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The Editor

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To the Editor:

I am writing with a question concerning Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller's recent article, "Evolution Vs. Intelligent Design." In discussing the conflict between the order of history given in *Ma'ase Bereishis* (where plants precede the luminaries and birds precede animals) and that concluded by modern science (which is the opposite), Rabbi Keller writes as follows:

As a result, one of this school has "allegorized" *Ma'ase Bereishis* and written *Ein mukdam ume'uchar beTorah* – that the account of creation is not in chronological order. This is absurd when the Torah speaks of *yom echad, yom sheni* – in numbered sequence.

While I have indeed used such a suggestion, and of course there are no traditional sources addressing the chronology given by modern science, the basic idea that *Ma'ase Bereishis* is a conceptual rather than chronological sequence is by no means my own. None other than Rambam was of this view, according to the consensus of the commentators to *Moreh Nevuchim* who deciphered its cryptic approach:

It is in describing the hierarchy in reality (of everything in the universe) that we say Day One, Day Two—but not that they were created in a progressive sequence, as appears from the simple meaning of Scripture. Rather, they were all created simultaneously. Only as a reflection of their purpose and importance does the Torah speak of the first, second, third, and the rest of the days. Understand this. (*Shem Tov* to *Moreh Nevuchim* 2:30)

Rambam held that the six days were not time-periods at all, and that the sequence of "days" is therefore not a chronological sequence. *Akeidas Yitzchak*, while strongly disputing this view, also points out that it was indeed Rambam's position:

The Ray, the Guide, gave the reason for the mention of days in the Beginning by explaining the statement of the Sages, who said that "all the products of Creation were created in their full form" (Talmud, *Chullin* 60a); in other words, everything was created at the first instant of creation in their final perfect form. Thus the mention of an order of Creation is not describing the sequence of days; rather, [but the days are simply serving] to differentiate the status of [the elements of creation] and to make known the hierarchy of nature. This was [Rambam's] major esoteric doctrine concerning Creation as those who are understanding can discern from that chapter which is devoted to this extraordinary account. (*Akeidas Yitzchak, Bereishis, Shaar* 3)

Abarbanel likewise acknowledges that this is widely known to be Rambam's view, before he disputes it:

The Rambam believed that there were not separate creative acts on six days, but rather everything was created on one day, in a single instant. In the work of Creation, there is mention of "six days" to indicate the different levels of created beings according to their natural hierarchy; not that there were actual days, and nor that there was a chronological sequence to that which was created in the acts of Genesis... This is the view of the Rambam which he considered as one of the major secrets of the Creation. He tried to conceal this view with ingenuity, as can be seen in his words there. But Ralbag went and spread it, revealing his secret, as did Narboni and the other commentators to his work; they uncovered his secret and publicized it. (Abarbanel, Commentary to Bereishis, p. 10)

Ralbag was also of the view that the sequence of Ma'ase Bereishis is non-chronological, and further stated that the order of Ma'ase Bereishis is deliberately altered from the conceptual order that he accepted based on the philosophy of his day (something with far less basis than modern science):

You already know from the preceding that God's generating the universe did not occur in time, since [its generation] was from nothing to something. Likewise, our Rabbis agreed that the heavens and the earth were created simultaneously... It is therefore apparent that the description of creation as being completed in six days is not in the sense that, for example, the first day was [prior] to the second as one [whole] day. Rather, they said this in order to show the priority amongst various created things...

According to the natural scheme of things, the creation of [the luminaries] should have taken place on the third day, for the heavens and the heavenly bodies are causally and ontologically prior to the elements and that which is derived from them (and yet which the Torah describes as having been created earlier)... The Torah intended through this ordering of the account of creation to awaken man through his reason to the secrets of existence... It does this by making him pause.... If it included nothing that would make a person pause, he would not study the Torah carefully, and this would be the cause that prevented him from reaping its benefits. Indeed, the change in the ordering of creation in this matter was precisely for this reason...
(*Milchamos Hashem* 2:6)

My question is this: When Rabbi Keller described this view as "absurd," was he aware that it is the view of Rambam and Ralbag – and if so, why did he not mention this? And if he was not aware that it was their view, would he now still describe it as "absurd"?

Of even greater importance is that these citations also demonstrate that Rambam was always understood as interpreting Ma'ase Bereishis in a non-literal manner. This is contrary to Rabbi Keller's description of such an explanation of Rambam's position as "unthinkable."

Sincerely,

Natan Slifkin