

**B”H.**

## **Promoting Torah-true Beliefs**

In continuation to our previous articles about the Rebbe’s relationship with The Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists (AOJS), and his interest in bringing awareness to the fact that science does not contradict Torah, we present the final and last article in the current series. This article will explore the Rebbe’s advocacy to promote undistilled Torah-true beliefs, and the insistence of this matter which Rebbe expressed to the AOJS.

Throughout the years, the Rebbe encouraged and prodded different individuals of various degrees of influence and religious leadership in the Jewish world regarding their methods of disseminating Torah and Mitzvos.

The Rebbe said that what the youth needed was clear guidance, and unequivocal leadership with regard to the observance of Torah and Mitzvos. This, the Rebbe said, would imbue the youth with the conviction and feeling that Torah and Mitzvos are the ultimate truth.

The Rebbe actively advocated for Yiddishkeit to be presented in its pure and unadulterated form. The Rebbe explained that presenting a watered-down and half-hearted form of Yiddishkeit was self-contradictory and self-defeating. He stated that cautioning for equivocation seemed to be a result of an inferiority complex; it seemed that those who promoted this felt ashamed of being regarded as observant Jews.

The Rebbe wrote ”I need hardly elaborate upon the terrible consequences of such an inferiority complex. Suffice it to remember that it is largely responsible for the so-called "lost generation" which has become more than a coin word. It is truly a cause for shame and pain when one sees an orthodox young man who has both a Rabbinical ordination as well as an academic diploma, yet the whole emphasis is placed on the college degree without mentioning the fact that he is also a Rabbi, except perhaps absent-mindedly<sup>1</sup>.”

This campaign played itself out in regards to the publications of the AOJS<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default\\_cdo/aid/2085070/jewish/The-Jewish-Scientists-Agenda.htm](https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/2085070/jewish/The-Jewish-Scientists-Agenda.htm).

This letter seems to have been written to a member of the AOJS. However, for a number of reasons, this writer is not entirely certain that it was written to the organization per say; rather it may have been written personally to an individual who was within the organization.

<sup>2</sup> While the Rebbe had in the past maintained a more private relationship with Jewish influencers regarding this matter; at this point, the Rebbe began a public campaign in this regard.

In addition to what we discussed in our first article with regards to Dr. Offenbacher, we also find a letter of the Rebbe sent (on the 16th Cheshvan, 5723 (November 13, 1962)) to Dr. Herbert Goldstein , professor of nuclear engineering at Columbia University, who was at the time the president of the AOJS.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a<sup>3</sup> diverse array of views were expressed in the pages of the AOJS journal “Intercom”, with regard to the view of the Torah and evolution. These opinions were presented in the journal by both members of the AOJS, and people who were not officially members of the AOJS.

Things came to head in an exchange in the August 1971 issue. Dr. Fred Bohensky, a biology teacher in Staten Island Community College and in various Jewish parochial schools penned an article titled: “Straddling the Fence in Science Education”. Bohensky wrote that while ancient earth — seeing the world as billions of years old — can be accommodated by Jewish sources, “it is the question of man’s origin that cannot be compromised ... Here one must take a stand one way or the other.” Bohensky added that in order to help his students through this very emotionally difficult conundrum, he would explain to them that he had chosen belief in special creation over evolution due to his commitment to Jewish tradition — and if one believes that one’s parents and rabbis form a chain reaching all the way back to Hashem’s revelation to Moshe Rabeinu, then this must be the response<sup>4</sup>.

Dr. Harry Faier, a theoretical physicist, and one of the editors of the periodical, strongly dissented to this view, and responded with a piece titled: “Evolution, Creation, etc<sup>5</sup> 6.”

In 1973, The Rebbe's views on evolution made it to the front pages of Intercom<sup>7</sup>. In that issue, Faier printed two letters he received from the Rebbe, who had written to the editor sharing his

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The Rebbe emphasized the basic principle of the Jewish way of life is, "Know him in all your ways." (בכל דרכי דעהו.) The life's mission of every Jew is to acknowledge Hashem even in the simplest pursuits of daily life. All the more so does this apply to the more essential aspects of one's life, especially in the case of one who has been endowed with special qualifications, knowledge, and distinction, etc., all of which place him in a position of influence. These are gifts of Divine Providence, which the Jew is duty-bound to consecrate to the service of G d, to disseminate G-dliness through the Torah and Mitzvos to the utmost of his ability.

