

Fables from the Jewish Tradition
By Rabbi Manes Kogan

(8)

The Lion and the Bird
Genesis Rabbah 64:10



Background to the Fable “The Lion and the Bird”

The Wolf and the Crane, By Aesop

<http://www.aesopfables.com/>

A Wolf had been gorging on an animal he had killed, when suddenly a small bone in the meat stuck in his throat and he could not swallow it. He soon felt terrible pain in his throat, and ran up and down groaning and groaning and seeking for something to relieve the pain. He tried to induce every one he met to remove the bone. "I would give anything," said he, "if you would take it out." At last the Crane agreed to try, and told the Wolf to lie on his side and open his jaws as wide as he could. Then the Crane put its long neck down the Wolf's throat, and with its beak loosened the bone, till at last it got it out.

"Will you kindly give me the reward you promised?" said the Crane.

The Wolf grinned and showed his teeth and said: "Be content. You have put your head inside a Wolf's mouth and taken it out again in safety; that ought to be reward enough for you."

Gratitude and greed go not together.

? Do you agree with Aesop's moral?

? Were you ever in the situation of the crane?

? Can you think on another moral to apply to the same fable?

Joshua ben Hananiah



Joshua ben Hananiah was a leading tanna of the first half-century following the destruction of the Temple. He was of Levitical descent (Ma'as. Sh. v. 9), and served in the sanctuary as a member of the class of singers (Arakhin 11b). His mother intended him for a life of study, and, as an older contemporary, Dosa b. Harkinas, relates (Yer. Yeb. 3a), she carried the child in his cradle into the synagogue, so that his ears might become accustomed to the sounds of the words of the Torah. It was probably with reference to his pious mother that Johanan b. Zakkai thus expressed himself concerning Joshua ben Hananiah: "Hail to thee who gave him birth" (Ab. ii. 8). According to another tradition (Ab. R. N. xiv.) Johanan b. Zakkai praised him in the words from Eccl. iv. 12: "And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Perhaps he meant that in Joshua the three branches of traditional learning, Midrash, Halakah, and Aggadah, were united in a firm whole; or possibly he used the passage in the sense in which it was employed later (Eccl. R. iv. 14; B. B. 59a), to show that Joshua belonged to a family of scholars even to the third generation.

Joshua ben Hananiah was one of the five who formed the inner circle of Johanan Ben Zakai's pupils (Ab. ii. 8). In enumerating them tradition places him at the head together with Eliezer b. Hyrcanus. Tradition also frequently mentions these two together as upholders of opposite views. They were both present at the celebration of the circumcision of Elisha b. Abuyah (Acher), in Jerusalem, and diverted themselves by connecting passages in the Pentateuch with others in the Prophets and the Hagiographa (Yer. Hagigah 77b). It was also Eliezer and Joshua who rescued Johanan ben Zakkai from the besieged city and brought him into the camp of Vespasian.

After the destruction of the Temple Joshua opposed the exaggerated asceticism with which many wished to show their grief, e.g., in going without meat and wine because the altar on which they had sacrificed animals and poured libations of wine had been destroyed. He represented to them that to be consistent they ought to eat no figs or grapes, since no more first-fruits were offered, and that they ought even to refrain from bread and water, since the festival of drawing water (Joshua describes this festival in Yer. Suk. 55b) had been discontinued, and the showbread as well as the two loaves of the feast of first-fruits could no longer be sacrificed (Tosef., Sotah, end; B. B. 60b). With such arguments Joshua supported the efforts of his teacher to make the grief at the loss of the Temple, which until then had been the center of religious life, less bitter.

One time, when Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was walking in Jerusalem with Rabbi Yehoshua, they arrived at where the Temple in Jerusalem now stood in ruins. "Woe to us" cried Rabbi Yehoshua, "for this house where atonement was made for Israel's sins now lies in ruins!" Answered Rabban Yochanan, "We have another, equally important source of atonement, the practice of gemilut hasadim (loving kindness), as it is stated 'I desire loving kindness and not sacrifice'.

