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Fables in Jewish Writings:
A Perspective on the Social, Moral and Ethical Lessons of Animals in Literature

by Zachary Rootberg Shapiro

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Referee: Dr. Susan Einbinder

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

1997

"Had the Torah not been given us, we would learn modesty from cats, honest toil from ants, chastity from doves, and gallantry from cocks."

-Johanan b. Nappaha. *Talmud: Erubin*, 100b

This thesis is about how to be moral and ethical; it is about how to be alive. Animals in their kingdoms teach us how to be human in our communities. In researching and in writing this thesis, I began to recognize specific individuals, friends, in some of the animals of these rich fables. I have found guidance, learned wisdom, and reaped ethical value from these individuals.

I owe endless gratitude to my family, who has guided and supported me to reach this goal and beyond. And to Dr. Susan Einbinder: your love of Jewish Literature fostered in me a passion towards the research of this thesis. It was truly an honor and a delight to work with you in this project.

I dedicate this thesis to my classmates at HUC-JIR. I also dedicate this thesis to all who were once a member of this class, but who are not graduating with me. You are my teachers and my rabbis. You are my animal kingdom, my zoo, a true exhibition of diverseness. I owe this work to your support. Your voices will always resonate inside my soul.

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Digest

This thesis explores animal fables in Jewish writings. Ethical and moral values concerning life and society are the cornerstones of animals fables. Jewish literature includes a rich genre of animal fables which, like those of Aesop, instruct human behavior. The Jewish fables derive from a wide range of sources, most combining world folk-motifs with Jewish text or culture. They provide a narrative voice for a wide audience that may not be schooled in the more traditional rabbinic anthologies of wisdom and ethics. In addition to depicting the morals in animal fables, this thesis provides enjoyment of endearing animal stories.

Chapter One identifies the precedent for Jewish animal fables. How do bible and midrash illustrate animals through fables? The narratives of the serpent in Eden and of Balaam's donkey in the desert are both examples of biblical fables. Psalms further describes certain animal characteristics through metaphors. Midrash engages animals through the *mashal*, the parable. It is here that the fox, for example, gains its reputation as a medium for fables.

Chapter Two explores specific medieval fables from Berechia ha-Nakdan's Mishlei Shu-alim. These fables integrate biblical texts with common motifs. Themes such as social order, avarice, and trust permeate this collection. Highlighted are tales with foxes, donkeys, insects. These animals portray consistent

characteristics from one fable to the next. Much of this reflects how bible and midrash represents them.

In Chapter Three, excerpts from the Indian book, Kalilah va Dimna furthers the understanding of animals fables in folk literature. This work does not resonate so much with Jewish text. But because Jews translated it into Hebrew (as well as many other languages), it has become identified with Jewish literature. *Kalilah va Dimna* was originally a guide for leaders. Thus the animals portray both effective and ineffective administrative skills that model what kings should or should not do.

Chapter Four looks at addition Jewish animal fable collections. It concentrates on Sefer Meshalim but also includes tales from the Kurdistani and Moroccan traditions. Themes from the previous chapters continue to surface through these fables. Some of the tales, in fact, directly parallel those from Mishlei Shu-alim.

Finally, Chapter Five examines concluding issues: the audience of the animal fable, the animal fable in modern Jewish literature, and the prevalent characteristics that link each animal from one literary corpus to the next. The thesis concludes recognizing the contribution of animals fables in Jewish literature as they add to our understanding of Jewish sociology, community, and lore.

Chapter One

Introduction: Why Animals?
Cultural, biblical, and rabbinic precedent for animals in Jewish fables

Art and literature from every corner of the world features animals as moral and ethical instructors. In fables, the innocence of an animal's very being combined with the moral perspective it provides have lured audiences. Familiar to most is the Aesopean collection of animal fables. Here animals either guide or deceive the listener, who seeks an upright existence, cautioning those who may go astray though envy, pride, or greed.

While many animal fables speak to a lower, working class, others represent the court life of the elite. We shall discover this through the various corpi involved in this thesis. But the underlying premise attracts all; animal fables provide the guidance as well as the entertainment that other forms of art do not.

Why animals? This thesis will seek to answer that question. For a start, Esther Cohen provides some insight as to why animals are so endeared in human thought:

> "Animals in fables acted in all human spheres, and in a manner hardly complimentary to humans… . The wily fox appeared in several human roles… . Whatever the procedure,

the issues were fairly universal: lineage, loyalty, vendetta, fraud, and honor.

