



Where we have been

- Reasons why Torah would reject scientific evidence or theory (the Tereifah, and Copernicus)
- Options for reconciling Torah and science (Copernicus, and the Age of the Universe)
- Is Torah a scientific textbook? (Talmudic Medicine)
- This week: A mixture of these discussions – spontaneous generation

The Core Issues

1. Talmud, Shabbat 107b

[A mishnah implies that one is liable for killing certain crawling creatures on Shabbat. Who is the author of the mishnah?] Rabbi Yirmiyah said: This is Rabbi Eliezer, for we have learned, “Rabbi Eliezer says: One who kills a louse on Shabbat is like one who kills a camel on Shabbat.”

Rav Yosef challenged: The Sages only disagreed with Rabbi Eliezer regarding a louse, which does not procreate, but they did not disagree with him regarding other crawling creatures which do procreate! [In other words: Lice are unique.] And both sides deduced their legal positions from...

Abbaye said to Rav Yosef: Don't lice procreate? You have taught: G-d sits and feeds [everything] from the horns of the *re'em* to the eggs of lice! [Rav Yosef replied:] This is actually a species of creature called “eggs of lice”.

2. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Laws of Forbidden Foods 2:14-15

Species of creatures which are created in fruit and food: If they separate and travel on the ground, then even if they subsequently return to the food, one who eats an olive-sized amount is liable, as the verse states, “the crawling creatures which crawl upon the ground”...

The exemption is only where the food became wormy after it was disconnected from the ground...

3. Good references regarding Spontaneous Generation

- Marc Kusnitz, <http://science.jrank.org/pages/6408/Spontaneous-Generation.html>
- Matt Simon, <https://www.wired.com/2014/06/fantastically-wrong-how-to-grow-a-mouse-out-of-wheat-and-sweaty-shirts/>

4. Exodus 16:20

...And some left from the manna until morning, and it developed worms and became rotten...

Question 1: Were the rabbis wrong?

5. Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti (17th-18th century Italy), Pachad Yitzchak 10 **צידיה האסורה**, Letter 1

I, the youthful author, if I were not afraid, would say that in our day, when the scholars of reproduction have examined and looked and they know and have written that all living things, of every kind, come from eggs, and they have proved it with clear proofs, then one who would guard himself should distance himself from them and kill neither *parosh* nor *kinah*... And regarding this I say that if the [talmudic] Sages of Israel could listen to the proofs of the nations, they would acknowledge their correctness, as they did in the case of the moving sphere and the fixed constellations.

6. Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti (17th-18th century Italy), Pachad Yitzchak 10 **צידיה האסורה**, Letter 2

The Israelite sages who recanted and admitted the view of the scholars of the nations regarding the fixed constellations and moving sphere demonstrated that not everything stated in the Talmud is by tradition. Sometimes the Sages of Israel spoke from their intellect and human investigation, and not by tradition...

7. Talmud, Chullin 63b

Rabbi Yitzchak said: A kosher bird may be eaten based on a tradition [that it is kosher], and a trapper is credible to say, "My master taught me that this bird is kosher." Rabbi Yochanan said: This is only if he is expert in birds and their names.

Rabbi Zeira asked: Is "master" a Sage or a trapper?

Come and hear: "Rabbi Yochanan said: This is if he is expert in birds and their names." If he is a trapper, this could be. But if he is a Sage, he may have learned their names, but how would he know the birds?! Rather: It must be a trapper.

8. Rabbi Yehudah Brial (17th-18th century Italy), cited in Pachad Yitzchak

Our Sages of that time recanted and admitted the view of the scholars of the nations, and in the end, after many centuries, all of the nations' astronomers, investigating via experiments and evidence, have returned to the view of our sages and our original tradition!

9. Rabbi Sholom Yosef Gelberg and Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin (21st century Israel), Orchot Shabbat 14:30

Some rule that it would be better to avoid this, because our lice are known to procreate. They may not be the same species as the lice of the Talmud.

10. Rabbi Dr. Leo (Yehudah) Levi (20th-21st century Israel), HaMadda shebaTorah pp. 35-37

We find this neglect [of the invisible] explicitly in the rulings of recent authorities in a variety of fields, such as the letters of a Torah or mezuzah, which must be surrounded by [blank] parchment... And thus one may breathe air even though it contains "crawling creatures" (viruses), and one may drink water even though it contains protozoa...

Question 2: Does the science change the halachah?

11. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kasher (20th century USA), Divrei Menachem II 15

The main reason not to be prohibit strictly [out of doubt] is lest this cause scandal regarding earlier generations, but in this case perhaps it would be appropriate to be strict and not kill these creatures, since nature has changed in this matter.

12. Rabbi Yehudah Brial (17th-18th century Italy), cited in Pachad Yitzchak

You see that many scientists have rejected, with evidence, the matter of *ayin hara*, but Ramban wrote to reject their words, regarding the Talmud's law that one may not stand by another person's field when its grain is standing...

13. Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti (17th-18th century Italy), Pachad Yitzchak 10 **ציידה האסורה**, Letter 2

Regarding *ayin hara*, no small number of non-Jewish scientists, like Ovid and others, and Pliny with them, believed in *ayin hara* as we do.

14. Rabbi Aryeh Carmell, citing Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (20th century England), Michtav meiEliyahu IV pg. 355 fn 4

Our master was asked about individual laws in which the reasons given for them do not match the reality revealed by scientific investigation in recent times... And our master said that in such cases the law never changes, even though the reason is not clear to us. One should maintain the law with both hands, whether strict or lenient. He explained that the reason is because the sages knew the law by tradition from the earliest generations... The explanation does not mandate the law, but the opposite, the law mandates the explanation, and the explanation given in the Talmud is not the only possible explanation...