

A Response To Rabbi Aharon Feldman's Article
THE SLIFKIN AFFAIR – ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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To the great surprise of many, Rav Aharon Feldman, Rosh Yeshivah of Ner Israel, has written a lengthy justification of the ban on Rabbi Slifkin's books. It is already a matter of public record that Rabbi Feldman told many people over the last year that he was deeply distressed by the ban and was opposed to it (and, of course, he did not sign on to it). He even said this almost explicitly in a lecture to the student body at Ner Israel, where he stated that one must respect the drive of those who fight heresy, even when they are wrong (sic). Yet several months after matters had been dying down, Rav Feldman has changed his position entirely. It is not wrong for a person to change their mind, but one must wonder why his essay makes no mention of his long period of opposition to the ban.

In this article I will respond to Rabbi Feldman's points. Many of the points that I shall raise are not of my own original insights, but rather are the results of conversations that I have had with others, and discussions that I have read on the Internet and elsewhere. I consider it beneficial to collect all these points together in a single response.

I will admit that the name under which I write this letter is a pseudonym. It is said that anonymity is a sign of cowardice – I agree that such is usually the case. However, I have no wish to undergo the endless persecution and slander to which Rabbi Slifkin and others have been subjected, and it is regrettably therefore necessary for me to take the path of anonymity. Let this letter be judged on its own merits.

Probably the public issue most damaging to the honor of Torah and to its leaders in recent memory is what is known as the Slifkin affair.

This is undeniably the case. One must wonder who is truly responsible for this damage.

Rabbi Nosson Slifskin, a talented young man still in his twenties, wrote three books in the past several years in which he attempted to justify certain conflicts between the findings of modern science and parts of the Torah and the Talmud.

Although he is still in his twenties, everything that Rabbi Slifkin wrote was checked by senior and respected *talmidei chachomim*. In this letter, Rabbi Feldman completely fails to address the issue of the prestigious *haskamos* that Rabbi Slifkin received.

The author is a fully observant *chareidi* Torah Jew whose intent was clearly *leshem shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven), to defend the honor of the Torah. Nevertheless, in September of last year a public letter banning the books was issued by some of the leading Torah authorities in Israel, and then shortly afterwards a similar ban, signed by many prominent American Roshey Yeshiva, was issued in the United States. The books were banned because they were deemed to contain ideas antithetical to Torah, and therefore forbidden to read because of the Torah commandment, לא תתורו אחריו לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם (“You shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes”) which forbids tempting oneself with matters which might turn one away from the Torah.

Yet four of the most prominent American Roshey Yeshivah, including Rabbi Feldman himself, did not sign on to the ban. Surely this indicates that they were opposed to it.

The ban was met with resistance by Slifkin....

The ban was met with resistance by the majority of Orthodox Jews, including Rabbi Slifkin’s own rabbinic advisors.

And why does Rabbi Feldman refer to Rabbi Slifkin without any honorifics? I understand that his essay was intended for the Jewish Observer. That has featured an article on Rabbi Slifkin in the past, in which he was given his proper title, as did the Yated Ne’eman when it used to publish his essays. Why did the condemnation by the Gedolim, and Rabbi Feldman’s letter, strip him of his title?

...who vigorously defended himself on his Internet site on several grounds. First, he argued that there was nothing heretical in his books; his views were based on opinions already offered in the past by the greatest authorities in Jewish history. The ban was based, he claimed, on excerpts of the book taken out of context by extremists who manipulated the signatories, many of whom do not read English, into signing against them.

There is no doubt that *some* of the signatories would have banned the books even had they read them in their entirety. But in any case, surely it is inappropriate to form an opinion of books based on extracts selected and translated by hostile parties and without speaking to the author. Why did the Gedolim refuse to meet with Rabbi Slifkin? Aside from the *halachos* that would seem to require such a meeting before ruining his reputation and career, didn’t basic *derech erez* require it? I regret any disrespect towards these Gedolei Torah, but this a point that bothers many of us.

Secondly, the ban was unjustifiably personally cruel to him: it damaged his reputation and caused him to lose his job as a teacher of newcomers to Judaism.

That is quite correct. No matter what one’s opinion of Rabbi Slifkin’s books – even if one genuinely believes them to be heretical – there is no doubt that he wrote them with good intentions, following his rebbeim, and receiving *haskamos*. As Rav Elyashiv said, he could even be one of the *lamed-vav tzaddikim*. It was therefore unjustifiable for him to be tarred and feathered.

Finally, he portrayed the dispute as pro- or anti-science, with himself as a champion of truth and his detractors as uneducated deniers of the discoveries of modern science.

I do not recall Rabbi Slifkin portraying the dispute in this way. Had he done so, he would have been neither unjustified nor alone in viewing it as such. After all, the letters of condemnation mentioned that he is accursed for believing that the world is billions of years old – something for which even Rabbi Feldman will shortly concede that there is clear evidence.

Slifkin's campaign was eminently successful. In short time, most people were convinced that the ban had no basis or reason, and that Slifkin had been unwarrantedly victimized.

They did not need Rabbi Slifkin's campaign to convince them. Most people, including many outstanding Torah scholars, reached that opinion quite independently of anything that Rabbi Slifkin wrote on his website. They were quite capable of reaching their own conclusions without Rabbi Slifkin's assistance.

His campaign made the signatories appear easily swayed and naive. Easily swayed, because they had relied on the "extremists" and had not sufficiently checked the accuracy of their claims.

It was not Rabbi Slifkin's campaign that did this. Rather, it was the investigations by many people who determined that several of the signatories had no real knowledge of either the books or their market. Furthermore, many people spoke to the *maskimim* and discovered that they had not retracted their *haskamos*, contrary to what the ban had stated and what the signatories had presumably believed without checking (the other alternative is too disturbing to consider).

Naïve, because the tumult over the ban catapulted the books into best-sellerdom. The books had been previously virtually unknown but after the ban began selling by the thousands even at inflated prices – which meant that the ban accomplished nothing.

Anyone who drew such a conclusion (I do not know if Rabbi Slifkin drew this conclusion) was clearly mistaken. The ban certainly accomplished one of its goals, which is to warn anyone away from ever trying to publicly present these views in a *charedi* framework. On the other hand, if the purpose of the ban was to prevent harm to people's *emunas chachomim*, then it was indeed naïve, because it utterly devastated people's *emunah* in the Gedolim, as Rabbi Feldman himself openly admits.

