

Fables from the Jewish Tradition  
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(40)

**The Father and His Son**  
Rashi on Exodus 17:8



**Background to the Fable "The Father and His Son"**

**Exodus 17:1-8**

1. *And all the congregation of the people of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink.*
2. *Therefore the people complained to Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said to them, Why do you strive with me? why do you tempt the Lord?*
3. *And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?*
4. *And Moses cried to the Lord, saying, What shall I do to this people? they be almost ready to stone me.*
5. *And the Lord said to Moses, Go on before the people, and take with you of the elders of Israel; and your rod, with which you struck the river, take in your hand, and go.*
6. *Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*
7. *And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the people of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?*
8. *Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.*

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רש"י שמות פרק יז.ח

(ח) ויבא עמלק וגו'. סמך פרשה זו למקרא זה י לומר, תמיד אני ביניכם ומזומן לכל צרכיכם, ואתם אומרים היש ה' בקרבנו אם אין, חייכם שהכלב בא ונושך אתכם, ואתם צועקים לי ותדעו היכן אני. משל לאדם שהרכיב בנו על כתפו ויצא לדרך, היה אותו הבן רואה חפץ ואומר, אבא שול חפץ זה ותן לי, והוא נותן לו, וכן שנייה, וכן שלישי, פגעו באדם אחד, אמר לו אותו הבן ראית את אבא, אמר לו אביו, אינך יודע היכן אני, השליכו מעליו ובא הכלב ונשכו:

A man lifted his son onto his shoulders and went out for a walk. When the boy saw something he liked, he said, "Give it to me!" and his father gave it to him. This happened two or three times.


When they met a man, the child, who was still on his fathers shoulders, asked, "Do you know where my father is?"


His father replied, "Don't you know where I am?" He lowered his son down from his shoulders, and a dog came and bit him.


Rashi on Exodus 17:8

### Comprehension Questions


 Why is the father carrying his son on his shoulders?

 What do you think about the son's way of asking his father for the things he liked?

 Why does the child ask, while still in his father's shoulders, "Do you know where my father is?"

 Why is the father so upset with his son?




 What is the punishment that the father intends for his son?


### Note on "The Father and His Son"

This strange tale is told by Rashi as a commentary on Exodus 17:8: "Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim." Rashi tries to explain why the people of Israel were attacked, and concludes that it was a divine punishment for their lack of trust expressed in the previous verse: "...and because they tried the Lord, saying: Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:7). Thus Rashi explains Amalek's attack and at the same time connects two apparently unrelated issues. The metaphor is clear: the father is God, the ungrateful son is Israel, and the dog is Amalek.

### Marcelo Ferder's Drawing

 How do the son and the father look in Marcelo Ferder's drawing?

### Comprehension Questions

 What do you think about our fable?

### Wrapping Up

Say "thank you" or else...

## Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

### K-3<sup>rd</sup> GRADES:

- 1)  
What did the father do to please his son while he carried him on his shoulders?
- 2)  
What did the boy forget (so that he had to ask the man they met)?
- 3)  
Why do you think the boy was punished by the dog coming and biting him?
- 4)  
Do you ever think that you take your parents' care and kindness for granted? What can you do to show them you love them and appreciate them?

### 4<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> GRADES:

- 1)  
How would you describe the boy's behavior? Do you think his father was overly generous and is to blame for the boy's behavior or not?
- 2)  
What do you think kids learn when their parents give them anything they want? How does this prevent them from growing and from relating to other people well?
- 3)  
We express our thanks to God every morning in the first prayer we say upon waking up: Modeh Ani. Look over the words and meaning of this prayer. What might you like to add or change about this prayer to make it more personal for you?

### 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> GRADES:

- 1)  
What two kinds of child-rearing practices do we see in this story? What are the plusses and minuses of each? What do we learn from this story ?
- 2)  
Would you agree or disagree that we live in a world which has replaced "Honor your father and mother" with "Honor your son and daughter"? Explain your answer. What might be some of the ramifications of this for our society?
- 3)  
The fable told by Rashi as a commentary on Amalek's ability to successfully attack Israel had to do with the Jews' lack of trust in God. Why do you think that such an attitude would weaken them and give enemies power over them? Do you think that the Jewish people in Israel are in such a position today or not? Explain.

## Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

### Post Reading Strategy: Book Link

After reading this fable, a discussion of the relationship between a father and a son could take place. This would be followed by reading "Once More to the Lake" by E.B. White. In this essay, White recalls the summers of his youth, when he and his family spent a month on a lake in a woods. Years have passed, and he has begun to "wish for the placidity of a lake in the woods." So, he and his son return.

After reading both the fable and the essay, students could be directed to discuss not only the differences in the content/plot, but also the different point of view. In the fable, we have a stronger sense of the son until the father acts so abruptly. In the essay, we have a stronger sense of the father. So a discussion of what we actually know and what we can infer of these men would be interesting.

	<b>"The Father and His Son"</b>	<b>"Once More to the lake"</b>
Setting		
Action		

Relationship between father and son		
Something the son wants		
Ending		
Theme		