

OPINION

THE JEWISH STAR

Serving the Orthodox communities of the South Shore

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Letters

Lost in Space

To the Editor:

I agree with Rabbi Avi Shafra's conclusion in "Lost in Space" (8/24/07) that scientific discovery does not threaten our beliefs. However, I fear that by only subtly distinguishing between science and "scientism," while describing scientific research along with the atheistic spin, Rabbi Shafra's article, however unintentionally, tends to belittle science itself.

Real science is entirely neutral towards religion. Science studies that which can be perceived. Religion studies that

which cannot be perceived ("Man cannot see me and live," Exodus 33:20). Science does not reject G-d, but simply states that G-d is part of another conversation. Certainly, some atheists argue that the fact that science explains facets of the world disproves G-d's existence. But this religious response of certain people is by no means science.

This distinction can be seen in the debate over teaching creationism in science classes. Creationists argue that their theory should be taught as an alternative perspective to "The Big Bang." Scientists generally respond not by saying that the idea that G-d created the universe is wrong, but that the idea is scientifically untestable, and

it's really almost here. The night when parents spend time sharpening pencils and pulling together all the assorted paraphernalia of education — including, no doubt, eight different types of notebooks for six different teachers, each of whom felt compelled to issue a list of required supplies as long as NASA's spec sheet for the next generation reusable spacecraft. And what do teachers do with all those boxes of tissues, anyway?

Beyond that, of course, is nervous contemplation of the next round of tuition checks, and beyond that — the question some might ask: why do we put ourselves through this grueling experience, anyway?

The answer actually becomes simpler and simpler all the time.

A video beginning to make the rounds on YouTube was recently produced by the National Jewish Outreach Program. Called Jew Walking (presumably with apologies to Jay Leno) it features a talk show host-type prowling Manhattan's Upper West Side for Jews — not in short supply there — posing stumbers such as, "Who was Jesus' mother?" (correct answer given: Mary), followed by, "Who was Moses' mother?" (hint: not Yo Yo Ma).

(To see the video for yourself go to www.youtube.com and search for NJOP Jew Walking).

therefore belongs within the realm of philosophy and theology, not in the realm of science. Science does, however, often demonstrate facts of history which presents a threat to religions that require a fundamentalist read of Bereshit (Genesis). Judaism, on the other hand, has

long recognized the possibility that G-d created everything on the first day, while managing the appearance of each phenomenon at the appropriate time (see Rashi on Genesis 1:14 and 1:24) and an agadah (story) in the Babylonian Talmud (Berachot 61b) surmises

that ancestors of foxes and fish resided together in the same habitat (there are numerous other examples of these ideas in rabbinic literature). Because of the great tzedakah which can come out of the field of science, and because science teaches us about the

wonders of the Almighty's creations, we should be careful to separate the discipline of science from those who believe that science in any way debunks religion.

RABBI NOAH GRADOFSKY
 Temple Israel of Long Beach

Getting our money's worth out of yeshiva tuition

Editorial

One man couldn't pinpoint the difference between Passover and Pesach and assured his questioner that "If it's sliced, it's no longer kosher." None, it seems, could name all Ten Commandments, or seemed very certain why Jews fast on Yom Kippur (to remind Jewish people of their suffering, one man offered).

The point, of course, is that each of these people was clearly deprived of something that was their birthright. Namely, a Jewish education.

Several weeks ago an excellent book called "Stars of David" by Abigail Pogrebin was released in paperback (www.broadwaybooks.com). Two years ago she published the book detailing her interviews with 62 Jews who have achieved wide renown and success in the secular world. The book is fascinating, but more than anything, it's just plain sad.

Some of these people are downright brilliant — brilliant, but lost to Judaism at an early age, explains one after the other, by a lack of education, and by their accurate reading of the mixed signals sent by their parents about just how important — or not — Judaism was to them.

The late playwright Wendy Wasser-

stein, for example, went to the Yeshiva of Flatbush. "I can remember from second grade," she said. "Joel Braverman" — for whom the high school was later named — "coming around on Sunday mornings — terrifying — saying, 'Did you go to shul yesterday?' And I hadn't gone because my mother made me go to the Judy Taylor School of Dance every Saturday instead. And I begged her, I said, 'Please, if you're going to send me to this yeshiva, let me at least go to temple!'"

"I've heard that a lot," Pogrebin told The Jewish Star, that the book is sad. "A lot of women — men too — just feel disappointed. I just think it's the lack of observance in this slice of the population. Now you can say that it's not representative, but I don't think you can just dismiss it. I think they are meaningful in the Jewish firmament, and they just feel like, where are we if people drop this thing without thought?"

Education provides time for that thought — if we provide it properly. Our children are born with the right to have a Jewish education, and if we offer it grudgingly, or accompanied by mixed signals, G-d forbid, we may well not get our money's worth out of it after all. What is our money's worth, anyway? One possible answer: Jewish grandchildren.

Letters

Recently, Sderot residents won their case in the Israeli High Court of Law, resulting in a court order to protect all classrooms in Sderot.

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