The Rebbe went on to praise Dr. Goldstein and his abilities, and appealed to him urgently, to use his position as the president of the AOJS, and put the whole weight of his prestige as a leading scientist behind a resolute effort for the cause of Torah and Mitzvos.

This letter is reproduced in full here:

[https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default\\_cdo/aid/1917050/jewish/Influencing-the-Two-Tendencies-of-Todays-American-Youth.htm](https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/letters/default_cdo/aid/1917050/jewish/Influencing-the-Two-Tendencies-of-Todays-American-Youth.htm)

It should be noted, that the editors of this article incorrectly named Dr. Offenbacher as the recipient of the letter and president of the AOJS at the time. This is however incorrect. Dr. Offenbacher was at the time on sabbatical in Israel, and Dr. Goldstein was, in fact, the president during that period of time.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the following section has been adapted from “Agreeing to Disagree: American Orthodox Jewish Scientist’s Confrontation with Evolution in the 1960s,” Rachel S. A. Pear , Cambridge University Press, Volume 28, Issue 2, Summer 2018, PP. 206-237.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Bohensky, “Straddling the Fence in Science Education,” Intercom 12 (1971): 12.

<sup>5</sup> Harry Faier, “Evolution, Creation, etc.,” Intercom 12 (1971):14.

<sup>6</sup> This debate which will be elaborated upon shortly, resurfaces in “Challenge.”

<sup>7</sup> “Two Letters from Lubavitch,” Intercom 14 (May 1973,) pp. 3–6. These letters were published two years after being penned by the Rebbe. It is unclear as to why it took two years to publish the letters.

In this same issue of Intercom, readers were introduced to the Soviet Jewish scientist Dr. Herman Branover, who had just been permitted to emigrate from the U.S.S.R.

distress at the recent Intercom articles promoting non-literal interpretations of Genesis. The Rebbe wrote as follows: "To put it bluntly, some orthodox Jewish scientists seem ashamed to declare openly their adherence to such basic tenets of the Torah as, for example, that G-d created Adam and Chava [Eve] ... When I ask them, squarely, how do they reconcile this lack of conviction in basic Torah matters ... The answer was that they have managed to compartmentalize their day - Tefila [prayer] and Torah [Bible] etc. being one department, science another.

The Rebbe also specified that he believed that the Kedushah of Shabbos is dependent on a literal reading of Chumash Breishis: "The attempt to 'reinterpret' the text of the first section of Breishis [Genesis] to the effect that it speaks of periods or eons, rather than ordinary days ... is not only uncalled for, but it means tampering with the Mitzvah [commandment] of Shabbos [the Sabbath] itself... For if one takes the words 'one day' out of their context and plain meaning, one ipso facto abrogates the whole idea of Shabbos as the 'seventh day' stated in the same context. The whole idea of Shabbos observance is based on the clear and unequivocal statement in the Torah: 'For in six days G-d made the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested' - days, not periods<sup>8</sup>."

### **The Rebbe's letter as printed in the anthology Challenge.**

In the month of Sivan 5730, the NCSY published an anthology entitled, "A Science and Torah Reader."

In the volume's introduction, the editor notes that "we have occasionally offered varying approaches in resolving what appear to be conflicts between science and Torah."

The second entry, was a letter of the Rebbe to a student who felt that his loyalty to Torah was being weakened, by his difficulty in reconciling his scientific ideas and the Torah's account of creation. The Rebbe's piece specifically laid forth the "young" age of the earth — less than six thousand years<sup>9</sup>, and how one should relate to scientific theories<sup>10</sup>.

In 5736, the AOJS published their own anthology, entitled, "Challenge: Torah Views on Science and Its Problems.", which dealt with the interaction between Torah and science. This book was co-edited by two British AOJS members, the abovementioned Dr. Cyril Domb and Rabbi Aryeh Carmell.

In this volume, the editors presented a spectrum of views which they believed reflected "authentic Torah" perspectives on evolution. On the one hand, there were sections which argued

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<sup>8</sup> The presentation of these letters, have been dramatically condensed for the article. In order to capture the full picture, it suggested that one read the letters in their complete entirety, which can be viewed here: [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/112235/jewish/Apologetics.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112235/jewish/Apologetics.htm) .

