

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(13)

The Fox and the Wolf
Rashi on the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 39a



Background to the Fable "The Fox and the Wolf"

The Fox and the Goat in the Well, by Aesop

A fox had unwittingly fallen down a well and found herself trapped inside its high walls. Meanwhile, a thirsty goat had made his way to the same place and asked the fox whether the water was fresh and plentiful. The fox set about laying her trap. "Come down, my friend," said the fox. "The water is so good that I cannot get enough of it myself!" The billy-goat lowered himself into the well, whereupon the little vixen leaped up on his back and emerged from the hole, leaving the goat stuck in the watery prison.

Moral: As soon as someone clever gets into trouble, he tries to find a way out at someone else's expense.

? Do you agree with the moral? Why? Why not?

? Can you think of another moral to apply to the same fable?

Biblical Background

Ezekiel Chapter 18

1. And the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

2. "What do you mean that you use this parable over the land of Israel, saying, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge'?"
3. As truly as I live, says the Lord God, you shall no longer use this parable in Israel.
4. Behold, all souls are Mine. Like the soul of the father, like the soul of the son they are Mine; the soul that sins, it shall die.
5. So a man who is righteous and practices justice and righteousness,
6. And does not eat [offerings of meals] on the mountains, and does not lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel; neither defiles his fellow man's wife nor approaches a woman in her period of separation,
7. And wrongs no man; what has been pledged for a debt he returns; [he] has committed no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry, and clothes the naked with garments,
8. Does not lend on interest, nor does he take any increase on a loan, keeps his hand back from wrong, executes true judgment between man and man,
9. Has walked in My statutes, and has kept My ordinances to deal truly-he is a righteous man; he shall surely live, says the Lord God.
10. If he beget a profligate son, a shedder of blood, and he commits upon his brother any of these [crimes].
11. And he does not do all these [good deeds], but has even eaten [offerings of a meal] to the mountains and defiled his fellow man's wife;
12. Wronged the poor and the needy, committed robberies, did not return pledges, lifted up his eyes to the idols, committed abomination;
13. Gave out on interest, accepted increase on loans -shall he then live? He shall not live! He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood falls back on himself!
14. And behold, if he beget a son, who sees all the sins of his father which he has done, and sees and does not do likewise;
15. He did not eat on the mountains and did not lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, did not defile his fellow man's wife,
16. Wronged no man; did not retain any pledge, and committed no robbery; his bread he gave to the hungry and the naked he covered with clothes;
17. From the poor he kept his hand back, interest and increase he did not take; My ordinances he kept, in My laws did he walk-he shall not die for the sins of his father, he shall surely live.
18. [But] his father, because he illegally suppressed, committed robbery against his brother and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.
19. Yet you say, "Why does the son not bear with the sin of the father?" But the son has practiced justice and righteousness, he has kept all My laws and he carries them out; he shall surely live.
20. The soul that sins, it shall die; a son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and a father shall not bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.
21. And if the wicked man repent of all his sins that he has committed and keeps all My laws and executes justice and righteousness, he shall surely live, he shall not die.
22. All his transgressions that he has committed shall not be remembered regarding him: through his righteousness that he has done he shall live.
23. Do I desire the death of the wicked? says the Lord God. Is it not rather in his repenting of his ways that he may live?
24. And when the righteous repents of his righteousness and does wrong and does like all the abominations that the wicked man did, shall he live? All his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered; in his treachery that he has perpetrated and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die.
25. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right!' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is it My way that is not right? Is it not rather your ways that are not right?
26. When a righteous man repents of his righteousness and does wrong and dies on that account; for the wrong that he has done he should die.
27. And when a wicked man repents of his wickedness that he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he will keep his soul alive.

28. He will see and repent of all his transgressions that he has committed-he shall surely live; he shall not die.

29. And yet the house of Israel say, 'The way of the Lord is not right!' Is it My ways that are not right, O house of Israel? Is it not rather your ways that are not right?

30. Therefore, every man according to his ways I will judge you, O house of Israel, says the Lord God: repent and cause others to repent of all your transgressions, and it will not be a stumbling block of iniquity for you.

31. Cast away from yourselves all your transgressions whereby you have transgressed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, and why should you die, O house of Israel!

