

EXCERPTS FROM MAIL-JEWISH DISCUSSION REGARDING THE FLOOD OCT. - DEC. 1994

I. ON INTERPRETING THE FLOOD ALLEGORICALLY by Marc Shapiro Oct 22, 1994

I would like to share with people what I believe is the modern Orthodox approach on some of the issues being discussed. I am led to do so after a conversation I had with someone who confessed that he could no longer be religious since he didn't believe... that the world was some 5000 years old and that the entire world was destroyed in the Flood...

The response... shared by all of the so-called modern Orthodox scholars I have spoken to... [is that] the Flood (and the Genesis story)... are not to be taken literally... a number of Rishonim took the Garden of Eden story allegorically and R. Kook writes that it makes no difference if in truth there was no Garden of Eden... the answer offered by modern Orthodox scholars is that the Flood can only be understood by comparison with the Gilgamesh epic and it is in comparing the two that we see the real significance of the Torah's story, which is not trying to teach us history but important lessons about G-d and his relationship to man... what is significant is the inner meaning of the Torah and not its outer texture which was never meant to be taken literally, and was able to be appreciated much better by the early Israelites who were aware of the Gilgamesh story.

...One who believes in the flood story literally (or in the five thousand year history of the world) rejects the entire historical enterprise.

[Further from Marc Shapiro, Oct. 29, 1994]

...[our] great sages interpreted the Garden of Eden story allegorically and refused to take literally aggadot... The endeavor to allegorize aggadot is based on the fact that G-d (and the world) do not behave in a completely outrageous fashion...

...knowledge in just about every field of human study is dependant on the fact that the world is not 5000 years old and that there was not a Flood.... biology, physics, astronomy, history, anthropology, geology, paleontology, zoology, linguistics etc. etc. Belief in a 5000 year old world and a flood which destroyed the

world 4000 years ago is a denial of all human knowledge as we know it... it is impossible to make sense of anything in this world, in any field of science and many of the social sciences by adopting a fundamentalist position... One can only go against the obvious facts of our day for so long... before the weight of evidence ran over them.

...The world of exegesis hasn't stood still... insights which modern theories of literature and modern ways of reading text offer us about the great works will assist us in understanding the Torah...

II. MESORAH AND THE FLOOD - [against interpreting the Flood non-literally] by Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer Nov. 1994

... Our sources do not sustain the allegorical interpretation of the recorded facts of Parashas Noach... Our entire religion is based on the Tradition - and the accuracy that our Fathers and Mothers have vouchsafed for it - in an unbroken chain back to Sinai. There can be much new and original exegesis of Tanach ... but not ... factual reinterpretation of Tanach not based on that Mesorah...

We... see no reason to raise difficulties with our accurate (and sacred) Mesorah on the basis of the latest scientific notion... Today it is thus, tomorrow it shall be otherwise (take for example, Velikovsky's once intensely derided theory of the extinction of the dinosaurs via a comet's impact on the Earth. This theory is now (with no credit given to Velikovsky) universally accepted. They even "know" where it happened! The Yucatan Peninsula). It is only "Netzach Yisroel lo yeshaker" - the eternal truths of the exalted Chosen People, imparted to us by Moshe Rabbeinu, Chazal and the great Rishonim that have withstood the tests of time with the resilience of the Divine.

...In the service of Man's efforts to shake off the shackles of religious restrictions, the secular world has mounted an unceasing attack on our timeless truths and Toras Emes...

III. RESPONSE TO CRITICISMS OF MARC SHAPIRO'S SUBMISSION ON THE FLOOD by Moshe Shamah, Nov. 14, 1994

Whether one agrees with Marc Shapiro's non-literal interpretation of the Flood or not, anyone familiar with the broad outlines of traditional Jewish exegesis and thought must admit that the right to such an interpretation is absolutely within the parameters of our tradition. There have been numerous interpretations expounded by Talmudic and Midrashic sages and our great commentators that ran counter to what at least superficially appears to have been the previously widely-accepted opinion.

Marc's example of Rishonim allegorizing was the Garden of Eden. Several additional examples will be helpful. The Rambam, primarily because of his interpretation of prophecy as occurring in a vision, allegorizes each of the following: G-d taking Abraham outside and showing him the stars; the passage of Abraham's three visitors; Jacob's wrestling with the angel; the episode of Balaam's talking ass; Hosea's taking a harlot wife; Ezekiel's resurrection of the dead (a Talmudic controversy); Gideon's fleece of wool; and many other Scriptural events (Guide 2:42, 47). R. Yosef Ibn Caspi and others allow allegorization of the great fish swallowing Yonah. Many Rishonim felt science indicated that necromancy doesn't exist and rejected a literal interpretation of the necromancer's conjuring up of the deceased prophet Samuel and his ensuing conversation with King Saul. If there would have been a compelling scientific or philosophic reason to support the Eternity of the Universe view, the Rambam states he would have interpreted Genesis 1 in accordance with it, but he believes Aristotle didn't truly make his point, so Mesorah came into play. In our century R. Kook considered the doctrine of evolution - modified to include the Creator's role - so compelling and uplifting that he urged Torah only be taught that way.

The "Mesorah," which some have thrown against Marc, important as it is, should not be glamorized into something it isn't. The Talmudic sages and the Rishonim recognized that there are many, many matters in Scripture that "Mesorah" even in their days did not clarify and everybody had to do their best with whatever they could garner from tradition, logic and available evidence. Sages and commentaries are constantly arguing with each other about how to understand thousands of matters of realia, events and meaning of words, often having diametrically opposed views, trying to reach truth. We should continue the process and use the great tools of science, archaeology,

philology, history, etc. that are at our disposal today. Let us not get bogged down with a misinterpretation of "Elu VeElu - these and these are the words of the living G-d," and feel untraditional every time we come up with an interpretation contrary to the view of a Talmudic sage or a Rishon. Great as the sages were, they were fallible and welcomed every opportunity to clarify a matter. The misinterpretation of "Elu Veelu" and the recently-developed concept of "Daas Torah" are stifling legitimate Torah research and moving Orthodox Judaism into an unenlightened age contrary to our glorious heritage...

In conclusion we should recognize that a prophetic allegory is as true and inspiring as any "actual" history.

IV. MARC SHAPIRO TO M. SHAMAH (not on MJ) Nov. 17, 1994

Thanks for your show of support. By the way... Efodi interprets Rambam as believing that the Jonah incident and even the Akedah took place in a dream. This passage is censored in contemporary editions of the Guide, but I made a copy from the Sabbionetta 1551 edition.

V. FURTHER ON THE FLOOD AND MESORAH by Y. G. Bechhofer Nov 17, '94

>>From M. Shamah

>>There have been numerous interpretations expounded by Talmudic and Midrashic sages and our great commentators that ran counter to... the previously widely-accepted opinion.

