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Concerning McKay's Response to our article "Of Science and Parody"

By Doron Witztum

McKay's response, "Codes in War and Peace – a reply to Doron Witztum" [1], purportedly answers our article [2] "Of Science and Parody: A Complete Refutation of MBBK's Central Claim." But, unfortunately, McKay's response is both distracting and misleading and fails to answer a single point. Just for protocol's sake, we will make this brief note.

A.

Concerning comment #1: We are scientists, not detectives. It is well known that Mr. Levitan (who is no expert in the field of rabbinical bibliography) prepared the lists for McKay (and McKay does not deny this). But now McKay surprisingly claims that he is hiding some other mysterious person (hitherto never mentioned), who also helped prepare his lists. We are certain that were this enigmatic person as expert as Prof. Havlin, or even equal to Dr Emanuel, McKay would never have kept him under wraps for so long.

May we remind the reader (see [2], chap. 2, "The Cohen Affair") McKay *et al*'s claims which were publicized in two stages:

a. Their claim that Prof. Cohen helped prepare their list.
b. Their claim that Prof. Cohen certified that they "did the same thing" as WRR.

Both these claims were proved false [2]! Now McKay wishes to claim that there was another expert behind the scenes, and we are supposed to rely on him - what a shoddy joke!

Concerning comment #2: McKay repeats his opposition to our challenge (that an independent expert prepare a new list of names and appellations for the 32 personalities of the *second list*, according to Havlin's rules) claiming that Havlin's rules were prepared *a posteriori.*

However, this opposition and pretext have already been thoroughly discussed and methodically disproved in our article [2] (see chap. 1 and the appendix). McKay gives no substantial reply to all this and obviously has nothing to say. Therefore our refutation remains in full force.

Concerning comment #3:

McKay repeats his absurd claim that Professor Havlin did not prepare the lists of names and appellations that were published by WRR, ignoring the report of Havlin himself [3] who wrote:

> "In 5746 I was asked by Mr. Doron Witztum to prepare a list of the names and appellations of 34 Torah sages. The list of sages was presented to me by Mr. Witztum, and I was told that it was based on the Encyclopedia of Great Men in Israel (Hebrew; ed. Dr. M. Margalioth). The criteria for inclusion of a personality in the list was simply that his entry contains at least three columns

of text and that a date of birth or death be specified (day and month). The list of names and appellations I prepared and forwarded to Mr. Witztum was later published by him (together with Professor A. Rips and Y. Rosenberg) in the article "Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis," in both the first version thereof (from early 5747), pp. 40-42, and the second version of the above-mentioned article (5748), pp. 16-17. I shall hereinafter refer to this list as "the first list." A year later, Mr. Witztum asked me to prepare a second list of names and appellations. This time, the criteria for inclusion of a personality in the list was that his entry contains between one and a half and three columns of text and that a date of birth or death be specified (day and month). I forwarded this additional list of names and appellations to Mr. Witztum, and it was subsequently published in the second version of the above-mentioned article (5748) on pp. 25-26. I shall hereinafter refer to this list as "the second list." At that time I confirmed that each of these lists of names and appellations "was based on my own personal judgment and on the examinations I carried out with the assistance of the database in the Data Retrieval Institute at Bar Ilan University — the Responsa Project." (Emphasis mine).

Professor Havlin repeated this in [4] and added:
"Before that time, I had met neither Prof. Rips nor Mr. Witztum. At the time, all I knew about their research was that it was some kind of mathematical investigation of certain hints they found in the text of the Torah. I didn't know anything more specific about their research, the way they conducted their work, nor the programs they were using in their research." (#1)

And he emphasized:
"I must emphasize that, in the course of preparing the above-mentioned lists, not only was it impossible for me to know what effect the choice of a particular name or appellation would have on the success of the experiment, I also had no idea how the success of the experiment would be gauged, and in which way it was connected to the lists of names and appellations." (#5)

B.
Concerning McKay's comments about appellations:
Confirmation by an expert in rabbinical bibliography who knows Hebrew is a **necessary condition** for a list of names and appellations which is claimed as being "the same" as Havlin's list (i.e., it is compatible with the spelling rules and Havlin's rules, or breaks them to "the same extent"). Even McKay *et al* understand this. Therefore, with their first list they deceivingly tried to represent Cohen as an expert in rabbinical bibliography, and gave the impression that he had sanctioned their list.

But after we disqualified their list in our article [5] "A Refutation Refuted", McKay *et al* no longer dared to rely on any expert (or even on any identifiable person) to sanction their second list publicized in *Statistical Science* (See details in [2] chap.2).

Instead, McKay *et al* tried to cast a smoke screen through a long response [6] signed by "anonymous" to our article [5]. McKay claims that we ignored "Anonymous". But we already wrote in [2] (the end of chap. 3): "This work has all the deficiencies of its predecessor, including lies and deceptions obvious to anyone knowledgeable in Hebrew grammar and rabbinical bibliography." We consider the

refutations in our article [5] sufficiently clear and thorough for any expert and anyone capable of examining the bibliographical material. For anyone else, a new detailed response would be of no avail. Only expert opinion can convince such people. And we did indeed bring the opinion of authentic experts agreeing to [5], and opposing the opinion of "anonymous".

<u>Examples of McKay-"Anonymous" work:</u>

1.   Let us clarify one of the main methods they use to mislead their readers.
The linguist Yaakov Orbach o.b.m. established the following rule for our experiment: The spelling should be *grammatical orthography* – "ktiv dikduki" (this is the correct spelling in a vowelized text), which is in accordance to the spelling found in the Torah. His rationale was obvious: When searching for codes in the Torah, one's spelling must conform to the spelling found in the Torah. This rule was actually established before the first experiment and could certainly not be altered for the second experiment. Therefore, the only way would be to write the names with the help of an expert, who will apply the spelling rules as they were phrased by Orbach in the first pre-print of our paper (and as McKay *et al* asked Dr. Emanuel to do).