32. For I do not desire the death of him who dies, says the Lord God: so turn away and live!"

? Do you know of situations in which children do pay for their parents' mistakes?

? Do you know of situations in which children can free themselves from their parents' fate?

Proverbs 11:1-11

1. Deceitful scales are an abomination of the Lord, but a perfect weight is His will.
2. When willful wickedness comes, then comes disgrace, but with the modest is wisdom.
3. The innocence of the upright leads them, but the distortion of the treacherous robs them.
4. Riches will not avail on the day of wrath, but charity will save from death.
5. The righteousness of the innocent will straighten his way, but the wicked will fall in his wickedness.
6. The righteousness of the upright will save them, but in the destruction, the treacherous will be caught.
7. When a wicked man dies, hope is lost, and the expectation of his children is lost.
8. A righteous man is extricated from trouble, and a wicked man comes in his stead.
9. With his mouth, the flatterer destroys his neighbor; but with knowledge, righteous men are extricated.
10. When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish, there is song.
11. With the blessing of the upright, the ceiling is raised, but with the mouth of the wicked it is demolished.

Leviticus 19:36

36. You shall have true scales, true weights, a true ephah, and a true hin. I am the Lord, your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Three Complex Texts on Retribution

- Exodus 34:7 (a tough one with a helpful Rashi)
- Deuteronomy 24: 16 (a nice one with a troublesome RaSHI)
- Shabbat 32b (a tough one with very little help)

The Fox and the Wolf

Rashi on the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 39a

רש"י סנהדרין דף לט.א

אבות יאכלו בוסר - משל הוא שרימה השועל את הזאב ליכנס לחצר היהודים בערב שבת, ולתקן עמהם צרכי סעודה ויאכל עמהם בשבת, וכשבא ליכנס - חברו עליו במקלות, בא להרוג את השועל, אמר: לא הלקוך אלא בשביל אביך שפעם אחת התחיל לסייען בסעודה ואכל את כל נתח טוב, אמר לו: ובשביל אבא אני לוקה אמר לו: הן, האבות יאכלו בוסר וגו', אבל בא עמי ואראך מקום לאכול ולשבו, בא לו על הבאר ועל שפתו מוטל עץ והחבל מושכב עליו, ובשני ראשי החבל שני דליים קשורים, נכנס השועל בדלי העליון והכביד וירד למטה ודלי התחתון עלה, אמר לו הזאב: למה אתה נכנס לשם אמר לו: יש כאן בשר וגבינה לאכול ולשבו, והראה לו דמות הלבנה במים כדמות עגול, כמין גבינה עגולה, אמר לו: אני היאך ארד אמר לו: הכנס אתה בדלי העליון, נכנס והכביד וירד, ודלי שהשועל עליו - עלה. אמר ליה: היאך אני עולה אמר לו: צדיק מצרה נחלץ ויבא רשע תחתיו, לא כך כתיב מאזני צדק וגו'?

It so happened that a fox tricked a wolf by saying, "Enter the place where the Jews live on Sabbath eve, help them to prepare what they need for dinner, and eat with them on the Sabbath." When the wolf tried to enter, they chased him out with sticks. The angry wolf vowed to kill the fox.

The fox said, "They beat you because of your father, who once helped them to prepare their dinner and then ate the best parts."

"I was beaten because of my father?"

"Yes! The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' (Ezekiel 18:2). But come with me, and I will show you a place where you can eat your fill."

The fox led the wolf to a well with a beam across it and a rope tied to the beam. A bucket was attached to each end of the rope. The fox climbed into the bucket at the top and was lowered down by his own weight, while the bucket at the bottom flew up.

The wolf asked, "Why did you climb into the bucket?"

The fox answered, "Down here there is meat and cheese for me to eat my fill," and he showed the wolf the image of the moon in the water that, because of its round shape, looked like a cheese.

"And how am I to get down?" the wolf asked,

The fox replied, "Climb into the bucket." The wolf climbed in and his weight caused the bucket to plunge down, while the bucket the fox was in flew up.

The wolf then asked, "And now how am I to get up?"

The fox answered, "The righteous is rescued from trouble, and the wicked takes his place" (Proverbs 11:8).

