1. Deuteronomy Chapter 17

(11) According to the teaching that they will instruct you and the judgement they will say to you, you shall do; do not stray from the matter they will tell you to the right or left.

2. Sifrei D’varim, Parashat Shof’tim, Piska 154

“Left or right,” even if they show in your eyes about the right that it is left and about the left that it is right, listen to them.

3. Palestinian Talmud (Vilna Edition), Tractate Horayot, Chapter 1, Halakha 1

It is possible that if they say to you about the right that it is left and about the left that it is right, listen to them: the Torah says, “To walk right or left.” That if one says to you about the right that it is right and about the left that it is left.

I. The Sun Going Around the Earth and Matzah

4. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesachim 94b

Our Rabbis taught: the Sages of Israel say, “The celestial sphere is fixed and the stars rotate.” But the sages of the other nations say, “The celestial sphere rotates and the stars are fixed.”

Said Rebbi, “There is a response to their words. We never find Ursa Major in the south or Scorpio in the north.”

Rav Acha son of Ya’akov challenged this: Perhaps it is like a pivot of a millstone; alternatively, like the pivot of a door.
The Sages of say, “During the day the sun goes under the firmament and in the night above the firmament.

But the sages of the other nations say, “During the day the sun goes under the firmament and in the night under the earth.”

Said Rebbi, “And their words seem better than our words.” For in the day springs cool down and in the night they heat up.

5. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate P’sachim 42a

Said Rebbi Yehuda, “A woman should only knead with water *shelanu* [שלום].” Rav Matnah taught this in Papunia. The next day, everyone brought their pitchers and came to him. They said to him, “Bring us water!” He said to them, “I spoke of water that rested overnight.”

6. Rashi on the above

Shlomo Yitzchaki, 11th Century Rhineland

*Shelanu* - In the night. Since in the days of Nissan the springs are hot, for it is still the season of rain, as we say in [chapter of Talmud] *Mi Sh’haya*: In the season of rain the sun goes in the lower part of the firmament; therefore, the entire world cools and the springs heat up. Therefore we rest them overnight and they cool off.

II. T’reifah

7. Mishnah Tractate Chullin, Chapter 3, Mishnah 1

Here are the *t’reifot* for cattle… This is the...
8. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Chullin 54a

Of the house of Yosef the fowler would strike the sciatic nerve [of animals] and kill them. They came before Rebbi Yehuda son of B’taira. He said to them, “Can one add to the [list] of t’reifot? You only have what the Sages enumerated!”

Rav Pappa son of Abba the fowler would strike the kidney and kill. They came before Rebbi Abba. He said to them, “Can one add to the [list] of t’reifot? You only have what the Sages enumerated.” “But we see that it died!” They have a tradition that if they spread an ointment on it, it lives.

III. Killing a Louse on Shabbat

9. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 107b

As it was taught: Rebbi Eliezer says, “One who kills a louse on Shabbat is like one who kills a camel on Shabbat.”

Rav Yosef challenged it: Our Rabbis only disagree with Rebbi Eliezer about a louse, since it does not generate offspring. But all other creepy crawlers that do generate offspring, they do not disagree.

Abaye said to him, “A louse does not generate offspring? Did not the master say, ‘The Holy Blessed One sits and nourishes from the horns of the wild ox to the eggs of lice!’ It is a species called, “eggs of lice.”

Was it not taught, “T’fuyim [small insect] and the eggs of lice?” It is a species that is called,
“eggs of lice.”

IV. Response: The Sages Were Correct

10. Shitah M’kubetzet, Tractat K’tubot 13b

Betzalel Ashkenazi, 16th Century Egypt and Israel, quoting Jacob ben Meir, 12th Century France

And I heard in the name of Rabbeinu Tam, of blessed memory, that he said as such on that which we say in chapter Mi Sh’Hayah Tameh, “The Sages of Israel say, ‘The celestial sphere is fixed and the stars rotate.’ But the sages of the other nations say, etc.” And we say there, “Said Rebbi, ‘There is a response to their words, etc.’”

And Rabbeinu Tam, of blessed memory, said, that even though the sages of the nations of the world defeated the Sages of Israel, that is a victory of claim. But the truth is like the Sages of Israel, and that is like we say in prayer, “And opens the windows of the firmament.”

V. The Law (Halakhah) Is Correct Regardless of the Science

11. Mikhtav Me’Eliyahu, Part 4 (in the notes)

Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, 20th Century Lithuania, England, Israel

I saw fit to note here what I heard explicitly from the holy mouth of my master, my teacher, my rabbi, of blessed memory, when he was asked on the matter of other rules such that the reasons that were given for them are not according to the reality that was revealed in scientific investigation in later generations. And they fall under the framework of what...
the Gemara asks in several places, “But we see that it is not so.”