That is of course true, but they are "Talmudic and Midrashic sages and our great commentators," and we are not. Yes, we are smaller, less knowledgeable and privy to less Ruach HaKodesh than Chazal and the Great Rishonim, such as Rabbeinu Chananel, whom other Rishonim testify had direct access to the Mesorah "shekol devarav divrei kabbala" - "that all of his words were from the Tradition." That doesn't mean we can't be creative - we just must know our limitations...

...With all due respect to you and others who commented to me privately about the Rambam, Ralbag and others' approach towards such events... that they say were visions or conveyed by prophets - THAT IS NOT THE SAME AS ALLEGORY. The Rambam,

who codified the reality of prophecy as one of the 13 Principles believes that this is the way angels appear and signs occur - in visions. The Tanach accurately describes real events that actually transpired - in the realm of prophecy... (BTW, I would find the interpretation of the Flood as a vision unacceptable. Miracles do occur - no one says, or can say, that the Splitting of the Sea or the Giving of the Torah was a vision, and the Flood I place in the same category. But that is a separate issue.)

>>R. Yosef Ibn Caspi and others allow allegorization of the great fish swallowing Yonah.

Rabbi Ibn Caspi was a controversial source. I reserve the right to reject his interpretation as beyond the mainstream.

>>Many Rishonim felt science indicated that necromancy doesn't exist and rejected a literal interpretation of the necromancer's conjuring up of the deceased prophet Samuel and his ensuing conversation with King Saul.

Again, not as allegory but as visions...

[Quote from previous submission of M. Shamah regarding Rambam's view on Eternity and Rav Kook's view on evolution]

...Of course we can accept science where it does not contradict Torah. It is where there is a REAL clash that our debate begins.

>> ...the Talmudic sages and the Rishonim recognized that there are many, many matters in Scripture that "Mesorah" even in their days did not clarify and everybody had to do their best with whatever they could garner from tradition, logic and available evidence.

This is true, but it does not justify your next statement, in which you leap to equate us with our "tools" with Chazal.

>>The misinterpretation of "Elu Veelu" and... "Daas Torah"...

I don't think they have anything to do with this discussion...We are not discussing a dispute with our contemporaries which would bring [in] "Elu Veelu"

and "the recently-developed concept" of "Daas Torah" (as an aside, see Rabbi Wein's article in the November "Jewish Observer" - "Da'as Torah" is a new phrase, but not a new concept) but our attitude towards Mesorah and Chazal... Once you question the Mabul as fact, pray tell, what leads you to believe Mattan Torah and Yetzias Mitzrayim are fact?

...science... is certainly as fallible, IMHO, much more, than the traditions of our Jewish Heritage and History.

VI. THE FLOOD, MESORAH AND NON-LITERAL INTERPRETATIONS From Moshe Shamah, Nov. 21, '94

...Regarding both the Rambam's position...[on] Eternity... and R. Kook's position... [on] Evolution... [Y. Bechhofer] comments: "I fail to see why these points are relevant."

But these sources are very relevant. The Rambam and tradition consider non-Eternity of the Universe a much more important principle than a literal interpretation of the Flood, and yet, if there is overwhelming evidence to support Eternity (the magnitude of which can probably never approach the evidence against a literal Flood reading) the Rambam would reinterpret the Torah. His view is that one cannot deny absolutely overwhelming evidence but should reinterpret the Torah, even if the interpretation is a new one for the time in which it is proposed. Truth must be consistent with itself, logic and science are part of the Creator's revelation and we have no right to dismiss them as out-of-hand. R. Kook knew the traditional world interpreted the six days as a series of discrete creative activities, but when the scientific evidence compellingly indicated otherwise, he reinterpreted the Torah in harmony with the evidence. The Flood should be no different.

Of course we must not be hasty to jump to conclusions, but if it appears certain that there is a contradiction and we try to resolve it to no avail, it would appear that according to some of our great authorities we have a responsibility to look into our tradition and ask how sure are we that it has the absolutely correct perspective on the relevant matter.

...regarding the many instances Rishonim give non-literal interpretations to Scriptural passages, [he] comments "THAT IS NOT THE SAME AS

ALLEGORY..."

[Here he] overlooked Marc's original citation - the Garden of Eden - a passage not presented by Scripture as comprising a prophet's specific vision yet interpreted by many Rishonim allegorically - "a symbolic story, much like a parable."

But more importantly, if the Flood is an allegory it is nonetheless a prophetic statement - a communication transmitted from the Almighty to a prophet - and the reality it and its attendant events represent are just as true as any literal passage. If the Book of Job refers to a "fictitious" individual - as one Talmudic opinion holds - and the afflictions described, the dialogue with friends and with G-d and his ultimate restoration are all one grand allegory, the sefer's truth is not diminished. If the elaborate description of human beings being resurrected in Ezekiel's vision doesn't refer to human beings at all but to the nation's revival, perhaps the Flood doesn't refer to the whole world's being drowned but to some other form of chastisement and salvation.

Interestingly, the sages of old made radical statements limiting the Flood against the literal reading of the Biblical account: it wasn't in the Land of Israel; "giants" such as Og lived through it. It appears some sages looked on the Flood as allegorical.

Because it is difficult to know where to draw the line - a difficulty pointed out centuries ago by the Rashba and others - we cannot ignore a long-sustained, multi-disciplinary unanimity of numerous serious researchers, some of who are from our own traditional circles. Especially as regards pre-history, it should create no problem if we are dealing with a prophetic vision presented in a narrative mode even for those who don't want to follow the Rambam et al. (Viewed against the background of pre-Torah literary compositions such as the Gilgamesh epic - cited by Marc in his original posting - the Flood narrative is highly inspiring, conforming with the revolutionary new standards the Torah, through prophecy, brought into the world.)

[He] writes that "Elu VeElu" and "Daas Torah" have nothing to do with this discussion, which is centered around our attitude towards Mesorah and Chazal, and Chazal - via the Mesorah - accepted the Flood as literal. Perhaps - only perhaps - they did. However, great as the sages were, the Rambam and others make the point that

they definitely were not infallible. That is the point of insisting on a correct understanding of "Elu VeElu" and "Daas Torah" and citing the thousands of instances regarding realia, interpreting events and explaining meanings of words where the tradition is incomplete, where the sages and Rishonim have controversies often espousing diametrically opposed views which cannot all be factual as far as historical accuracy is concerned. That also is the point of citing the numerous instances where later authorities proffered novel interpretations - unheard of in the works of Hazal - to solve what they considered problems. If Rishonim thought science disproved necromancy and rejected a literal interpretation of the necromancer's conjuring up the prophet Samuel and King Saul's conversation with him, today, they might possibly interpret the Flood in a non-literal manner.