<sup>9</sup> The editors introduced the Rebbe's position, noting that "The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi M. M. Schneerson) is the revered leader of a group as firmly committed to spreading Jewish truths among the masses as they are committed to living these truths themselves. The Rebbe's spiritual and intellectual leadership extends beyond the confines of his own 'Hassidim' (followers), and he is consulted by Jews of varying convictions on all levels of communal and civic life."

<sup>10</sup> This letter is available on request.

for the consideration of views that accept evolution. On the other hand, the editors also included standpoints which were highly critical of accepting evolution as a credible viewpoint. While former view was held by some of the AOJS scientists, Dr. Domb chose to publish the Rebbe's letter on the subject (previously published in "A Science and Torah Reader" anthology) as the first essay in the section which dealt with "creation and evolution". Only afterwards were the differing views of totally different standpoints published.

In the introduction to the article, the editor's note that "Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, is one of the outstanding Torah personalities of the present generation ... During the past 25 years his inspiration and guidance have led to an enormous expansion in the scope and activities of the movement, and branches now exist all over the Jewish world. The Rebbe has paid particular attention to estranged Jewish intellectuals, and the letter reproduced here was written to one of these who was experiencing difficulty reconciling Science and Judaism."

This was notwithstanding the fact that Domb and the Rebbe had differing views with regards to the validity of the theory of evolution<sup>11</sup>.

"The theory of evolution has many scientific headaches and shortcomings," Domb acknowledged. "But there is no reason why a religious Jew should not accept the theory as a current summary of biological knowledge."

The Rebbe, however, held such a view as apologetic, stating that the biblical account of creation was literal and precluded the possibility of the world being billions of years old.

Although the Rebbe disagreed with Domb, he continued to encourage the scientist to write, and advocated for other scientists to submit articles for Challenge.

Conversely Domb wrote about the Rebbe in the following manner, "I am not a Chabad follower, but I am a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I considered him an outstandingly wise and extraordinarily able personality, and would treat any advice he gave me seriously<sup>12</sup>."

### **Jewish Meditation**

We will now make mention one more anecdote which is not connected to our subject matter; however, in a roundabout way, it does give us an understanding as to the Rebbe's regard for the AOJS.

In Adar 1, 5738 the Rebbe sent out a confidential memorandum asking for "doctors specializing in neurology and psychiatry," to develop a meditation program that could serve as an alternative for the popular meditative imports from the Far East, such as Transcendental Meditation (TM.) Dr. Yehuda Landes, a psychologist in Palo Alto, California, responded positively and soon launched a pilot project.

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<sup>11</sup> See the sources in the previous article note 10.

<sup>12</sup> See source in the previous article on Prof. Cyril Domb note 14.

This resulted in extensive back and forth correspondence with the Rebbe and Dr. Landes, with regard to the direction which this program would take.

It is not my intention to discuss this entire matter here<sup>13</sup>; however, I would like to make note, that in a letter (dated 15 Menachem Av 5738) the Rebbe writes, "It would also be well to get in touch and enlist the cooperation of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists — National Office: 116 E. 27th St., NYC 10016. (Their Annual Convention is scheduled for next week)."

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Readers that have any additional light to share on the content of this article are encouraged to do so in the comments, or by emailing, N.Ahavaschesed@gmail.com.

P.S. It would be well if you could take time out to discuss the matter with Dr. (Sholom Zeev - Seymour W.) Applebaum, M.D., formerly of L.A. and presently in Kew Gardens, N.Y., who is also in this field. He has been corresponding with me.

It would also be well to get in touch and enlist the cooperation of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists - National Office: 116 E. 27th St., NYC 10016. (Their Annual Convention is scheduled for next week).

Also with Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov of Philadelphia, Pa., with whom our Secretariat has discussed the problem.

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on this matter, see Rabbi Dr. Natan Ophir (Offenbacher), "The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Call for a Scientific Non-Hasidic Meditation," in B'Or Ha'Torah, vol. 22, PP. 109-123. Rabbi Yehoshua P. Landes, "The Inside Story of the Founding of Jewish Meditation," B'Or Ha'Torah, Vol. 23, PP. 171-188.