

Rashi's Stance on Corporealism: A Response to Rabbi Zucker

By: NATAN SLIFKIN

Many people, including Roshei Yeshivah, rejected my article “Was Rashi a Corporealist?” on the simple grounds that it just couldn’t possibly be true, and saw no need to even address the varied lines of evidence that I brought (and in some cases, they dismissed the article without even reading it). I am grateful to Rabbi Saul Zucker for actually providing detailed arguments against my hypothesis; until one has a dedicated opponent, one cannot know if one’s arguments have really been tested. Zucker brings up some very valuable further sources from Rashi, and some interesting arguments, but I must state that I am a little taken aback at the inclusion in his article of comments to blog posts. Like a *chavrusa* discussion, these surely have no place in a journal, which is designed for more professional writing, based on more *yishuv ha-da’as*; it also means that large portions of his article are simply redundant. Still, since Zucker decided to include these, I will also do likewise, but I will try to keep it to a minimum.

In my original article, I brought a range of evidence for Rashi being a corporealist, after which I also discussed possible counter-arguments. I concluded in the end that the evidence overall converges towards Rashi being a corporealist. Rabbi Zucker has no such hesitations and is adamant that *all* the evidence shows that Rashi was not a corporealist. He first presents counter-arguments to the various lines of evidence that I brought that Rashi was a corporealist, after which he brings several arguments with which he attempts to prove that Rashi was not a corporealist. I shall deal with these in reverse order, first addressing his arguments that Rashi was not a corporealist, and then examining his attempted rebuttals of the evidence that Rashi was a corporealist.

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The Opening of the Heavens

Zucker's first argument for Rashi not being a corporealist is that Rashi in *Yeshayah*, in two places, links the testimony that there are no other gods to our not seeing any image at Sinai when the seven heavens were opened up. Zucker points out that this testimony only works if the presumption is that anything there that *can* be seen, *would have* been seen; hence, it must be that God is incorporeal, since if He were corporeal but invisible to us, perhaps there are other deities that were likewise hidden from us, and the testimony would be meaningless.

This sounds like an ingenious argument. But before subjecting it to closer inspection, let us look at the context of the verses in *Yeshayah*. They are not discussions of God's incorporeality, or even of His nature at all; rather, they are discussions of His exclusivity, that there is none besides Him, to which God then calls on us to attest. Zucker claims that "the location of this evidence is exactly where we might expect a discussion of incorporealism to be." I am astonished at his claim that the primary evidence that Rashi opposed corporealism ought to be based on a non-explicit inference from a comment in *Navi* on a verse whose purpose is not even to discuss the issue of corporealism. Surely the place where we would expect a discussion of incorporealism to be is the place where every incorporealist Rishon discussed it, which is the very obvious place to discuss it—the numerous verses where the Torah speaks of God in corporealist terms, where Rashi does not say anything at all, and even more fundamentally, with the verse describing man being made in God's image, where Rashi explains that man was made in the *dmus deyokno* of God, without any elaboration. I shall return to this point later.

Zucker claims that "it should come as no surprise that this evidence for Rashi's incorporealism centers around the issue of not seeing any image whatsoever at Sinai; after all, the verse of *lo re'issem kol temmunah*... is a principal proof text for the doctrine of incorporealism"—but what Zucker fails to note is that Rashi makes no comment whatsoever on that verse in *Devarim*. Zucker further claims that Ramban also cited the verse from *Yeshayahu* as one of his proof texts for the doctrine of incorporeality, implying that Ramban uses the same type of argument that he is claiming to be evidence from Rashi. However, Ramban is in fact citing the verse in support of a different claim, that God is not limited by anything.