VII. ON R. WEIN'S JEWISH OBSERVER ARTICLE CITED BY Y. BECHHOFFER

From Mechy Frankel Nov 21, 1994

R. Y. Bechoffer (V16#67) recommends a recent article by R.Wein in the Jewish Observer as a source to buttress the suggestion that the concept of Daas Torah (DT) is quite ancient... To summarize up front, I found R. Wein's article thoroughly appalling. Specifics follow:

1. ...R. Wein's article is devoted in its entirety to "refuting" an earlier article on the subject of DT by Lawrence Kaplan, which appeared in an Orthodox [Forum] volume devoted to the subject of rabbinic authority. R. Wein's article itself is a polemical piece rather than a work of scholarship, full of ad hominem little nasties tossed at Kaplan. Indeed, R. Wein is no historian. (I say this as someone who has listened to every single one of his 2 billion history tapes while driving back and forth from work.) ...he is an amusing popular lecturer... But it was a rare tape that did not contain at least one major historical howler, e.g... his recurrent puzzlement that Jews in Bavel did not seem as subject to early Christian persecution as elsewhere. He apparently thought that Roman/Christian power extended to the Ganges rather than the Euphrates, clearly unaware of the existence and geographical sway of the various incarnations of an entire, world class, Persian Empire.

2. To summarize Kaplan's thesis al regel achas, which

so irked R. Wein and the JO, Kaplan tries to demonstrate that a) both the terminology and concept of DT as currently practiced are modern innovations, b) the modern usage is actually antithetical to the classic halakhic process which depended on open discussion of differing points of view and critical give and take, while modern DT implementation seeks to stifle or de-legitimize discussion through ex-cathedra diktats (my para-phraseology, not Kaplan's). Kaplan also seeks to define what DT actually is according to its modern practitioners relying heavily on a description by R. B. Weinberger (published in JO so it's religiously correct) which seems to equate it, if only very distantly, with nevuah.

3. ... R. Wein simply does not... get it. He essentially concedes Kaplan's first terminological point right away, but then insists that it is the concept of DT, whatever it was called, which was ancient. However, he then proceeds to set up as a straw man such a watered down version of DT, essentially the assertion that Jews have always looked to their gedolim for general insight and advice about worldly matters, that Kaplan himself would surely have no problem agreeing with this innocuously true formulation. After triumphantly dispatching this straw man, R. Wein entirely skips over the central point that the modern formulation of DT is much more ambitious and doesn't attempt to refute Kaplan's notion that the modern concept is employed to cut off all debate on issues of interest by stigmatizing and de-legitimizing opposing viewpoints.

4. R. Wein also consistently questions Kaplan's personal motives...

5. ...What is truly appalling however, is R. Wein's misrepresentation of Kaplan's description of the sad events surrounding the departure of the Belzer Rebbe z"l from Europe to Israel. The facts are these. The Belzer's farewell speech (where he seemed to reassure his large flock that they would not come to harm) was censored in later published editions to delete these reassuring references. R. Wein (falsely) accuses Kaplan of portraying the Rebbe z"l as deceitfully preparing to abandon his followers while seeking to calm them with false reassurances while he made his unimpeded escape. He even accuses Kaplan of displaying "glee" at this "gotcha" of a gadol apparently making, in retrospect, a mistake. I found this... disgusting, since Kaplan nowhere accuses the Belzer z"l of such

behavior, nor imputed such motives to him... Recounting the factual story was, however, not irrelevant to a discussion of Kaplan's thesis and R. Weinberger's charedi concept of DT which does hint of a certain infallibility.

6. There are other significant R. Wein misrepresentations. E.g. R. Wein suggests that Kaplan essentially accuses R. Soloveitchik z"l of similar deceitful tailoring of a message to his audience when the Rav delivered his famous eulogy for R. Chaim Ozer to the US Aguda convention in the late 30s at a time the Rav was a Vice President of the Aguda. R. Wein then indignantly demolishes this straw man (which he created) as well. Contemplating how someone (like YU graduate Kaplan) who holds the Rav z"l in such esteem could possibly do such a thing, and which suggestion nowhere appears in Kaplan's description, is to realize how truly ludicrous R. Wein's interpretation is. To note that the Rav z"l was V.P. of Aguda in the 30s but an unlikely candidate to receive an invitation to join the Moetzes Gedolai Torah in the 60s is a commentary on changes wrought by life, experience, and an evolving intellectual engagement, not mendacity.

R. Wein is an entertaining and frequently insightful speaker... perhaps this article was an aberration...

VIII. FURTHER ON FLOOD AND MESORAH

from Yosef Bechhofer, Nov 23, 1994

[Quote from M. Shamah regarding Rambam's statement on Eternity and Rav Kook on evolution]

...What the Rambam says is that were Chazal not to have stated that the world is created, he would not have a problem with the eternity of matter from a theological standpoint. He does not say what you attribute to him, that were science to "refute" Chazal, he would accept science over Chazal... Could I please have precise chapter and verse citation as to where the Rambam says that scientific THEORY requires us to reinterpret Torah?

>> R. Kook knew the traditional world...

I believe I am part of the Traditional world, and I don't necessarily take the Six Days as twenty-four hour days. After all, Rabbeinu Bechaye accepted the Chazal of 1000 years duration each. You err, however, concerning

Rav Kook. Rav Kook never deals with the question of the Six Days - only Evolution, which is quite a different issue, as the series of consecutive worlds described by the Tiferes Yisroel and others might accommodate the literal Six Days and Evolution quite well. Indeed, Rav Kook's primary concern with Evolution was the application of that theory to social and moral development on a metaphysical and metahistorical plane. He does not, to the best of my knowledge... engage in Scriptural reinterpretation.

...Again, ... WHAT IS STOPPING YOU THEN FROM REGARDING YETZIAS MITZRAYIM AND MATTAN TORAH AS ALLEGORY? Clearly, the fact that the Torah clearly and unambiguously presents the account of the Mabul as historical fact does not sway you from regarding it as allegory - why not the cornerstones of our belief as well?

The proofs you cite from the Gemara in Zevachim are in fact dramatic proof of the exact opposite - Chazal took the Flood quite literally, and, indeed, have explicit disputes as to its very REAL extent and survivability!...

>>If Rishonim thought science disproved necromancy and rejected a literal interpretation... today, they might possibly interpret the Flood in a non-literal manner.

The Rishonim did not believe that SCIENCE repudiated necromancy. You would be correct, and this case would be parallel to ours, had a Rishon said something to the effect of: "Dr. X has brought convincing evidence that archaeological and paleontological records indicate that the Necromancer of Ov never existed. I therefore come to the conclusion that the Biblical Passage in question is an Allegory." In fact, of course, no Rishon would ever say such a thing. The very notion is preposterous. What Rishonim did say is something to the effect of: "My masters have taught me theology and I have learnt more theology from the Bible and the Talmud. Based on my understanding of the theology of Judaism, I come to the conclusion that the Biblical Passage concerning the Necromancer of Ov refers not to an act of witchcraft, which is invariably an illusion, but a prophetic vision that King Shaul, a known prophet, experienced."