Blogspots, Internet sites (mostly anonymous) where anyone with access to a computer can express his spontaneous, unchecked and unedited opinion with impunity, became filled with tasteless, derogatory attacks on these authorities, at times to the accompaniment of vulgar caricatures.

It must also be noted that the packet of extracts from Rabbi Slifkin's books that were marked up and passed to the Gedolim for their condemnations was likewise filled with tasteless and derogatory attacks, referring to him as a sick man, peasant, evil *rasha*, animal, etc. And let us not forget that all the condemnations of Rabbi Slifkin's books are implicitly also condemnations against the Gedolei Torah who wrote *haskamos* for his books, as well as condemnations against the Rishonim and Acharonim upon whose views Rabbi Slifkin relies.

As a result, many thoughtful, observant Jews were beset by a crisis of confidence in the judgment of the signatories. This was an extremely vital crisis since these authorities constitute some of the greatest Torah leaders of our generation, authorities upon whom all of the Jewish people rely for their most serious decisions. More important, it threatened to make any of their future signatures on public announcements questionable.

This is perhaps the most disturbing part of Rabbi Feldman's letter. How can he possibly suggest that it was as a result of Rabbi Slifkin's website that many Jews were beset with a crisis of confidence in Rabbinic authority? The crisis came about solely due to the ban itself. Many of us were expressing our shock and dismay long before we saw Rabbi Slifkin's website, which itself consisted of an extremely mild and brief defense. Our shock was due to several factors:

- **The branding of views held by the Rishonim as heretical**
- **The demonstrably false statement in the ban that the *maskimim* withdrew their *haskamos*.**
- **The statement in one of the letters that it is unacceptable to believe that the universe is millions of years old**
- **The statement that there is no possible justification for either Rabbi Slifkin or his works**
- **The lack of any explanation as to the reasons for the ban**
- **The lack of any explanation as to the parameters of the ban (what exactly is it prohibited to believe?)**
- **The harsh and unmitigated treatment delivered to someone who successfully worked for years at being *mekadesh Shem Shamayim* under the guidance of his rabbonim.**

The irony of it all is that the books, which had originally been written to defend the honor of Torah, became one of the most potent vehicles in our times for weakening the authority of Torah.

This would not appear to a fair assessment of the situation, and it would be more accurate to express this somewhat differently: The irony of it all is that these books, which successfully solved the crisis of faith of many people in Torah and rabbinic

authority, were subject to an attack by the Gedolim which shattered the faith of many people in Torah and rabbinic authority.

Since very few matters could be more serious, it is important to examine the issues of this affair and to render them in their proper perspective.¹

Agreed. One can only wonder why, since the matter is indeed so serious, the Gedolim did not see fit to provide any detailed explanation of the ban.

To attain this perspective, the foremost question to be addressed is: do the books contain anything which is antithetical to Torah - in which case the ban was justified, or do they not – in which case the signatories committed a grievous error.

If the books are forbidden and the ban is justified, then the other issues become secondary. The rabbis were asked if the book is permitted to be held in a Jewish home and were obligated to respond, as they are on any other halachic question. Their intention was not to halt the sales of the books, and it was not their concern if, as a result of their ruling, the book would sell more copies. If a rabbi is asked if a certain product is kosher, he is obligated to rule accordingly even if knows that there will be those who will rush out to buy the product for the thrill of eating something forbidden. Also, as unfortunate as is the loss of employment of the author, if his world-view on Torah is incorrect this would indeed disqualify him from teaching newcomers to Judaism.

This paragraph is so bizarre that it is difficult to imagine that Rabbi Feldman himself believes what he is writing.

First of all, the Gedolim were not merely “asked a question.” They were approached by people who were already determined to ban these books and discredit the *maskimim*, and who knew exactly how to arrange signatures condemning them.

Rabbi Feldman writes that their obligation was only to rule accordingly, and other effects did not need to be their concern. Yet Rabbi Feldman has already pointed out the obvious truth that this whole episode is “the public issue most damaging to the honor of Torah and to its leaders in recent memory.” Were the Gedolim not obligated to assess this effect? It is clear that there are many people whose entire Judaism has been utterly shattered. The articles in the newspapers were the most appalling *chillul Hashem*. Were the Gedolim really not responsible to take this into account?

Furthermore, it was precisely for these reasons that Rabbi Feldman himself, as is widely reported, exerted considerable efforts to try to prevent the ban from coming about in the first place! So how can he now state that those who issued the ban had no obligation to consider these consequences?

¹The opinions expressed here are totally and exclusively the personal views of the author and do not reflect those of any body, institution or organization with which he is associated, or those of any of the signatories - with whom this article was not discussed.

There are two problematic theses in Slifkin's books which brought about the ban. These are: a) his approach to cosmology (the creation of the world), and b) his approach to the credibility of the Sages. Each of these need to be examined separately.

THE COSMOLOGY ISSUE

Most scientists believe that the world is 15 billion years old, and that the human species evolved from lower life forms. The Torah says that it is less than 6000 years and that man was created individually at the end of Creation.

It is quite obvious that the world *appears* older than 6000 years.

While I fully agree with Rav Feldman's assessment, it seems that several of the signatories on the ban dispute it.

One needs only look up to the sky and see stars billions of light years away for evidence of this. On the other hand, for a Torah Jew, because his ancestors experienced a revelation by G-d of Torah at Mount Sinai and the Jewish People bears an unbroken tradition of that revelation, there is no doubt that the Torah is true. If so, the appearances which make the world seem older must have some explanation.

In truth, explanations are elusive. Creation does not follow the laws of nature. According to natural law nothing can come into existence *ex nihilo*; therefore by its very definition creation is an act which defies the laws of nature. The apparent age of the universe is based on observations made after the laws of nature came into being, and applying these observations to nature as it existed during the days of Creation is therefore illogical; for perhaps during Creation time passed at a greater speed, or perhaps natural reactions proceeded at a faster pace.

Although one might question whether one can use these scientific methods to establish a precise age of the universe, it is quite obvious that one cannot use Rabbi Feldman's reasoning to argue that the world is only 5765 years old, because the geological record shows that there were many different eras of different animal life that existed long before there were any human beings in the world.