Avoth deRabbi Nathan

In the beginning of Hadrian's rule Joshua appears as a leader of the Jewish people. When the permission to rebuild the Temple was again refused, he turned the excited people from thoughts of revolt against Rome by a speech in which he skilfully made use of a fable of Æsop's concerning the lion and the crane (Gen. R. lxiv., end). About the same time Joshua by his eloquence prevented the whole area of the Temple from being pronounced unclean because one human bone had been found in it (Tosef., 'Eduy. iii. 13; Zeb. 113a). Joshua lived to witness Hadrian's visit to Palestine, and he followed the emperor to Alexandria (130). The conversations between Joshua and Hadrian, as they have been preserved in the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian

Midrash, have been greatly modified and exaggerated by tradition, but they nevertheless present in general a just picture of the intercourse between the witty Jewish scholar and the active, inquisitive emperor, the "curiositatum omnium explorator," as Tertullian calls him.

- Joshua ben Hananiah was regarded by posterity as a man always ready with an answer, and as the victorious representative of Jewish wit and wisdom.

Historical Background to the Fable "The Lion and the Bird"



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_Kokhba_revolt

After the failed Great Jewish Revolt in the year 70, the Roman authorities took measures to suppress the rebellious province. Instead of a procurator, they installed a praetor as a governor and stationed an entire legion, the X *Fretensis*.

In 130, Emperor Hadrian visited the ruins of Jerusalem. At first sympathetic towards the Jews, Hadrian promised to rebuild the city, but the Jews felt betrayed when they found out that his intentions were to rebuild the Jewish holiest city as a Roman metropolis, and a new temple upon the ruins of the Second Temple, which was to be dedicated to Jupiter.

An additional legion, the VI *Ferrata*, was stationed in the province to maintain order, and the works commenced in 131 after the governor of Judaea Tineius Rufus performed the foundation ceremony of Aelia Capitolina, the city's projected new name. "Ploughing up the Temple" was a religious offence that turned many Jews against the Roman authorities. The tensions grew higher when Hadrian abolished circumcision (*brit milah*), which he, a Hellenist, viewed as mutilation. A Roman coin inscribed *Aelia Capitolina* was issued in 132.

Because the Great Jewish Revolt had resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin at Yavne provided spiritual guidance for the Jewish nation, both in Judea and throughout the diaspora.

The Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135CE) against the Roman Empire was a second major rebellion by the Jews of Judaea Province (also spelled *Judaea*) and the last of the Jewish-Roman Wars.

Simon bar Kokhba, the commander of the revolt, was acclaimed a Messiah (rather than The Messiah), a heroic figure who could restore Israel. The revolt established a Jewish state for over two years, but a massive Roman army finally crushed it. The Romans then barred Jews from Jerusalem, except for Tisha B'Av.

According to Cassius Dio, 580,000 Jews were killed, 50 fortified towns and 985 villages razed. The Talmud, however, claims a death toll in the millions. The latter figure is unlikely, because there were simply not that many Jews in the region at that time. Cassius Dio claimed that "Many Romans, moreover, perished in this war. Therefore, Hadrian, in writing to the Senate did not employ the opening phrase commonly affected by the emperors: 'If you and your children are in health, it is well; I and the army are in health.'"

Hadrian attempted to root out Judaism, which he saw as the cause of continuous rebellions. He prohibited the Torah law, the Hebrew calendar and executed Judaic scholars. The sacred scroll was ceremoniously burned on the Temple Mount. At the former Temple sanctuary, he installed two statues, one of Jupiter, another of himself. In an attempt to erase any memory of Judea, he wiped the name off the

map and replaced it with Syria Palaestina, after the Philistines, the ancient enemies of the Jews; previously similar terms had been used to describe only the (smaller) former Philistine homeland to the west of Judaea. Since then, the land has been referred to as "Palestine," which supplanted earlier terms such as "Iudaea" (Judaea) and the antiquated "Canaan." Similarly, he re-established Jerusalem as the Roman pagan polis of Aelia Capitolina, and Jews were forbidden from entering it.