Once more, I reiterate, the veracity of our entire religion is predicated on the Ramban and Kuzari's (among others) premise: Our traditions are authenticated by

600,000 men + women and children who vouchsafed the truth of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Mattan Torah. That Mesorah is grounded in the firm and rational position that parents would not perpetrate grand hoaxes - and even allegories - on their children generation after generation. The Flood has not come down to us in our Mesorah as anything other than historical fact...

IX. Second Nov. 23 Submission from Yosef Bechhofer

M. Shamah has raised the issue of the Rambam's view of Aristotle's theory... Let us examine the actual Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim II:25 (p. 328 in the Pines edition, which I quote):

"If, however, one believed in eternity... - the opinion of Plato - ...this opinion would not destroy the foundations of the Law... It would also be possible to interpret figuratively the texts in accordance with this opinion. And many obscure passages could be found in the texts of the Torah and others with which this opinion could be connected... However, no necessity could impel us to do this unless this opinion were demonstrated..."

In fact, this section - paraphrased by Rabbi Shamah - is in regard to PLATO's opinion. In regard to Aristotle's opinion, the Rambam writes in the previous section:

"...The belief in eternity the way Aristotle sees it - that is, the belief according to which the world exists in virtue of necessity,... and the customary course of events cannot be modified with regard to anything - destroys the Law in its principle, NECESSARILY GIVES THE LIE TO EVERY MIRACLE, and reduces to inanity all the hopes and threats that the Law has held out, unless - BY GOD! - ONE INTERPRETS THE MIRACLES FIGURATIVELY ALSO, as was done by the Islamic internalists; this, however would result in some sort of crazy imaginings."

(The emphasis is, of course, mine.) The text, I believe, speaks for itself...

X. MORE ON THE FLOOD, MESORAH AND NON-LITERAL INTERPRETATIONS

From M. Shamah Nov. '94

Yosef Bechhofer... recommends we should read the Rambam's words (and I thank him for correctly

indicating that I should have written Plato instead of Aristotle in my previous submission). The following is from the Moreh II:25, Pines translation p. 327-9:

Know that our shunning affirmation of the eternity of the world is not due to a [Torah] text... for we could interpret them as figurative.. Two causes are responsible for our not doing this or believing it. One... eternity of the world has not been demonstrated. Consequently in this case texts ought not to be rejected and figuratively interpreted in order to make prevail an opinion whose contrary can be made to prevail by means of various sorts of arguments... second... eternity the way Aristotle sees it... destroys the law in its principle, necessarily gives the lie to every miracle... If, however, one believed in eternity according to... Plato... this... would not destroy the foundations of the Law... It would also be possible to interpret figuratively the texts in accordance with this opinion... However, no necessity could impel us to do this unless this opinion were demonstrated. In view of the fact that it has not been demonstrated, we shall not favor this opinion... but rather shall take the texts according to their external sense and shall say: the Law has given us knowledge of a matter the grasp of which is not within our power and the miracle attests to the correctness of our claim.

This indicates that the Rambam held that Plato's theory of Eternity - since it doesn't destroy the foundations of Torah - might theoretically have been acceptable. However, as it wasn't demonstrated (and cannot so be) we reject it based on tradition. We do not reject on tradition a proposition that does not go against the foundation of the Torah if it was demonstrated. (The Rambam does not fully subscribe to the Ramban's and Kuzari's understanding of tradition.) It should be borne in mind that "demonstration" according to the Rambam was not limited to "hard" science but included logic, philosophy and metaphysics. When the logical evidence was overwhelming it was a demonstration, not a "theory," and could not easily be dismissed.

Therefore, [R. Bechhofer] is misreading this Rambam when he states: "What the Rambam says is that were Chazal not to have stated that the world is created, he would not have a problem with the eternity of matter from a theological standpoint. He does not say what you attribute to him, that were science to "refute"

Chazal, he would accept science over Chazal... Could I please have precise chapter and verse citation as to where the Rambam says that scientific THEORY requires us to reinterpret Torah?"

He continues:

>>You err, however, concerning Rav Kook...

The citation of Rav Kook's written recommendation (or urging) to teach Torah in accordance with evolution did not at all refer to his modifying the meaning of a day (the history of such modification also perhaps being an example of adapting interpretation to evidence) but to the fact that previously there was unanimity in understanding the verses describing the creations of the Six Days as a series of discrete creative activities, species created just as they presently are, each physically independent of the preceding creation. Accepting a form of the theory of evolution necessarily requires reinterpretation of Scriptural passages contrary to previously prevalent interpretation.

Regarding citation of some Rishonim's non-literal interpretation of the conversation between King Shaul and the "conjured" deceased prophet Shemuel, [he] writes:

>>The Rishonim did not believe that SCIENCE repudiated necromancy ...

But a number of Rishonim, in addition to interpreting necromancy (as well as magic) fraudulent, did not believe Shaul had a prophecy at that moment, the episode being understood as something of a mental apparition, contrary to both the literal appearance of the text and the apparent Talmudic understanding of it. It would appear the combination of science, logic and philosophy provided overwhelming evidence to prompt their forced interpretation of the text.

He further states regarding the Flood:

>> I am amazed at the blind faith that some have when it comes to "multi-disciplinary unanimity of numerous serious researchers," faith we would not give to our Mesorah. Scientific theory is constantly in flux!

Those with whom this debate began, who studied the subject extensively and found an immense amount of scientific evidence in many different fields indicating

there could not have been a Flood as literally described in Parashat Noah 4000 years ago, and find absolutely no evidence for such a Flood in any area of scientific endeavor, and find a prophetic allegorical interpretation of it meaningful, inspiring and in harmony with Torah and with the literary record of the ancient Near East, should not be thought of as having blind faith in science.

Scientific theory regarding the possibility of the Flood as literally described in Parashat Noah has not been in any sort of flux; evidence has been incessantly accumulating for generations, rendering a non-literal interpretation more likely.

XI. REGARDING AN ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION OF GAN EDEN from Yosef Bechhofer, Nov. 1994

I certainly do not claim to have done exhaustive research, but I would like to present what I have found concerning Gan Eden account as allegory.

In the first place, there is no source that I could find that holds that the whole of the Gan Eden account is allegory... allegorical interpretation[s]... pertain only to the nature of the “Nachash,” the serpent in the story. The opinion that the serpent was not a real live creature, while distinctly a minority view, is the view of the Sforunu on the episode (Bereishis 3:1) and the “Efodi” Commentary on the Moreh Nevuchim (Ibn Tibbon edition, II:30, pp. 51-52). In my opinion, this is clearly not the Rambam himself’s position, and I invite readers to peruse the Moreh themselves (Pines English translation, p. 356).

I note that the Abarbanel mentions that the Rambam himself holds the episode allegorical, but he clearly was influenced by the Rambam’s commentators, whom he calls the Rambam’s “friends.” The Abarbanel himself, however, is critical of the Rambam. [He] uses reasoning that I used in my previous postings: It is incorrect to take texts that the Torah conveys as actual factual description and interpret them allegorically! He does give some novel interpretations of the events in Gan Eden, but all true to a factual perspective.

