



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

חג שבועות שמח

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## Light Insight

*“I Have Heard  
That Song Before”*

“**W**hat 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 the 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 for enabling him to hear the melody once again. A royal proclamation would be 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 positively declared that the tune he played was not the one that he 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.

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

“My dear fellow,” parried the king, “I may not have such a fine ear for music as to be able to play that melody, but when I hear it once again you may be sure that I will recognize it!”

Both Pesach and Shavuot celebrate great moments in the history of the Jewish nation. The “Season of our Freedom” offers us an opportunity to relive the great Divine revelation enjoyed by our ancestors on the eve of their liberation from Egyptian bondage, when the Almighty Himself slew the firstborn of their masters and did a “pass-over” on

the Jewish homes. This was a powerful experience of intimacy with G-d. There was, however, one problem with it. Jews had not really prepared themselves with spiritual growth for this Divine revelation. It was handed to them on a silver platter by the Creator, who had fulfilled His promise of liberation.

When one is not properly prepared through his own efforts, it is impossible for him to internalize such an experience and truly incorporate it into his consciousness. This is why the liberated slaves had to wait seven weeks until they reached the “Season of the Giving of Our Torah.” During these weeks, they would grow spiritually day by day, and thus properly prepare themselves for the next great revelation at Sinai which they would be capable of internalizing and incorporating.

But why first be exposed to a “silver platter” revelation which cannot be internalized, if it will not last?

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 first Pesach Eve were they capable of envisioning

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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.

This concept is applied by the “*Bnei Yisasschar*” to answer yet another question:

While yet in his mother’s womb, our Sages teach us, a Jew is taught the entire Torah by an angel. When he is about to enter the world, the baby is gently struck by that angel and caused to forget all that he learned. If it is the will of G-d that we gain Torah knowledge through our own efforts, what purpose is there in prenatal education doomed to be forgotten?

Torah knowledge is not like any of the human sciences and philosophies. It is Divine in nature and cannot be acquired through ordinary human effort. Only if a Jew has once heard the melody of Torah before birth is he capable of recognizing it when he

eventually learns it through his own efforts.

We connect these two epic seasons of revelation — Pesach and Shavuot — with the counting of the 7 x 7 days and weeks of the Counting of the Omer. These days and weeks help us relive the days and weeks of the move our ancestors made from a transient “silver platter” revelation to a lasting earned one. So when we finally reach the last station in this growth, we too are capable of making it a permanent part of our consciousness.

“Return us to Your Torah,” a Jew prays three times a day. How can you return to where you have never been? The answer is that we have all heard the melody of Torah before. Our souls heard it at Sinai, and we learned it in our mother’s womb. That is why a Jew prays only for Divine assistance in achieving what that king sought — an opportunity to hear that melody again — so that we can gaze with wonder and joy at the déjà vu experience and proudly proclaim: “I have heard that song before!”

## Response Line

### Clean Torah

Michael D. Moroney Jr. wrote:

*If a person is ritually impure or dirty and they handle a copy of the Torah, does this defile the Torah permanently and if so is there any way to rectify this desecration? I am anxious to hear your thoughts on this.*

Dear Michael,

A person who is ritually impure may touch a Torah scroll. A person who has dirty hands should not. In either case the Torah scroll does not become defiled or impure.

This law, according to Maimonides, has its source in the Talmudic statement

that “words of Torah cannot become impure.”

### Two Trop Tune

Matthew Schutz wrote:

*I noticed in Parshat Yitro two different trop [cantillation or “tune” markings associated with each word] were given — one for Shabbat and one for Shavuot. Why is this?*

Dear Matthew,

There are two kinds of *trop* by means of which the Ten

Commandments are read. They are called *ta’am elyon* and *ta’am tachton* (lit. the “uppermost meaning” and the “undermost meaning”). The difference between the two is “musical” but not only musical.

*Ta’am tachton* is the regular *trop* of this passage as part of the Scriptures. The special *trop* — *ta’am elyon* — breaks up the sentences in a different way, making each of the Ten Commandments into a single, separate sentence, and is used only in the public Torah reading, resembling the revelation at Sinai. As you noted, most communities use it only on Shavuot, the Festival celebrating G-d giving us the Torah.