

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(21)

The Lamb, the Wolf, and the Shepherd
Exodus Rabbah 5: 21



Background to the Fable “The Lamb, the Wolf, and the Shepherd”

Exodus Chapter 5

1. *And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus said the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast for me in the wilderness.*
2. *And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, nor will I let Israel go.*
3. *And they said, The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray you, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice to the Lord our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.*
4. *And the king of Egypt said to them, Why do you, Moses and Aaron, take the people from their works? Go you to your burdens.*
5. *And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and you make them rest from their burdens.*
6. *And Pharaoh commanded the same day the task masters of the people, and their officers, saying,*
7. *You shall no more give the people straw to make bricks, as till now; let them go and gather straw for themselves.*
8. *And the quantity of the bricks, which they did make till now, you shall lay upon them; you shall not diminish nothing of it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God.*
9. *Let there more work be laid upon the men, that they may labor in it; and let them not regard vain words.*
10. *And the task masters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spoke to the people, saying, Thus said Pharaoh, I will not give you straw.*
11. *Go, get straw where you can find it; yet nothing of your work shall be diminished.*
12. *So the people scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw.*

13. And the task masters hurried them, saying, Fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw.
14. And the officials of the people of Israel, which Pharaoh's task masters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, Why have you not fulfilled your task in making bricks both yesterday and today, as till now?
15. Then the officers of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, saying, Why do you deal thus with your servants?
16. There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, Make bricks; and, behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.
17. But he said, You are idle, you are idle; therefore you say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord.
18. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall you deliver the quantity of bricks.
19. And the officers of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight, after it was said, You shall not diminish nothing from your bricks of your daily task.
20. And they met Moses and Aaron, who stood in the way, as they came forth from Pharaoh;
21. And they said to them, The Lord look upon you, and judge; because you have made us loathsome in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us.
22. And Moses returned to the Lord, and said, Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why have you sent me?
23. For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have you saved your people at all.

? Moses is being challenged both by Pharaoh and by his own people. What is the advantage of Pharaoh's strategy over disposing of Moses (by killing him, for example)? Do you know of any other tyrants throughout history who used the same strategy in dealing with similar challenges?

The Lamb, the Wolf, and the Shepherd

Exodus Rabbah 5:21

מדרש רבה שמות פרשה ה סימן כא

כא ויאמרו אליהם ירא ה' עליכם וישפוט אם באמת באתם משמו של הקב"ה ישפוט בינינו ובין פרעה ואם מעצמכם באתם ישפוט ה' בינינו וביניכם, אשר הבאשתם את ריחננו, ר' יוחנן אמר מן המכות שהיו מכין אותם היה ריחן מבאיש, ורשב"ל אמר מאותן שהיו משקעין בבנין היו מתים וריחן מבאיש, ור' חייא אמר משל לנבלה שהיתה נתונה בזוית ועפר מכוסה עליה ואין ריחה עולה ובא אחר וגילה אותה והלך ריחה, כך אמרו ישראל למשה משה ריח היה ביד מצרים שאנחנו עתידין ליגאל ובאתם ועכרתם אותו, לתת חרב בידם להרגנו, א"ר יהודה הלוי ב"ר שלום אמרו לו למשה למה אנו דומין לשה שבא הזאב ליטול אותו, רץ הרועה אחריו להצילו מפי הזאב, בין הרועה ובין הזאב נבקעת השה, כך אמרו ישראל משה מבינך לבין פרעה אנו מתים.

A wolf came to attack a lamb. The shepherd ran after the lamb to save it from the wolf's mouth. Between the shepherd and the wolf, the lamb was split in two.

