

Two “Fitting” Parables

written by Ozer Bergman

May 24, 2009

Two Parables on Receiving the Torah

This is from the Ben Ish Chai of Baghdad (d. 5669/1909). Even though he lived after the Magid of Dubno, this is a more “general” parable so I am presenting it first.

A rich man had two sons. One was handsome, strong and wise. The other was homely, weak and—let’s be generous—not as intelligent. Before he passed away, the rich man sold his properties and furnishings. With the money, he bought precious jewels and gold coins. He sewed extra pockets onto a pair of overalls, and filled them with the jewels and coins. Then he sewed up the pockets and died, without saying which of his sons just receive the overalls.

The brothers went to court. The strong, wise, handsome brother claimed that because of his superior qualities, and because he was the firstborn and always closer to his father than his brother had been, certainly the overalls were meant for him. It was a persuasive argument. The judges turned to the younger brother and asked for his arguments.

“Esteemed judges, all that my claims is correct. Just one thing, though. Let’s see whom the overalls fit. If they fit him, they’re his. If they fit me, they’re mine.” They fit him, not the older brother.

The angels had many arguments why the Torah should stay with them, and not be given to human beings. But Moshe Rabbeinu responded, “Were you ever slaves in Egypt? Have you parents to honor?” The Torah is a perfect fit for we homely, weak, could-be-smarter humans.

This is from the Magid of Dubno, who occasionally visited the

Vilna Gaon.

A country bumpkin went to the city. He walked passed a men's clothing store and saw a beautiful suit in the window. He went inside and told the salesman that he wanted to buy the suit in the window. The salesman took the bumpkin's measurements and brought him the suit in his size. He gave it to the bumpkin and told him to try it on. In the meantime, the salesman went to another customer.

The bumpkin went into the dressing room and put on the suit. It was very uncomfortable. The jacket and pants were too tight—he couldn't close them—and the sleeves and legs were too short. He looked ridiculous.

He came out of the dressing room and the salesman came over to help him. "This doesn't fit me at all! Look at the sleeves, the legs—everything. It doesn't fit me at all."

The salesman knew he had brought out the right size. He looked closely at the bumpkin and realized the problem. "Sir, if you want the new suit to fit, you must take off the old one first!"

This, explained the Magid, is why we often feel that what we learn in the Torah "doesn't fit." We foolishly forget (ignore?) the fact that in order to try on something new we have to shed the old. To grow in our Torah awareness and observance, we have to let go of our ideas and behavior that prevent them from fitting.

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