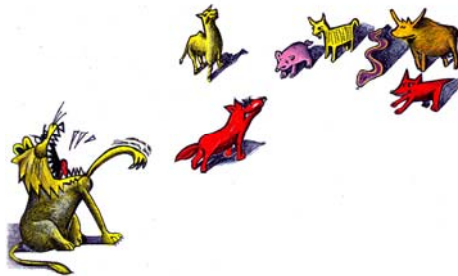


Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(10)

The Lion, the Fox, and the Other Animals
Genesis Rabbah 78:7



Background to the Fable "The Lion, the Fox, and the Other Animals"

AESOP'S THE SICK LION

A lion, unable from old age and infirmities to provide himself with food by force, resolved to do so by artifice. He returned to his den, and lying down there, pretended to be sick, taking care that his sickness should be publicly known. The beasts expressed their sorrow, and came one by one to his den, where the Lion devoured them. After many of the beasts had thus disappeared, the Fox discovered the trick and presenting himself to the Lion, stood on the outside of the cave, at a respectful distance, and asked him how he was. "I am very middling," replied the Lion, "but why do you stand without? Pray enter within to talk with me." "No, thank you," said the Fox. "I notice that there are many prints of feet entering your cave, but I see no trace of any returning." He is wise who is warned by the misfortunes of others.

? What do you think about Aesop's fable?

Genesis 32: 4-9

4. Jacob sent emissaries ahead of him to his brother Esau, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom.
5. And he commanded them, saying, "So shall you say to my master to Esau, 'Thus said your servant Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and I have tarried until now.
6. And I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, menservants, and maidservants, and I have sent to tell [this] to my master, to find favor in your eyes.' "
7. The emissaries returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother, to Esau, and he is also coming toward you, and four hundred men are with him."
8. Jacob became very frightened and was distressed; so he divided the people who were with him and the flocks and the cattle and the camels into two camps.

9. And he said, "If Esau comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape."

? What do you think about Jacob's reasoning?

Idiom: "Every man for himself"

Something that you say which means that everyone in a particular situation is trying to do what is best for themselves and no one is trying to help anyone else.

"It might be a civilized place to shop at other times but come the January sales, it's every man for himself."

? What do you think about the attitude "Every man for himself"? Under which circumstances may you justify it, if any?

Marcelo Ferder's drawing

? How does the lion look in Marcelo Ferder's drawing? How do the other animals look in Marcelo Ferder's drawing?

The Lion, the Fox, and the Other Animals
Genesis Rabbah 78:7

מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה עח סימן ז

ז וישא יעקב את עיניו וירא וגו', א"ר לוי ארי הוא כעס על הבהמה והחיה, אמרין מאן אזיל ומפייס יתיה אמר להון הדין תעלא אתון להכא דאנא ידע תלת מאה מתלין ואנא מפייס יתיה, אמרין ליה אגומין, הלך ציבחר וקם ליה, א"ל מה דין, אמר להון אנשית מאה, אמרין ליה אית במאתן ברכאן, הלך ציבחר וקם ליה אמרין ליה מה דין א"ל אנשית אף מאה א"ל אף במאה ברכאן, וכיון דמטא תמן אמר אנשית כולהון אלא כל חד וחד יפייס על נפשו, כך יעקב אבינו, רבי יהודה בר סימון אמר יש בי כח לערוך תפלה, ר' לוי אמר יש בי כח לערוך מלחמה, וכיון דמטא ויחץ את הילדים וגו', אמר כל איניש ואיניש דכוותא תקום ליה.

A lion got angry at all the animals, both wild and tame. The animals asked, "Who will go and calm him down?"

The fox answered, "Come with me and we'll go to him, since I know 300 fables that will calm him down."

"Let's go!" said the animals. After walking a short distance, the fox stopped.

"What happened?" the animals asked.

"I forgot 100," the fox said.

The animals replied, "There are enough to calm him down in the 200 that are left."

They walked another short distance, when the fox stopped again.

Once more the animals asked, "What happened?" to which the fox replied, "I forgot another 100."

The animals said, "There are still enough to calm him down in the 100 that are left."

As they approached the lion, the fox said, "I forgot them all. Each of you go and calm the lion down in your own way."

Genesis Rabbah 78: 7

This fable is told in Genesis Rabbah, attempting to reflect the state of mind of Jacob before the encounter with his brother Esau. The author of Genesis Rabbah tells us that Jacob had prepared to confront his brother with arms and had implored God to help him. However, when the "hour of truth" was near, he became paralyzed with fear and decided to divide his camp, echoing the words of the fox in our fable: "Let each of you go and calm the lion (Esau) in your own way." The theme of the angry lion and the sly fox is presented by almost all of the fabulists, although with some variations. In Aesop, La Fontaine, and Samaniego, the lion, instead of being disgusted, is sick and asks for visitors. In our fable, the fox's initial bravery is changed to wariness or fear at the end.

? Why do you think the midrash presents to us an cautious -even fearful- Jacob?

Wrapping Up

Surviving in the Diaspora: when you do what you can more than what you should!

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1)
Why couldn't the fox calm the lion down at the end? How do you think he felt then?
- 2)
What did the fox expect the other animals to do then?
- 3)
If you were one of the other animals, how would you have calmed the lion down?
- 4)
Have you ever had to do something very brave? What was it and what gives you the courage to be brave?

4th- 6th GRADES:

- 1)
What does this story tell us about being a leader?
- 2)
If you were one of the other animals, what would you have told the fox at the end?
- 3)
What things do you do to find courage when you face a scary or difficult situation? Are there other people you rely on to help you? Who might they be?
- 4)
How do you think that telling people fables can help them? Why do you think our Rabbis used this method so much when it came to understanding the Torah?

7th-12th GRADES:

1)

What moral crisis is depicted in this story?

2)

Why do you think the Rabbis used this fable in relation to the encounter between Jacob and Esau, who had not seen each other for many years?

Fables from the Jewish Tradition 29

3)

There are other Biblical leaders who face crises in leadership: look up the situations that apply to Moses, Barak, King David, and Gideon, for example. Discuss how each leader handled these situations. What qualities of leadership did they develop as a result?

4)

What happens to a nation when leaders do not lead? Give examples for current situations in our world today.

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Post Reading Strategy: Conceptually-Related Reading

(Vacca, R. and J. Vacca. Content Area Reading. N.Y.: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1996.)

This fable can be related or linked to the tales of the One Thousand and One Nights in which Scheherazade, a beautiful maiden, vows to marry the king and change his dangerous behavior. He marries women and has them killed the next day because his first wife betrayed him. Scheherazade tells a fascinating story the first night, and the king asks her to tell him another. She says it is too late, so he keeps her alive to tell another tale. Each tale is more interesting, and 1001 nights pass. Through the story telling, the king becomes wiser and kinder. Scheherazade becomes his queen.

“The Lion, The Fox, and the Other Animals” v. “Scheherazade”

Elements of Fiction	“The Lion, the Fox, and the Other Animals”	“Scheherazade”
Plot		
Conflict		
Resolution		
Symbolism of stories		
Theme		