



Ask The Rabbi...

Researched at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College
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This edition contains: 1. The New World
2. Yiddle Riddle

Michael Davidoff of Los Angeles wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

It is hard for me to understand the fact that many relics such as dinosaur bones, cave art, and rock formations are thought to exist for millions of years. I asked this to a local Rabbi. He told me that dinosaur bones were planted by Hashem to test our faith. I do not really understand this answer. How can you explain this apparent contradiction with the Jewish calendar?

Dear Michael,

The resolution of the apparent contradiction between the "scientific" age of the universe and the Jewish date of 5755 years since Creation has two standard approaches:

- The scientific estimate is true, and the text of Genesis can be reconciled: For example, saying that the six "days" are not really days, but rather six "time periods."
- The Jewish date is true, and the scientific estimate must be explained (away).

Several satisfactory explanations following the first approach can be found in the book *Challenge* and I recommend that you look there. Since you asked about the second approach, I will address it.

It's definitely **possible** for G-d to create a world that looks older than it is. Adam was created as an adult. Observing him a few minutes after he was created, you would assume him to be at least twenty years old. The Garden of Eden had full-grown trees laden with fruit. According to the Torah text, these trees were no more than three days old.

Let's take this idea a step further: A star 10 million light-years from the earth **could have** been created with its light **already** reaching the earth. The star would appear 10 million years old, even though it was just created.

Now you're probably thinking, "But why would G-d do that? Why create bones, artifacts, partially decayed radium, potassium-argon, uranium, red-shifted light from space, etc. — all pointing to an age which is not true?"

Strictly speaking, this isn't a problem. **Not knowing why G-d did something doesn't prove that He didn't do it.** But I'll try to answer this anyway:

The purpose of this world is to **hide** G-d's presence. This allows us to exercise free will. In fact, the Hebrew word for "world" — *olam* — means "hiding." Evidence which "hides" the age of the universe could be part of G-d's general "policy" of hiding.

Now you might say "According to this we can **never** rely on our observations. Doesn't this approach negate **all** scientific findings?"

No. This approach merely questions evidence that contradicts **other** reliable evidence.

Let me give you an analogy: Suppose George is accused of murder. We find his fingerprints at the scene of the crime, the murder weapon on his premises, and he has a motive. The defense argues that George was framed. Will anyone take that seriously? But suppose that reliable witnesses testify that they saw George 100 miles from the scene at the time of the murder. Suddenly it becomes appropriate to take the "frame-up" defense seriously.

Here too, scientific observations have to be understood in light of the **other** available evidence — i.e., the Torah. The Jewish People were *eyewitness* at Sinai who *observed* the giving of the Torah (hence the term "observant Jews?"). For us the Torah's account of events is first-hand testimony. Therefore, the idea that scientific observations *might* be misleading should be taken seriously.

Speaking of archeological finds that ought not be taken too seriously, did you hear this one?

Caveman 1: Ugh!

Caveman 2: Ugh! Ugh!

Caveman 1: Stop changing the subject!

Sources:

- *Challenge*, Carmell and Domb, 1978, Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, pp. 124-41, 164-75.
- *ibid.*, pp.142-49.

Yiddle Riddle:

I'm too young to be *Parve*. Who am I?
Answer next week...

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