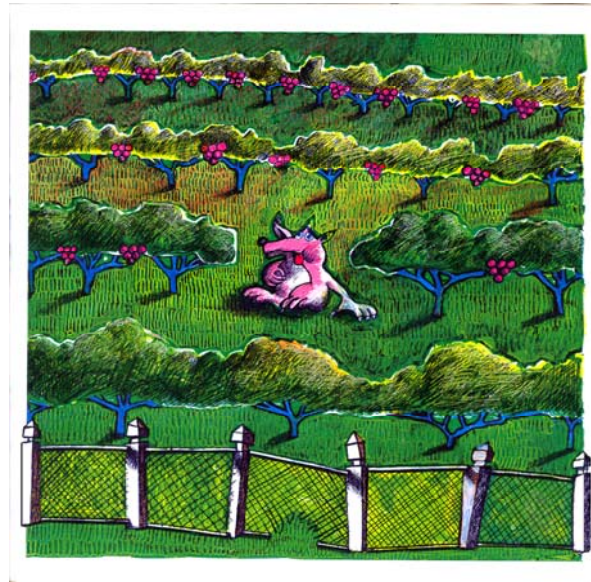


Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(14)

The Fox and the Vineyard
Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:20



Background to the Fable “The Fox and the Vineyard”

The Fox and the Swollen Belly by Aesop

A very hungry fox, seeing some bread and meat left by shepherds in the hollow of an oak, crept into the hole and made a hearty meal. When he finished, he was so full that he was not able to get out, and began to groan and lament his fate. Another Fox passing by heard his cries, and coming up, inquired the cause of his complaining. On learning what had happened, he said to him, "Ah, you will have to remain there, my friend, until you become such as you were when you crept in, and then you will easily get out."

Time fixes difficulties.

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

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

The book of Ecclesiastes: Not an Optimistic Book or Lessons that everybody should know, but nobody wants to hear!

Ecclesiastes (often abbreviated *Ecc*) (Hebrew: *Kohelet*, variously transliterated as *Qoheleth*, *Göhalath*, *Koheles*, *Koheleth*, or *Coheleth*) is a book of the Hebrew Bible. The English name derives from the Greek translation of the Hebrew title.

The main speaker in the book, identified by the name Qohelet, introduces himself as "son of David, and king in Jerusalem." The work consists of personal or

autobiographic matter, at times expressed in aphorisms and maxims illuminated in terse paragraphs with reflections on the meaning of life and the best way of life. The work emphatically proclaims all the actions of man to be inherently "vain", "futile", "empty", "meaningless", "temporary", "transitory", or "fleeting," depending on translation, as the lives of both wise and foolish men end in death. While Qohelet clearly endorses wisdom as a means for a well-lived earthly life, he is unable to ascribe eternal meaning to it. In light of this perceived senselessness, he suggests that one should enjoy the simple pleasures of daily life, such as eating, drinking, and taking enjoyment in one's wife and work, which are gifts from the hand of God.

According to Talmud however, the point of Qohelet is to state that all is futile under the sun. One should therefore ignore physical pleasures and put all one's efforts towards that which is *above* the Sun. This is summed up in the second to last verse: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Everything has an appointed season, and there is a time for every matter under the heaven. A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time of wailing and a time of dancing. A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

- Lessons that everybody should know, but nobody wants to hear

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5: 14

12. There is a grievous evil that I saw under the sun; riches kept by their owner for his harm.

13. And those riches are lost through an evil design, and he will beget a son who will have nothing in his hand.

14. As he left his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and he will carry nothing with his toil, that he will take in his hand.

15. And this too is a grievous evil, that just as it came so shall it go, and what advantage does he have that he toil for the wind?

Job 1:20

20. Then Job stood up, and rent his robe and tore his hair; then he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.

21. And he said, "From my mother's womb, I emerged naked, and I will return there naked. The Lord gave and the Lord took; may the name of the Lord be blessed."

Marcelo Ferder's drawing

? How does the fox look in Marcelo Ferder's drawing?

The Fox and the Vineyard Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:20

מדרש רבה קהלת פרשה ה סימן כ

[יד] כאשר יצא מבטן אמו, גניבא אמר לשועל שמצא כרם והיה מסוייג מכל פנותיו והיה שם נקב אחד ובקש להכנס בו ולא הוה יכיל מה עבד צם תלת יומין עד דכחיש ותשש ועאל בהדא נקובא, ואכל ושמן, בעא למיפק ולא יכיל מעיבר כלום, חזר וצאים תלת יומן אוחרנין עד דכחיש ותשש וחזר היך מה דהוה ונפק, כד נפק הוה אפיך אפוי ואיסתכל ביה אמר כרמא כרמא, מה טב את ומה טבין אינון פירין דבגווד, וכל מה דאית בך יאין ומשבחן, ברם מה הניה ממך, כמה דבר נש עליל לגוויך כך הוא נפיק, כך הוא דין עלמא, ד"א כאשר יצא מבטן אמו ערום ישוב ללכת כשבא, תניא כמו שבא אדם כן ילך, אדם בא בקול ונפטר מן העולם בקול, בא לעולם בבכיה ונפטר מן העולם בבכיה, בא לעולם בחבה ונפטר מן העולם בחבה, בא בעולם באנחה ונפטר מן העולם באנחה, בא לעולם בבלי דעת ונפטר מן העולם בבלי דעת, תני בשם רבי מאיר כשאדם בא לעולם ידיו הן קפוצות כלומר כל העולם כלו שלי הוא אני נוחלו וכשהוא נפטר מן העולם ידיו הן פשוטות כלומר לא נחלתי מן העוה"ז כלום, שכן שלמה אומר כאשר יצא מבטן אמו ערום ישוב ללכת כשבא ומאומה וגו'.