And our master, our teacher, our rabbi, of blessed memory, said that in these and similar cases for sure the rule does not change, but initially the reason was not clear to us. Rather one should grasp the rule with two hands, whether to be strict or to be lenient…

And the reason, said our master, our teacher, our rabbi, of blessed memory, is because our Sages knew the halakha as received tradition for many generations, and they also knew it from experimentation [experience?]... But in the matter of scientific explanation, the explanation does not obligate the rule but rather the opposite. The rule obligates explanation. And the reason that is mentioned in the Gemara is not the single possible reason for the matter. And if sometimes they gave explanations that are according to the knowledge of nature in their day, it is an obligation on us to find other explanations that with them the law is upheld on its foundation according to the knowledge of nature in our day…

And also if no plausible reason is found, we believe with full faith that the law is a true law and to Hashem we hopefully wait that He will enlighten our eyes to find a suitable explanation.

VI. Halakhah Based on Changing Science is Too Difficult

12. Dor Revi‘i

Moshe Shmuel Glasner, 20th Century
Hungary

But know, that the truth is that our Sages in any laws of the Torah did not rule according to the study of nature, but rather according to the received tradition or exegesis of the
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Sources compiled and translated by Joel Goldstein

verses… and in truth, all of the wisdom is based on trial and error. But if our Sages had decided based on the wisdom of medicine, they would by necessity need to be experimentalists and to establish laboratories… like the professors of medicine. And even though in the old days the Sages of Torah also engaged in the study of nature, but their decision in the rule of Torah was only through received tradition, and deductions of exegesis of the verses. For if they were to judge according to science, the rules in all areas of the Torah would be changing according to the position of wisdom at any time, for sure. And in those types of t'reifot that we have, according to the wisdom of medicine, we would never arrive at a decision like this. For wisdom states that, regarding this, it would be impossible to construct general rules at all, for no bodies are identical and no injuries are identical. And this matter would require a specific estimate for every body and injury. And truthfully, this is the rule for a murderer, that it requires a medical estimation, and we do not find general principles by which to judge. Therefore the rule to establish general principles on t'reifot must be for stringency. For anything that has such an injury is a t'reifah, without looking at whether it can live or lived twelve months, like all measurements in the Torah....

VII. Halakhah Should Follow Science

13. Pachad Yitzchak

Yitzchak Lampronti, 18th Century Italy
(With the Responsum of Yehuda Briel 17th and 18th Century Italy)

But I the young writer, if I were not terrified, I would say that in our day that the natural historians observed, noticed, understood, and wrote that all life that ever is and was is from...
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However I inquired my teacher, the Rabbi Rav Yehuda Briel of Mantua and he upheld the permissible ruling. His response: this I was asked: if in this time, where the world is filled with the opinions of scientists who deal with the matters under discussion, that all living things are born and created from an egg, is it permissible to kill a louse on Shabbat? And I responded that one should not stray from the rules established on the received traditions of those before us due to the research of the sages of the nations of the world. For see that many researchers… and there is no need for the believer to seek out proofs and claims from another place, even though there are many strong ones; for the received traditions of our Rabbis is sufficient for it they based this matter they created and etched final rule and law. And further faithful testimony is with me by what is written in the Gemara in P’sachim on the matter of if the celestial sphere is fixed and the star rotates, that the Sages of Israel recanted at that time and agreed with the sages of the nations of the world. But the end of the matter, after many centuries, all of the astronomers from the nations of the world changed in their research based on tests and trials and returned to the words of our Sages and our original received tradition. If so, one should not move from what was ruled by our Gemara, even if all of the winds of human research in the world come and blow through one, for the wind of...
Hashem speaks through us. Therefore the knowledge of the scientist is lacking and his cleverness does not reach the depths of the wisdom of nature and the happenings of B’reishit, for it is great.

And this was my answer to him: I saw your ruling of great Torah on the lice and I said, very well, even though it goes fully against sense since we are holding strictly and not leniently… and the Sages of Israel who recanted and agreed with the sages of the nations of the world in the matter of fixed stars and a rotating celestial sphere, they showed pointedly that sometimes the Sages of Israel also spoke from intelligence and human investigation and not from the received tradition. For if not so, why did they agree? They should have clung to the received tradition and not reneged in the face of all of the proofs of the nations of the world. And if, in our time, there are sages of the other nations who think like Copernicus that the celestial sphere is fixed, a not insignificant number think and prove the opposite. And these things are not like learned wisdom, they are mathematics, such that a person may bring clear and true proofs and follows a pattern so that a claimant has no room to argue or respond to them.