The Sforunu’s view does have legitimacy, however, because it has a source in Chazal: “And the serpent: Rabbi Yitzchak said, this is the yetzer hara [evil

inclination]. R. Yehuda said, the serpent was an actual serpent. They came before Rabbi Shimon [b. Yochai]. He told them, certainly both opinions are one. The serpent was Samael and he appeared on [in?] the serpent, and the visage of the serpent is that of the Satan and all is one...” (Zohar Chadash 35b; Torah Sheleima vol. 2 p. 252)

(We see, BTW, from the Zohar Chadash that those that equate the serpent with the evil inclination thus need not dismiss its actual existence, but rather see it as “evil incarnate” (see the Nefesh HaChaim 1:6 in the note there.)

Now, to me it seems quite clear that R. Shimon b. Yochai rejected R. Yitzchak’s premise that it was only the yetzer hara and R. Yehuda’s premise that it was only an actual serpent, but rather explained to them that it was both. Nevertheless, the Sforunu is perhaps entitled to adopt the opinion of R. Yitzchak.

I could not find any Chazal or Rishon that takes the rest of the account of Gan Eden as allegorical. Indeed, the Ramban in his commentary 3:22 and in the “Toras HaAdam” (Kisvei Ramban vol. 2 p. 295 in the Mossad HaRav Kook edition) takes great pains to stress that Gan Eden and all the events that occurred therein actually existed in this world, and that references to a spiritual Gan Eden in Chazal refer to a parallel spiritual realm that also really exists, and that the events that transpired in Gan Eden below also transpired in that Gan Eden on high.

...Rabbenu Bechaye takes the view of the Ramban, of course. The Ibn Ezra as well is adamantly opposed to allegorical interpretation. (See Nechama Leibowitz’s “Iyunim” p. 14 as well.) So is R. Sa’adia Gaon.

...Bear in mind: a) [Sforunu] too takes the rest of the Gan Eden account as literal; b) that he was not adverse to the surreal (see his link of “Tumah” and demons in his “Kavanos HaTorah”); c) [he] weaves in and out of the allegory in 3:14. The last point causes me to wonder if the Sforunu is actually engaging here in exegesis - perhaps this is actually homiletics? Yet, be that as it may, the Sforunu only makes this jump here where he can cite verses from Nach (and where we find basis in Chazal) in which the term “Nachash” is used as an express allegory for the Evil Inclination and the Power of Fantasy. The Sforunu certainly did not take the Flood

as allegorical - there is no basis for that, even according to the Sfornu's non-mainstream approach here. Thus, although according to Tradition, as previously mentioned by other MJ posters, there is precedent - albeit slim - for an "allegorical" interpretation of a highly specific aspect of the Gan Eden account, there is no such tradition in the case of the Flood.

In closing, I note tangentially Mechy Frankel's long attack on Rabbi Wein's article on Da'as Torah. Because my name figured prominently at the beginning of that posting, I feel that I should state explicitly that I care not one whit whether Dr. Lawrence Kaplan or Rabbi Wein was correct in either of their assessments...

XII. REGARDING ALLEGORY IN GAN EDEN from M. Shamah

Regarding... Gan Eden, the Ralbag (1288-1344) interprets tree, command, serpent and punishment allegorically. He understands the Rambam to also interpret Hava (Eve) allegorically, but disagrees with him... from his commentary on Genesis 3... (my hasty translation):

You should know regarding the serpent that we must admit it is allegorical... however, regarding Hava, there is no compelling cause that she must be interpreted allegorically... and considering that she gave birth to Cain, Abel and Seth. However, it appears the Rav Hamoreh [Rambam] understood even Hava [in this context] allegorically, referring her to one of the human faculties... Some great later hakhamim erred and devised allegories (asu tsiyurim) regarding Cain, Abel and Seth and lost the intentions of the Torah. You should know that it is improper to devise allegories with Torah subjects except in places where it is compelling to be allegory, for if this measure was given over [freely] to men the Torah would fall and we would not be able to derive from it the intended benefit.

XIII. DAAS TORAH from: Elad Rosin, Nov 21, 1994

...I take him [Rabbi Shamah] to task on [stating]:

>>"The misinterpretation of 'Elu VeElu' and the recently-developed concept of "Daas Torah" are stifling legitimate Torah research and moving Orthodox

Judaism into an unenlightened age contrary to our glorious heritage."

...as I ponder the meaning and ramification of this statement I am quite troubled. [He] would have me believe that adhering to the guidelines of Daas Torah will cause the downward spiral of Torah research and study... I can say with complete confidence that being involved in yeshiva full-time, accepting from my Rabbaim the Torah which they received from their Rabbaim, and developing an outlook on life based on Daas Torah, does not in any way feel to be "stifling." Also I don't believe that it would take a large scale survey to determine that those same people who are supposedly "stifling" the "enlightened" age of Torah research are precisely those who are in fact most intensely engaged in it.

In addition... The concept of Daas Torah is as old as the world itself. It refers to the idea that if the Torah is all-encompassing, containing all the knowledge in the world, then those people best suited to dealing with the problems of this world are the same people who best understand the Torah, which holds ALL the solutions.

Our faith is one which may survive only through the continuance of the Mesorah. Without it, it is comparable to wandering the streets of a foreign city with a map in a language you don't understand. This Mesorah dictates that it is only if we follow the examples and direction of our Gedolim that we will be successful in our goal of Avodas Hashem.

...the misconception that we in this day and age are on a comparable level with our Great Sages, the Geonim, Rishonim, and Acharonim and that we are therefore entitled to our opinions on Halacha, Hashkafa, and Torah interpretation as they were... is the underlying problem...

XIV. TRADITION AND MODERN RESEARCH: RESPONSE TO ELAD ROSIN From M. Shamah, Nov. 22 '94

Elad Rosin complains about [a] sentence I wrote in a recent posting. He writes:

>> I can say with complete confidence that being involved in yeshiva full-time, accepting from my Rabbaim the Torah which they received from their Rabbaim, and developing an outlook on life based on

Daas Torah, does not in any way feel to be “stifling.”

Yes, Elad, you and many yeshiva students don't feel stifled by your curriculum and are happy to limit your learning to accepting from your rebbi what he received from his rebbi, etc. Would that it were so simple! Why disturb a blissful situation? If not that your submission was posted on a major forum I would not respond...

In most yeshivot, Torah is not being studied with the great insights the contemporary disciplines of history, archaeology, philology, etc. afford us. This applies even to numerous matters where our tradition admittedly is uncertain of the proper interpretation, where there are countless controversies upon controversies on how to interpret controversies, even regarding matters of realia. Often, the yeshiva student struggles with a problem for many hours, coming to a less than satisfactory conclusion, on an item that the “outside” scholarly world has long resolved. Sad to say, I have met more than one rosh yeshiva who sincerely thinks and teaches that the sun moves upward and away from the earth after setting, traverses from west to east above the firmament during the night, descending in the morning, based on a Talmudic passage. I have met rabbaim who genuinely believe that lice do not have eggs, and are created by spontaneous generation, also based on a Talmudic passage. Some rabbaim still teach their students the meaning of the word “pim” (1 Sam 13:21) as describing a “saw” not knowing that a number of “pim” coins have already been found. One rosh yeshiva told me they stopped studying Tanach in his yeshiva because there are too many problems understanding it [with the traditional commentaries].

