

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(31)

The Man and the Glow Worm

Pesikta Rabbati 33:4



Background to the Fable “The Man and the Glow Worm”

Isaiah 51:7-12

7. Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my Torah; do not fear the taunts of men, nor be dismayed by their insults.

8. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall be forever, and my salvation for all generations.

9. Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days of old, in the generations of old. Are you not he who cut Rahab in pieces, and wounded the crocodile?

10. Are you not he who dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?

11. Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

12. I, I myself, am he who comforts you; who are you, that you should be afraid of a man who shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass?

? Can you find comfort in the words of Prophet Isaiah? Why? Why not?

Glowworm



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

Glow worm is the common name for various different groups of insect larvae and adult larviform females which glow through bioluminescence. They may sometimes resemble worms, but all are insects (*Arachnocampa* being a fly and all the others being beetles). The major families are:

- Lampyridae (fireflies), found around the world. The wingless adult female is the glowworm of literature, especially *Lampyris noctiluca* (the "Glow-worm" proper of British English) found in the most of Europe. In this species the male flies but does not glow. In some areas, a Firefly can also refer to members of the *Luciola* family found commonly throughout Europe, in which both the males and the flightless females glow.

- Phengodidae, found in North America and South America.
- Rhagophthalmidae, found in Asia
- *Arachnocampa* (formerly called *Bolitiphila*), found in New Zealand and Australia.

The glow is produced by different organs in the different families, suggesting they evolved separately, though several other beetle families in the superfamily Cantharoidea exhibit bioluminescence, suggesting a single origin within this lineage, so the Lampyrids and Phengodids do apparently share a common bioluminescent ancestor. The chemical reaction in each case is very efficient; nearly 100% of the energy input is turned into light (compared to the best light-emitting diodes at just 22%).

The purpose of the glow varies. Those adult females which glow do so to attract a male for mating. The *Lampyridae* larvae are believed to glow as a warning signal (see aposematism) to predators like toads not to eat them as they're mildly toxic. But the *Arachnocampa* larvae on the other hand glow to attract prey like midges into sticky snare lines for the larva to feed on.

Glowworms



? Why do you think someone could get scared of a glowworm?

The Man and the Glow Worm

Pesikta Rabbati 33:4

פסיקתא רבתי פרק לג סימן ח

דבר אחר [מי את ותראי וגו'] מאנוש ימות את מתיירא, אמר רבי יהודה ברבי שמעון למי שהיה רואה תולעת והיה מתיירא ממנו, רואה בגחלת נקראת גומרת לילו, אמרו לו מזו אתה מתיירא, בלילה היא גחלת ויוקדת, יבא הבקר ואתה רואה שאינה אלא תולעת, כך אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא מאנוש אתם מתייראים, תולעה הוא אף כי אנוש רימה ובן אדם תולעה (איוב כ"ה ו') מאנוש אתם מתייראים, אמרו לפניו רבש"ע והרי שיעבודם של מלכיות קשה (היה) [הוא], אמר להם מפני שהעולם הזה לילה (היה) [הוא] ושולטים בו, יבא בוקר ואתם רואים אותם שאינם אלא תולעה, איזה בקר, מה ישעיה אומר שומר מה מלילה [וגו'] אתא בוקר [וגם לילה] וגו' (ישעיה כ"א י"א וי"ב).

A man saw a glow worm (a type of firefly) and got scared, since it looked like a burning ember.

People said to him, "Are you afraid of this? At night it is a burning ember, but when morning comes, you will see that it is nothing more than a worm."

Pesikta Rabbati 33:4

Note on "The Man and the Glow Worm"

Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi Shimon, uses our fable in Pesikta Rabbati to illustrate his interpretation of the following verse: "...who are you that you should be afraid of a man who shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass?" (Isaiah 51:12). Rabbi Yehuda wants to teach us that a man should not fear another man, no matter how powerful he may be, since in the end we are only dealing with (someone who will be consumed by) a worm.

They asked the Holy One—blessed be He: "Lord of the Universe, why then do we suffer the slavery to which the nations of the earth subject us?" To which God replied that this world is like the night, but the day (the symbol of redemption) will finally come and you will see that "you are only dealing with worms."

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? What deep theological question is our fable trying to address? Are you satisfied with the answer? Why yes? Why not?

Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

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

More Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Do you think the words of comfort in our fable can be used in every day's situations when trying to help someone with a phobia or anxiety? Why yes? Why not?

Idiom of the Day: "Making a mountain out of a molehill"



To make a slight difficulty seem like a serious problem (usually in continuous tenses). *You're making a mountain out of a molehill. You wrote one bad essay - it doesn't mean you're going to fail your degree* (<http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com>)

! Wrapping Up

When the molehill is really a mountain, or when you can't help it!

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K-3rd GRADES:

1)

Why did the man get scared by the firefly?

2)

What did the people tell the man so he wouldn't be afraid anymore?

3)

What things sometimes seem more scary to you in the dark but really you don't have to worry about them when you see them in the light?

4th –6th GRADES:

1)

We associate the darkness with all kinds of fearful things. Why do you think this is so?

2)

What helps you to overcome any fears you might have?

3)

How does Jacob overcome his fear of meeting his brother Esau after many years and after he has cheated Esau of his birthright? (See Genesis 32:7- 33:4.)

7th-12th GRADES:

1)

Our perception of things is often skewed by our fears, our beliefs, our assumptions. How can we learn to perceive things without these or is this impossible?

2)

What causes us to fear something or someone? How do you go about dealing with such feelings in your life?

3)

The fable connects to a midrash on a verse from Isaiah about the mortality of all humans. How does this perspective help us to conquer our fears?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Post Reading Strategy: Discussion based on a Book Link

After reading "The Man and the Glow Worm" and the Notes, have a discussion of the concept that all men will die, be buried, and become part again of the earth. The lesson is to fear no man because ultimately "you are only dealing with worms" (i.e., no matter how powerful he may be, he is human and will ultimately be consumed by worms).

This is a dark and deep discussion and might benefit from the delightful children's story *The Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin, masterfully illustrated by Harry Bliss. The story is fun and fast paced. The lessons are an interesting point of view of life on earth from worms. A few sample entries from the diary:

- April 4th "Fishing season started today. We all dug deeper."
- April 10th "It rained all night and the ground was soaked. We spent the entire day on the sidewalk. Hopscotch is a very dangerous game."
- June 15th "My older sister thinks she's so pretty. I told her no matter how much time she spends looking in the mirror, her face will always look just like her rear end. Spider thought that was really funny. Mom did not."

- August 1st "It's not always easy being a worm. We're very small, and sometimes people forget that we're even here. But, like Mom always says, the earth never forgets we're here."