McKay and "Anonymous" assume that most of their readers know little Hebrew and are ignorant of the following simple fact: Unvowelized texts like newspapers, books and rabbinical responsa, are spelled with <u>a different method</u> than the Torah. They are spelled with **'full' spelling,** which incorporates the usage of **extra** letters, as compared to the Torah's spelling. Therefore McKay's repeated insistence that the names from rabbinical responsa should be used "as they appear" - is based (at best) on lack of basic understanding. Similarly, all McKay *et al's* "proofs" collected from street signs, books, and even from quotes of Havlin himself - are irrelevant to our experiment, because all these texts are intentionally written with an <u>alternative</u> spelling method.

Besides, it is clear that a writer (or an editor) who wishes to mention a name or an appellation of a certain personality in an article, can usually do so freely: he need not be particular in choosing the most proper of several alternatives. Moreover, he can even allow himself to "jargonize" and use irregular expressions (like "HaBeit Yosef").

But all these should be considered a loose and inappropriate approach to dealing with expressions sought for in the Torah. See Havlin's report [3] (and also in [5], Part A).

2.   The work of "anonymous" relies on many books as sources for alternative appellations (and spellings) and to attack Havlin's work. But not one of these books pretends to be a source for making decisions in linguistic and spelling problems (as was explained in the previous paragraph), and therefore they are <u>irrelevant</u> to this issue.
Besides, It should be noted that many of those books are bibliographically deficient. Here is the opinion of Dr Simcha Emanuel, McKay's own expert, on some of these books [7]:
- "Chachmei Yisrael" (Halachmi) - is worthless.
- "Otzar HaRabbanim' (Friedman) - is worthless. It is merely a collection.
- "Melitzei Eish" - is unprofessional.

- Encyclopedia "Otzar Yisrael" - is antiquated and second rate. Nowadays it is not regarded accurate.
- Concerning "Atlas Etz HaChaim" (Halperin) he said that he is familiar only with the volume of medieval rabbis, and that is generally accurate (he did not mention the spelling).

We have Dr Emanuel's exact wording regarding each of these works.

      It is obvious to us that no <u>expert</u> would ever dare rely on these works. Perhaps this is why their critic hides behind the alias "Anonymous"!

C.

Please note that McKay's whole response to our article [2] discusses only rabbinical bibliography, relying on the fact that the reader understands little about it. But precisely because of this, our article [2] concentrated on a factual, logical and scientific analysis to enable even a lay reader to understand the deception behind the work of McKay *et al* and how it is utterly refuted. Regarding this analysis McKay has no reply - because he has nothing to say.

      Here too, we will not enter into a bibliographical argument which the average reader cannot follow [8]. We will merely mention that in the case of the name "Zacuta", McKay completely ignores the fact that he tried to deceive his readers by claiming that "Zacut" was never called "Zacuta" or "Zacuto". He brought purported "proof" for this from a certain bibliography, confident that no one would have the patience to check it out. However we revealed the whole thing as a deception.

      Because McKay's *War and Peace"* list has no professional backing, and because the average reader cannot check its bibliographical claims, McKay's **trustworthiness** is of paramount importance. The "Zacuta" example is an obvious case of McKay's unreliability, and so far he has given no reply sufficient to remove this impression.

References:

1. McKay, B. D. (2001). "Codes in War and Peace – a reply to Doron Witztum". Available at http://cs.anu.edu.au/ ~ bdm/dilugim.
2. Witztum, D. (2000). Of Science and Parody: A Complete Refutation of MBBK's Central Claim. Available at:
   http://www.torahcode.co.il/english/pdf_files/parody1e.pdf.
3. Havlin, S. Z. (1996). Statement of Opinion. Available at:
   http://www.torahcode.co.il/english/pdf_files/havlin1e.pdf.
4. Havlin, S. Z. (1999). A Letter to Professor Leon Gleser (the Executive Editor of Statistical Science).
5. Witztum, D. (1998). Witztum, D. (1998). A Refutation Refuted, or: How the List of Famous Rabbis *Failed* in *War and Peace*. Part A, Part B.
6. Anonimus (1999). Equidistant letter sequences in Tolstoy's "War and Peace": Witztum's "refutation" refuted. http://cs.anu.edu.au/ ~ bdm/dilugim /WNP.
7. A telephone conversation with Dr S. Emanuel, 19 Jan. 2000, about 20:00.
8. We will avoid a bibliographical debate, but we will demonstrate the quality of facts upon which McKay relies. He brings a "proof" that the name "Zacut" is the correct form:

> "For example, the signature 'Zacut' appears almost 40 times in the same source in which Witztum found two examples of 'Zacuto'."

But in the manuscript of the book which he is referring to, which was written during the lifetime of Rabbi Moshe Zacuto, it is specifically the name "**Zacuto**" which **almost always** appears. Only decades after Zacuto's death, the printer changed "Zacuto" into "Zacut" in many instances. [See "Igroth Ha'Remez", "amended and corrected according to manuscript", Yeshivath Ha'Chaim Veha'Shalom edition, Jerusalem, '99. The title of the book (given on page 1 footnote 1) according to the manuscript is "Letters written in reply by… Moshe **Zacuto** נר״ו (=may his light illuminate)". The expression following his name indicates that this title was written in his lifetime. See there on page 4 footnote 37, that he "**almost always**" signs himself as "**Zacuto**".]