

Maharal Torah Paths

The Wisdom of the Nations (2)

Netiv HaTorah 14:560 - In light of the complete G-d-given nature of the wisdom of the nations, it is not reasonable to say "How can we turn away from Torah to learn outside wisdom?" We are told, "You shall contemplate it day and night" [Yehoshua 1:8].

This dilemma was addressed by Ben Dama [Ben Zoma?], "Take my case. I have learned the entire Torah, may I now learn Greek wisdom?" They quoted the verse "This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth" [Yehoshua 1:8]. Go and find a time of day that is neither day or night-then you can learn Greek wisdom. The rabbis decided it was forbidden to learn Greek wisdom.

However, it would seem that Greek wisdom in that case did not relate to Torah at all, like allegory and literature, and to take time to learn it violates the commandment to contemplate Torah day and night. But Greek wisdom that deals with the order of the world is permitted to be studied. Similarly, the gemara that says, "cursed is he who raises swine, and cursed is he who teaches his child Greek wisdom [Bava Kama 82b] must relate to allegory and literature rather than science, medicine, mathematics, etc. On the same page we are told that of one thousand young men in Rabban Gamliel's court, five hundred learned Torah and five hundred learned Greek wisdom. Apparently, wisdom relating to the order of the world that Hashem gave to the nations is permitted.

MDK - Secular knowledge of the order of the world seems compatible with Torah and could even enhance it. A critique of this position will be brought in next tidbit. *Column preped by Dr. Moshe Kuhr*