

8. Religion and Science in Conflict

The question was raised at the very start of this book as to whether or not science has explained everything. A better phrasing of the question would be "has science explained anything?"

Let us begin this chapter with a discussion of a major subject over which religion and science have long clashed: the age of the world.

Authentic Judaism puts the age of all matter in the universe at less than six thousand years. Modern science puts its estimate at 5,000,000,000 years (for the age of the *earth*, matter being much older)—give or take a billion or two.

This scientific "fact" is derived from the results of experiments conducted with certain rocks which contain radioactive substances, such as uranium. These particular rocks turn themselves into lead at a very slow, unchanging (?) rate, and a piece of uranium takes, theoretically, billions of years to change completely into lead. Therefore its age can be estimated by ascertaining the amount or percentage of rock which has turned to lead thus far.

Similarly, the age of matter that once lived can be estimated by counting the number of radioactive rays given off by its remnants, specifically those given off by radiocarbon. (This is done with the aid of Geiger-counters.) Radiocarbon is the name given to a radioactive molecule of carbon, an element each living being absorbs while alive and gives off at constant rates both while alive and after death. A living man, for instance, gives off 918 rays per hour per gram of radiocarbon. When he dies the rate decreases steadily until, after about five thousand years, the same amount of radiocarbon should theoretically give off about 400 rays per hour.

The age of the globe is further measured by estimating the amount of time needed to have formed the oceans and mountains.

None of these methods are very accurate but, seemingly, could not be in error to the extent necessary to coincide even roughly with traditional biblical figures.

The explanation of this apparent contradiction between science and Judaism lies in two points.

First of all, conditions during Creation and the Flood were extreme and varied to an extent that had never occurred before and never occurred afterward. The immense pressure and heat to which the earth was subjected during these two traumatic events could easily have pockmarked the earth's surface and brought about drastic geographical and chemical changes in our planet. Every geographical aspect of the earth which scientists necessitate billions of years for the development of, is easily understood if we assume the existence in history of an unequalled natural (or supernatural) disaster, because all geographical changes are brought about by pressure and heat. This "disaster factor" is not just an easy way out of the scientists' arguments. It rather calls attention to the fact that the Torah specifically mentions Creation and the Flood as having been drastic upheavals of the earth and its contents. In the instance of Creation those of the entire universe were affected. Modern science has been assuming, quite wrongly, that conditions were always as they are presently. The scientists wonder why their results do not correspond with religious tradition. The answer lies in religious tradition.

Secondly, the age of rocks and remains presents no problem in the light of another religious teaching. Our tradition tells us that when G-d created the universe He created it and its entire contents in the prime of their existences. Adam was not created a baby, but rather a young man. This applies to all of the original animals and rocks. Therefore, a rock which is estimated today as being four billion years of age was created six thousand years ago, *at the age* (physical and chemical appearance) of 3 billion, 999 million, 994 thousand years.

Either one, or a combination of both these points refutes

any "proof" of the antiquity of the universe.

Returning to the question at hand, namely, "has science explained all?" we reiterate by stating an emphatic *no*.

Science, to a great extent through guesswork and misinterpretation of confirmations, to some extent through faultily-controlled experiments and overgeneralizations, and to a very limited extent through legitimate logic (drawing specific conclusions from specific data) has compiled a vast storehouse of results. Though, as in the instance of the age of the world, much of science's results is balderdash, some in pure form, and some, more dangerously, in diluted form, let us, for the sake of argument, assume that all of modern science's theories are—excuse the expression—the gospel truth. Now, keeping in mind the question with which we are occupied, telephone the head of the science department of a reputable university and ask him politely to tell you what *life* is. Ask him why science cannot take a dead body and, with the aid of machines to pump its heart and work its lungs, cause it to *live* again. Ask him simply if science can define, duplicate, or dissect the life-force. Or ask him where original matter (which all scientific theories about the origin of the universe take for granted) came from. Then, while he's still sputtering, hang up and ask yourself: has science explained all?

Every age assumes that it is right and its science absolute truth. Every age says to itself, "after all, this age is the culmination of all the previous ages and therefore surpasses them all in wisdom and understanding."

Every age is stupid.

It is a stubborn emotion to suppress and it is quite natural for a human being to assume his own omniscience—at least relative to his fellow men. But the honestly introspective man with a bit of insight realizes that the future plays havoc with the present's science.

Ptolemy was certain that he was correct in thinking that the earth was at the center of the universe. Those proposing otherwise were, at best, laughed at; at worst,—well, remember the Church . . . ?

Time brought change and years later the sun was given the honor of being in the center (of the solar system, at least) by Copernicus. Incidentally, the heliocentric theory was actually

voiced long before Copernicus ever saw the light of day, by an ancient Greek known as Aristarchus. But we all know how scientific "truths" come and go—and come again.

Even today, if the geocentric theory is proposed, it is greeted with cynicism and laughter. But, in reality, as the slightest knowledge of elementary relativistic logic will make evident, neither the sun nor the earth is "in the middle" and the geocentric theory is as "correct" as is the heliocentric.

And tomorrow perhaps someone will come along and destroy, for the upteenth time, our whole conception of everything, and *his* theory will prevail—until *his* time comes.

Absolute true science, like any other true knowledge, is only to be found in the Torah, possibly only alluded to in the actual text but given in all its detail to Moses at Mt. Sinai as part of the Oral Law. The deep secrets of Creation are there; the facts concerning the structure and extent of the universe are there; the explanation of the life-force is there. All is there. There!

Once more let us impress the fact that though all knowledge is contained in the Torah, the great part of it is hidden from the casual student of its books who claim to be "Bible scholars" or "talmudic experts". The deep secrets of the Torah can only be touched upon by sincere men with a love of G-d and a very thorough knowledge and understanding of the Talmud, Midrash, and Kabbala. But even with all this, the man of today could only strive toward but never reach the level of ultimate wisdom and understanding that Moses or Solomon, for examples, attained.

In conclusion we can state that Torah is Absolute Knowledge and Truth. The level to which one fathoms Torah is thereby the level to which he fathoms Truth. Science should be accepted when it doesn't contradict the teachings of the Bible or Talmud. Through science the wonders of G-d can be realized and faith strengthened (see chapter 1 on R. Bachya's philosophy and also chapter 13). However, when the science of the hour clashes with G-d's teachings and the situation is irreconcilable, "science" is, very simply, wrong.