



## Feynman's Lost Lecture: The Motion of Planets Around the Sun

By Richard P. Feynman, David Goodstein, Judith R. Goodstein

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**"Glorious."?Wall Street Journal**

Rescued from obscurity, *Feynman's Lost Lecture* is a blessing for all Feynman followers. Most know Richard Feynman for the hilarious anecdotes and exploits in his best-selling books *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!* and *What Do You Care What Other People Think?* But not always obvious in those stories was his brilliance as a pure scientist—one of the century's greatest physicists. With this book and CD, we hear the voice of the great Feynman in all his ingenuity, insight, and acumen for argument. This breathtaking lecture—"The Motion of the Planets Around the Sun"—uses nothing more advanced than high-school geometry to explain why the planets orbit the sun elliptically rather than in perfect circles, and conclusively demonstrates the astonishing fact that has mystified and intrigued thinkers since Newton: Nature obeys mathematics. David and Judith Goodstein give us a beautifully written short memoir of life with Feynman, provide meticulous commentary on the lecture itself, and relate the exciting story of their effort to chase down one of Feynman's most original and scintillating lectures.

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**Feynman's Lost Lecture: The Motion of Planets Around the Sun** By Richard P. Feynman, David Goodstein, Judith R. Goodstein **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Richard Feynman, the rock star of theoretical physics, has left an image that belies his nerdy side. Not many bongo-playing surfer beatniks would have spent hours of their spare time proving Newton's law of elliptical planetary motion using only plane geometry. But *Feynman's Lost Lecture: The Motion of Planets Around the Sun* shows that the great man did just that. Originally delivered to an introductory physics class at Caltech in 1963, this 76-minute CD and book set contains everything the math-savvy listener needs to savor the pleasures of applied math. Caltech physicist David L. Goodstein and archivist Judith R. Goodstein found the notes and tape amid another professor's papers and set to work making sense of them; unfortunately, photographs of the blackboard drawings didn't survive. The book briefly covers their find and recovery work, then presents the proof as reconstructed--crucial reading if one is to follow the lecture. There's nothing easy about it, as Feynman acknowledges in the lecture:

I am going to give what I will call an elementary demonstration. "Elementary" means that very little is required to know ahead of time in order to understand it, except to have an infinite amount of intelligence.

He means, instead, that he is strictly using geometrical methods to reach his destination, which explains why it was so difficult to reconstruct without his diagrams. His charming Brooklyn accent and good humor show through in this lecture, even if the material is quite a bit drier than his fans might expect. Still, those interested in adding a new dimension to their understanding of this brilliant scientist--and those with a deep interest in Newtonian physics--will find *The Motion of Planets Around the Sun* a rare and unexpected treat. -  
-Rob Lightner

#### From Publishers Weekly

Isaac Newton, in his *Principia Mathematica* (1687), proved Johannes Kepler's law explaining why planets travel in elliptical orbits around the Sun. In 1964, theoretical physicist Richard Feynman, the bestselling author and Nobel Prize winner, set forth his own proof of Kepler's law, using only plane geometry. Feynman's difficult proof, presented in an introductory lecture to Caltech undergraduates, never made it into the classic multivolume Feynman Lectures on Physics, published between 1963 and 1965, but California Institute of Technology archivist Judith Goodstein unearthed the transcript of Feynman's 1964 lecture, published here along with explanatory commentary and historical background, plus 25 photographs and 150 diagrams. Caltech physics professor David Goodstein, Feynman's friend and colleague until the latter's death in 1988, provides a warm reminiscence and does a good job of explaining how quantum physics and relativity supplanted Newtonian science.

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#### From Library Journal

Not only colleagues but friends of noted physicist Richard Feynman, David and Judith Goodstein, a professor of physics and a registrar/archivist, respectively, are well qualified to present this material. Their book consists of four chapters. The first and largest is a brief history of the establishment of the Copernican cosmology, which Feynman gave as a lecture to the freshman class at Caltech. Feynman then revisits the work of Isaac Newton and the watershed proof of the Scientific Revolution that separated the ancient world from the modern. There is also chapter a with some wonderful reminiscences of Feynman. While Feynman's presentation requires only an understanding of high school geometry, some persistence will be required to

grasp what he is saying. Recommended for academic and public libraries emphasizing the history of science. (CD-ROM not seen..

-?James Olson, *Northeastern Illinois Univ. Lib., Chicago*

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#### **Harold Dalton:**

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