

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(27)

The Dancing Crow

Ben Sira's Alphabet, in Eisenstein, p. 48



Background to the Fable "The Dancing Crow"

The Jackdaw and the Ravens by Aesop

(Translated by Laura Gibbs, 2002)

There was a jackdaw who was bigger than the other jackdaws. Scorning his fellows, he joined the company of the ravens, having decided to spend his life as a member of their flock. The ravens, however, did not recognize the voice of this bird or his appearance, so they attacked him and drove him away. Rejected by the ravens, he went back again to the jackdaws. But the jackdaws were angry about his presumptuous behavior and refused to accept him. The final result was that the jackdaw had nowhere to go.

This is also true of someone who leaves his homeland, preferring to live elsewhere: he is treated with contempt abroad and is rejected by his own people for his presumptuous behavior.

Note: For the Greeks, the jackdaw was a bird who was supposed to stick to his own flock. The equivalent of the English proverb 'birds of a feather flock together' was koloios poti koloion, 'the jackdaw (stands) next to the jackdaw'



Jackdaw



Raven

? Read Aesop's fable "The Jackdaw and the Ravens" and look carefully at the pictures above. Why do you think the jackdaw scorned his fellow jackdaws and decided to join the ravens?

? Why do you think wasn't the jackdaw accepted back into the flock?

? Do you agree with Aesop's moral of the fable?

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אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין) אלפא ביתא דבן סירא עמוד 84

(ט"ז), אמר לו מפני מה העורב הולך ברקידה? אמר לו פעם אחת ראה עורב ליונה הולך בטוב הליכה יפה יותר מכל העופות, ישר בעיניו הליכת יונה, אמר בלבו אלך גם אני כמותה, והיה משבר עצמו בהליכה, והיו העופות משחקין בו, נתבייש העורב ואמר אחזור להליכתי הראשונה, בא לחזור ולא היה יכול כי שכח הליכתו הראשונה והיה כמרקד ולא עלתה בידו לא הליכה ראשונה ולא אחרונה.

Why does the crow move as if it were dancing? Once, a crow saw a dove that walked in a very elegant manner. The crow so liked the way the dove walked that he said, "I will walk the way she does." He almost killed himself trying to walk like the dove.

The other birds made fun of him. The crow was embarrassed and said, "I will walk the way I used to." He tried to walk the way he did before, but couldn't because he had forgotten how.

And so he remained like a dancer—he could not walk the way he used to, or the way he did afterwards (when he was imitating the dove.)

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Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What is the common motif to both Aesop and the Midrash fables?

? How can we apply our fable to family situations, to community life, and to Jewish history?

? What do you think is good -and not so good- about "flocking together with birds of our same feather"?

? What serious challenge presents our fable to the conception of "giur" (conversion to Judaism)? How can we address the challenge?

Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

? How does the crow look in Marcel Ferder's drawing?

Note on "The Dancing Crow"

The theme of this fable is found, with certain variations, in almost all of the fabulists. Here is Aesop's version:

The Crow and the Ravens

A crow who was larger than the other crows thought he was better than they were, so he left to join the ravens, thinking that living with them would be more dignified. But the ravens, finding his looks and his voice strange, pecked at him and chased him away. He went back to the crows again, but they, annoyed by his arrogance, wouldn't let him return. As a result, he was an outcast from both the crows and the ravens.

With people, similarly, those who leave their own country for another are not welcomed there because they are foreigners, and they are also despised by their fellow citizens for having scorned them.

Wrapping Up

! *The wicked son, what does he say: What is this service to you? ... And because he separated him self from the community, he rejects that which is essential! (From the Passover Haggadah)!*

Bibliography

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

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

- 1)
Who was the crow trying to imitate?
- 2)
What did the other crows think of him? What happened to the crow?
- 3)
If you could help the crow, what would you do? What did you learn from the crow's story?

4th- 6th GRADES:

- 1)
How do you understand the main idea of this story?
- 2)
What are some of the things you think your group of friends would not accept if you did them? Do you agree or disagree with these ideas of your friends? Explain.
- 3)
As babies we learn by imitating others, especially our parents and our older brothers and sisters, and this continues as we grow up. At what point do you think it is NOT a good thing to imitate others when we try to develop or learn new things? Explain.

7th-12th GRADES:

- 1)
How would you say this fable is about peer pressure and how it can really backfire for someone?
- 2)
How hard is it to develop our own personalities and our own style without imitating others? What can we do instead?
- 3)
We belong to an international group called the Jewish people. What responsibilities do we have towards our group? What helps us to stay a part of this group? What might cause us—or some Jewish person—to be seen as an outsider?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre and Post Reading: Connect to Outside World

At Saginaw Valley State University we have a charity function called “Walk a mile in her shoes.” Students, faculty, and administrators walk in women’s high heels. They do this so they can experience and “feel” a woman’s point of view—albeit one of fashion. It is a highly popular event and does increase some understanding.

Discuss this real life event in relation to the fable