

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(18)

The Two Dogs and the Wolf
Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 105a



Background to the Fable “The Two Dogs and the Wolf”

The Lion and the Boar at the spring, by Aesop

In summertime, when the heat makes everyone thirsty, a lion and a wild boar had come to drink from the same small spring. They began to argue about who was going to take the first drink, and their argument escalated into a duel to the death. When they momentarily paused to catch their breath, the lion and the boar saw that vultures were waiting to snatch and devour the one who was killed. At that point, the lion and the boar put their hatred aside and said, 'It is better for us to befriend one another than to be eaten by vultures and ravens!'

The story teaches us that it is good to set aside our deadly disputes and conflicts, since they put everyone's lives in jeopardy.

Martin Fierro



<http://www.wikipedia.org/>

Martin Fierro is a 2,316 line epic poem by the Argentine writer José Hernández. The poem was originally published in two parts, *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) and *La Vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879). The poem is, in part, a protest against the Europeanizing and modernizing tendencies of Argentine president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. The poem, written in a Spanish that evokes rural Argentina, is widely seen as the pinnacle of the genre of "gauchesque" poetry (poems centered around the life of the gaucho, written in a style that evokes the rural Argentine ballads known as *payadas*) and a touchstone of Argentine national identity. It has appeared in literally hundreds of editions and has been translated into over 70 languages. It has earned major commentaries from, among others, Leopoldo Lugones, Miguel de Unamuno, Jorge Luis Borges and Rafael Squirru.

Los hermanos sean unidos,
Porque esa es la ley primera
Tengan unión verdadera
En cualquier tiempo que sea

Por que si entre ellos pelean
Los devoran los de ajuera.

*To stick to your brother 's a good old law
That'll help you in many dangers,
Remember it boys and hold together
In fair as well as in stormy weather,
When a family fight among themselves
They're soon eaten up by strangers.*

(Walter Owen's version of the poem Martin Fierro)

Numbers 22:1-7

- 1. And the people of Israel set forward, and camped in the plains of Moab on this side of the Jordan by Jericho.*
- 2. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.*
- 3. And Moab was very afraid of the people, because they were many; and Moab was distressed because of the people of Israel.*
- 4. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all who are around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.*
- 5. He sent messengers therefore to Balaam, the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt; behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me;*
- 6. Come now therefore, I pray you, curse this people for me; for they are too mighty for me; perhaps I shall prevail, that we may defeat them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.*
- 7. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and spoke to him the words of Balak.*

The Scorpion and the Tortoise (A fable without logic)

One day a scorpion who wanted to cross a pond found a tortoise and asked it for a lift to the other side. The tortoise could hardly believe his ears. "Are you kidding me? You're a scorpion! You'll sting me while I'm swimming and I'll drown."

"My dear tortoise," laughed the scorpion, "if I were to sting you, you would drown and I'd go down with you. Now where is the logic in that?"

"You've got a point there," reasoned the tortoise. "Hop on."

The scorpion climbed aboard and halfway across the pond, he carefully aimed his powerful stinger, gave that tortoise everything he had, and they both began to sink to the bottom.

Resigned to his fate, the tortoise turned to his attacker and said, "Do you mind if I ask you something? You said there was no logic in your stinging me. Why in the world did you do it?"

"It has nothing to do with logic," the drowning scorpion replied. "It's just my nature!"

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סנהדרין דף קה.א

וילכו זקני מואב וזקני מדין תנא: מדין ומואב לא היה להם שלום מעולם. משל לשני כלבים שהיו בעדר והיו צהובין זה לזה, בא זאב על האחד, אמר האחד: אם איני עוזרו - היום הורג אותו, ולמחר בא עלי. הלכו שניהם והרגו הזאב.

Two dogs that hated each other were guarding a flock. A wolf came and attacked one of them. The other dog said, "If I don't help him, the wolf will kill him today and will kill me tomorrow." So the two of them went and killed the wolf.