"Animals were thus symbolic for people, a mirror held to humanity's face and a vehicle of human self-perception."[1]

This thesis shall explore examples of how animal fables are not only mirrors of but also guides for humanity.

The greatest works of Jewish animal fables we have today belong to the medieval period, when folk literature throughout Europe began to prosper. Berechiah Ha-Nakdan's Mishlei Shu-alim appeared in the twelfth century. Kalilah va Dimna, an older, Indian corpus, emerged in Europe in the tenth century. Some of the questions this thesis shall address include: What was the lure of these animal fables? What guidance could the animal tales offer that the traditional literature did not? And what elements distinguished Jewish animal fables from the secular? What characteristics distinguish one animal from another in fable literature and in Jewish thought? Of prime importance to this thesis is the provision of a resource for vibrant animal stories from Jewish culture.

While Jewish folk writers borrowed from their non-Jewish neighbors, distinct roots of these medieval fables do exist in our heritage. Wonderful animal stories appear sporadically in our Bible: the animals in Eden, the gathering and dispersing of

[1] Esther Cohen, "The Crossroads of Justice," in *Brill's Studies in Intellectual History*, ed. A. J. Vanderjagt, (University of Groningen), 105.

the animals of Noah, the wisdom of Balaam's ass, the ability of King Solomon to understand animals. Comparisons to animals abound in the book of Proverbs. The Midrash, too, expounds upon the animals of the Bible. Additionally, the Midrash introduces fables of its own, the *mashal* being the aggadic device through which the rabbis draw comparisons. We shall see later in this chapter how the rabbis employed animals to instruct in the midrashic fables.

First, however, we shall explore the migration of specific folk literatures from East to West.

In comparing fables of various cultures, we find evidence of shared sourses in connections between common story-lines. Jewish animal fables, as found in the medieval genre, often reflect motifs of Greek and even Indian traditions. David Stern, scholar of Biblical and Medieval texts, writes:

> "Parables and fables are hardly the property of Rabbinic literature alone. They can be found in the literatures of virtually every culture throughout the world. . . .. Native homes for parables and fables tend to be traditional cultures that still possess oral literary traditions. Of these, perhaps the foremost example is ancient Greek epic, which possesses a literary genre, the *ainos*, that is directly analogous to the mashal."[2]

But while Jewish fable writing shares this methodology, unique to the Jewish literature is the transposition of Biblical

[2] David Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 5-6.

and rabbinic verses into the story. Nathan Ausubel, editor of A Treasury of Jewish Folklore, writes,

> "While there are traces of the fable in Jewish scriptures, it would be wrong to include Jews among the innovators, or even significant developers, of this folk-art form. They were only skillful translators and adapters of the fables of India and Greece."[3]

Indeed, when Jewish writers reworked the non-Jewish writings, they would transpose quotations from scripture and rabbinic literature into much of these borrowed works.

Professor Dov Noy of the Hebrew University specializes in Jewish Folklore. His studies include comparisons of Jewish fables to those of the Worlds' cultures. He explores how the Jewish versions of the universal tales compare to and differ from the secular literature in terms of style and structure. Further, he identifies how universal folk motifs become intertwined with particular Jewish content. An important distinction for Noy is the difference between a sermon and a story. Jewish can employ sermonic messages (excerpts of wisdom from the Bible and rabbinic literature) without actually preaching. Noy writes,

> "One must remember that the narrator does not open his story by quoting the scriptural verse; he never refers openly to his Biblical source; by doing so, he would act as a preacher, which is not expected of him. He merely alludes to the Biblical verse within the plot, and assumed that the audience follows his hint. Usually he puts it into the mouth of the initial *dramatis persona* in the tale."[4]

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[3] Nathan Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1948), 621.
[4] Dov Noy, "The 'Animal Languages' Folktale" in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, ed. Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy (Jerusalem:Magnes Press., 1971), 176.

We shall observe in the scope of this thesis that animals in the Rabbinic, medieval, and modern periods of Jewish writings speak with biblical quotations and allusions.

