

In the Beginning of...A New Look At Old Words by Judah Landa.
Jay-El Publications USA 2004.

My most revered teacher taught me that when reviewing someone else's work you should always be courteous and respectful of the effort that the author had put into it, regardless of what your ultimate opinion was.

In this spirit the first thing that should be said about Judah Landa's self-published book is that it represents an honest attempt to create a meaningful synthesis between the statements of the earliest verses in the book of Genesis and contemporary scientific theories about the origins of the Universe, Evolution and other natural events.

In his introduction Judah Landa states his aim to be: *...to demonstrate that it is possible to interpret the Bible literally and accept it as divinely inspired...and at the same time not encounter any irreconcilable conflicts between it and the well-established and widely accepted tenets of modern science.*

Unfortunately, as he traces a path through individual verses in Genesis chapters 1-11, Landa undermines the confidence one might repose in his theories and scholarship. Having made great play of the unreliability of the various translations of the Hebrew Bible into English and the importance of language, he adopts a system of transliteration that does to conventional standards of transliteration what scraping finger nails down a blackboard does to the nerves. Rather than making it easier for the reader to follow the original this execrable attempt serves only to point up the terrible mangling our holy tongue receives in the wilder reaches of Ashkenazi pronunciation.

In his comments on selected verses Landa often quotes some of the medieval Jewish commentators, which is to be expected, but rarely then nor when quoting scientific theories does he allude to the original source, so that it is hard to discern what is his original view and what that of another scholar – either contemporary or from a previous century.

It is sad to report that the panegyric about the book on its back cover – presumably written by the author himself – uses hyperbolic language about its content and author which are unjustified by the contents, and while I am sure that he is a genuine and decent man if the book is ever republished Judah Landa might be wise to rewrite it in a way that reflects less embarrassingly on the book, and on the author's "solid mastery of ancient languages".

Nevertheless, Judah Landa should be saluted for a brave attempt to tackle a subject whose readers likely fall into two camps: Those who would agree with him whatever he wrote, and those who would never agree with him at all.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh