

Closing Statement regarding Rabbi Saul Zucker's responses

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I am not going to issue a lengthy rejoinder detailing all the misrepresentations and strained and unreasonable arguments in Zucker's latest response, for several reasons. One is that I am sure that by now, 99.99% of people have made up their mind on this issue, one way or the other, and are not going to be swayed by further arguments (or even bother to read them). Another is that in the realm of internet publishing, such debate would go on *ad infinitum*; the one who has the last word, and effectively "wins," is the one who has more time, obstinacy and sticking power. Zucker would constantly respond to whatever I write and would never be convinced, for reasons that become increasingly clear.

In my previous article, I commented on the strange phenomenon of Zucker closing his *Hakira* article with a special section which declares that the article provides a model for a "methodological approach" of how to approach such topics. He introduced that article as being written "with an eye toward factual accuracy and logical analysis," and concluded by declaring that he has subjected the topic "to the rigors of careful examination for factual accuracy and the application of logical analysis." All these proclamations were extremely odd; obviously every writer feels that they do this, but few tout this claim about themselves, since it is rather meaningless. In Zucker's latest missive, he again introduces his arguments with a declaration of how he will be engaging in "rigorous methodology" with "careful logical analysis." Since Zucker engages in the strange practice of continually praising himself in this way, I feel compelled to point out that in fact, I would suggest precisely the opposite. This is not mathematics; the arguments in each direction are not based on logic but rather on reason, and reason is greatly susceptible to bias. Now, with regard to the matter of bias, Zucker wrote on my website as follows: "I can categorically state that I have no tendency that prevents an unprejudiced consideration of this question." I was utterly astounded to read this; I don't know how anyone can ever categorically state that they have no bias about anything, much less about a sensitive topic such as this, and certainly not when they have a very obvious bias! Rabbi Zucker is a product of Yeshivah Bnei Torah, an unusual institution which views Rambam's philosophical approach to Judaism as being the sole correct, authentic and traditional form of Judaism.¹ In Zucker's *Hakira* article, he stated that those who staunchly oppose corporealism – which includes himself – would not be able to praise or even cite from a corporealist. If he takes such an approach, he obviously is not especially open (to put it mildly) to the suggestion that Rashi was a corporealist.

The most important and revealing part of R. Zucker's missive is where he strives to explain that the examples of the Rishonim respecting corporealist Torah scholars should not be understood at face value. Zucker argues that Ramban was motivated by pedagogical purposes when being respectful in his letter to corporealist rabbis, and did not truly respect them; Raavad could not possibly be speaking

¹ See the essays at <http://www.ybt.org/default2.html> for a sample of YBT's unique approach.

literally when he spoke about greater and better people than Rambam who were corporealists;² etc., etc. Regardless of whether these arguments are true, one thing is clear: they reveal that R. Zucker himself does not see corporealists as being worthy of respect. Since that is the case, obviously no amount of evidence will convince him that Rashi was a corporealist. There is thus no point in arguing with him.

One claim that Zucker made was fascinating in its novelty. He was forced to admit that there were many corporealists in France, but relegated them to being the masses rather than the rabbis. Zucker is thereby faced with the question of why Rashi never attempts to straighten them out, as did all the other Rishonim (even those who did not have any corporealists in their own communities). To address this stark problem, Zucker (p. 22) argues that Rashi deliberately allowed the masses to continue with these heretical beliefs, for their own benefit, while concealing the doctrine of incorporeality so that only sophisticated readers will be able to draw it out from his writings! Applying such a Straussian mode of interpretation to Rambam, who explicitly states that he will be concealing hidden meanings and giving contradictory statements, is one thing; applying it to Rashi is a very different matter. Still, considering that Zucker views Rambam's approach to Judaism in general as being the correct, authentic and traditional approach, it is not surprising that not only does he see Rashi as possessing Rambam's philosophical views, but also his esoteric style of concealing hidden meanings that contradict his superficial meaning.

² Zucker's argument for this is that Raavad frequently describes Rambam's rulings as "nonsense," and thus obviously should never be interpreted literally in his comments about Rambam. Apparently Zucker cannot bring himself to believe that there were those who really did not "hold of" Rambam.