When we look at folk tales throughout the world, we recognize motifs common to all cultures. Examples are greed and pride, love and lust, envy and selfishness. These characteristics preocupy peoples of all nations regardless of the theology or even mythology of the community. What intrigues scholars of this literature, however, is not so much the common thread of emotional traits that crosses cultural boundaries. It is the similarity of the actual stories that the various cultures employ. While fables may originate in one part of the globe, (or perhaps they simultaneously flourish in different areas) they range to all corners. Each local culture adds particular national and religious elements. Rabbi Abraham Millgram writes,

> "An outstanding feature of folk-tales is their tendency to migrate from their original home and to spread in ever widening circles. They are usually passed on from father to son and from neighbor to neighbor, and in the process not only gather new elements like a rolling snow ball, but often assume the status of unwritten lore of a whole nation. Eventually the folk-tales . . . become the property of practically all mankind."[5]

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[5] Rabbi Abraham E. Millgram, *An Anthology of Medieval Hebrew Literature*, (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1961), 287.

Rabbi Millgram then explains how the Jews specifically became involved in this process. Because Jews lived in all lands, and because they were masters of many languages, it was fitting that they became involved in the sharing, exchanging, and writing of world fables and legends. Jews translated written texts from one language to the next, sometimes adapting them to a Jewish setting. Such was the case with Kalilah va Dimna; it was in part because of Jewish translators that the text spread from East to West. In the process, the Jews embraced the stories as their own.[6]

Jews have always been a transient people. Yet, our ancestors retained extended family connections even as they journeyed from country to country. In the case of Kalilah va Dimna, the Jewish author largely translated directly while leaving the stories in the original context. But with most of Mishlei Shu-alim, fables with elements world folk tales are embellished with the wisdom of our heritage that is in the mouths of the animals or the words of the narrator. Many of these fables find parallels in the Aesop tradition of Greece. But even the motifs of Aesop existed concurrently in other cultures.

But Jewish fable literature does not derive exclusively from other nations. On the contrary, Judaism shares in the deeply rich tradition of animal tales. The primary difference is that

[6] Ibid., 288.

in biblical accounts, animals speak with humans while in world folk literature, animals speak with one another as well.

The very beginning of *Bereishit* invites us to explore the animal kingdom in the Garden of Eden. The first earthly creature to speak in the biblical text is not Adam nor Eve, but the serpent. In Bill Moyers', Genesis, a Living Conversation, Professor Leon Kass of the University of Chicago, shares the following,

> "I take the conversation with the serpent to be . . . the awakening of the voice of reason and the fueling of the imagination to consider possibilities other than the merely given ones. The serpent asks the Bible's first question and produces the first conversation."[7]

Midrash does not provide the language of this conversation, as the rabbis did not know the first language of humanity. Midrash suggests that the serpent and Adam actually spoke Hebrew to one another, but that Adam could also understand the animal language of all other beasts. Rabbinic legend also maintains that the original serpent resembled man more than any other animal because it could speak and use intellect.[8] Later, when we look at the accounts focusing on Solomon, we shall see how Solomon could understand the language that animals used among themselves. Through the relationship with the serpent, Adam and Eve fall, but learn through their mistake to rise again. Here we shall look at

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[7] Bill Moyers, *Genesis, A Living Conversation*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 46.
[8] Dr. J. H. Hertz, (editor), *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, (London: Soncino Press, 1992), 10.

the some examples of Biblical animal tales and how they act as a prototype of future rabbinic and medieval animal writings.

In Torah, the next and only other animal to speak after the serpent is the ass in *Parashat Balak*. As the serpent does in the account above, this amusing episode elevates the intelligence of beast over man. In some miraculous way, the donkey was able to have greater sensitivity than a human being, a prophet no less. Before the donkey speaks, it senses the Angel blocking its way. Balaam, ironically, sees nothing. But not only does God allow the donkey to see, God then lets it speak, admonishing Balaam for beating it. Indeed, Balaam the seer is blind.[9] Most commentators site this account as a miraculous event. Rambam, however, diminishes this entire phenomenon to a mere vision of Balaam. Rashi does not comment on the miracle at all. Louis Ginsberg writes, "[The Lord] permitted her to use speech, a gift that she had possessed ever since her creation, but had not until then used."[10] The motif in this story sets up an irony that exists in much of folk literature. The irony of learning from an animal underscores the message that animal conveys. The donkey, an ass, the symbol of stupidity in so much of world literature, communicates with his master. In later writings, we shall see other literary treatments of the donkey. Generally, the donkey does not secure such honor as does the donkey of Balaam. In fact, Ginsberg relates at the end this account,

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[9] General Midrash, not actual Bible text

[10] Louis Ginsberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1913), 3:364.