This fable starts out from the following verse: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). The fable seems to be about children inheriting the guilt of their parents. However, the moral of the fable, presented by Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak—1040-1105 C.E.) in his commentary on Tractate Sanhedrin, is taken from another biblical verse: "The righteous is rescued from trouble, and the wicked takes his place" (Proverbs 11:8).

In this fable, the fox tricks the wolf twice. The wolf is presented as the incarnation of wickedness. ("Your father once helped them to prepare their dinner and then ate the best parts.") Therefore, the wolf's punishment at the end of the story seems to be justified by his ancestor's behavior. However, the verse "the wicked takes his place," which ends the fable, points to the wolf's own greed.

Comprehension Questions

? Where do we see the wolf's greed?

Wrapping Up

- ! Dreaming with Justice
- ! Understanding God's justice: an impossible task, but...
- ! A new twist to help us deal with a difficult text: Nature and Nurture in the making of a man (and a woman, and the wolf of our story)
- ! Rabbi Manes Kogan on "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime" (Deuteronomy 24: 16)

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Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1)
Why did the wolf get mad at the fox?
 - 2)
What did the fox tell the wolf to explain why the Jewish people had chased him away?
 - 3)
How did the fox convince the wolf to climb into the bucket? What happened next?
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4)

From the way the fox acted, and what he said to the wolf at the end, do you think the fox was going to help the wolf get up from the bottom of the well? Why do you think the fox did all this to the wolf?

5)

In this story, whom do you like—the fox or the wolf, or neither of them? Why?

6)

If you were either the fox or the wolf, how would you have acted differently?

4th- 6th GRADES:

1)

What do you think the fox is trying to tell the wolf by using each of the two Biblical quotes in this story?

2)

Which of these characters do you like more and why? Why don't you like the other one?

3)

What would you say the moral (what the story is trying to teach us) of this fable is? (There are several possibilities.)

4)

What would you have added or removed from this story to make the moral more clear to the reader?

5)

How would you give an example of the moral of this story from something that happens in our lives?

7th- 12th GRADES:

1)

Look up the verse in Ezekiel 18:2 and see what it might have meant in the original context. Why do you think that Rashi felt it needed further explanation? By connecting it to the verse from Proverbs 11:5, what do you think Rashi was trying to tell us about the meaning of the original verse?

2)

This fable then comes to further illustrate the verse in Proverbs—what lessons do you understand it tries to teach us?

3)

How do you feel about the various characters and what happens? Are there any other Biblical events or narratives that this reminds you of?

4)

Think of examples of people either in present times or in history that you could use as examples of the verse in Proverbs 11:5, and explain what you mean.

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Post Reading Strategy: Movie Link

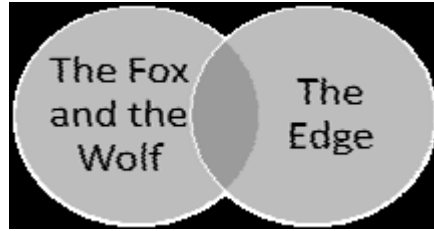
In the Movie Link, students usually read the text first and discuss it. Then, they view either the entire film or selected segments and not only discuss the film, but also discuss the differences and why they think the director and the actors made those changes.

In this case, the suggested film is not based on the text; however, both concepts and conflicts are similar. Students and teachers can enjoy making comparisons and contrasts which will deepen the comprehension of the text. A Venn Diagram works nicely for note taking during the viewing and the discussion.

“The Fox and the Wolf” versus “The Edge”

In The Edge, after a series of events, two men are desperately attempting to survive a dangerous wilderness, and one of the ploys they use to escape a dangerous bear is tricking it to fall down a well-like pit, just as the fox tricks the wolf to sink to the

bottom of the well. Eventually, the men turn on each other. One man has already stolen the hero's wife, and he now wishes to steal the hero's life. But at the end of both the fable and the movie, "The righteousness of the sincere shall make straight his way; but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness."



Rabbi Manes Kogan on "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime" (Deuteronomy 24: 16)

I

Martin Buber, in his famous compilation of Hassidic Stories, relates a dialogue between a Hasidic Master and a new disciple.

