

## Parallel Thinking Part 12: The Age of the Universe – Section IV

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The last three articles have examined different methods of reconciling the accepted scientific view that the Universe is 13.8 billion years old with the Torah's account of Creation over six days.

This article will explore the view that while the Torah is the true, absolute word of God, the attempts to reconcile the literal interpretation of Bereishit with science are often unconvincing. This does not mean that the Torah is merely symbolic or metaphorical. It means that our simple understanding of the text is at fault and the messages which God wishes to convey are much deeper than we first thought.

There is precedent for this. Many of the Rambam's (Maimonides d. 1204) philosophical writings address the conflicts between Greek thought and the Torah. In particular, he targets Aristotle's view that the Universe is eternal, without beginning or end. This notion is in direct contradiction to the opening verse of the Torah and the entire concept of Creation. Yet the Rambam writes that even if Aristotle's position could be proven scientifically and we would be forced to accept it, that would not mean that we would abandon the Torah or declare it false. On the contrary, the Rambam actually affirms that scientific evidence is not a threat to the veracity of our religious texts. In fact, it offers a positive way of refining our own understanding of the Torah narrative.

Yet one question remains. The Torah contains a narrative which ostensibly contradicts scientific fact. Why would God confuse us by describing Creation as a six day process if it wasn't literally six periods of 24 hours?

The answer requires a fundamental paradigm shift in our approach to understanding Bereishit. The purpose of the Torah is to help us comprehend our identity and guide us to live a proper, moral and spiritually connected life. It is not the Torah's role to explain the mechanics of Creation. It therefore does not make sense to view the Torah as a textbook of cosmology, biology or anthropology.

Furthermore, as the crystallisation of God's Divine wisdom, the Torah must be eternally relevant. Revelation about the scientific mechanics of reality is not the highest priority for building an ethical and just society. In any case, no one in Biblical times would have had the tools to understand it. Attempts to force an interpretation of Bereishit which concords with science essentially misses the point.

Among a multitude of other eternal lessons, God's description of Creation over six days teaches us the importance of Shabbat, which reflects the natural cycle of applying our own creative powers for six days of the week while refraining from creative activity on Shabbat. This gives us time and space to shift our focus and remind ourselves of the core purpose of our creative efforts

