos* tall, authorities such as Rashba interpreted it allegorically; it means that Moshe was a great man, and the number 10 is of symbolic significance. Maharal, on the other hand, was of the view that the Gemara was speaking from the perspective of metaphysical, spiritual essence, by which Moshe really was 10 *ammos* tall. A difference between these perspectives is that whereas according to Rashba and others, Moshe was, from a physical standpoint, of ordinary height, Maharal’s view is that Moshe’s physical form would have approximated his inner spiritual form as much as is possible within the constraints of the scientifically possible i.e. he would have been as tall as is humanly possible (around eight feet).

The third revolutionary aspect of Maharal’s approach, and the one that is most germane to our discussion, is his extension of this approach even to topics that are not normally considered to be non-literal *aggadata*. A striking and important example of this is with the discussion in the Gemara concerning where the sun goes at night:

The Jewish sages said, “By day the sun passes beneath the firmament and at night above it.” The sages of the nations maintained, “By day beneath the firmament and at night beneath the ground.” (*Pesachim* 94b)

The Jewish Sages stated that at night, the sun travels behind the solid roof of the sky back to its morning starting position, hidden from our sight. The non-Jewish scholars believed that the sun travels around the far side of the earth at night. The Gemara proceeds to record that Rebbe acknowledged this:

Rebbe said, “Their opinion seems more correct than ours, because in the day, the wellsprings are cool, but in the night, they steam (Rashi – ‘because the sun heats them under the ground’).”

Rebbe is referring to the vapor that one sees rising from bodies of water in the early morning. Rashi explains that this is due to the sun heating the underground sources of water when it passes beneath the ground at night. We now know that this is not the case, but it is nevertheless true that the sun does pass on the far side of the earth at night, just as the gentile sages maintained and as Rebbe conceded.

The standard approach to this Gemara, taken by dozens upon dozens of authorities, is to interpret it in accordance with its straightforward meaning: as a scientific dispute between the Jewish sages and the non-Jewish scholars. The vast majority of Rishonim and Acharonim understood it to mean that the Jewish sages were wrong understanding it as attesting that the Sages of the Talmud made a scientific error.² Rabbeinu Tam also interprets the Gemara as referring to a scientific dispute, but states that while Rebbe conceded that the non-Jewish scholars had more convincing arguments, the truth still lay with the Jewish sages.³

Maharal, on the other hand, is of the view that the Jewish Sages were referring to a metaphysical reality, not to the physical path of the sun at night.⁴ Rebbe’s concession was apparently only that the view of the non-Jewish sages *appears* correct – that the physical world manifests their approach. But the Jewish Sages were not disputing the non-Jewish scholars; they were speaking about a different plane of reality.

Maharal’s approach is ingenious, but it stands in complete contrast to the legions of Rishonim and Acharonim who did indeed understand the Gemara as referring to a scientific dispute. Even authorities who frequently interpreted Chazal non-literally, such as Rambam, did not consider this discussion to fall into that category. This does not in and of itself mean that Maharal is wrong. But it does mean that his approach can hardly be considered binding or even normative.

² Rav Saadia Gaon, Commentary to *Sefer Yetzirah* 2:4; Rabbi Eliezer of Metz, *Sefer Yere'im* #52; *Tosafos Rid*, *Shabbos* 34b, s.v. *Eizehu*; Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:8; Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, *ma'amar al aggadas Chazal*; Rosh, *Pesachim* 2:30 and *She'eilos U'Teshuvos HaRosh*, *Kelal* 14, #2; Ritva, Commentary on the Haggadah, s.v. *Matzah zo she'anu ochlim*; *Sefer Mitzvos HaGadol*, *Lo Ta'aseh* #79; Rabbeinu Yerucham ben Meshullam, *Toldos Adam VeChavah*, *Nesiv* 5, Part 3; Rabbeinu Manoach, Commentary to *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Chametz U-Matzah* 5:11, s.v. *Ela bemayim shelanu*; Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, *Responsum* #57; Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, *Akeidas Yitzchak*, *Parashas Bo*, Chap. 37; Maharam Alashkar, *Responsum* #96; Radvaz, *Responsa*, Part IV, #282; Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim* 6:3; *Lechem Mishneh to Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Shabbos* 5:4; Maharsha to *Bava Basra* 25b; *Minchas Kohen*, *Sefer Mevo HaShemesh* 10; *Chavos*, *Responsum* #210; Maharif *Responsum* #47; Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti, *Pachad Yitzchak*, *erech tzeidah*; Rabbi Moshe Schick, *Responsa Maharam Schick*, *Responsum* #7; Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, letter written to Rabbi Pinchos (Hile) Wechsler, published by Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Breuer in *Hama'ayan* (1976); Rabbi Yeshua Shimon Chaim Ovdayah, *Responsa Yesamach Levav*, *Orach Chaim* #10, #12.