"It is out of consideration to mankind . . .that God has closed the mouth of animals, for were they to speak, man could not well use them for his service, since the ass, the most stupid of all animals, when she spoke, confounded Balaam, the wisest of the wise."[11]

Midrash surrounding the Flood account adds to understanding of animal lore. The animals that enter Noah's Ark actually do not speak at all. Though Midrash, however, we learn about their culture. Marc Gellman, in his contemporary Midrash, illustrates how the fish were the only animals who knew that like water, God was all around them. Their reward was that God would save them all and destroying the rest of the world with water, in which the fish could swim.[12] In Sefer Ha-Aggadah, Resh Lakish explains how the raven complained when Noah sent her out after the flood.[13]

Midrash also develops the wisdom of Solomon. Our tradition ascribes the Proverbs to this King. These writings discuss animal behavior. In I Kings 5: 12-13, we learn, "*[Solomon] composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five. He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; and he discoursed about beasts, birds, creeping things, and fishes.*" From this passage, legends have flourished about Solomon's ability to converse with the animals. One story, as told in Louis Ginsberg's The Legends of the Jews, relates a story of a

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[11] Ibid., 3:366.
[12] Marc Gellman, *Does God Have a Big Toe?*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 27-29.

man who would visit with King Solomon every year. The following is a synopsis:

> One year, the man asked Solomon to teach him the language of the animals. Solomon allowed this, but warned that if the man were to reveal any word he hears from an animal, he would be killed. As the man returned home, he overheard a conversation between his ox and his ass. They were devising a scheme so that the ox would not have to work so hard under their master. They would pretend that the ox was sick and unable to eat. Thus the master would not work it so hard.
>
> That night, not knowing that the man had understood the plan, the ox refused his food. But the ass had its own scheme. It went and ate the food which the ox had left! The man secretly watched all this and laughed. His wife inquired why he was so amused, for she had not noticed anything out of the ordinary. His reply was, more or less, "I was just thinking of a funny joke someone once told me." (We remember that the man cannot reveal his secrete of understanding animals).
>
> The next day, the master punished the ass by making it do all the ox's labor as well. At the end of the day, exhausted and bitter because of all the work, the ass said to the ox, "I heard [the master] peak of heaving thee slaughtered, if thou shouldst refuse to eat this night, too." Trembling the ox ran to eat every speck of his food. Witnessing all this, the man once again could not contain his laughter. His wife threatened to leave him if he did not tell her the reason for his laughter. Because of his love for her, he related to her everything.

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[13] Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hannah Ravnitzky (editors), *The Book of Legends Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 28.

> Always a loyal bystander, the dog became sad because he knew his master would soon die because he had revealed the secrete. His sadness eclipsed his appetite. The cock, however, took the food which the dog abandoned and provided a banquet for him and his wives. The dog scolded the cock for his lack of sensitivity. The cock replies, "Is it my fault if our master is a fool and an idiot? I have ten wives, and I rule them as I will. Not one dares oppose me and my commands. Our master has a single wife, and this one he cannot control and manage. . . . Let him take a heavy stick and belabor his wife's back thoroughly." The master heard this advice, followed it, and escaped death.[14]

A few motifs appear in this story. One is that those who tell secretes garnered through the understanding of animal language will be put to death. A second describes the nature of the relationship of a man to his wife, unequal in the eyes of a twentieth century Reform Jew. The lesson is that one should not step outside of established boundaries, whether by revealing secretes or by cowering to his wife. Both motifs find parallels in myths of Arabic cultures. In one Muslim tale, Solomon overhears a bird tell its wife that if she wishes, he would destroy Solomon's throne. Solomon summoned the bird to appear before him, imploring that it explain these words. The bird replied, "O Solomon, where is thy wisdom? Knowest thou not that one utters foolish things to gain the admiration of the woman one loves?"[15]

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[14] Ginsberg, *Legends*, 4:138-140.
[15] Ibid., 6:288.

