



Just Enough

Ashkenazi Judaism - Russia

At a very young age, Jacob began helping his father in the tailoring business. From his father, he learned to measure, cut, sew and iron, helping him in the design and construction of suits and other garments for the rich men of the town. However, with the passage of time, as he began to take more and more pleasure in his craft, Jacob began to dream of designing his own clothes. In particular, he dreamed of one day making a coat for himself with a special fabric, like those used by his father for the very best orders.

Over the years, Jacob planned what that coat would be like and what fabric he would make it with, all the while saving some of the little money that his father gave him for helping in the tailor shop. Finally, after several years of waiting, the young Jacob had enough money to buy whatever expensive fabric he wanted.

Once he had purchased the perfect cloth, Jacob worked every evening to make the longed-for coat, until finally, one day, he showed up in his father's workshop with the finished work.

'You have made a very nice job, Jacob!' said his father, proud of his son's work. 'It is clear to me that you have become a full-fledged tailor.'

Jacob loved his coat and, as soon as winter arrived, he lost no chance to wear it. Years passed by, then one windy winter morning, he came across a young woman shivering with cold, because all she had to cover herself with was a shawl. Jacob offered her his coat, and then

accompanied her home, chatting along the way. That young woman – Sarah was her name– was lovely. Two years later they got married!

On the ground floor of the house they rented to make their home, Jacob set up his own tailor shop. He had a good hand at sewing and soon had a large clientele among the upper bourgeoisie. The years passed and Jacob continued to wear his coat –it was still his most precious garment– until one day, when he took it from the hanger and looked at it.

‘My old coat ... How worn it is!’ he said to Sarah. ‘It was my dream for many years, a dream that came true. And how proud my father was of me! It was thanks to this coat that we met! But look, there is nothing left. Nothing!’

Suddenly, his eyes lit up.

‘However,’ he muttered under his breath, ‘what is left is just enough.’

Instead of getting rid of his coat, Jacob went into his workshop and started cutting, measuring and sewing. He worked until the wee hours of the morning. When the dawn arrived, Sarah saw him appear with a new jacket ... made with the sections of the fabric that were still usable.

Jacob loved his jacket and he wore it everywhere. Soon after, Sarah bore twins. One early autumn morning, when the girls were two years old, Jacob looked through the kitchen window and saw that during the night it had snowed. Without thinking twice, he went to the twins’ bedroom, woke them up and said:

‘Come on, girls! Let’s have fun with the snow!’

Wrapping them with his jacket, he carried them out into the white landscape, and danced with them in the falling snow. All was laughter and more laughter, as they circled like a carousel, while Sarah watched them from the door.

Jacob wore that jacket for many years, until, as could be expected, the fabric aged.

'You're going to have to finally get rid of that jacket,' Sarah said when she saw him coming from the street one day.

'Yes,' he said sadly. 'This jacket has been very important to me. Do you remember that day, when I took the girls to see the snow wrapped in this jacket and we started dancing? What good memories! But there is nothing left of it. Nothing!' He said, sadly.

Then, suddenly, a mischievous smile crossed his face.

'Maybe ... there is still enough left,' he said, looking enigmatically at Sarah. 'Just enough!'

Instead of getting rid of the jacket, Jacob went back into his workshop and, after a few hours, he came out with a nice cap fitted to his head, a cap made with what useful fabric had remained.

'How about this?' he asked his wife.

As you might imagine, Jacob loved his cap and wore it everyday, sometimes even inside his house.

Around that time, the country was devastated by a terrible famine. The crops were lost, and people had almost no food to eat. Even the rich were forced to greatly reduce their orders of clothing. Sarah planted a vegetable garden in the backyard, so they could at least eat potatoes, beans, carrots and cabbage. But, how much the family missed sweets, a delicacy unattainable in those days!

One day, while the family was in a nearby forest collecting firewood, one of the girls found herself among some rocks covered with bushes full of ripe blackberries. What a joy! The whole family laughed! And how sweet were the berries! They ate their fill, but some berries still remained. They decided to take them home to make a cake. But what could they use to carry them?

'We can use my cap!' Jacob declared with a grin.

The cap, now stained inside by the blackberries, lasted for a good number of years. Meanwhile, Jacob's daughters grew into women and became engaged to two handsome and promising young men. And more and more of the hair under Jacob's cap grew white.

