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NOAM BLUMENTHAL

HOWARD
SALAMON

the Greatest Gift

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what nature
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WHICH RABBI IS RIGHT?

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TORAH'S MANY LAYERS

"Better is one handful with ease, than two handfuls with a vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes 4:6)

Ibn Ezra says these are the fool's words who prefers less, than securing more and better for himself with extra toil. This can be a wise person's words to mean that having a better demeanor due to less stress is preferable to wealth and a troubled soul. The wise person wishes peace so he can engage Torah study with a conducive mindset. Both interpretations are true.

PARSHA

NOAM BLUMENTHAL

Yisro's Goosebumps



This week's parsha starts with Moshe telling Yisro in detail all of what happened in Egypt, and Yisro's response:

"And Yisro rejoiced over all the kindness that Hashem had given Israel when delivering them from the Mitzrim. Yisro said, 'Blessed HaShem, who delivered you from Mitzrayim and from Paroh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Mitzrim. Now I know that HaShem is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their schemes against [the people].'"

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The question is why is Yisro comparing HaShem to other gods if he knows there are no other gods!?

The Gemara in Sanhedrin brings down a machlokes about Yisro's reaction to hearing about the miracles that HaShem performed in Yitzias Mitzrayim. Shmuel holds that Yisro reacted with goosebumps. Rav holds that Yisro reacted by giving himself a circumcision. Rashi quotes this Gemara and brings down Shmuel's position that Yisro reacted by rejoicing and getting goosebumps. Rashi quotes that Gemara that this shows that Yisro felt pained by the destruction of Mitzrayim. If while Yisro was rejoicing, he also felt pained, it is clear that according to Shmuel, Yisro was in conflict.

In the Gemara, Rav adds that one cannot belittle a convert in his (the convert's) presence, because he will surely take offense.

Rav gives insight into what Yisro's conflict was. While on the one hand he was able to recognize the greatness of HaShem, he compared HaShem's greatness to other gods, revealing his identification with Egypt. This is explained by Shmuel when he tells us that Yisro had goosebumps. Yisro, being a convert, was moved by what HaShem did for the Jews, but there was a part of him that identified with Mitzrayim and on some level, sympathized with the Mitzrim. When one is within the 10 generations of a descendant of a convert or a convert himself, one has an identification with where he came from. We learn that even a tzadik like Yisro had an identification with Egypt, kal vachomer any convert who may not be on such a high level. This helps us to understand the feelings of a convert and be able to be sensitive and kind to converts, as the mitzvah instructs us to do. ■

HOWARD
SALAMON

the Greatest Gift

**TORAH
SURPASSES
NATURE**

Its (sun's) source is the end of the heavens and its circuit is to their end; nothing is hidden from its heat. God's Torah is perfect restoring the soul; the testimony of Hashem is trustworthy making the simple one wise (Psalms 19:7,8)

Saadia Gaon says that the phrase "The sun said" is missing. The sentence should, read as follows: "The sun said, 'God's Torah is perfect'" (Ibn Ezra 19:8).

In Psalms 19 read on shabbos, King David first discusses natural wonders. He then transitions to the wonders of the Torah. Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia Gaon who says you need to add the words "the sun said"— meaning that creation is saying (metaphorically) that as wondrous as creation is, Torah is even more perfect. How are we to understand this? If we look at creation, we see the many wonders, and at the same time we know there's much more we can never penetrate. In what manner does Torah surpass creation?

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We have two answers. Rabbi Israel Chait said that Torah teaches us perfection, whereas nature does not. Torah teaches us about morality, justice, kindness, etc. But from nature, we can never learn about character perfection as we can through Torah, which specifies matters like tzedaka and tithes. The second answer my friend Marshall suggested: nature offers no “communication” or words. We can only “derive” from observation. But Torah is God’s very articulations: perfectly formulated truths. We gain far more from studying God’s words and thoughts than by deriving our own notions from nature.

The sun, as it were, “admits” to Torah’s superiority with the phrase, “God’s Torah is perfect.” Meaning, Torah is perfect, whereas nature is not. Nature lacks God’s articulated words and thoughts. The sun’s admission of Torah’s superiority means that in nature itself this discrepancy is observed. ■



Astrology

Which rabbi is right?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The rabbis argue on astrology's validity. But 2 opposing views cannot both be correct. How must we decide the matter?