In spite of these considerations, several explanations have been offered by the great commentaries of the previous generations. Basing themselves on Midrashim which say that G-d created many worlds before ours and destroyed them, some say that the earth upon which these worlds were built was not destroyed.² Accordingly, the world is as old as the first world created while the six days of creation of the Torah refer to our present world. Along the same lines, sources in Kabbala state there

² *Tiferes Yisrael* in *Derush Ohr Hachayim*, the end of Sanhedrin in the standard edition of Mishnayos. Some vigorously dispute his theory, explaining that the Midrashim refer not to previous physical worlds, but rather to spiritual worlds – in which case no record of these worlds would be found in the present world. However, the great halachic authority, the *Maharsham*, in his *Techeylas Mordechai* Sec. I, praises the *Tiferes Yisrael's* view.

are seven cycles in creation and that we are in the third cycle or, some say, in the fifth. *Leshem Shevo VeAchlama*,³ basing himself on Kabbala, states (without addressing the issue of the age of universe) that each of the 24 “hours” of the day during the days of Creation was at least a thousand times the length of present day hours. In fact, he says, longer “hours” continued, albeit at a reduced pace, until the Generation of the *Mabbul* (Flood). Still others have explained that though there were 24 of our present day hours in each day, but that time flowed at a different, more compressed speed during the days of creation; in other words more events occurred during the course of a day even though a day lasted from the light of one day to that of the next.⁴ According to all these explanations, the world could appear to be vastly old and yet would still not be older than the age which the Torah gives it. All of these interpretations do not distort in any way the plain meaning of the Torah.

Surely the explanation of the Leshem, in which each hour was much, much more than sixty minutes, is far from the plain meaning of the Torah! Yet Rav Elyashiv and Rabbi Feldman consider this acceptable. Why?

Conspicuously absent from Rabbi Feldman’s list of acceptable explanations is the one that is probably most prevalent – that each day lasted for billions of years. This explanation was proposed by the great Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman and others. Does Rabbi Feldman consider such an explanation unacceptable, or is he simply unwilling to discuss it?

Slifkin has a totally different explanation.

It is not Rabbi Slifkin’s explanation. It is Rav Dessler’s, and it can clearly be seen in the Michtav Me-Eliyahu.

Rather than saying that the six days of creation were literal days, i.e. periods of time extending from the beginning of one day to the next, which is the position of the above explanations and of virtually every commentary on Torah, he posits that they refer to actual 15 billion literal years during which the world evolved from the first Big Bang until the creation of man.

As noted earlier, Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman and others also stated this.

The six days of creation, explains Slifkin, do not refer to the real world but are concepts of creation which existed in G-d’s mind.⁵ Accordingly, there were no six separate acts of creation, as the Torah teaches, but a seamless evolution put into

³ *Sefer De’ah*, Sec II, *Derush 3, Anaf 22*, by R. Shlomo Eliashiv, known as the teacher of the Chafetz Chayim in Kabbala and considered to have been the last true master of this body of wisdom. He was the grandfather of R. Yosef Shalom Eliashiv, Shlita, considered by many to be the greatest living authority on Torah law, and one of the signatories to the ban.

⁴R. Shimon Schwab in his *Collected Writings*. This would explain the saying of the Sages that Kayin and Hevel were born immediately after their conception. That which took nine months after the six days of Creation occurred during these days in a few seconds.

⁵ *Science and Torah* p. 120, 122.

action at the first moment of Creation, a single act which expressed six Divine concepts.

In support of this he cites the Ramban's statement that all matter was created from an original matter called *hyle* (*hiyuli*).⁶ This, however, has no bearing on the issue: the Ramban never said that there were no other acts of creation after the creation of the *hyle*; only that the *hyle* was the material with which the rest of Creation was formed, each on its own day.⁷

Another source given for his theory of Creation is a cryptic statement by Rav E. E. Dessler, cited by Slifkin at least twice, that before man was created the idea of time was meaningless and the idea of "days" is simply man's way of perceiving this pre-human "time".⁸ Slifkin implies from this his theory that the days did not really occur in the real world.⁹ But Rav Dessler is not saying this. All Rav Dessler is saying is that humans perceive the "time" of Creation as "days." He makes no mention of the days as being Divine concepts.

It seems to me that Rabbi Slifkin did indeed present Rav Dessler's ideas correctly. But I am no authority on this topic (and certainly not in my capacity as an anonymous commentator.) However, Rabbi Aryeh Carmell is renowned as one of Rav Dessler's leading disciples, and is the editor of *Michtav Me-Eliyahu*. Surely the fact that he wrote a glowing *haskamah* to Rabbi Slifkin's book proves that he considered that Rabbi Slifkin had accurately presented his rebbe's thoughts.

Furthermore, says Slifkin, although the Torah relates that vegetation came before the luminaries (on the third and fourth days, respectively) and birds came before animals (on the fifth and sixth days, respectively), the actual order of creation follows the view of current scientific opinion, that the luminaries preceded vegetation and that animals preceded birds.¹⁰ Slifkin explains that the Torah refers to G-d's conceptual plan of creation, not to its actualization. In reality the luminaries and the birds came first; conceptually, in G-d's mind, the order was reversed.¹¹

To explain G-d's mind, Slifkin suggests that birds and fish are more spiritual than animals since they "fly" through their media of locomotion, and also their habitats are blue (the sky and the sea) which is a more spiritual color.¹² He does not explain why vegetation is more spiritual than the luminaries.

In support of this theory that the actual order of creation did not follow the order written in the Torah, Slifkin applies the principle, *Eyn mukdam u-me'uchar batorah* – "The Torah does not follow a chronological order."¹³ This application borders on the absurd. The Talmud employs this principle only to explain why two separate portions

⁶ *Loc.cit* p. 126.

⁷ I have learned that Slifkin has subsequently retracted this source.

⁸ *Michtav MeEliyahu* Vol IV, p 113 and 114; *loc.cit* p. 128, 130.

⁹ *Loc. cit* p 130.

¹⁰ *Loc. cit.* p 119.

¹¹ *Loc.cit.* p 119

¹² *Loc.cit.*, p.132-3 and Note 3.

¹³ *Loc. cit.* p. 131-2.

of the Torah do not have to follow a chronological order.¹⁴ In no way can it be employed to uproot the plain meaning of the verses which explicitly give a specific order for creation.

