

Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from
the famed Maggid of Dubno
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Greatness of T'shuva Nitzavim

The Sages in Sanhedrin 99a taught:

"The place occupied by the penitent cannot be attained even by the completely righteous."

How could it be that a ba'al teshuva is greater than a tzadik?

The Groom's Clothes

Jack was a peddler from a small village. Jack's son, a bright and talented young man, caught the eye of a young lady from an extremely affluent family. Despite the vast differences in social status and wealth, the woman's father liked the hardworking young man and approved of the match.

When the time came close for the wedding, the bride's father approached Jack with a request. 'Please buy your son a proper suit, so that when he comes to my city for the wedding celebration he will look respectable.'

Jack readily agreed, and took his son to a local clothing shop in the village to buy him a nice suit.

The evening before the wedding, Jack and his family arrived in the city, and took a room in a local hotel. The following morning, the father of the bride together with his friends went to greet his future son-in-law. But they were surprised to find a great commotion in the hotel. What happened?

Jack was so upset that he could barely speak. Agitated and shaken, he pointed to the broken lock on the door. In the middle of the night, thieves had broken into their hotel room, stealing their luggage, clothes, and other possessions. "Even the new suit which I bought my son for the wedding is gone", Jack wailed. "This is a catastrophe!"

The wealthy father of the bride put his arm on Jack's shoulders. "Don't let this trouble you at all. Don't worry about the loss; I will make it up to you." He then told his butler to take Jack and his son to the finest stores in town and buy them suitable clothes for the wedding.

After the wedding, the wealthy man organized a reception for his friends and neighbors, and he seated his new in-laws at the head of the table. Yet people noticed that Jack looked unhappy. A good friend of the bride's family took Jack aside. "This should be a time of great joy for you. You just married off your son to a

wonderful family. Why are you upset?"

"Why shouldn't I be upset?" replied Jack. "Didn't you hear what happened to us in the hotel, how thieves stole our clothes, including the new suit that I purchased for my son?"

"Why should that bother you so? Did not the bride's father buy splendid clothes for all of you?"

"True - but why should I have to resort to gifts? I had prepared everything myself!"

At this point, the friend smiled. "Fool! You have no idea what a favor that thief did for you! You thought you bought a good suit for your son, and probably in your village it would have been considered very appropriate. But here in the big city, people have very sophisticated tastes. They would have laughed at that suit!

"But now that the thief stole everything and his father-in-law bought new clothes for everyone, your son was dressed in style, even according to the standards of our city. So this was the best possible outcome for you!"

The Tzadik and the Ba'al T'shuva

The tzadik fills his bags with valuable objects - a lifetime of good deeds, prayers, Torah learning and mitzvot. After 120 years in this world, he takes his collection of 'valuables' to the

heavenly court, where each object is taken out and examined.

The angels scrutinize each one. "Tell me, this you call Torah Lishmah, Torah studied for its own sake?" "You think that this counts as a prayer recited with a pure heart?" "And this you call a mitzva?" There is no end to measuring the quality and intentions of good deeds.

But the repentant ba'al t'shuva arrives at the heavenly court in tears. "How could I have wasted my time in the world? How could I have lost my days, spending them in worthless pursuits?"

Then the Holy One Himself makes for him new 'clothes', as it says, "Great is T'shuva, for it transforms sins into merits." The spiritual clothes that God makes for the ba'al t'shuva are certainly of the highest, purest quality. Like the new clothes that the wealthy man bought for his son-in-law, no one will find what to criticize.

This is what the Sages meant when they taught that, "The place occupied by the penitent cannot be attained even by the completely righteous."

Adapted from Mishlei Yaakov, pp. 463-464