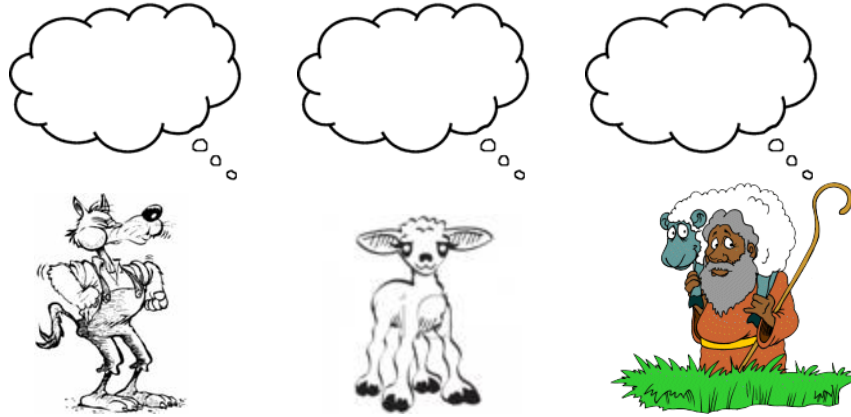
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Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

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

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? If we were to read the minds of the wolf, the shepherd and the lamb at the moment our fable takes place, what do you think we would find out?



The author of Exodus Rabbah puts this fable into the mouths of the Children of Israel, when they reproach Moses for intervening with Pharaoh, an act which, instead of relieving them of the heavy burden that they carried, only made it worse. The verse that opens the Midrash is the following: "And they said to them, The Lord look upon you, and judge; because you have made us loathsome in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Exodus 5:21). Rabbi Yehuda bar Shalom explained that the Children of Israel told Moses: "You are like the shepherd, who runs to save the lamb from the wolf's mouth and only succeeds in having the lamb torn apart. You say you want to help us, but you are only making our precarious situation worse."

Wrapping Up

! When the wolf doesn't let go...

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1)
What is happening to the lamb in the picture? How do you think the lamb feels?
- 2)
What do you think the wolf is saying? What do you think the shepherd is saying?
- 3)
What would have been a better solution to this problem?

4th – 6th GRADES:

- 1)
This story seems to have everyone losing in the end. Why do you think that happened? Do you hold any one more responsible than the others for this sad ending? Explain.
- 2)

What might have been a way to resolve this situation so that the ending could have been a happy one? Can you think of a solution where all three characters come out “winning”?

3)

Describe a situation where someone’s trying to help only made the problem worse. What do you think should have been done instead?

7th-12th GRADES:

1)

The wolf and the shepherd are both interested in the lamb for different reasons, and therefore their actions are diametrically opposed, yet neither in the end is satisfied by the outcome. In what way could this have been resolved so that the lamb would not have been sacrificed and the wolf and shepherd could have been satisfied? Is this realistic? Explain.

2)

This fable comes to illustrate the attitude of the Children of Israel towards Moses after he tried to first intervene on their behalf with Pharaoh, who then decided to make their sufferings even greater. What does this show us about the way the people felt about Moses, and how do you think Moses may have reacted to this? How was this possibly a learning experience for each of the three characters—Moses, Pharaoh, and the Children of Israel?

3)

How can you know when it is proper and effective to intervene to help others and when it is not? Should we intervene even if we might risk making the situation worse—as, for example, in giving an experimental drug to someone who has a brain tumor when all other treatment has failed?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre-Reading Strategy: Read a Story

It is helpful to read another text with similar ideas and themes prior to reading the text to be studied. This should be followed by a discussion of those ideas and themes that students will see in their silent reading.

Prior to reading “The Lamb, the Wolf, and the Shepherd,” read aloud to students the Biblical story of King Solomon and the two women and the baby. From “Solomon” by Shira Schoenberg in the Jewish Virtual Library:

“Although Solomon was young, he soon became known for his wisdom. The first and most famous incident of his cleverness as a judge was when two women came to his court with a baby whom both women claimed as their own. Solomon threatened to split the baby in half. One woman was prepared to accept the decision, but the other begged the King to give the live baby to the other woman. Solomon then knew the second woman was the mother.”

Discuss the themes of justice, prevention, and solutions. Have students read the fable. Discuss the similarities and the differences.

Post Reading: Connect with Outside Sources

When possible, it is helpful to connect what is being read for school with issues and ideas outside of the classroom. It is motivating if something in popular culture can be used. The television sitcom *Seinfeld* used King Solomon’s justice in a situation when Elaine and Kramer fought over ownership of a bicycle. They could not resolve their differences, so they went to Newman—of all people—who suggested that they break the bike in half and each take part. Elaine said fine, but Kramer cried, “No, no, the bike must not be broken.” Newman awarded the bike to Kramer. *Seinfeld*, Season 7, Episode 13, “The Seven.”