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Our fable is used to illustrate the nature of the pact that Moab and Midian made against Israel: "And the elders of Moab and the Elders of Midian" (Numbers 22: 7). The Talmud teaches us that Moab and Midian were enemies, but on seeing the threat that the multitude that left Egypt represented for them, decided to join forces by hiring Balaam to defame the children of Israel. It is interesting to note that, at least in this case, the fable is used to discuss a situation that occurred in the past in which "the worst enemies are willing to unite when it suits them," and does not attempt to leave us with an edifying moral for the future. On the other hand, although the wolf represents Israel (it is the common enemy of Moab and Midian), its representation only goes so far, since it is impossible to think that the Talmud would want to associate Israel with the evil wolf, particularly when it is killed by the two dogs, while Israel defeats—with God's help—Moab and Midian.

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What was the nature of the dogs' relationship before the wolf attacked one of them? What do you think was the nature of the dogs' relationship during their joint venture? What do you think would be the nature of their relationship over time, after the wolf was defeated?

? Can you think of a case (maybe in history) in which two antagonistic sides united to fight a common enemy? What does our fable tell us about human nature?

? How can we apply the moral of our fable to the current situation of American Jewry?

Wrapping Up

! When being practical becomes a matter of life and death.

Bibliography

Aesop's Fables. A new translation by Laura Gibbs. Oxford University Press (World's Classics): Oxford, 2002.

Martin Fierro, 14th Ed. Jose Hernandez Luis Sainz De Medrano (Editor) Paperback, Catedra Ediciones . June 2005.

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1) What did the dog who was not attacked by the wolf at first think might happen?
- 2) What did he decide to do then?
- 3) Do you think the two dogs hated each other at the end, after they killed the wolf together? Why or why not?

4th – 6th GRADES:

- 1) Do you think the unattacked dog really cared about the other dog that was attacked by the wolf? Why or why not?
- 2) If this is a story about overcoming problems or common “enemies” how might this apply in your life?
- 3) While in Judaism we don’t encourage violence, this story emphasizes the thoughts behind the action that is the kind of thinking that we can say is moral or ethical. What kind of thinking and action would have made the unattacked dog into a real hero, giving us a much better example of ethical behavior?

7th-12th GRADES:

- 1) What kind of moral behavior does the unattacked dog exhibit?
- 2) There is a level of cooperation in this story that seems admirable. Relate this to our world today where such cooperation could be very helpful. What do you think it will take to get this cooperation?
- 3) The footnote relates this fable to Moab and Midian who both hated Israel more than they hated each other. But here is where the parallel ends since the Rabbis would not have made Israel into the evil wolf. If we look at it from this perspective, and compare it to those who unite against Israel today, what does this tell us about their real reasons for uniting? Can Israel ever use this knowledge to break up this union or turn its goal to one of peace? Or is this impossible for Israel? Is there anyone else that could do this for Israel?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Post Reading Strategy: Copy Change Writing

Following the reading, teachers can encourage students to write a similar fable with different characters, situation, and outcome. Copy Change means that they copy parts of the text, and they change parts of the text. In this case, they can copy the context and change the content. A sample chart is included here:

Context	Content: “The Two Dogs and the Wolf”	The Copy Change
Two similar characters	Two dogs who hated each other	A cat and a bird who feared each other
What they are doing	Guarding a flock	Cleaning itself and singing
One enemy	A wolf	An eagle
What it is doing	Attacking one of the dogs	Attacking the bird

What the two similar characters realize	One must help the other. Or they will both die	One must help the other. Or they will both die
What the two characters do	The dogs attack the wolf and kill it	The cat and the bird unite to outwit the eagle
Theme	"Even the worst enemies are willing to unite when it suits them."	"Even the worst enemies are willing to unite when it suits them."

Now have the students try this.

Context	Content: "The Two Dogs and the Wolf"	The Copy Change
Two similar characters		
What they are doing		
One enemy		
What it is doing What the two similar characters realize		
What the two characters do		
Theme		