In Rabbi Slifkin's recent lectures in Brooklyn and Queens, he stated that when he wrote his book, he reasoned that since Rav Dessler explains the real meaning of the six days to be *sefiros* rather than time-periods, it is not problematic to posit that the sequence of Bereishis is a conceptual sequence following a spiritual hierarchy rather than a physical chronological sequence. Rabbi Slifkin then said that just a few weeks previously, it was pointed out to him that Rav Dessler explicitly states this in the most recent volume of *Michtav Me-Eliyahu*, and he has since posted this on his web-site:

“ ‘Scripture does not teach us anything about the chronological order of events’ – Rashi. The reason for this is that the ten utterances with which the world was created (see *Avos* 5:1) are the ten *sefiros* whose order is the order of distinguishing revelations (*havchanas hagiluyim*). The Torah instructed us according to this order in Maase Bereishis, not according to the order of physical time.” (*Michtav Me-Eliyahu* vol. 5 p. 348)

It further turns out that Rambam was also of the view that the order of days in Bereishis is not meant to represent a chronological time-sequence. This is the way that Rambam is understood by Shem Tov, Abarbanel, and Akeidas Yitzchak, and the same view is found in Ralbag.

Of course, Rabbi Feldman is fully entitled to describe the view of Rambam, Ralbag and Rav Dessler as bordering on the absurd. I myself am not sure if I agree with it. However, surely Rabbi Slifkin is equally entitled to present this explanation in his book, and to favor it as being the only solution that adequately accounts for the overwhelming physical evidence that the luminaries preceded plants and that animals preceded birds.

Slifkin goes on to posit that the Theory of Evolution in one form or another is a fact – only mentioning in passing those eminent scientists who have discredited this theory because the discovery of the DNA molecule make it statistically impossible.¹⁵

Regrettably it seems that Rav Feldman has not properly understood what Rabbi Slifkin wrote, and it appears that he is mixing up entirely different aspects of evolution. The part of evolution that Rabbi Slifkin accepted in the book is “descent with modification”- that, somehow, animals gave rise to different types. Rav Feldman's mention of the problems with DNA molecules relate to a different point, that of evolutionary mechanisms, which Rabbi Slifkin explains in the book to be indeed the subject of fierce debate and to be far from conclusively proven. His

¹⁴ Pesachim 7b; Sanhedrin 49b.

¹⁵ Cf. Professor Alvin Radkowsky, *Encounter*, 1989, p58, AOJS, citing Nobel-prize winning physicist, E.P. Wigner, that the probability of a simple life-form arising spontaneously from primeval “soup” and reproducing itself (as current evolutionary theories have it) is zero, or impossible.

footnote refers to the origins of life, which is another point entirely and which Rabbi Slifkin likewise describes in my book as far from scientifically proven.

According to Slifkin, when the Torah says that man was created, it means that the human species evolved until a certain point in time when this species was invested with a Divine spark which made it “human” in our sense of the word.¹⁶

Not “according to Slifkin.” According to an approach approved by Rav Hirsch, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Rav Gedalyah Nadel, and others that Rabbi Slifkin simply quotes and explains. It is wrong to pin these ideas on “Slifkin” when he is simply quoting greater authorities.

He does not explain why the first woman, who presumably evolved together with man, had to be taken from his side, as the Torah teaches us she was.

These cosmological explanations have no basis in any commentary or Midrash and clearly violate the plain meaning of the Torah.

Rabbi Feldman is quite correct that these cosmological explanations have no basis in any commentary or Midrash and clearly violate the plain meaning of the Torah. But the same can be said for heliocentrism, which likewise has no basis in any commentary or Midrash and clearly violates the plain meaning of the Torah, and it was for this very reason that most Acharonim staunchly opposed it. And the same can be said for the modern explanation that when the Torah describes the kidneys and heart as being involved in cognitive processes, it is allegorical. The Sages of old did not have to deal with the scientific evidence that presents itself nowadays and therefore did not present such explanations. Rav Gedalyah Nadel ז”ל presents this point succinctly: “...The expression ‘one day’ that the Torah uses, according to its literal translation, refers to one [conventional] day. Rambam and the other early authorities truly held of this view, that each of the six days of creation lasted for one [ordinary] day, because they had no reason to believe otherwise. However, for us, there are indeed such reasons.”

Like the famous archer who painted the targets after the arrows landed and thereby ensured himself a perfect bulls-eye each time, Slifkin uses questionable sources as proofs for his *a priori* belief that the theories of modern science which he cites are indisputable fact.

I do not see why Rav Dessler is a “questionable source.” Nor Rav Hirsch, who writes that there is no conflict between the evolutionary explanation of human origins and Torah. And with regard to the general approach, surely it is perfectly appropriate that, when faced with an accepted scientific theory that seems to conflict with Torah, one searches for Torah authorities that deal with these problems. Rambam and others who followed his approach made it very clear that when something is well proven and does not conflict with Torah ideology, there is no problem in

¹⁶ *Science of Torah* p. 179.

reinterpreting the Torah to suit it – indeed, we are obligated to provide such an approach and to help those that are understandably disturbed by such conflicts.

Furthermore, with regard to the famous metaphor that Rav Feldman cites, it would seem more applicable to assign this parable to Rabbi Feldman’s own essay. He was faced with a ruling of the Gedolim that these books were heretical, and then created an explanation for this. (In fact, perhaps the same thing happened with the Gedolim – the *askanim* manipulated a declaration of heresy from them, and then rather than back down from this, they forced an explanation as to how it could indeed be rated as heresy).

Interpretations which have no basis in the Written or Oral Torah and which contradict the tradition of the Midrashim and the commentaries are perversions of Torah ideas and may be classified as *megaleh panim baTorah shelo ke-halacha* (distorted interpretations of the Torah) which are forbidden to study.

In a booklet entitled *Maamar Mevo HaShemesh*, someone used precisely this line of reasoning to prove that it is an unacceptable perversion of Torah to believe that the earth orbits the sun. There is no basis in the Written or Oral Torah for it, it contradicts the tradition of the Midrashim and the commentaries, and prominent Acharonim condemned it as a perversion of Torah.

Even if the Torah authorities who signed the ban based their ruling on excerpts which were translated before them, it would therefore appear that they were not misled. They were perfectly justified in terming his views inauthentic interpretations of Torah.

Rabbi Feldman appears to be stating that ultimately, their verdict was correct, even if the methods used to obtain these verdicts were entirely inappropriate. I am not sure if this is an adequate justification of their actions.

We will now turn to the second problem in Slifkin’s books, his view regarding the credibility of the Sages.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE SAGES

There are many places in the Talmud where statements made by the Sages seem to contradict modern science. The most common are the cures and potions which the Talmud gives for various diseases. Our great halachic authorities have noted the phenomenon that these cures, in the vast majority of cases, do not seem to cure illnesses in our times.