Modern historians have come to view the Bar-Kokhba Revolt as being of decisive historic importance. The massive destruction and loss of life occasioned by the revolt has led some scholars to date the beginning of the Jewish diaspora from this date. They note that, unlike the aftermath of the First Jewish-Roman War chronicled by Josephus, the majority of the Jewish population of Judaea was either killed, exiled, or sold into slavery after the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, and Jewish religious and political authority was suppressed far more brutally. After the revolt the Jewish religious center shifted to the Babylonian Jewish community and its scholars. Judaea would not be a center of Jewish religious, cultural, or political life again until the modern era, though Jews continued to live there and important religious developments still occurred there.

Marcelo Ferder's drawing

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

The Lion and the Bird Genesis Rabbah 64:10

מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה סד סימן י

י ויאמרו ראה ראינו, ראינו מעשיך ומעשה אבותיך, ונאמר תהי נא אלה אם תעשה עמנו וגו', רק מיעוט שלא עשו עמו טובה שלימה, בימי רבי יהושע בן חנניה גזרה מלכות הרשעה שיבנה בית המקדש הושיבו פפוס ולוליאנוס טרפיזין מעכו עד אנטוכיא והיו מספקין לעולי גולה כסף וזהב וכל צרכם, אזלין אלין כותאי ואמרין ידיע להוי למלכא דהדין קרתא מרדתא תתבנא ושוריא ישתכללון מנדה בלו והלך לא יתנון, מנדה, זו מדת הארץ, בלו, זו פרובגירון, והלך, אנגרוטינה, ואמר להון מה נעביד וגזרית, אמרין ליה שלח ואמר להון או ישנון יתיה מאתריה או יוספון עליה חמש אמין או יפצרון מיניה חמש אמין מן גרמיהון אנון חזרין בהון, והון קהליא מצתין בהדא בקעתא דבית רמון כיון דאתון כתיבא שרון בכיין, בעיין לממרד על מלכותא אמרין יעול חד בר נש חכימא וישדך צבורא, אמרין יעול ר' יהושע בן חנניא דהוא אסכולוסטקיא דאורייתא, עאל ודרש ארי טרף טרף ועמד עצם בגרונו אמר כל דאתי מפיק ליה אנא יהיב ליה אגריה אתא הדין קורא מיצראה דמקוריה אריך יהיב מקוריה ואפקיה אמר ליה הב לי אגרי א"ל זיל תהא מלגלג ואומר דעילת לפומא דאריה בשלם ונפקת בשלם, כך דינו שנכנסנו לאומה זו בשלום ויצאנו בשלום, ויבואו עבדי יצחק, אין אנו יודעים אם מצאו אם לא מצאו, מן מה דכתיב וימצאו שם באר מים חיים הוי שמצאו מים חיים.

A lion was devouring his prey when a bone lodged in his throat. He said, "I will give a reward to whoever comes and removes the bone."

A bird with a long beak came, stuck it in the lion's mouth, and pulled out the bone.

He then demanded, "Give me my reward."

The lion replied, "You may go forth and proclaim: I entered the mouth of a lion in peace and came out in peace."

Genesis Rabbah 64:10

The context of this fable is the attempt of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania to convince a group of Jews not to rebel against Rome. (The consequences of the previous revolts had been disastrous for the Jewish people.) For this purpose, he uses this well-known fable, although the moral is a little different from the ones presented by the Aesopic tradition and by Samaniego. While these last two versions attempt to teach us that it is impossible to expect anything from an evil person, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania tries to show the assembled public that when one has confronted a powerful enemy, there is no greater reward than to come out of the dispute alive. Although there were many Jewish victims under the yoke of the Romans, the Jewish leader rescues the people as a whole and invites the audience to give up their fruitless rebellion and to think of the future.

