



Torah in the Observatory: Gersonides, Maimonides, Song of Songs (Emunot: Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah)

Menachem Kellner

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Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (Ralbag, Gersonides; 1288-1344), one of medieval Judaism's most original thinkers, wrote about such diverse subjects as astronomy, mathematics, Bible commentary, philosophical theology, "technical" philosophy, logic, Halakhah, and even satire. In his view, however, all these subjects were united as part of the Torah. Influenced profoundly by Maimonides, Gersonides nevertheless exercised greater rigor than Maimonides in interpreting the Torah in light of contemporary science, was more conservative in his understanding of the nature of the Torah's commandments, and was more optimistic about the possibility of wide-spread philosophical enlightenment. Gersonides was a witness to several crucial historical events, such as the expulsion of French Jewry of 1306 and the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Papacy. Collaborating with prelates in his studies of astronomy and mathematics, he had an entree into the Papal court at Avignon. Kellner portrays Gersonides, revered among Jews as the author of a classic commentary on the latter books of the Bible, as a true renaissance man, whose view of Torah is vastly wider and more open than that held by many of those who treasure his memory.

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