The most widespread explanation offered for this is *nishtanu hatevaim*, “nature has changed” - cures that worked in the times of the Talmud are no longer effective.¹⁷ There are many examples of illnesses and cures, which because of environmental and

¹⁷ *Tosafos s.v.kavra* to Moed Katan 11a, and many other places.

nutritional differences and physical changes to the body over the years are no longer effective.

That is true. But this is far from adequate to explain the vast disparities between Talmudic science and modern science. Rabbi Feldman himself earlier said that evolution is scientifically impossible – how can he now suggest that the most widespread explanation of Talmudic science is that the most radical evolution of all has taken place?

Another explanation is that we cannot reproduce these cures, either because the definitions or the amounts of the ingredient of these cures are unspecified in the Talmud.¹⁸

This is a very difficult explanation to accept. What would be the purpose of Chazal describing these cures, if it did not give sufficient information to be able to put them to use?

It has also been suggested that the cures had their effect on the inner, spiritual level of the affected person, and therefore were effective only for the people of the era of the Sages who were on a higher spiritual level than nowadays but not for later generations when increased physicality did not permit the cures to take effect.

This is an interesting, but far-fetched explanation, that many will not accept.

Against these explanations, there is another opinion which Slifkin uses explicitly and implicitly in his books. This theory goes as follows. The Sages based their wisdom on the medical knowledge of their times. This would seem perfectly legitimate, for why should they not rely on the experts of their time on issues not directly addressed by the Written or the Oral Law? Therefore, when subsequently medicine indicates that these cures are ineffectual, there would be nothing disrespectful in asserting that the scientific knowledge of antiquity available to the Sages was flawed.

This approach is mentioned by many eminent authorities in Jewish history. Rav Sherira Gaon¹⁹ mentions it with respect to cures. R. Avraham, son of the Rambam, mentions it with respect to all science and the Rambam with respect to astronomy.

*Pachad Yitzchok*²⁰ says that statements in the Talmud which seem to uphold spontaneous generation are incorrect, even though we do not change any laws based on their words. Rav Shmshon Refael Hirsch applies this argument to animals mentioned in the Talmud which do not seem to exist nowadays. Finally, a

¹⁸ *Teshuvos Chavos Yair* No. 234.

¹⁹ Of the Geonic era..

²⁰ By Rav Yitzchak Lampronti in *Pachad Yitzchak*, entry “*Tzeydah*.”

conversation with R. Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler recorded by Rabbi Aryeh Carmel indicates a somewhat similar approach.²¹

To this list we can also add Ramban (commentary to Vayikra 12:2) and Maharam Schick (*Teshuvos Maharam Schick* 7), which is not well known as is worth citing in full:

“Matters that were not received by Chazal as *halachah leMoshe miSinai*, but rather which they said according to their own reasoning - and with something that is not received [from Sinai] and has no root in our Torah, but rather comes from investigation and experience, it is difficult to determine [that it is true]. And there are many occasions when the sages determined, according to their own intellects, that a matter was a certain way, and subsequent generations analyzed the matter further and disputed the earlier view.”

We can also add the views of Rabbi Eliezer of Metz, Ritva, Rabbeninu Manoach, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, Maharam Alashkar, Mizrachi, Radvaz, Lechem Mishnah, Minchas Kohen, and Chavos Ya’ir, all of whom say that Chazal erred in their beliefs concerning astronomy.

Additionally, we can also add the views of Tosafos, Rashba, Rosh, and Korban Nesanel, all of whom say that Rabbi Yochanan made a mathematical error.

This approach (henceforth, that of R. Avraham) is used often by Slifkin to explain many difficulties he has with the Sages’ statements.²²

Why does Rabbi Feldman refer to it as “henceforth, that of R. Avraham”? He is the least prominent of the authorities listed. Why not refer to it as the approach of Rambam, Ramban, or if we are to discuss relatively contemporary authorities, the approach of Maharam Schick and Rav Hirsch?

It is a recurring theme of [Slifkin’s] book, *Mysterious Creatures*, where he assumes that the Sages relied on various legends of antiquity.

It is not quite a recurring theme, although doubtless many of those who support the ban but have not read Rabbi Slifkin’s books are under that impression. In fact, he explains most of the mysterious creatures in his book to be metaphorical concepts that Chazal did not intend to be understood as actual animals.

With it he explains why we have no record of certain animals mentioned in the Talmud, and why certain rules of the Sages regarding animals seem to have

²¹ Rabbi Aryeh Carmel, citing an informal conversation with Rav Dessler, in a footnote to *Michtav MeEliahu* IV p. 355 that the Sages never erred in the final halacha, although they may have erred in the reason they gave for it..

²² It is a recurring theme of his book, *Mysterious Creatures*, where he assumes that the Sages relied on various legends of antiquity.

exceptions. Because they based themselves on the information available at their time, they simply made a mistake.

He did indeed write the former, but I believe that the latter point, about rules with exceptions, is a misunderstanding of Rabbi Slifkin's book. He writes that it is unnecessary to say that such exceptions indicate an error on the part of Chazal – rather, Chazal did not need to concern themselves with remote exceptions when making their rules.

This theory, more than the first, has caused the most misunderstanding. How could Slifkin be faulted for espousing a view stated by giants of previous generations?

The answer to this question is that although these giants did indeed espouse this view, it is a minority opinion which has been rejected by most authorities since then.

Even if it were to be a minority opinion that had been rejected by most authorities, this would not qualify it as heresy. But in any case, as we shall discuss, this characterization of it is far from accurate.

In *Lev Avraham* Dr. Abraham Abraham-Sofer,²³ discusses why the cures mentioned in the Talmud should not be relied upon in actual practice. As above, he explains that either a) the cures worked for the Sages but not for us; or b) following R. Avraham, that the Sages erred when they thought that these cures work.

I assume that Rav Elyashiv would therefore rule that it is forbidden to bring this book into a Jewish home (along with many others).

In a note to a later edition of this work, the world famous authority R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach asked to add the following comment: “The principal explanation is the other views; that which is written “when the Sages spoke etc.” [R. Avraham's view], should be mentioned in the name of *yesh omrim*.”²⁴ This means that the view of R. Avraham is a minority opinion which only “some say.”