? How is our fable different from Aesop's?

? Why do you think did Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania use a fable to make his point?

? As we know, the attempts of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania to dissuade his audience from rebelling against the Romans were futile, despite his convincing argument. What do you think prevented Rabbi Yehoshua's audience from following his advice?

Wrapping Up

When you can't win, be ready to bite the bullet!¹

¹ Endure pain with fortitude.

<http://www.phrases.org.uk>

In the days before effective anesthetics soldiers were given bullets to bite on to help them endure pain. Improvements in battlefield medicine has seen the real act of biting bullets migrated into metaphor, although it must still happen occasionally. First recorded in print in Kipling's *Light that Failed*, 1891. Kipling uses 'bite the bullet' rather than 'bite this bullet', which we might have expected if the idea were new to the character being spoken to. That tends to suggest the phrase was already public when the story was written.

...'Going to sleep by you. Lie down now; you'll be better in the morning.'

'I shan't!' The voice rose to a wail. 'My God! I'm blind! I'm blind, and the darkness will never go away.' He made as if to leap from the bed, but Torpenhow's arms were round him, and Torpenhow's chin was on his shoulder, and his breath was squeezed out of him. He could only gasp, 'Blind!' and wriggle feebly.

'Steady, Dickie, steady!' said the deep voice in his ear, and the grip tightened. 'Bite on the bullet, old man, and don't let them think you're afraid.'

Bibliography

Jones, V.S. Vernon, trans. Aesop's Fables. New York: Avenel Books, 1988.

Discussion Ideas from Rabbi Dorit Edut

K- 3rd GRADES:

1)

What did the bird expect to happen when he saved the lion by taking out the bone?

2)

What did the lion say then to the bird? How was this a reward for the bird?

3)

Do you think the lion was being fair? Why or why not?

4)

How do you feel when you've done something to help another person? How do they usually treat you? Could you imagine that as a kind of reward or gift for what you did?

4th- 6th GRADES:

1)

What do you think about the lion's "reward" for the bird's deed?

2)

Do you think the bird would have done this without the lion promising a reward? Give your reasons.

3)

Have you ever done something for someone else "just because"—without expecting anything in return? What was it, and how did it make you feel afterwards?

4)

In Jewish tradition, there is a prayer that we say when we have survived an accident or a catastrophe that could have seriously injured or even killed us. It is called "Birkat HaGomel" and is usually said during the Torah service. Look this up and see what it means in English. Then discuss why you think we have this tradition. Can you think of times in your life or your family members' lives when this may have been important to say? What about times in the history of the Jewish people?

7th-12 GRADES:

1)

If you had been the bird, how would you have responded to the lion? Why?

Teacher's Manual 22

2)

There is a Jewish saying : "Sachar Torah, Torah" ("The reward of the Torah is the Torah"). Would you apply that to this fable or not? Give your reasons.

3)

We live in a world where people are often not motivated to come forth with information to solve crimes or even to give donations to non-profit organizations unless there is some kind of tangible reward involved. What do you think of this? Why do you approve or disapprove of this?

4)

In Leviticus 19:16 it says: "Lo ta'amod al dam rey-echa" ("Do not stand idly or take advantage of your fellow human being's blood"). It has been the basis for our people to be involved in many social-action causes. How would you possibly apply this to situations you face in the world today?

Language Arts Strategies from Dr. M. Patricia Cavanaugh

Pre-Reading Strategy: Book Link

Prior to reading "The Lion and the Bird," read Aesop's Fable "Androcles and the Lion" to the students. List the events and the reward:

	"Androcoles and the Lion"	"The Lion and the Bird"
Event	Androcoles comes across a lion	
Event	He removes a painful thorn	
Event	Remains with lion securing meat	
Event	They are eventually captured	
Event	The lion is starved for three days	
Event	The Emperor comes to see the kill	
Event	Lion comes out roaring	
Event	He recognizes Androcoles and stops	
Reward	Emperor frees them both	