In the story, the Rabbi asks the disciple, "Who are you?"

The disciple introduces himself: "I am the son of the great Rabbi of Warsaw and the grandson of the great Rabbi of Kiev."

When the Master hears the answer, he replies to his new disciple, "I didn't ask you who your father was, or your grandfather, but rather who you are."

Sometimes, if our parents are famous or powerful, it is very helpful to invoke our parents' name, or what in Hebrew is called our "yichus" - our lineage. In the Dominican Republic or in Argentina, it is very common if you don't like to stand in a line, or if you want to get your phone repaired as soon as possible, to mention the name of a relative who has a high position in the government (i.e. I am the president's son, the judge's nephew, or Senator Garcia's sister).

However, to be a famous person's son or daughter can be, sometimes, very challenging. To be President Bush's daughter, or John Lennon's son, for example, doesn't seem very easy.

Sometimes, our parents' achievements can be very helpful for us in life, and we can take advantage of their financial situation, their reputation or their position in society.

Nevertheless, when we talk about spiritual achievements, about religious sensitivity, about values in life, about common sense, about knowledge or intelligence, our parents' achievements or position cannot help us very much.

As in the Hassidic story, or as the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland, someone will eventually ask us, "Who are you?" Not your father, or your mother, or your grandfather, but you. "Who are you?"

And this is something everybody needs to work on alone.

How much we'll achieve in our spiritual life, how much we'll study and whether we'll become a "mensch" or not depends only on us.

As we read in Parashat Ki Tetze:

"Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime" (Deuteronomy 24: 16)

Even though it's a simple verse, we need to work on it a little. I am sure that a long time ago, in ancient cultures, when a person committed a crime, his entire family was punished. The opposite also was very common. If a child committed a crime, it was not unusual to condemn his father or mother for the child's sin.

3500 years ago, the Torah dealt with a very important issue and introduced a change in the parameters of the cultures that surrounded the people of Israel: "a person shall be put to death only for his own crime."

But, what can this verse teach us today, when it's obvious that we don't have criminal courts in Jewish Law? Can we learn something from this lost passage in our Torah?

I think we can, and I would like to share an insight I learned from it:

At the end of the day, everyone is responsible for the outcome of his own journey, for his attitude, for his behavior, for his approach to life, and cannot blame his parents for what he or she is today. If you don't like the way you are, if you think you didn't receive enough from your parents, if you think you can be more religious, more spiritual, more supportive, more Jewish than your parents, don't blame them. Change yourself! Your parents did what they were able to do, and now it is your turn to work harder, to grow spiritually, emotionally and intellectually.

Some people think they are too old, or tired to change. For these people, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov has a powerful message:

"Don't make the same mistake as all those people who give up trying to change because they feel stuck in their habits. If you truly want to, and are willing to work hard enough, you can overcome them" (Likutei Moharan 11:110).

On the other hand, if your parents and grandparents are, or were, great people, that's wonderful, but don't think that you will receive their greatness through osmosis. Again, you have a good start, but at the end of the day, you will need to establish your own identity, to prove yourself.

Some people tell me, "Rabbi, you know, my great-grandfather was a very important rabbi in Poland, and he was a very pious and observant Jew." That's great, and I wish I had such an ancestor in my background. However, my question is about you, not about them. How pious and observant, are you today? Like in the Hassidic story, I ask, "Who are you?"

The responsibility is ours alone and we have the key in our hands.

Remember that Rosh Hashanah is around the corner. This is a wonderful time for change.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Manes Kogan on "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime" (Deuteronomy 24: 16)

II

A Halakhic Midrash of the second century - Sifrei Deuteronomy- interprets our verse.

"Parents died for their own crime" – says the Midrash- "but children died for their parents crime" (Sifrei Deuteronomy).

Sifrei Deuteronomy teaches us a wonderful lesson: Since we have free choice and we can determine our own life, God (and the society) will judge us based on our own behavior. At the same time we can't give up our responsibility with our children. Nobody can certainly know what will happen with our children in the future. However, we are responsible for them, and our attitude toward them today, probably will decide their attitude toward their children in the future. Just to give you an example: the way we live our Judaism every day probably will dictate the way our children will live their Judaism tomorrow.