Ten years later, a scholar,²⁵ about to publish a book on the topic of Torah and health, asked R. Shlomo Zalman how an opinion held by such giants of Jewish history be relegated to the position of *yesh omrim*? Rav Auerbach responded in a letter stating that he did not remember his sources (it was ten years later), but he believes one source to be that it is the accepted opinion of *poskim* that we rely on the medical opinion of the Sages to violate Shabbos even though according to modern medical opinion the cures are ineffectual and we are violating Shabbos unnecessarily.

This is not quite accurate. The citation is actually as follows:

²³ P. 60. This is a work on medicine and Halacha, by Dr. Avraham Avraham-Sofer, a noted *chareidi* Israeli physician who was in constant consultation with R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

²⁴ *Ib.* p. 19.

²⁵ Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Lerner of Jerusalem.

I saw in the work *Nishmas Avraham* 14:4 that he brings the words of Rav Sherira Gaon and Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam, and rates this view as one of the reasons why we cannot use the medical cures brought in the Talmud; and the *gaon* Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach raised the point that it is appropriate to bring this view as "some say," but the main approach is with the other views. I asked Rav Shlomo Zalman who are those views that argue with Rav Sherira Gaon and Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam. He wrote to me as follows: "At the moment I do not remember if there is someone who actually argues, or even if there is anyone who is able to argue with them. But it could be that my intent was that since many have given the reason of nature having changed, and did not mention at all the aspect of improvements and increased knowledge in medical methods in our time, therefore I raised the point that it should be written as 'some say'..." (*Shemiras HaGuf VeHaNefesh* p. 54)

It was not merely that R. Shlomo Zalman "did not remember his sources" – it was that he did not remember if there is *anyone* who argues with this approach or even if there is anyone who is *able* to argue with it.

What is undeniably clear is that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (unsurprisingly) endorsed the approach of Rav Sherira Gaon and Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam as a legitimate alternative approach. He did not say that it should be rejected as unacceptable, and certainly not as heretical.

Thus, for practical purposes we reject the view of R. Avraham.

Which "practical purposes"? True, for *halachic* purposes in some cases, as Rabbi Slifkin himself writes – but certainly not for beliefs, for our way of understanding strange statements in the Gemara!

There are other sources that this opinion is only one which "some say." In countless places where the commentaries, whether *Rishonim* or *Acharonim* (Early or Later Authorities), are faced with a contradiction between the science of their times and a statement of the Sages, they commonly apply the principle, *nishtanu hateva'im* ("nature has changed").

Hishtanus Hateva'im, by Rabbi Neria Moshe Gutel, lists these places.

It should be noted that *Hishtanus Hateva'im* also lists the Rambam's approach as a viable approach and makes no mention of it being a perversion of Torah. It would thus appear that according to Rav Elyashiv and Rav Feldman, it should likewise be prohibited from being brought into a Jewish home, despite containing *haskamos* from many Gedolei Torah.

Slifkin suggests (p. 207, Note 1) that R. Moshe Feinstein uses the principle of *nishtanu hateva'im* as a euphemism for R. Avraham's opinion. This is too brazen an absurdity to require refutation.

I personally strongly dispute Rabbi Slifkin's understanding off the *Iggros Moshe*. However, it can hardly be called either brazen or an absurdity, in light of Rabbi Slifkin's report (in his "response to the campaign package" that was on his website) that he heard this explanation from Rav Moshe Feinstein's son-in-law, Rabbi Dr. Moshe Tendler.

Had they held R. Avraham's view, they would have simply explained that the Sages erred in following whatever was the medical or scientific opinion of their times.

This does not follow at all. Of course it is always *preferable* not to say that the Sages erred. Furthermore, the concept of *nishtaneh hateva* is usually used in cases where the facts were readily available, so it is difficult to attribute it to an error by the Sages. One cannot derive any proof from citations of *nishtaneh hetava* that these authorities absolutely rejected Rambam's view.

The Rivash,²⁶ the Rashba²⁷ and the Maharal²⁸ write, as well, that it is forbidden to say that the Sages erred in matters of science.

This, too, does not appear to be accurate. The Rivash and Rashba are only addressing halachic matters – *tereifos* – that are *halachah l'Moshe miSinai*. They do not discuss other areas. Rashba himself states that Rabbi Yochanan made an error in mathematics! Maharal is condemning de Rossi's general approach, which takes many statements of Chazal at face value and casually dismisses them. Nowhere does Maharal categorically state that it is forbidden to say that the Sages erred in matters of science.

Leshem Shevo Ve-achlama²⁹ writes:

The main thing is: everyone who is called a Jew is obligated to believe with complete faith that everything found in the words of the Sages whether in *halachos* or *agados* of the Talmud or in the Midrashim, are all the words of the Living God, for everything which they said is with the spirit of God which spoke within them, and "the secret of God is given to those who fear Him (סוד ה' ליראייו)." This is just as we find in Sanhedrin 48b that even regarding something which has no application to Halacha and practical behavior, the Talmud asks regarding [the Sage] Rav Nachman, "How did he know this?" and the reply given is [that he knew this because] "The secret from God is given to those who fear him..."³⁰

²⁶ *Teshuvos Harivash* No. 447.

²⁷ *Toras Habayis, Mishmeres Habayis, Bayis 4, Shaar 1.*

²⁸ *Be'er Hagolah "Be'er Hashishi."*

²⁹ *De'ah, Sec. II, Derush 4, Anaf 19, Siman 7* (p. 160). See Note 3.

³⁰ This applies where the Sages are stating a fact, not where their intention is allegorical. Ramchal (*Maamar al Hagados*) says the Sages employed scientific pronouncements to convey veiled mystical truths but were not necessarily true in themselves. It does not appear that the *Leshem* or the other opinions would disagree with this.

In light of all the Rishonim and Acharonim who held that, on occasion, Chazal relied on the flawed science of their day, perhaps the Leshem's reference to "everything" is an exaggeration. The fact that sometimes God gave His secrets to those to fear Him does not mean that this was always necessarily the case, as we see in the dispute between the Sages of Israel and the Sages of the Nations regarding the course taken by the sun, in which the latter emerged victorious.

The Chazon Ish, considered by many to be the *posek acharon* (final Torah authority) for our times, writes in his "Letters"³¹ that "our tradition" is that the *shechita* of someone who denies the truth of the Sages whether in the Halacha or Aggada (the non-halachic parts) of the Talmud is disqualified just as is someone who is a heretic.

