

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(11)

The Lion, the Donkey, the Fox, and Some Other Animals
Yalkut Vaera 182



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

Donkey



1. The domesticated ass (*Equus asinus*).
2. *Slang* An obstinate person.
3. *Slang* A stupid person.

Heart and Brains as seat of Intelligence

During the second half of the first millennium BC, the Ancient Greeks developed differing views on the function of the brain. It is said that it was the Pythagorean Alcmaeon of Croton (VI and V centuries BC) who first considered the brain to be the place where the mind was located. In the 4th cent. BC Hippocrates, believed the brain to be the seat of intelligence (based, among others before him, on Alcmaeon's work). During the 4th century BC Aristotle thought that, while the heart was the seat of intelligence, the brain was a cooling mechanism for the blood. He reasoned that humans are more rational than the beasts because, among other reasons, they have a larger brain to cool their hot-bloodedness.

AESOP'S: THE LION, THE FOX, AND THE STAG

A Lion lay sick in his den, unable to provide himself with food. So he said to his friend the Fox, who came to ask how he did, "My good friend, I wish you would go to yonder wood and beguile the big Stag, who lives there, to come to my den: I have a fancy to make my dinner off a stag's heart and brains." The Fox went to the wood and found the Stag and said to him, "My dear sir, you're in luck. You know the Lion, our King: well, he's at the point of death, and has appointed you his successor to rule over the beasts. I hope you won't forget that I was the first to bring you the

good news. And now I must be going back to him; and, if you take my advice, you'll come too and be with him at the last." The Stag was highly flattered, and followed the Fox to the Lion's den, suspecting nothing. No sooner had he got inside than the Lion sprang upon him, but he misjudged his spring, and the Stag got away with only his ears torn, and returned as fast as he could to the shelter of the wood. The Fox was much mortified, and the Lion, too, was dreadfully disappointed, for he was getting very hungry in spite of his illness. So he begged the Fox to have another try at coaxing the Stag to his den. "It'll be almost impossible this time," said the Fox, "but I'll try"; and off he went to the wood a second time, and found the Stag resting and trying to recover from his fright. As soon as he saw the Fox he cried, "You scoundrel, what do you mean by trying to lure me to my death like that? Take yourself off, or I'll do you to death with my horns." But the Fox was entirely shameless. "What a coward you were," said he; "surely you didn't think the Lion meant any harm? Why, he was only going to whisper some royal secrets into your ear when you went off like a scared rabbit. You have rather disgusted him, and I'm not sure he won't make the wolf King instead, unless you come back at once and show you've got some spirit. I promise you he won't hurt you, and I will be your faithful servant." The Stag was foolish enough to be persuaded to return, and this time the Lion made no mistake, but overpowered him, and feasted right royally upon his carcass. The Fox, meanwhile, watched his chance and, when the Lion wasn't looking, filched away the brains to reward him for his trouble. Presently the Lion began searching for them, of course without success: and the Fox, who was watching him, said, "I don't think it's much use your looking for the brains: a creature who twice walked into a Lion's den can't have got any."

? Why does the fox say to the lion "It'll be almost impossible this time," when asked by the latter to convince the stag to go back to the lion's den?

? Why does the stag enter the lion's den the first time?

? Why does the stag enter the lion's den the second time?

? Do you know people who act in life like the lion of our story? Do you know people who act like the stag?

Fool Me Once, Shame on You; Fool Me Twice, Shame on Me

"Anyone who falls for the same deceit twice must accept responsibility for his own gullibility; thus, one should be more watchful the next time around. Originally a child's saying." From the "Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings" by Gregory Y. Titelman (Random House, New York, 1996).

Aesop's: The Butcher and the Dog

A dog went into a butcher's shop and stole the heart of some animal. The butcher turned around and said to him, 'You haven't stolen my heart; indeed, I have taken heart from this lesson! So if you ever come back in here again, I will give you the reward you deserve for this act of robbery!'