In addition, the increasing technical knowledge gap in understanding Torah sources between the yeshivot and the outside world prevents the yeshivot from properly influencing the rest of the world, which says, Who wants to pay attention to unenlightened people?

Some relevant contemporary knowledge seeps into even fundamentalist circles. Due to a lack of expertly and systematically addressing such knowledge, the problem is often compounded when superficial reconciliations are proffered - such as the rosh yeshiva who said that yes, lice do have eggs, but they can not be seen by the naked eye, and therefore don't count. But lice eggs can be seen by the naked eye!

In prior times, our rabbis used whatever evidence and research tools were available to understand Torah more fully. This point cannot be overemphasized - it is indisputable and it is our true tradition. Because of certain historical forces in recent centuries this is not any longer the case in many Orthodox circles and we should work to reverse the trend before it leads us into an unenlightened age.

XV. FLAT EARTH SOCIETY, RABBINIC BRANCH From Shalom Carmy Nov 26, 1994

[Responding to postings skeptical of some attributions to rashe yeshivot]

Skepticism has been raised as to whether any contemporary Rabbinic scholars reject the heliocentric theory or assert the flatness of the earth. Such views are adduced in at least two collections known to me: 1. R. Menachem Mendel Kasher's monograph on the International Date Line 2. One of R. Harvey Korman's books on science and religion contains, and attempts to mollify, attacks on a previous book in which Korman had assumed a round earth revolving around the sun.

All halakhot derived from geocentric presuppositions known to me can readily be reinterpreted so as NOT to depend on dubious scientific foundations. Thus, to take one example, maran haRav Soloveitchik zt"l explained Rabbenu Tam's analysis of halakhic sunset while silently detaching it from its geocentric moorings (see Shiur on “Day and Night” in SHIURIM L'ZEKHER A”M Vol. I)

[A second Nov. 26 submission by Shalom Carmy]

RAV SOLOVEITCHIK ON LITERAL READING

I have scanned some of the remarks on the need for, and necessity of, literal reading of Scripture, without regard for inquiry into the message that the Torah is presumably communicating, and without consideration for the pressure of evidence coming from the various sciences. Frankly, I find some of the comments frightening... Maran haRav Soloveitchik zt"l, who was strongly affected by the Rambam's example in all areas, wrote the following under the title THE HALAKHIC MIND (119):

The frequent collisions of the church and positive

science will confirm our thesis that there are cognitive trends in the world of religion and that the homo religiosus is concerned with the sensible universe reality. It would be absurd to maintain that the interference of organized religion with scientific advancement was prompted by political or practical motives alone. The conflict arose rather from the essential cognitive interests of a religion challenged by science. The controversy did not rage so much about single scientific propositions as it did about an entire world perspective which was incommensurable with the basic religious cognitive outlook. Religion could not (and will not) recognize the scientifically postulated universe as its own.

XVI. Re: Flood and Massorah From Mark Steiner
Nov. 25 '94

Yosef Bechhofer says:

>>The Rishonim did not believe that SCIENCE repudiated necromancy... no Rishon would ever say such a thing. The very notion is preposterous. What Rishonim did say is: ...Based on my understanding of the theology of Judaism, I come to the conclusion that the Biblical Passage concerning the Necromancer of Ov refers not to an act of witchcraft, which is invariably an illusion, but a prophetic vision...

Rabbi Bechhofer writes as though "the rishonim" are an undifferentiated mass of rabbis. His words simply do not make sense for the Rambam, who paskened in Hilkhos Yesodai Hatorah and Hilkhos Talmud Torah that the study of physics and metaphysics is part of "gemara." Hence, for the Rambam, the distinction between science and theology simply does not exist. But I don't think that the point is well taken even for the Ramban, no lover of Greek philosophy or of the Rambam's addiction to it, that he would never have stated "science is Torah."

Consider the following passage from the Ramban's Commentary on the Torah, Gen IX,12:

"THIS IS THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT: The plain meaning (mimashma`) of this sign is that there was no rainbow at the Creation, and now Hashem created the rainbow... and [Chazal] said... that the rainbow was not made with its legs facing upward, looking as though from Heaven [G-d] is shooting with it [at humanity]...

but we have no choice but to believe the Greeks when they say that from the glow of the sun in moist air, the rainbow appears as a natural effect [toladah], since we see a rainbow-like image in a glass of water standing in the sun. And when we look further into the language of Scripture we can understand it thus, since it says I PLACED MY BOW IN THE CLOUD and not I PLACE... and the words MY BOW indicate that [G-d] had the rainbow from the beginning..."

Although the Ramban very often upheld the plain meaning of Scripture against allegorical interpretations based on philosophy (for example, he condemned interpreting the stories of communication or confrontation between human beings and angels as dreams), we see here that where Greek science was backed up by publicly available empirical evidence, Ramban was willing to reinterpret the plain meaning of the text, and uphold the non-"pshat" interpretation as the deeper meaning. That is, science, including Greek science, could be a key to understanding Torah itself, since if it hadn't been for Greek science, presumably the Ramban would not have thought of using the words "I PLACED" and "MY BOW" as referring to the creation of rainbows at the beginning of creation.

At the same time, the Ramban could easily have turned aside the evidence from the glass of water in the sun. He could have said, for example, that this effect was created together with the rainbow. He obviously chose not to do this. In a real sense, then, science --even for the Ramban-- was indispensable to understanding Torah.

XVII. TALMUD AND SCIENCE from Moshe Shamah, Nov. 29 '94

Binyomin Segal (MJ16#84) comments on the Talmudic controversy between the sages of Israel and those of the nations regarding the sun-earth relationship:

>>...Rabbi Meiselman (a PhD in math from I believe MIT with undergrad degree from Yale) told me that the rabbis' description (as understood by the rishonim) has not been proven false. ...the difference between a geocentric theory and a heliocentric theory is merely how complicated the math is. You can assume the earth stands still and compute the sun & planets motion, or assume the sun stands still and compute.

Mathematics can do wonderful things but cannot help us here. The Talmudic passage under discussion - in which the wise men of Israel said the wise men of the nations appear more correct - was not referring to the yearly sun-earth cycle but to the 24 hour cycle of each day. Decisive proof that day and night are neither the earth rotating around the sun nor the sun rotating around the earth (disproving both theories of that passage) can simply be brought from the astronauts' observations and our space cameras.

Yaacov Haber asked which rosh yeshiva believes that the sun rises at night. Shalom Carmy in MJ16#90 cited some contemporary published sources. The statements I heard - from prominent personages - date to the 1960's and 70's, so I will not cite them here as perhaps the parties changed their minds.

