

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(22)

The Hen and Her Chicks
Leviticus Rabbah 25:5



Background to the Fable “The Hen and Her Chicks”

Deuteronomy Chapter 31:17

17. Moses summoned Joshua, and in the presence of all Israel, said to him, 'Be strong and brave, since you will be the one to bring this nation to the land that God swore to their fathers that He would give it to them. You will be the one to parcel it out to them.

Joshua Chapter 1: 1-2

*1. And it was after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,
2. Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross over the Jordan, you, and all this people, to the land which I give to them, to the people of Israel.*

Joshua Chapter 5: 9-12

*9. And HaShem said unto Joshua: 'This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.' Wherefore the name of that place was called Gilgal, unto this day.
10. And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal; and they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.
11. And they did eat of the produce of the land on the morrow after the Passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn, in the selfsame day.
12. And the manna ceased on the morrow, after they had eaten of the produce of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.*

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ה (איוב לח) מי שת בטוחות חכמה מהו בטוחות בטויה (שם איוב ל"ח) או מי נתן לשכוי בינה הדא תרנגולתא א"ר לוי בערביא צווחין לתרנגולת' שכויה הדא תרנגולתא כד אפרוחיה דקיקין היא מכנשא להון ויהבת להון תחות אגפיה ומשחנה להון ומעדרנה קדמיהון וכד אינון רבייה חד מנהון בעי למקרב לותיה והיא נקרה ליה בגו רישיה וא"ל זיל עדור בקוקלתך כך כשהיו ישראל במדבר מ' שנה היה המן יורד והבאר עולה להן והשליו מצוי להן וענני כבוד מקיפות אותן ועמוד ענן מסיע לפניהם כיון שנכנסו ישראל לארץ אמר להם משה כל אחד ואחד מכם יטעון מכושיה ויפוק וינצוב ליה נציבין הה"ד כי תבאו אל הארץ ונטעתם...

The hen, when its chicks are small, shelters them under her wings, warms them and finds them food. But when they are grown, if they try to approach her, she pecks them on the head and says, "Go (find food) in your own waste."

Leviticus Rabbah 25:5

? Why do you think the caring hen pecks her grown chicks on their head and tells them to find food in their own waste?

Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

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

Note on "The Hen and Her Chicks"

What the fable presents as cruel or alienating on the part of the mother hen toward her chicks appears, in context, as the desire of God for his children to learn to defend themselves.

In the text of Leviticus Rabah that serves as the framework of our fable, Moses, in the name of God, speaks to the Children of Israel before they cross the Jordan River to establish themselves in the land of Israel: "Thus far you have received everything from the hands of God. Now you must procure your own food, seek your own sustenance, and satisfy your own needs. Be strong and brave."

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? After reading the note on our fable, what do you think of the hen's "pedagogical" approach towards her chicks?

? How do you think the grown chicks dealt with their mother's "pedagogical" approach?

Wrapping Up

! Exploring alternative ways to "wean" your chicks and the limitations of the parenting lessons from the mother hen.

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

1)

How does the mother hen treat her chicks when they are young?

2)

How does the mother treat them differently when they are grown up? Why do you think she acts this way?

3)

What things can you do by yourself now that once your mom or dad had to help you with? How does it make you feel? What are the next things you want to be able to do by yourself – but your parents don't think you're old enough? What are things that you are glad that your parents do for you now, that someday you will have to do for yourself?

4th – 6th GRADES:

1)

What do you think about the hen's treatment of her chicks? Would you describe her as loving or cruel?

2)

How would you describe an ideal parent (mom or dad)?

3)

How independent do you think your parents let you be? In what ways are you dependent on them? At what age or under what circumstances will you be totally independent of your parents? How does this make you feel?

7th – 12th GRADES

1)

The hen's treatment of her grown-up chicks can be likened to what we call today "tough love." What do you think of this attitude and is it good for every child? Explain.

2)

How do you think the chicks might have felt when they first heard their mother telling them to find food in their own waste? Does this accurately illustrate the feelings of the People of Israel as they prepared to enter the Land of Israel, after wandering in the desert? (See Numbers 13:17-14:25)

3)

What kind of a parent do you see yourself as becoming when it comes to raising your children to be independent adults? Will you use tough love or not? Explain.

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

See # 20: "The Pig and the Other Animals"