This fable shows that someone can be induced by experience to learn his lesson and be on his guard.

Note: In Greek, the 'heart' was considered a seat of intelligence (something like our 'brains'), whereas we commonly associate the heart with feelings and emotions. Instead of losing heart (= losing his wits), the butcher has taken heart (= wised up).

The Lion, the Fox and the Ass entered into an agreement to assist each other in the chase. Having secured a large booty, the Lion on their return from the forest asked the Ass to allot his due portion to each of the three partners in the treaty. The Ass carefully divided the spoil into three equal shares and modestly requested the two others to make the first choice. The Lion, bursting out into a great rage, devoured the Ass. Then he requested the Fox to do him the favor to make a division. The Fox accumulated all that they had killed into one large heap and left to himself the smallest possible morsel. The Lion said, "Who has taught you, my very excellent fellow, the art of division? You are perfect to a fraction. He replied, "I learned it from the Ass, by witnessing his fate."

Happy is she who learns from the misfortunes of others

? What was the donkey's mistake in Aesop's fable?

The Lion, the Donkey, the Fox, and Some Other Animals Yalkut Vaera 182

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת וארא [רמז קפב]

ויעשו גם הם וגו' בלהטיהם אמר אביי הלכות כשפים כהלכות שבת יש מהם בסקילה ויש מהם פטור אבל אסור ויש מהם מותר לכתחלה. העושה מעשה בסקילה האוחז את העינים פטור אבל אסור (ר' יוחנן אומר) מותר לכתחלה כדרב חנינא ורב הושעיא כל מעלי שבתא הוּו עסקי בהלכות יצירה ומברי להו עגלא תלתא ואכלי ליה, אמר ר' חייא בר אבא בלטיהם אלו מעשה שדים בלהטיהם אלו מעשה כשפים וכן הוא אומר ואת להט החרב. אמר ר' יוחנן למה נקרא שמם כשפים שמכחישין פמליא של מעלה אמר אביי דקפיד אמנא שד דלא קפיד אמנא כשפים, אמרי ליה יוחנני וממרא למשה תבן אתה מכניס לעפריים אמר להו אמרי אינשי למתא דירקא ירקא שקיל ויבלע מטה אהרן את מטותם אמר רבי אלעזר נס בתוך נס, כתיב כבד לב פרעה אמרו למה הדבר דומה לארי וחיות ושועל שהיו הולכין בספינה וחמור גובה מכס מן הספינה א"ל החמור תנו לי מכס א"ל שועל לחמור כמה עזין פניך אתה יודע שמלך שבחיות עמנו ואתה תשאל מכס א"ל החמור מן המלך אני נוטל ולגנזיו אני מכניס א"ל הארי קרבו לי הספינה ויצא וטרפו לחמור ונתנו לשועל, א"ל סדר לי אבריו של שוטה זה הלך השועל וסדרן. ראה לבו נטלו ואכלו. כשבא הארי מצא אבריו נתוחין א"ל לבו של שוטה זה היכן הוא א"ל אדוני המלך לא היה לו לב שאם היה לו לב לא היה נוטל מכס מן המלך. אף כך פרעה הרשע אם היה לו לב לא היה אומר למלך מלכי המלכים תן לי דורון ושכח מה שעשו לו העכברים ועדיין היה אומר מי ה' אשר אשמע בקולו לא ידעתי את ה':

A lion, a fox and some other animals were about to set sail. The donkey was collecting the tickets for the trip, saying, Pay me."

The fox asked, "How dare you! You know that the King of Beasts is traveling with us, yet you dare to charge us?"

The donkey replied, "I will collect the money for the trip, even from the king, and then will deposit it in his treasury."

The lion said, "Bring the ship closer." He then went and attacked the donkey, killing him. He handed the donkey over to the fox and ordered, "Prepare the parts of this fool for me to eat."

When the fox was preparing the parts, he found the heart and ate it. When the lion returned, he asked, "Where is this fool's heart?"