I suspect some authorities still hold the sun rises at night because of a statement specifically addressing this issue made by one of the greatest aharonim - one who has a large academic following in the yeshiva world and who lived in relatively modern times - Rav Akiva Eger. In Gilyon Hashas on Pesahim 94b (published in the 1830's) he cites Rabenu Tam that when the Gemara states the sages of the nations appear correct it was only in the realm of "evidence" but the truth of the matter is with the Sages of Israel, and that is the meaning of the prayer phrase "ubokeah halone rakiah and brings the sun forth from its place."

XVIII. WHERE THE SUN GOES AT NIGHT From Shalom Carmy, Dec 1, 1994

M. Shamah cites R. Akiva Eger on Pesahim 94 to show that some authorities held that Hazal, despite the apparent conclusion in the text, continued to disagree with the "Gentile sages." Several additional sources on this subject can be found in a footnote to Prof. Twersky's essay on R. Yosef ibn Kaspi. ...the volume, if I'm not mistaken, was also edited by Prof. Twersky (STUDIES IN JEWISH LITERATURE & _____??)

XIX. SCIENCE AND MESORAH: THE LICE PROBLEM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS from Moshe Shamah, Dec. 7, 1994

Regarding one defense of the Gemara's position that lice do not have eggs - explaining it to mean lice eggs cannot be seen by the naked eye and hence have no

halakhic import - I raised the objection that lice eggs can be seen by the naked eye. Danny Skaist asks (V16#82):

>Are lice eggs ALWAYS visible to the naked eye, immediately after being laid? Or are they laid dehydrated, and colorless until they absorb liquid (sweat) and expand, change color and become visible?

Mark Steiner (V17#1) asked how is it possible any rabbi may think lice don't have eggs in light of the famous Talmudic passage: "Thou art He who governs the world from the horns of the wild ox until the eggs of lice... [meqarnei re-emim `ad beitzei kinim]."

This topic requires some elaboration. In BT Shabbat 107b there is a Tannaitic controversy if it's permitted to kill lice on Shabbat (but not other insects). The Gemara explains the lenient view of the Rabbis as based upon the "fact" that lice do not reproduce through biogenesis in contrast to other insects; thus they are sufficiently dissimilar to those creatures regarding whom the prohibition of killing on Shabbat applies.

The passage cites objections from a memra and a baraita (Talmudic statements) which apparently state that lice do have eggs. One of those statements is the one cited by Mark Steiner quoted above. In order to reconcile these statements with the view that lice do not reproduce through biogenesis, the Gemara rejected their apparently clear meaning by ascribing a different meaning to the key words. The words that were thought to mean lice eggs - betse kinim - were interpreted to be the name of another species of some small creature (otherwise unattested).

If the Gemara sages thought that lice do have eggs but they are laid dehydrated and colorless until they absorb sweat etc. and therefore don't count for the purpose of considering lice living creatures similar to those living creatures prohibited to kill on Shabbat, why reject the simple meaning of the problematic passages? Merely state this distinction! The praise to He who sustains all the world's creatures is not affected by the kind of eggs lice have if they do indeed have eggs! That is one reason Danny's interpretation and others along this line appear incorrect.

Considering that the questioner in the Gemara (Abaye) had thought betse kinim meant lice eggs, it is far-fetched to explain that the answer cited a widely

accepted tradition - it is more logical to understand the answer as generated from the necessity to support a view. This view is codified by the Rambam, Hilkhot Shabbat 11:2, and Shulhan Arukh O.H. 316:9. Today, that we know lice do indeed have eggs, should we not consider interpreting the memra and baraita according to their apparent literal meaning? The point I originally had made was that not every concept in our tradition these past centuries is as sacred a principle as every other; some are not impervious to scientific research. Great as our tradition is, we should not attribute to it something that isn't there, namely, across-the-board infallibility even on matters prone to scientific proof.

The great Talmudic authority, Rabbi Yisshaq Lampronti (1679-1756) wrote in his encyclopedic work the Pahad Yisshaq (under "tseda"), that now that we know lice have eggs it should be prohibited to kill them on Shabbat, especially considering that it would only be a case of being stringent on a Talmudic leniency. He wrote that if the Talmudic sages would be familiar with the scientific evidence discovered subsequent to their time they would undoubtedly modify their ruling. He cites the Talmudic discussion (Pesahim 94b, recently discussed here on MJ) concerning astronomical matters in which the Jewish sages conceded to the non-Jewish sages as support for his position that the sages, even in their Talmudic statements, sometimes spoke according to their own [fallible] study and research. His position is reminiscent of that of the Rambam.

The Rambam writes (Guide, Part II Chapter 8): "And you already know that the opinion of the non-Jewish sages was accepted [by the Talmud] over that of the Jewish sages in these matters of astronomy, as explicitly stated 'the non-Jewish sages were victorious.' This is proper, for in speculative matters none spoke except in accordance with the results of his study, and therefore one must hold that which is established by proof."

The Pahad Yisshaq was told by another great authority that it may be true that lice have eggs, but perhaps the eggs come into existence through spontaneous generation. He responded that their eggs also come about through biogenesis. It is noteworthy that the Pahad Yisshaq wrote before the final decisive proof disproving spontaneous generation in living creatures was put forth by Louis Pasteur in the late 19th century.

(Regarding the halakha, there is room to disagree with the Pahad Yisshaq. If the Tannaim from whom the lenient ruling was derived held like the baraita and memra according to their apparent meaning, that lice do have eggs, then they never based their decision on spontaneous generation but on some other reason - whatever it may be. Thus, the lenient ruling would stand in any event.)

XX. Flood and Mesorah - Continuation From Yosef Bechhofer, Nov. 30, 1994 (MJ12#98)

I will be brief...

1. ...true, the Rambam entertains the theoretical possibility of reinterpretation under certain circumstances, but never gives any guidelines, as in his opinion, this never has happened. Who says here it has? You don't know what guidelines the Rambam used, and who gave you the right to make them up?
2. ...Rabbi Shama claims that this theory [evolution] requires allegorization of Biblical verses. Rav Kook never made that claim...
3. ...Shaul's vision of Shmuel as hallucination... is not allegory, a "mashal." You are interpreting the Flood as a "mashal" & to this I have objected.
4. Rabbi Shama cites scientific evidence that the Flood could not have occurred. Science, by definition, denies miracles. Krias Yam Suf could not have occurred either by scientific rules.
5. Rabbi Shama never answered why he accepts, if he does, the Exodus and Lawgiving as literal...

XXI. Mesorah, Science and The Flood From Moshe Shamah, Dec. 13, 1994

...in response to the first [question]... the Rambam must be defined more carefully to derive the full and proper meaning of the passage.