Anyone who performs a deed because of an astrological calculation or arranges his work or his journeys to fit a time that was suggested by the astrologers is [liable for] lashes, as [Leviticus 19:26] states, "Do not tell fortunes" (Maimonides, Laws of Star Worship 11:9).

All the above matters are falsehood and lies with which the original idolaters deceived the gentile nations in order to lead them after them. It is not fitting for the Jews who are wise sages to be drawn into such emptiness, nor to consider that they have any value (Ibid. 11:16).

How could Maimonides say that witchcraft and idolatry are all imaginary and foolish, if there was demonstrated proof? Clearly, there is no evidence. To verify what is true, we must prioritize God's words over man's, His words being absolute truths:

You are helpless, despite all your art. Let them stand up and help you now: the heaven gazers, the star-gazers, who announce, month by month whatever will come upon you (Isaiah 47:13).

Here, Isaiah taunts fools to test their beliefs which they know are just that: beliefs without evidence.

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Thus said the Lord: "Do not learn to go the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed by signs in the sky; for the nations fear them. For the laws of the nations are delusions" (Jer. 10:2,3).

Jeremiah delivers God's rebuke that astrology is a delusion. The prophets teach of the fallacy of astrology. Their words are direct from God.

Maimonides explains that some sages might have been misled:

I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man's birth, the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. Do not regard this as a difficulty, for it is not fitting for a man to abandon the prevailing law and raise once again the counterarguments and replies (that preceded its enactment). Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden. (Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille) ■

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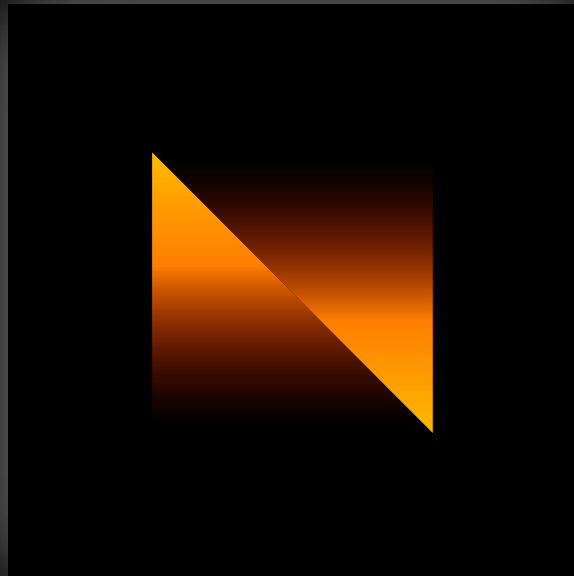