The fox replied, "Your Majesty! This fool had no heart. (The heart was assumed to be the seat of intelligence) If he had had one, he wouldn't have charged Your Majesty for the trip."

Yalkut Vaera 182

? What was the donkey's mistake in our story? Was he stubborn or stupid or too narrow minded?

In antiquity, the heart was thought to be the source of understanding and intelligence. This is made clear in our fable, but can also be seen in Aesop's Fables. In one of the fables attributed to Aesop (The Lion, the Fox, and the Stag), the lion convinces the fox to deceive a stag so that he can eat the heart. Twice in a row the stag falls for the fox's trick, showing its stupidity.

On the other hand, the donkey often symbolizes the lack of understanding which leads a person to become a victim of the powerful and unscrupulous. The donkey does what is just in an unjust world, and its logic does not include the vision of a corrupt world in which the weak are very often oppressed. It is important to note that the donkey does not act in this manner because he is motivated by infinite heroism, but rather because he isn't wise.

The Jewish Context of our Fable (or the partial use of a motif)

Exodus 5:1-2

1. *And afterwards, Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "So said the Lord God of Israel, 'Send out My people, and let them sacrifice to Me in the desert.' "*
2. *And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should heed His voice to let Israel out? I do not know the Lord, neither will I let Israel out."*

Exodus 8:27-28

27. *And the Lord did according to Moses' word, and He removed the mixture of noxious creatures from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; not one was left.*
28. *But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.*



Wrapping Up

When arrogance begets stubbornness and when stubbornness begets stupidity!

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

Note: I would not necessarily have this story for the K-3rd grades as it is very gruesome and I don't know if they would really understand it. I do include a few questions for them, but I think this fable is more for a little older audience.

K- 3rd GRADES:

1)

Why did the other animals think the donkey shouldn't charge them money to ride on the boat?

2)

Do you think the lion and the fox were right to have killed and eaten the donkey?

3)

The fox tried to say that the donkey wasn't smart because he should have known not to make the lion king and his friends pay. Do you think the donkey was really dumb, or that the lion and fox were just being mean bullies?

4)

When other kids try to gang up on you and act mean or say mean things to you, what can you do about it?

4th-6th GRADES:

1)

Write a caption for each of the characters in the story as they are seen in the illustration.

2)

What do you think this story tells us about bullies and gangs? If this is a problem in your school or your life, how has it been dealt with? What do you think is the best way to handle these problems?

3)

If the donkey represents people who are perhaps slow learners or have mental challenges, how do you think they should be treated? Why?

7th- 12th GRADES:

1)

What can we learn from this story about the way gangs form and operate?

2)

Why is "the law of the jungle" not the embodiment of justice as we understand it in Judaism and in the Western world? (See, for example, the Biblical saying from Leviticus 19:15, "Lo tisa p'nai dal v'lo tehdar p'nai gadol—b'tzedek tishpot amitecha": "Do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich, but judge your kinsman fairly.")

3)

The fox, representing shrewdness, symbolically removes the heart, representing understanding, and tells the lion, representing power, that there was nothing but a fool left of the donkey, representing lack of understanding and stubbornness. How could you then understand this as a commentary on wisdom and intelligence, and its use in life?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre-Reading: Inferential Strategy

(Hansen, J. "An Inferential Comprehension Strategy for Use with Primary Children." The Reading Teacher. 1981.)

1. Select 3 or 4 central, important ideas from the selection
2. Develop 2 questions for each idea
 - a. Background Knowledge
 - b. Prediction
3. Discuss responses
4. Read the selection

5. Discuss the prediction and the connections with the text

Central Ideas in “The Lion, the Donkey, the Fox, and Some Other Animals”:

-

Lying

-

Fooling people

-

Leadership

Questions:

-

Have you ever told a lie?

-

Why do you think people lie?

-

Should people get in trouble when they fool others? Why or why not?

-

Why are some people leaders and others followers?