The doctrine because of which he "entertains the theoretical possibility of reinterpretation" was Eternity of the World, notwithstanding that it goes against Tradition. When and if compelling scientific demonstrations oppose non-critical issues of Tradition he makes it clear we go with the demonstrations. An

example of a non-critical issue of Tradition is, in his opinion, Creation, as denial of it does not undermine the foundations of the Torah. It happens to be the demonstration against Creation was not compelling, so we go with Tradition. Although he often speaks of the importance of Tradition, he does not imbue it with the same degree of accuracy and authenticity as do the Kuzari, Ramban et al. We cannot say this is not a guideline of sorts. As interpretation of the Flood as a prophetic allegory would not deny critical beliefs as the Rambam defines them - a literal Flood undoubtedly being a lesser value in Judaism than Creation - the Rambam might very well so interpret it in the light of compelling scientific evidence.

Nevertheless, the questions of guidelines and who has the right to define them are indeed important. But, even aside from the considerations of the previous paragraph, it is just not correct to say the Rambam “never gives any guidelines [for reinterpretation], as in his opinion, this never has happened.” In the case of Eternity it has not happened, but the Rambam never implied that it never has happened that there were or are times when it may be necessary to reinterpret our tradition in the light of scientific evidence. For one of many relevant statements he made on this general topic, we may read his letter on Astrology written to the Community of Marseilles when he was about sixty years of age. In it he addresses the contradiction between his anti-astrology views arising from scientific and philosophic research and many explicit statements of Talmudic sages expressing belief in astrology. (Many of these statements, it should be noted, interpret Biblical verses and themes according to astrologic beliefs.) Following an attack on astrology, he states:

I know you may find statements of individuals among the sages of truth, our rabbis, peace be upon them, in the Talmud, Mishnah and Midrashim, from whose words it appears that at the moment of formation of a person the stars caused thus and thus. Do not let this disturb you. For it is not proper to abandon practical halakha to pursue questions and answers, and similarly it is not proper to abandon rational views whose proofs have been demonstrated, letting go of them, to hang upon opinions of an individual from among the [Talmudic] sages, peace be among them. For possibly something was hidden to him at that moment, or perhaps his words comprise a hint at

something, or perhaps he only said them for the particular time or for some specific incident that occurred. Do you not see that many Torah verses are not to be taken literally, and being that it was rationally demonstrated that it is impossible for them to be taken literally, the Targum translated them in a rationally acceptable manner? A man should never cast his rationality in back of him, for our eyes are in front of us, not in the back. I have thus related my heart to you with my words.

Here the Rambam gives some guidelines and expects - or more correctly persuades - his readers to abide by them. The rational proofs against astrology - especially in his days - were nowhere near the order of magnitude of the rational difficulties with a literal interpretation of the Flood today. Serious scholars contested the science of medieval anti-astrology proofs; no serious scholar contests the science of the anti-literal Flood interpretation. Serious scholars may perhaps disagree based on faith but not on science. The Rambam and his school of traditional Jewish thought insist on a harmony of Torah, logic, science and faith.

When [one] asks, “who gave you the right” to decide when reinterpretation is acceptable, my natural tendency is to agree with him - who am I, and why contest what is being taught in many great yeshivot. But too much is at stake - it is not just the truth and glory of Torah although that should be motivation enough. Traditional Judaism has lost the allegiance of enormous numbers of our intellectuals and is regularly losing more partly because we haven't honestly and courageously interpreted Torah in harmony with compelling scientific discoveries. It was just such an encounter with a potential defector from Judaism that prompted Marc Shapiro to begin this MJ thread. Many of us have experienced such encounters. Additionally, the resulting defensiveness and lack of intellectual integrity that have set in in some traditional circles have enormous insidious ramifications in a number of areas and are partly to blame for many of the ills that plague Orthodox Jewry today. This is not the time and place to explicitly discuss these matters.

For several centuries the gedolim, particularly in Eastern Europe, had to combat the threat of wholesale defection from traditional Judaism by insulating yeshiva and community from general academic culture. This included discouraging, sometimes prohibiting,

exposure to an important and vital part of our tradition. This policy was necessary then and there as a hora'at sha'ah (temporary measure) but has now become counterproductive. Although it may be difficult today to tread in the path of the Rambam and other harmonizing luminaries of old, it appears we have no choice but to recognize their relevance and should welcome the movement in their direction. We should mobilize our brightest and best to lead the way. To the question "who gave you the right," I must answer it is a sacred responsibility of our tradition.

XXII. Moshe Shamah's Response to R. Bechhofer's Points 2-5 Dec. 14, '94

>>2. ...Rav Kook never made that claim...

It is obvious that if we posit G-d's creative activity working through evolutionary circuitry, verses such as "G-d formed man dust from the earth"; "G-d cast a deep sleep on man and as he slept took one of his ribs... and built it into woman" and many other verses necessarily require new, non-literal and sometimes allegorical interpretation. (BTW, I have been asked for a copy of Rav Kook's statement on evolution, which I carefully read and reread years ago in an early edition of his works and to which I have been referring from memory. It appears that it is not readily available today. As far as I can determine it has been expunged from recent editions. This probably is another example of zealous posthumous censorship.)

>>3. ...the Rishonim who regarded Shaul's vision of Shmuel as hallucination...[do] not [mean] a "mashal."

The right to interpret passages non-literally, against the previously prevalent consensus of understanding them, in order to reconcile them with results of science, is also the right to interpret a passage as prophetic allegory.

>>4. ...Science, by definition, denies miracles...

G-d governs the world and science is at his disposal. He reconfigures the forces of nature as and when He wills to achieve His purposes. His relationship with the world is beyond so-called "scientific rules." However, there is no reason whatsoever to assume - and it is contrary to our common sense to believe - that He totally eradicated the effects of His intervention concerning an event such as a literal Flood is supposed to have been, recreating vegetative growth, creature development and

acclimation, natural formations, ancient records, structures, ruins and remains and myriad details in such a way that it will appear to man as if there hadn't been the Flood.

>>5. Rabbi Shama never answered why he accepts, if he does, the Exodus and Lawgiving as literal...

A literal Exodus and Lawgiving are much more essential elements of our historical tradition and much less problematic than is a literal interpretation of the Flood. Some reasons... (there probably is some degree of metaphoric language and detail here)... are because the Biblical narrative in what might be called a "modern" historical context indicates it; they are specifically attested to by prophets as basically literal; they are so transmitted by sages and they are deeply intertwined with the Torah legal code.

XXIII. On Torah and Science From Howard Reich, Dec. 12, '94

Rabbi Bechhofer wrote in part:

>>science, by definition, denies miracles. Krias Yam Suf could not have occurred either by scientific rules.

...I wish only to bring to the attention of those MJ'ers who would find of interest the existence of a study that was published in the March 1992 issue of the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society. The authors of the study analyzed possible oceanographic processes resulting from a strong wind of 10-hour duration, and concluded that both the crossing of Yam Suf and the Egyptians' drowning, in the words of the authors, "could have been the result of known natural phenomena" and "are certainly possible from a scientific point of view..."