

Fables from the Jewish Tradition  
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(12)

**The Lion's Feast**  
Esther Rabbah 7:3



**Background to the Fable "The Lion's Feast"**

Esther 2: 21-22 & 3:1

**Chapter 2**

21. In those days, when Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of the guards of the threshold, became angry and sought to lay a hand on King Ahasuerus.

22. And the matter became known to Mordecai, and he told [it] to Queen Esther, and Esther told [it] to the king in Mordecai's name.

23. And the matter was investigated and found [to be so], and they were both hanged on a gallows, and it was written in the diary [that was read] before the king.

**Chapter 3**

1. After these events, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite and advanced him, and placed his seat above all the princes who were with him.

**?** Assuming that you know the story of Purim, how is the end of chapter 2 connected to the beginning of chapter 3?

**The Lion's Feast**  
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מדרש רבה אסתר פרשה ז סימן ג

ד"א אחר הדברים האלה, כתיב (שם איוב כ') אם יעלה לשמים שיאו, לרומא, וראשו לעב יגיע, לעננה, כגללו לנצח יאבד, מה גללים הללו מזוהמין כך הוא מזוהם, (שם איוב כ') רואיו יאמרו איו, חמיין ליה ולא חכמין ליה אן הוא המן ואן הוא שלותו, ר' פנחס הוה משתעי אילין עובדיא

A lion gave a feast for all the animals, both wild and tame. For the occasion he made a tent from the skins of lions, wolves, and other wicked animals. When they had finished eating and drinking, the animals asked, "Who will sing something appropriate for the occasion?"

They all looked at the fox, who said, "Will you say 'Amen' to what I am about to say?"

They answered, "Yes, we will."

The fox raised his eyes to the skins and said, "May what happened to those above happen to those who are below."

Esther Rabbah 7:3

#### Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

- ?** How does the lion look in the drawing?
- ?** How do the rest of the animals look in the drawing?
- ?** What do you think is the lion having for his meal?
- ?** Why do you think is the fox somehow removed from the gathering?

#### Comprehension Questions

- ?** Why did the lion make a feast for all the animals, wild and tame?
- ?** What is the mood of the guests at the feast?
- ?** Why do the animals look at the fox for something appropriate to sing?
- ?** Why does the lion look for the animals' approval?

Our fable appears in Esther Rabbah and attempts to connect the following two verses that are apparently unrelated: "And when inquiries were made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king" (Esther 2:23), and "After these things king Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes who were with him" (Esther 3:1).

The author of Esther Rabbah seems to be asking, "What is the relationship between Bigtan and Teresh's death and Haman's promotion?" According to Rabbi Pinchas,

who brings us this fable, the Book of Esther wants to teach us that Haman could have avoided his death if he had learned of what had happened to Bigtan and Teresh.

The moral of our fable— “May what happens to those above happen to those below”—is applied by the authors of Esther Rabbah to the villains in the story of the Book of Esther and, by extension, to all the enemies of the people of Israel.

## **Wrapping Up**

Wishful thinking: surviving the “feast of the wicked”!

## **Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut**

This one I definitely think BOTH literally and figuratively goes over the head of the youngest grades, especially if it is done out of context with the Purim story.

### **4th-6th GRADES:**

1)

What did the fox mean by his “toast”?

2)

How do you think the other animals felt when they heard this and had to say “Amen” as they had agreed?

3)

What do you think is going on according to the illustration?

4)

What does it mean to have a “guilty conscience”? Have you ever felt this way? What did you do about it?

### **7th-12 GRADES:**

1)

The lion literally has the other animals’ fates hanging over their heads—what might this scene symbolize theologically? What other images are used in Jewish tradition or in the Torah to depict this kind of life-and-death feeling? Compare these to the fable scene.

2)

Read in connection with the Book of Esther, how does this fable give the lighthearted Purim holiday a more serious and darker side? Look at the Book of Esther to see if the text supports a theme such as this fable suggests.

3)

Uttering curses is prohibited in Judaism, but wishing for the downfall of our enemies is allowed if it is said in a way that still recognizes their humanity. Look, for example, at the middle section of the Aleynu prayer. Why do you think we are permitted to express such feelings? Why are they tempered in such a way as to lose much of their forcefulness?

## **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.)

A conceptually related reading strategy brings together two texts with similar ideas, plots, characters, etc. In discussing the similarities and differences, students’ understanding of both, but especially the main text under study, is deepened.

“The Fire on the Mountain” is an Ethiopian folktale which involves a feast, a person in control, and a serious issue. Perhaps someone could compare Arha with the Fox, but that is up to those discussing these texts.

"The Lion's Feast" v. "The Fire on the Mountain"

	The Lion's Feast	The Fire on the Mountain
Elements of Fiction		
Plot		
Main Characters		
Conflict		
Resolution		
Irony of Ending		
Theme		