

# Velveteen Rabbi

## Walking the Walk (Radical Torah repost)

*Here's the d'var Torah I wrote back in 2006 for this week's Torah portion. This is the last of the weekly Torah portions; the final portion in the Torah is read not as part of the regular weekly cycle, but on Simchat Torah (the festival of "Rejoicing in the Torah"), immediately followed by the first portion in the Torah.*

*This also marks my last Radical Torah repost, since I've now reposted all of the divrei Torah I had published at that now-defunct blog. Thanks for reading!*

And when Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them: Take to heart all the words with which I have warned you this day. Enjoin them upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching. For this is not a trifling thing for you: it is your very life[.]

As our journey through the Torah scroll approaches this year's ending and concomitant new beginning, I've been thinking about what it means to take Torah seriously, as Moses here instructs us to do. What does it mean to "observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching," to understand Torah as "our very life"?

I can tell you what it doesn't mean: it doesn't mean taking Torah literally, because reading Torah literally and attempting to believe its many contradictory statements as factual reality would no doubt make one's head explode. It doesn't mean reading only the easy bits of Torah, or the fun bits, or the bits that make immediate and intuitive sense.

It doesn't mean skipping over the boring or confusing parts, or the parts that contradict other parts. It doesn't mean accepting anybody else's interpretation, necessarily, but it also doesn't mean always feeling compelled to come up with your own, either. It doesn't mean watching other people engage with the text while remaining at a safe distance, comfortably aloof.

It doesn't mean limiting your understanding of "Torah" to just the Chumash, or just the Tanakh, or just the Written + Oral Torahs, or just the feminist commentaries on the Torah, or just the non-feminist ones. It doesn't mean squeezing Torah into any kind of glass slippers that would require you to trim a toe here and a slice of heel there in order to fake a comfortable fit.

It doesn't mean assuming that the interpretation you're longing for is necessarily right, or assuming it's necessarily wrong. It doesn't mean using your version of the text to whack other people whose understandings don't match the one you prefer. It doesn't mean anything liberal or conservative, progressive or restorationist or anything else besides.

It doesn't mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater, but it doesn't mean keeping the baby in diapers forever either. It doesn't mean idolizing the written text in such a way that we forget the unending revelation streaming beyond and through and behind it.

It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing, which means the only way to make Torah our lives is to dance with it, sometimes wildly and sometimes gently, sometimes furiously and sometimes tenderly, sometimes cradling it in our arms like a lover and sometimes passing it around the room like a bottle of wine.

It means opening ourselves to the wisdom of our ancestors, and their occasional idiocy too. It means embracing the willingness to be wrong, and the willingness to be right, and the willingness to keep putting one foot in front of the other, step by step.

Because that's what it's all about: doing the hokey-pokey and turning the scroll around, turning it and turning it because everything is in it, knowing all the while that what matters is not how we walk the Jewish walk but that we care enough to walk it at all.

Shabbat Shuvah and Yom Kippur are on the near horizon. May we take these words of Torah into our very hearts, and may they fuel us to move with serious and joyful intent through the challenges of the days that are coming. Shanah tovah, Radical Torah folks. Keep on walking.