³ Rabbeinu Tam, cited in *Shitah Mekubetzes*, *Kesuvos* 13b.

⁴ *Be'er HaGolah* 5. See too Netziv, *Ha'amek Davar* to Deuteronomy 4:19.

While Maharal extends his approach to topics in the Gemara that were interpreted literally by everyone else, it is not absolutely clear, and certainly not explicit, that Maharal would apply his approach to every single statement of Chazal's about the natural world. But Rav Moshe apparently does. For example, the Gemara has raw halachic discussion about lice that grow from sweat. As I understand Rav Moshe's position – and I would be more than happy to be corrected on this – he explains that these insects do, in some metaphysical way, spontaneously generate. While other Rishonim and Acharonim interpret these statements in the Gemara as either true or false, I do not know of any authority who says that Chazal were not talking about physical phenomena altogether.

The appeal of Maharal's approach is clear. It is extremely intellectually stimulating. It allows one to attribute astonishing layers of depths to Chazal's words. It presents a sense of security in our Mesorah and places the words of Chazal in a position from which they cannot be disproved by science. Rav Moshe and his disciples project the view that Maharal's approach is the normative, even binding, approach to Chazal; that Maharal is merely the spokesperson for the standard, authorized approach to Chazal throughout the generations. (An example of this is with *Mima'amakim* on *Parashas Vayikra*, based on Rav Moshe's teachings, which states that in the famous dispute between Rambam and Ramban about offerings, both were presenting the Maharal's approach, with slightly different angles.) However the fact is that Maharal's approach is an innovation that is far from mainstream.

Cosmology

With regard to Rav Moshe's position on cosmology – the age of the universe and the evolution of life – I must confess that I do not know what Rav Moshe's position is. There seem to be several contradictions in what Rav Moshe has said about it.

On the one hand, Rav Moshe's letter of condemnation was written to Rabbi Aaron Lopiansky, who gave his approbation to *The Science of Torah*. But on the other hand, I was informed that when Rav Zevulun Schwartzman, a colleague of Rav Moshe, read through *The Science of Torah* and told Rav Moshe that there was no heresy in it, Rav Moshe claimed that his objection was not to that book but rather the others.

Then there is the bizarre situation whereby one of Rav Moshe's long-time *talmidim* says that he has Rav Moshe's approval to recommend Dr. Nathan Aviezer's books (which describe the modern scientific view of how the universe developed and life evolved), but on the other hand, another of Rav Moshe's long-time *talmidim* writes that Rav Moshe's view is that even for *kiruv*, it is forbidden to tell people that there are any rabbis who permit believing that the universe is billions of years old.

In light of these contradictions, I simply do not know what Rav Moshe's position is – and, it seems, nor do his *talmidim*. Unfortunately it is futile for me to ask one of his *talmidim* what his views really are, because his *talmidim* are saying such vastly different things in his name. The only way for Rav Moshe's position on this to be clarified is if he makes a public statement about it.

Afikei Mayim: A Fundamentally Dishonest Work

My understanding of Rav Moshe's approach and attitudes regarding approaches to Chazal was confirmed, rather disturbingly, by *Afikei Mayim*, published after the ban. A *talmid* of Rav Moshe told me that this volume of *Afikei Mayim* is a terrible disgrace to Rav Moshe Shapiro. I am unclear as to whether he meant that it is a disgrace because it distorts his views on these matters, or because it reveals them. My impression is that it accurately records his views, as it is consistent with statements that others have told me about his views, based on their conversations with him. Furthermore, it bears a particularly enthusiastic endorsement and foreword from him.

There are different legitimate approaches one can take in writing a *sefer*. One might choose to present the entire range of different views on a topic, without taking any stance on which is correct; a good example of this is R. Daniel Eidensohn's work *Daas Torah*. One might choose to present the full range of views, but to analyze them for strengths and weaknesses and to draw conclusions; this is the approach that I take in my works. One might also choose to only present one viewpoint; this, too, is legitimate.

What is not legitimate, though, is to only present one viewpoint, and yet to claim that this represents the only existing view. And this is what is done in *Afikei Mayim*. *Afikei Mayim* cites the Geonim, Rambam and Rav Hirsch in various places, thereby consolidating the impression that it is presenting a comprehensive guide to approaching Chazal from the viewpoint of all Torah authorities. Yet it claims Rav Hirsch's letters to be forgeries, and ignores the statements from the Geonim and in *Moreh Nevuchim* about Chazal making errors in science. (Unless, that is, one considers that it deals with the *Moreh* when claiming that only Rambam was qualified to write such a work – as if that forbids others from quoting it!) It fails to cite any of the dozens of authorities who took a different approach.