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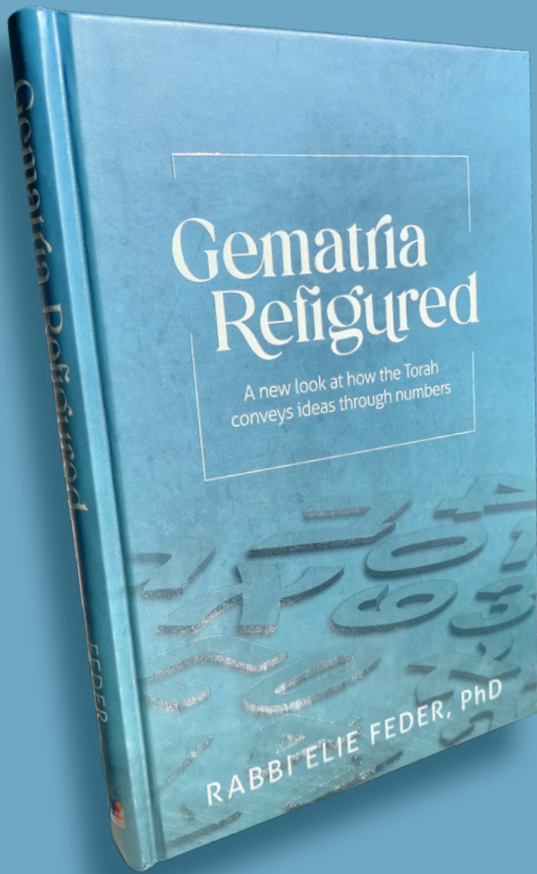
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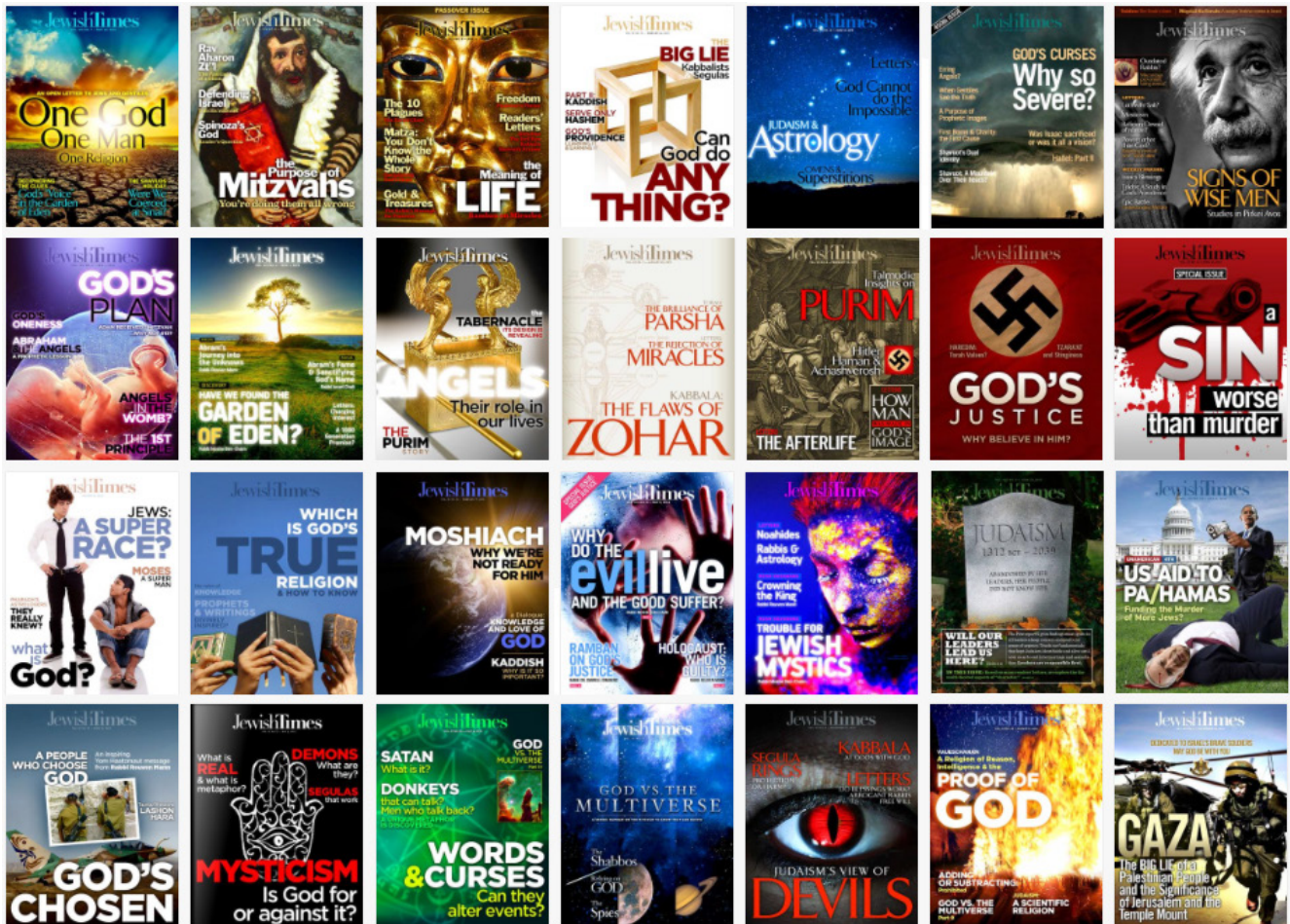
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