

Light Insight

“I Have Heard That Song Before”

“What a beautiful melody!” Taking a solitary stroll through a forest in order to get away from the pressing affairs of state in his palace, the king was captivated by the strains of a melody coming from some distant, invisible shepherd’s flute. He hummed the tune to himself on his way back to the palace, but by the time he got back into the business of ruling his country he had completely forgotten it. Haunted by the memory of the beautiful melody, the king was unable to resume his usual routine. Watching his ruler’s growing aggravation, one of his advisors suggested a plan that would enable him to hear the melody once again. A royal proclamation was issued throughout the land, offering a generous reward to the shepherd who could play the desired tune for his majesty.

Shepherds by the dozens lined up in front of the palace, each awaiting his turn to play his favorite melody for the king in the hope that this was the one his majesty had heard and the reward would be his. One after the other they departed the royal chambers in disappointment, as the king

declared that their tune was not the one that he had heard while walking in the forest. One frustrated shepherd got up the nerve to challenge his sovereign:

“Is your majesty capable of playing on this flute the melody he heard?”

When the king replied in the negative, the shepherd closed in with what he thought was a victorious thrust.

“How then can your majesty be so certain that the melody just played is not the one that he heard?”

“My dear fellow,” parried the king, “I may not have the wherewithal to produce that melody anew, but when I hear it once again you may be sure that I will recognize it!”

Both Passover and Shavuot celebrate great moments in the history of the Jewish nation. Passover, the celebration of the Redemption from Egypt, offers us an opportunity to relive the great Divine revelation enjoyed by our ancestors on the eve of their liberation from Egyptian bondage.

The final redemption from Egypt was a powerful experience of intimacy with G-d. There was, however, one problem. The Jewish People had not prepared themselves spiritually for the Divine revelation. It was handed to them on a silver platter when G-d took

the Jewish People out from their bondage, in fulfillment of His promise of liberation.

Without thoroughly preparing oneself in advance, it is impossible to internalize such an experience and incorporate it into one’s consciousness. That is why the liberated slaves had to wait seven weeks until Shavuot for the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. During these weeks, they grew spiritually day by day, and properly prepared themselves for the great revelation at Sinai which they were therefore capable of internalizing and incorporating.

But why was it necessary to first be exposed to a “silver platter” revelation which cannot be internalized, if it anyway needs to be repeated in order to be properly received?

The parable of the king supplies the answer. If someone has never before heard the sweet melody of Divine revelation, he is incapable of searching for its replay. Only after the Heavens had virtually unfolded before our ancestors on the night of Passover were they capable of envisioning what spiritual horizons they could reach. Then they could begin a seven-week process of growth through effort, confident that when they would hear the sweet melody of the Divine voice speaking to them at Sinai, they could say, like the king, that they had heard this song before.

The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

On Shavuot, we eat milky foods to remind us that the Torah's teachings are as sweet as milk and honey. One such teaching is that we must judge others, including our spouses, favorably. Think about that the next time you ask...

Milk, Honey?

A young man in Jerusalem was home watching his baby one evening when the baby woke up. "No prob-

lem," he thought, "a little milk and the baby will fall right back to sleep."

But there was no milk. "How frustrating," he thought, staring into the empty fridge. "Is my wife so unorganized? Can't she keep an extra bag of milk on hand? (In Israel, milk comes in bags.) Now, I'll have to hold the baby for an hour until she comes home. The baby will be perfectly happy, but I won't."

Suddenly, in a flash of genius, he decided to borrow milk from his upstairs neighbor. "Sorry," said his neighbor, "we're out of milk. As a matter of fact, we even borrowed a bag from you

this afternoon, and we already finished it!"

"So!" he thought, walking downstairs. "My wife had done just what I would have wanted; she lent the milk to the neighbors who needed it for supper. We don't really need it anyway, because I can just hold the baby until my wife comes home to nurse him. After I've tried one more neighbor, of course."

He continued past his apartment to his downstairs neighbor. "Sorry," said his neighbor, "we're out of milk. As a matter of fact, we borrowed a bag from your wife this afternoon, but we used it..."

Moral: A lack-dose of lactose is not what matters most.

Response Line

Right Shouldering

Harold Crandus wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

When the Torah is removed from the Ark and carried through the synagogue, over which

shoulder should it be carried and why?

Dear Harold,

The Torah scroll is held with the right hand against the chest and right shoulder. This shows honor and love of the Torah, as expressed in the verse in Song of Songs: "His right hand embraces me." Carrying it in the right hand is also reminiscent of the verse "From His Right Hand, He gave a Law of fire to them."

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