Afikei Mayim: Its Perversions Of Authorities

Afikei Mayim's perversions of citations from Torah authorities and distortions of critical issues are numerous and astounding. One widely respected authority in *machshavah* described it to me as the single most dishonest work he had ever seen, outside of professional anti-Semitism. I will limit myself to just a few examples.⁵

⁵ I am indebted to Rabbi Gil Student's *Hirhurim* blog for some of these observations. More can be found at his blog, <http://hirhurim.blogspot.com>

- In the section entitled, “One Who Denies Chazal’s Words” (pp. 22-24), which in the context of the book is obviously meant with regard to someone saying that Chazal made scientific errors, the first citation is Rambam’s discussion of *makchish maggideha!* Whereas Rambam himself was certainly not referring to someone saying that Chazal made scientific errors, since he said it himself on at least two occasions!
- On page 31, it cites Rabbeinu Tam’s view that although the Gemara records that the non-Jewish scholars were victorious in asserting that the sun travels on the far side of the planet at night instead of behind the sky (as Chazal claimed), in truth Chazal were correct and the non-Jewish scholars were only victorious in terms of having better arguments. There is no mention of all the dozens of other authorities who learn the Gemara according to the simple meaning, that Chazal were wrong! Furthermore, is Rabbi Schmeltzer indeed asserting that the sun travels behind the sky at night?! The mind boggles.
- On page 32, it cites Rabbi Yehudah Brill’s position on Chazal’s scientific infallibility vis-à-vis lice spontaneously generating – without mentioning that we only know of this position from its citation in *Pachad Yitzchak* by Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti, who disagreed with it and felt that there may well have been a scientific error!
- On page 38, the author quotes from a responsum of the Rashba (1:9) in which he decries allegorizing verses based on philosophical conclusions. Yet he fails to cite the immediately preceding paragraph of the Rashba, where he explains that under some circumstances it is indeed permissible to allegorize verses based on philosophical conclusions! The Rashba tells us when allegorization is acceptable, entirely contrary to the implication of the partial quote that seems to say that it is never acceptable.
- In footnote 52 to the aforementioned citation, the author quotes a responsum of *Chakham Tzvi* in which this view of the Rashba is quoted and accepted. Yet it cuts off the quote from the *Chakham Tzvi* at precisely the crucial point – where the *Chakham Tzvi* qualifies the Rashba’s opposition to allegorization as not being applicable under Rav Sa’adia Gaon’s criteria for when allegorization is permitted.
- The section entitled “The *Moreh Nevuchim* Was Only For That Generation” (pp. 46-47) quotes several authorities saying that one can’t bring proofs from Rambam regarding studying philosophy, since he was such a Torah giant. But nobody is talking about studying philosophy – we are talking about quoting Rambam’s own words! In addition, while Greek philosophy is long dead, the challenges posed by modern science are no less severe. *Afikei Mayim* makes no mention of the Rema’s statement that “Even if we say that they prohibited reading all their books [of non-Jewish philosophy], it did not arise in anyone’s mind to prohibit all of the books of our sages from whose water we drink... this

is so especially of our great master the Rambam, because one certainly need not be concerned that his books contain any false view” (Responsum 7).

- The first section of Chapter Six is titled "*Ein Le-Fakfek Be-Divreihem z"l* – One May Not Question Their Words.” It is about how one must not question the words of either Chazal or the Rishonim, and includes citations from Maharam Alashkar and Chasam Sofer to this effect. In the context of the book, this is obviously intended to make the point that one may not question their statements about science. Yet *Afikei Mayim* does not quote Maharam Alashkar’s statement that Rabbeinu Tam was wrong to side with the Jewish Sages in stating that the sun passes behind the sky at night, since, as science has proven and as Rambam and the Geonim have explained the Gemara, the Jewish Sages were mistaken in this view (Responsum 96). *Afikei Mayim* likewise does not quote Chasam Sofer in his commentary to *Nidah* 17b, where he states that the statements of Rashi and Tosafos about anatomy have been disproved by science.
- Chapter Seven, entitled “Our Tradition Regarding *Chiddush HaOlam*,” is a collection of citations about the importance of *chiddush haOlam*. But *chiddush haOlam* refers to creation *ex nihilo*, which nobody is denying! And in a subsection entitled “*Maase Bereishis k’Pshuto*,” it quotes Rambam about how he is interpreting the Torah’s description of creation *ex nihilo* literally – but he certainly interpreted many other parts of *maase Bereishis* non-literally!

As noted, there are innumerable other examples of *Afikei Mayim*’s dishonesty; perhaps at a future stage I will be able to document them in full.