A fox came to a vineyard that was fenced in on all sides. He tried to get in through a hole in the fence, but it was too small. So what did he do? He fasted for three days until he became thin and weak and could fit through the hole. He entered the vineyard and ate until he was full and fat. He then tried to get out, but could not fit through the hole. He fasted for another three days until he was thin and svelte again, and could finally get out.

When he was on the outside, he went back to the vineyard, looked at it and said, "Oh, vineyard! How good you are and how good are your fruits! Everything you have is good and praiseworthy. Nevertheless, what is the benefit we can reap from you? As one enters, so shall one leave."

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:20

Our fable is used by the author of Ecclesiastes Rabbah to exemplify the verse "As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand" (Ecclesiastes 5: 14). The vineyard that the fox enters represents, for the author of our Midrash, life itself. One leaves life the way one entered, like the fox, who represents the human race. The end of the Midrash is also very interesting: "This is the destiny of the world: as you leave your mother's womb naked, so shall you return." It was taught: As you come, so shall you go; you enter crying and you leave crying, you arrive surrounded by affection and you leave surrounded by affection, you arrive in the middle of a breath and you leave in the middle of a breath, you arrive unaware and you leave unaware. This was taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: "Man (the baby) arrives in this world with a closed fist, as if to say, 'The whole world is mine,' and leaves with an open fist as if to say, 'I take nothing with me.'"

Comprehension Questions

- ? What does the vineyard symbolize in our story?
- ? What does the fox symbolize in our story?
- ? What does “the hole in the fence” symbolize in our story?
- ? How does the moral of this fable differ from the one in Aesop’s?
- ? Can you relate personally to this fable?

Wrapping Up

- ! Life as a narrow bridge

Avot 4:21

Rabbi Yaakov would say: This world is comparable to the antechamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the antechamber, so that you may enter the banquet hall.

Likutei Moharan II 48

“And know that a person needs to traverse a very, very narrow bridge, but the fundamental and most important principle is to have no hesitation or fear at all...”

- ! What do we take with us when we leave this world?

Lessons in Tanya Part I, Chapter 5

This is the meaning of the verse, “Your Torah is in my inner parts,” meaning that Torah is food for the soul. It is similarly written in Etz Chayim (Portal 44, chapter 3) that mitzvot are the “garments” of the souls in Paradise. Torah on the other hand is the food of the souls in Paradise which had engaged in Torah study for its own sake during their life on this earth.

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Artscroll Youth Pirkei Avos. Mesorah Publications
Rabbi Yosef Wineberg (Editor): Lessons in Tanya. Kehot

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-2nd GRADES

1)

What do you think the fox learned from this experience?

2)

As you look at the picture of the fox, what do you think he is saying or thinking?

3)

If you were the fox, how do you think you would have handled this problem of getting in to eat the grapes? How about getting out afterwards?

3rd-6th GRADES

1)

Did you ever feel like the fox, in that once you got something you really wanted, it created other problems, so that maybe you regretted having wanted this thing in the first place? What did you do?

2)

In the illustration, what is the artist trying to show us about how the fox was reacting? How would you have pictured the fox and the vineyard, and why would you have done something differently? (Perhaps have them draw this before seeing the illustration here, after just listening to the fable.)

3)

Would you describe this story as one that has a hopeful message? Why or why not?

7th-12th GRADES

1)

If this fable was meant to illuminate a point in the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes, which is all about how to live one's life, what do you think the vineyard, the fox, and the hole in the fence could represent? Do you agree or disagree with the view of life? Give your reasons.

2)

Compare this story to that of the Biblical narrative of Samson. How are they similar? How do they differ? What messages for our lives do you think we can find here?

3)

How would you compare this with the words of Psalm 144:3-4 ("O Lord, what is man that You should care about him, mortal man that You should think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.")?

4)

In our materialistic culture, what does this story tell us about finding satisfaction in THINGS that we want very much? Do you agree or disagree? What if it referred to non-material things, like love, wisdom, or peace of mind?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre-Reading Strategy: Anticipation Guide

(Readance, J., D. Moore, and R. Rickelman. Pre-Reading Activities for Content Area Reading and Learning. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 2000.)

The Anticipation Guide is a list of statements that pertain to the text. The statements are of a general nature so they can be considered and responded to prior to reading the text. They should also be somewhat thought-provoking, because the point of the exercise is to raise awareness of issues and ideas that will be found in the text. By introducing it prior to reading, students are prepared for them when they read. Thus, their comprehension is strengthened.

•

Students should be instructed to read each statement, and they should place a check on the line next to the statement if they agree with it.

•

They should write a brief reaction in the box below the statement.

•

The class should discuss the statements and their feelings as a whole class or in small groups.

•

Then, they should read the text.

- Afterward, they should return to the statements, and they should check the ones with which the author would agree.

- Another discussion should occur.
This can be used as a Post Reading Strategy also. The column on the right is checked prior to reading, and the column on the left is checked after reading.

Anticipation Guide for "The Fox and the Vineyard"

You

Author

_____ When faced with a problem, it is best to seek advice from an expert _____

_____ Losing weight is always healthy. _____

_____ We always learn from our actions. _____

_____ We should get what we want. _____

_____ Animals are smarter than humans. _____