Such an extreme citation cannot be quoted without analysis. Is the Chazon Ish also referring to someone who says that Chazal based their scientific knowledge on contemporary science? If so, this would be a very extreme view. Does Rabbi Feldman (or anyone else) follow such a view? Would Rav Hirsch's *shechitah* be disqualified? Would the *shechitah* of the many thousands of Torah Jews who accept his approach be disqualified? If so then there is a serious kashrus crisis. After all, the OU's most senior Poskim all accept the legitimacy of Rambam's approach.

He adds that experience has shown that those who begin questioning the truth of the Sages will ultimately lose their future generations to Torah.³²

Did this happen to Rav Hirsch's descendants?

Why does mainstream opinion reject R. Avraham's opinion? This is not because they considered the Sages greater scientists than their modern counterparts. Rather, they believed that, unlike R. Avraham's view, the source of *all* the knowledge of the Sages is either from Sinaitic tradition (received at the Giving of the Torah) or from Divine inspiration.

The implications of this are quite drastic. It means that Rav Sherira Gaon, Rambam, Rabbeinu Avraham, Ramban, Rosh, Ritva, Rabbeinu Manoach, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, Maharam Alashkar, Mizrachi, Radvaz, Lechem Mishnah, Minchas Kohen, Chavos Ya'ir, Maharam Shick, Rav Lamponti, and Rav Hirsch, to name but a few, all possessed a fundamentally flawed understanding of the nature of the Chazal and the Gemara.

That they were in contact with such sources is undeniable. How else could we explain numerous examples where the Sages had scientific information which no scientist of their time had?

³¹ Section I, Letter 15.

³² None of these opinions apply this approach to the words of the *Rishonim* or *Acharonim*; only to the Sages. They would not apply as well to passages in the Sages which are allegorical.

Regrettably, this is nothing more than a popular myth.

How were they so precise in their calculations of the New Moon?

Many other nations at that time were equally precise with their calculations.

How did they know that hemophilia is transmitted by the mother's DNA, a fact discovered relatively recently?³³

There are many ways to discover this. Or they may have simply followed the ancient belief that the mother contributes the blood of a baby.

How did they know that “a drop exudes from the brain and develops into semen”³⁴ without having known that the pituitary gland, located at the base of the brain, emits a hormone which controls the production of semen.

But they said that it develops into semen, not that it regulates its production! In any case, most ancient cultures believed that semen came from the brain.

None of this could have been discovered by experimentation. Either they had a tradition directly teaching them these facts, or they knew them by applying principles which were part of the Oral Torah regarding the inner workings of the world. Thus they knew the precise cycle of the moon; they knew that there was a relationship between the coagulation of blood and motherhood; and they knew that there was a relationship between the brain and male reproduction.

As discussed, none of these examples hold water. Even if one were to find a few examples where Chazal demonstrated knowledge of matters that was unattainable by ordinary means in those days, one cannot deny that there seem to be many more examples where Chazal's statements seem to be in error.

Furthermore, the Talmud is not a mere compilation of the sayings of wise men; it is the sum total of *Torah -she-be-al-peh*, the Oral Torah which is the interpretation of the Written Torah. It is, then, the word of G-d, for which reason we are required to make a *birchas hatorah* (a blessing) before we study it, which we do not make before studying other wisdoms. As the *Leshem* cited above says, if even regarding matters which are not related to halacha, the Sages say, *sod Hashem liyerav*, “G-d reveals the secrets of nature to those who fear him,” then certainly there must have been *siyata*

³³ It is forbidden to circumcise a child whose brothers have died from bleeding after his circumcision, *מתו אחיו מחמת מילה*, because of a danger that he too might die. Since the brothers died from what we know now as hemophilia, and we are afraid that this condition is hereditary. Since this prohibition applies only to a maternal brother, the Sages knew that hemophilia is inherited through the mother, a fact discovered relatively recently.

³⁴ Source from Kabbala works cited many places, as in *Kehillas Yaakov* (by the author of *Melo Haro'im*), *Erech Holada*.

dishmaya (Divine assistance) and even *ruach hakodesh* (a Divine spirit) assisting the Sages in their redaction of the Oral Law.

***Sod Hashem liyerav* is used on three occasions in the Gemara to mean that sometimes Hashem reveals secrets to those who fear Him. It does not mean that this is always necessarily the case.**

It is therefore inconceivable, to these opinions, that G-d would have permitted falsities to have been transmitted as *Torah She-be-al-peh* and not have revealed His secrets to those who fear Him.

As noted, there is a long list of authorities who do not agree with the Leshem.

One of the most powerful reasons why R. Avraham's opinion was rejected by most opinions, is the introduction of the wisdom of Kabbalah of the Ari Zal in the sixteenth century. This cast the Sages in another dimension. Before then, many authorities had held that the esoteric wisdom described in the Talmud as *Ma'aseh Breyshis* and *Ma'aseh Hamerkava* was science and philosophy. After the introduction of Kabbalah it became clear that these were the *Sefer HaYetzira*, the *Zohar* and the *Tikkunim*.³⁵ This was accepted by the overwhelming majority of Torah scholars since then. Kabbala made it clear that when the Sages spoke, they based themselves on their knowledge of the mysteries of creation.³⁶ This would give them an accurate knowledge of matters of natural science as well.

Rabbi Feldman appears to be stating that in the sixteenth century there was some kind of consensus reached that Chazal possessed special, divinely-based knowledge of the world. How is it that Maraham Schick and Rav Hirsch were not aware of this? How is that Rav Yitzchak Herzog and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach were not aware of this?

In any event, R. Avraham's opinion is a minority opinion, one of many which have fallen by the wayside in the course of the centuries and which we do no longer follow.

It is not "a minority opinion" – it is presented by a long list of prominent authorities, including Rav Sherira Gaon, Rambam, Rabbeinu Avraham, Ramban, Rosh, Ritva, Rabbeinu Manoach, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, Maharam Alashkar, Mizrachi, Radvaz, Lechem Mishnah, Minchas Kohen, Chavos Ya'ir, and others. It has not "fallen by the wayside" – it was used in recent times by Maharam Shick, Rav Lampronti, Rav Hirsch, and others. It is not "no longer followed" – it is still followed by numerous *talmidei chachomim* and the majority of Torah Jews who are learned in the natural sciences.

³⁵ See *Leshem Shevo Veachlama*, *ib.* where he discusses this change wrought by Kabbalah.

³⁶ This is constantly seen in the writings of the Vilna Gaon who, besides being a towering authority on Halacha, consistently shows how the Talmud's statements are based on the secrets of Kabbala.