Afikei Mayim’s Strange Divergence From Maharal

One particularly puzzling aspect of *Afikei Mayim* is its citation of several sources advocating that everything in the Gemara, including such sections of Aggadatas as the Rabbah bar bar Chanah stories, is true on a literal level as well as on deeper level.⁶ This is strange for three reasons. First, is Rabbi Schmeltzer really insisting that everyone must believe this? There are aggadatas that describe birds the size of Manhattan, sailors being transported by waves to the stars, newborn goats that are eighty miles in length, Adam HaRishon being the height of the world, Avraham being 400 feet tall, and the pupil of Avshalom’s eye being five feet in depth. I have no doubt that the vast majority of Rav Moshe’s *talmidim* would insist that these Aggadatas should not be interpreted literally.

The second strange aspect of *Afikei Mayim* citing this position is that it is most certainly not the approach of Maharal. Maharal was of the view that most aggadatas should be interpreted non-literally *in exclusion* to the literal meaning. For example, Maharal insisted that Moshe was not literally ten *ammos* tall, and states

⁶ See pages 31-33, 52-53.

that such would be physically impossible. Maharal also notes that literal interpretations of such passages serve only to bring scorn and mockery upon Chazal.

I would presume that Rav Moshe follows Maharal's position, that such sections of the Gemara are only speaking about inner spiritual essences and are not at all to be interpreted literally. But then I am at a loss to explain why he would endorse Rabbi Schmeltzer's emphatic quotations that the Gemara is always literally true. Is Rav Moshe unaware that Rabbi Schmeltzer took this approach? I do not know.

As far as Rabbi Schmeltzer goes, I would presume that he is in a difficult position. In the controversy, he was actively representing both Rav Moshe Shapiro and Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel. Rav Wachtfogel strongly believes that everything in the Gemara is literally true – I have heard reports that he has publicly called people heretics for suggesting that some Aggadatas are not to be interpreted literally. Perhaps Rabbi Schmeltzer, in *Afikei Mayim*, was trying to represent both Rav Moshe's position and Rav Wachtfogel. If so, he is unaware that the non-literalists considered the literalist approach foolish, and the literalists state that the non-literalist approach is heretical.

The Response by the Talmidim

Rav Chaim of Volozhin, in *Ruach Chaim* 1:4, writes that it is forbidden for a *talmid* to accept the words of his Rebbe if he has difficulty with them, and notes that the *talmid* can sometimes be correct. The Talmud and Jewish history is replete with this phenomenon, whether it be Rava's statements made in distinction to those of his teacher Rav Yosef, down to Rav Nadel in relation to his teacher the Chazon Ish – and the Chazon Ish's proud support of his pupil's stance!

In contrast to this, I have seen several *talmidim* of Rav Moshe, who are apparently overwhelmed by his brilliance and strong personality, write about being entirely *mevatel* their *daas* to him. Unfortunately this seems to place a great strain upon them. Many of Rav Moshe's *talmidim* come from less-than-yeshivishe backgrounds and work with people who possess a strong secular education. They were attracted to Rav Moshe because of his broad and sophisticated outlook. They never discussed the issues of Torah and science with him, and assumed that he would have an open-minded approach in these areas. When Rav Moshe condemned my books as *kefirah*, insisted that the world was 5768 years old and that the writings of Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam and Rav Hirsch were forgeries, many of his *talmidim* were stunned and shaken.

As a result, rather than accept his opposition to my work for what it is – a genuine dispute with modern science, and a refusal to accept that many prominent Rishonim and Acharonim took a fundamentally different approach from that of Maharal – they prefer to reinterpret his stance to make it more palatable. Rather than confront questions such as “If I believe that dinosaurs did exist in prehistoric

times, and Rav Moshe claims this is unacceptable, what does that say about him or me?” or, “If I respect Rav Hirsch, and Rav Moshe claims that he is outside of legitimate Judaism, how am I to relate to that?” it is much easier for them to focus on me, to speak about how I am *chutzpadik*, or stubborn, or whatever. These claims provide the necessary distraction to avoid dealing with the substance of my arguments.

Unfortunately it is all too clear that when his *talmidim* read this monograph, the more that it resonates with them, the more conflicted they will become. As a result, some will undoubtedly become all the more driven to further discredit me in all kinds of ways. I can only hope that many of them will have the necessary self-confidence and level-headedness to be able to accept the points that I have made; to be able to accept what Rav Chaim of Volozhin wrote; and to be able to be proud *talmidim* of a brilliant Torah scholar without having to insist that his approach to these topics is the only one that exists.

I would like to express my thanks to all those who read and critiqued this essay for me. I would be more than happy to hear from others with any corrections to this essay and further clarifications of Rav Moshe's views.

Rabbi Chaim Eisen's essay, "Maharal's *Be'er ha-Golah* and His Revolution in Aggadic Scholarship — in Their Context and on His Terms" is freely available at <http://www.hakirah.org/Volume%204.htm>

An extensive list of quotations from Rishonim and Acharonim who believed that Chazal made statements about science that were in error can be found at <http://torahandscience.blogspot.com>

Further material relating to the controversy over my work can be found at www.zootorah.com/controversy