

Dating By Starlight

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The question is asked: "If a star is a million light years away, and I see the starlight now, how long ago did the light leave the star? Obviously a million years. And you say the universe is how old?" The Lubavitcher Rebbe replies.

”H, 1 Sivan, 5716[1]

Peace and blessing!

In response to your letter from the 25th of Iyar: I was happy to read in it that many of your doubts have vanished. Our holy books explain that Safek – doubt – has the same numerical equivalent as Amalek.[2] The intent is to the Kelipa of Amalek – the spiritual force of impurity that the nation of Amalek represented. Just like the people themselves, this force embodies the trait of jumping into even a boiling bath, just so long as it manages to cool the ardour the Jewish people.[3] The same is true of all of your doubts – their source is clearly in the influence of Amalek.

You wrote that you read in astronomy books that there are stars whose light rays must travel far more than six thousand years until reaching Earth. How, you asked, could that fit with our holy Torah’s position that we are in the year 5716 since Creation?

Even if you were to assume that the above-mentioned calculation about the star’s distance is correct (since that, too, is a subject of dissent among scientists), it does not pose a difficulty regarding the age of the universe. Just as stars were created, light rays were also created. And Just as G-d could create a star that begins to shine only after its creation, so could He create a star that already has rays of light shining forth from it. Especially since Torah tells us, “there was morning, the first day,” even though “Let there be luminaries” was only uttered on the fourth day; i.e. there was light even before the luminaries were set in the heavens.

You write that you saw in some book that possibly the six days of creation did not consist of twenty-four hour days, etc. etc. To our sorrow, similar interpretations are offered in several books. However, they distort the verses, because – with forgiveness asked from the honor of their Torah – they did not properly understand the “foundations” upon which the various scientific theories about the world’s age are built. Any knowledge or research into these foundations proves to any healthy mind that they are only conjectures, very far from certainties. This is the scientists’ opinion, as is clearly stated in their books. It is just that in the books generally studied in schools by beginners, they conceal their many doubts and uncertainties in the underlying assumptions.

And while there is no need to delve into this at length, the simplest proof that the six days of creation are twenty-four hour days is the fact that the concept of keeping Shabbat after six week days is connected to G-d’s resting after the six days of creation[4].

- May 11, 1956

- Safek comprises the Hebrew letters of samech – 60, pei – 80, and kuf – 100. $60+80+100=240$.

Amalek comprises ayin – 70, mem – 40, lamed – 30, and kuf – 100. $70+40+30+100=240$.

- About Amalek, the verse says asher karcha baderech. Though the literal interpretation is “who came across you on the way (out of Egypt),” karcha can also denote kar, coldness. Homiletically Amalek’s insipid influence is embodied in the act of cooling down. When someone is spiritually aroused and excited, Amalek attempts to cause the person doubts, to be a little bit more cynical, etc.

- this letter translated by Arnie Gotfryd from the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Igrot Kodesh, vol. 13, p. 137. There is a follow-up letter, *ibid.* p. 403 of the original.