‘Oh, my old cap!’ he lamented. ‘It looks like a rag. There is almost nothing left of it. Nothing!’

But, once again, the ingenuity of Jacob the tailor shone through his eyes.

‘Well ... maybe there’s still something left,’ he said, twirling his cap. ‘Just enough!’

Instead of getting rid of the cap, Jacob went into his workshop and, after an hour, he came out with a bow tie around his neck.

Wearing that bow tie, he attended the weddings of his daughters and, later, the births of his grandchildren. One afternoon, when his oldest granddaughter was sitting in his lap playing with the bow tie, she exclaimed, giggling:

‘Grandpa, you have a butterfly on your neck!’

From then on, grandpa’s ‘butterfly’ became an object of entertainment and fun. Whenever his grandchildren came to visit, Jacob would take off his bow tie and pretend it was a butterfly flying all over the house.

But one day, returning from the market Sarah exclaimed:

‘Where is your bow tie?’

Jacob put his hand to his neck, extremely worried.

‘It must have fallen off!’ he said in a trembling voice. ‘I’ll return to the market and see if I can find it.’

Jacob retraced his steps, he returned to all the places he had gone to, all the shops and streets, through which he had passed. He searched and searched, but to no avail. He returned late in the evening, depressed, without appetite and went straight to bed.

The next morning, Jacob did not get out of bed.

‘There is nothing left,’ he said to Sarah plaintively, ‘None of that fabric of my youth! It was with me through so many experiences. It is as if I have suddenly lost my memories, as if I have lost someone very dear!’

Sarah said nothing. She did not even try to comfort him. She told him that she was going out to do some shopping. But, instead, she went to fetch her daughters.

‘Come and bring the children,’ she told them.

When they all arrived home, the children ran down to Jacob’s bedroom and threw themselves headlong into their grandfather’s bed.

‘No, I do not feel like playing!’ Jacob warned them. ‘Grandpa is very sad. I lost my bow tie!’

But his daughters would not allow themselves to be carried away by the sentimentality of their father.

‘Dad, tell us the story of that fabric of yours! Your grandchildren do not know it!’

‘No, it’s very sad,’ Jacob rejected the idea.

But the grandchildren began to beg Grandpa until, finally, he agreed to tell them the story.

He told them how he had dreamed of a coat, which he would make with the most beautiful of fabrics. He told them how proud his father had been, and how he had met Sarah through that coat. He told them how the coat had been transformed into a jacket, and how he had wrapped his two daughters with it to dance in the snow. He told them about the beautiful cap that he made afterwards with the remains of the jacket, and how in the time of hunger they had made a cake with the blackberries they had collected in it. He explained to them how the cap ended up turning into a bow tie, which he had worn to the weddings of his daughters and the births of all his grandchildren.

‘But now the bow tie is gone,’ he told the children sadly.

‘What happened is that your bow tie became at last a butterfly, Grandpa, and went flying off without you noticing,’ his granddaughter told him, recalling what she had seen.

Jacob exhaled a long sigh, after which he said:

‘Yes, it seems that my beloved bow tie turned into a butterfly and flew away; and all of you have helped me to realise that my memories

did not go flying off with it. I have enough memories to make a beautiful story, a story that we will never lose, if you help me keep it.’

So they did, and the story was transmitted within the family through generations. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2018).

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Comments

This story is based on the only two versions I have found of this story, Haske (2012) and Pearmain (2005). Both adaptations are very similar, which is why I did not want to distance myself too much from the main lines of the story.

In addition to illustrating principle 7a of the Earth Charter, this story is also ideal to illustrate some of the concepts of the Circular Economy. This is a sustainable approach to the treatment of materials that attempts to effectively utilise resources on the basis of the seven R’s: Rethink, Reduce, Re-use, Repair, Refurbish, Recover and Recycle.

Sources

Haske, R. (2012). Just enough. A Woven Education (blog). Retrieved from <http://awoveneducation.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/dream.pdf>.

Pearmain, E. (2005). Just enough. In Skidegate Band Council (ed.), *Comprehensive Community Development Plan*, pp. 364-366. Vancouver, Canada: David Naime + Associates. Retrieved from <http://www.skidegate.ca/documents/ccp/2005CCDP.pdf>.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 7a: Reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials used in production and consumption systems, and ensure that residual waste can be assimilated by ecological systems.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 7f: Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