Thus, on the issue of the credibility of the Sages as well, the signatories to the ban were correct in terming Slifkin's books as perversions of the correct approach to the Sages' words.

I believe that it has been demonstrated that the signatories were actually incorrect in terming his books as perversions of the correct approach. It might not be the approach they favor, but in light of its illustrious supporters, it cannot possibly be deemed a perversion.

Furthermore, they did not only refer to the books as perversions of the correct approach – they referred to them as *kefirah gemurah*, absolute heresy. I fail to see how Rav Feldman has addressed this charge. One can disagree with the approach of all these Rishonim and Acharonim, but how can it be termed heresy?

R. Yosef Shalom Eliashiv, a signatory to the ban, was asked: if he considers Slifkin's approach wrong how could so many earlier authorities have held it? He answered: "They were permitted to hold this opinion; we are not."³⁷ In other words, they were authorities in their own right qualified to decide matters of Jewish law. We are not permitted to do so.³⁸ We are enjoined to follow the majority opinion and our tradition as to how we are to approach Torah.

Perhaps nothing has left people more perplexed than this. Since when can we not follow significant minority opinions in our understanding of Torah? For halachic purposes, we usually follow the majority, unless there is pressing need otherwise. But in a non-halachic area, how can it be forbidden to follow a minority opinion – especially since there is indeed a pressing reason to do so, namely that many people, for the best of reasons, cannot accept that the science of the Gemara is always accurate.

In deciding whether we must believe that there are mice which spontaneously generate from dirt, why is it forbidden to follow the approach of Rav Hirsch? In understanding the Gemara in Pesachim about the path of the sun, why is it forbidden to understand it in accordance with the approach of every single Rishon (except Rabbeinu Tam) and many Acharonim?

In a footnote, Rabbi Feldman adds the following:

³⁷ Conversation with the author. Since we are not permitted to follow Slifkin's views, R. Eliashiv believes that they can be rightfully categorized as heresy (*apikorsus*) as the ban's wording had it. I believe this is because they diminish the honor and the acceptability of the words of the Sages, which has the status of *apikorsus*.

³⁸ It also explains why Rav Eliashiv, in the above conversation with the author, said that one cannot rule that Slifkin is a heretic (*apikores*) even though the views he espoused have the status of heresy, as in the previous note. My understanding of his opinion is that Slifkin did, after all, intend to give a correct interpretation of the Torah and he did follow, at least, a minority opinion. Nevertheless, Rav Eliashiv added, "Even if he is one of the *lamed vov tzadikim*, these books may not be taken into a Jewish home."

Since we are not permitted to follow Slifkin's views, R. Eliashiv believes that they can be rightfully categorized as heresy (*apikorsus*) as the ban's wording had it. I believe this is because they diminish the honor and the acceptability of the words of the Sages, which has the status of *apikorsus*.

The authority who defined such a category of *apikorsus* is Rambam, who spoke of *makchish maggideha*. But Rambam himself had the views for which Rabbi Slifkin is being condemned! It is absurd to condemn Rambam's own approach as *apikorsus* under Rambam's own definition!

Can an individual on his own decide to follow the minority opinion? No more than he is permitted to do so in any matter of Jewish law³⁹ and certainly not in matters which determine our basic approach to *Torah she b'al peh* which is the domain of the *poskim* (recognized decisors of halacha) of the Jewish people.

This is a breathtakingly novel and far-reaching ruling. Is it accordingly forbidden for a person to accept the Tiferes Yisrael's approach that dinosaur fossils are the remnants of previous worlds? After all, it is a minority view. Is it forbidden to accept the view of the Leshem?

As noted earlier, it seems that the situation is the reverse of how Rabbi Feldman presents it. The majority view is that Chazal could indeed err in science. This is the view of Rav Sherira Gaon, Rambam, Rabbeinu Avraham, Ramban, Rosh, Ritva, Rabbeinu Manoach, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, Maharam Alashkar, Mizrachi, Radvaz, Lechem Mishnah, Minchas Kohen, Chavos Ya'ir, Maharam Shick, Rav Lamponti, and Rav Hirsch. Only the Leshem and Chida state otherwise. According to Rabbi Feldman's reasoning, it would appear to be forbidden to follow the view of the Leshem and Chida.

Furthermore, on what basis does Rabbi Feldman describe such matters as the domain of *poskim*? In cases that have no *halachic* ramifications, it would seem that it should more be the domain of authorities in *hashkafah*.

In any case, the great *posek* Rav Sholmo Zalman Auerbach ruled that it is a legitimate minority view. That alone is enough to reject any charge of heresy.

What about the conflicts between science and the Talmud which Slifkin raised? Like all difficulties in our Torah studies, we are obliged to seek solutions. However, the solutions have to be within the parameters of the true interpretation of the Torah and of the proper honor to the Sages. The fact that we are faced with a problem does not permit us to compromise our obligation as to how to properly approach Torah.

That is why the villication of Rabbi Slifkin over the last year was so wrong. He followed his obligation to seek solutions, both for himself and for others who were

³⁹ It should be pointed out that the principle, the majority opinion rules, applies equally to ideas as well as to practical halacha. Beliefs, besides falling under certain commandments, affect a Jew's status with respect to various laws and are therefore also part of practical halacha.

desperate for answers. He found solutions written by the greatest Rishonim and Acharonim. He followed the guidance of Gedolei Torah in presenting them.

There are cogent answers to the questions which Slifkin raised but these will of necessity, G-d willing, have to be the subject of another article.

It is a great pity that neither Rabbi Feldman nor anyone else has ever presented such cogent answers. I am not aware of any answers that are more cogent and reasonable than those of Rambam and Rav Hirsch. Since there are so many people who are obviously in need of these cogent answers, why is Rabbi Feldman so reluctant to actually provide them?

In the meantime we can be sure of one thing: the answers which Slifkin proposed are not the right ones.

Yet again, Rabbi Feldman is hanging matters on Rabbi Slifkin to make them easier to dismiss. It would be appropriate to name the greater authorities that Rabbi Feldman is dismissing. And I do not understand how Rabbi Feldman can be so sure that Rav Sherira Gaon, Rambam, Rabbeinu Avraham, Ramban, Rosh, Ritva, Rabbeinu Manoach, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, Maharam Alashkar, Mizrachi, Radvaz, Lechem Mishnah, Minchas Kohen, Chavos Ya'ir, Maharam Shick, Rav Lamponti, Rav Hirsch, and Rav Dessler were all wrong – and guilty of believing in heresy.