Arabic lore presents the same fable, *Suleyman el Hakim*, with slight variations. Here, Suleyman overhears two pigeons, a male and a female, in conversation. The male said, "Who is Suleyman the king? And what are all his buildings to be so proud of? Why, I, if I put my mind to it, could kick them down in a minute!" Suleyman asks the pigeon how he could say such a thing. The bird replies that when one talks to a female, he naturally boasts. Suleyman laughed and warned the pigeon never again to engage in such pretension. Nevertheless, the pigeon flew back to his mate and continued to boast. Enraged at this vanity, Suleyman turned both birds into stone. This served as a warning for men not to boast and for women not to provoke them.[16] At the Dome of the Rock are two marble slabs that sit side by side. The veining of the slabs resembles a picture of two birds. According to Muslim lore, this picture is a reminder of the above story.

Though so many delightful tales derive from I Kings 5:13, rabbis have made attempts to rationalize Solomon's understanding of animals. Numbers Rabbah asks, "But can a man speak with beasts and with fowl? No; what it means is that Solomon argued: What is the reason why a beast has been permitted as food only through [the cutting of] both organs [of the throat], while a fowl requires [the cutting of] one only? Because the beast was created out of dry land, while in the case of fowl . . .."[17] The

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[16] J. E. Hanauer, *Folk-Lore of the Holy Land; Moslem, Christian, and Jewish*, (London: Duckworth & Co., 1907), 48.
[17] Numbers Rabbah XIX, 3.

rabbis relate another Midrash based on the same verse. Here Solomon asks a series of questions:

> "Why in the case of eight creeping things mentioned in the Torah is one liable if he catches or wounds any of them on the Sabbath, but he is not culpable in the case of the other creeping things, forbidden animals, and reptiles? . . . Why do all the cattle, beasts, and birds require the ritual act of slaughter but fish do not?"[18]

The answers the rabbis provide are not pertinent to the focus of this thesis. These Midrashim deny Solomon's knowledge of animal language. Nevertheless, the legends surrounding Solomon's comprehension of animal language far outweigh the rationalizations of these Midrashim.

Tradition holds that Solomon wrote the Proverbs. Here, too, the numerous references to animals that further the notion that Solomon could understand not only their language but also their living culture. Similarly, we can procure wisdom not only through the words of the animals but also through their actions and their instincts. The animal wisdom in the Proverbs provides guidance and insights for our lives. The following is a collection of Proverbs that involve animals:

Sometimes, the reference is metaphoric. It can be positive:

> "Let you fountain be blessed;
> Find joy in the wife of your youth-
> A loving doe, a graceful mountain goat.
> Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;

[18] Ruth Rabbah VII. 3.

Be infatuated with love for her always." (Prov. 5:19-20)

On the other hand, other animals can warn us against seduction:

"[A woman] sways him with her eloquence,
Turns him aside with her smooth talk.
Thoughtlessly he follows her,
Like an ox going to the slaughter,
Like a fool to the stocks for punishment
Until the arrow pierces his liver.
He is like a bird rushing into a trap,
Not knowing his life is at stake." (Prov. 7:21-23).

Further in the Chapter 30, Proverbs relates the following characteristics of animal behavior:

"Four are among the tiniest on earth,
Yet they are the wisest of the wise:
Ants are a folk without power,
Yet they prepare food for themselves in summer;
The badger is a folk without strength,
Yet it makes its home in the rock;
The locusts have no king,
Yet they all march forth in formation;
You can catch the spider in your hand,
Yet it is found in royal palaces.

There are three that are stately of stride,
Four that carry themselves well:
The lion is mightiest among the beasts,
And recoils before none;
The greyhound, the he-goat,
The king whom none dares resist." (Prov. 30:24-31).

Many of these creatures, as Proverbs depict them, become central figures in Jewish Medieval animal writings. The Mishlei Shu-alim story of the grasshopper and the ant(also found in Aesop) shares its motif with the work ethic of the ant in this Proverb. Also in Mishlei Shu-alim is a story of a common spider who has influence in the castle. Numerous folk-tales depict the lion as royalty. While Proverbs was not the sole inventor of these motifs, it does provide a Jewish standard for later fables.

We have seen some of the animal lore surrounding biblical stories. Additional midrashim abound providing further examples of animal fables that do not derive directly from the biblical sources. According to Sanhedrian 38b, Rabbi Johanan ascribes Rabbi Meir three hundred parables of foxes to Rabbi Meir. Of those, only three exist in Talmud and Midrash though others composed by additional rabbis exist as well. Even though Talmud credits Rabbi Meir with these fables, we do not know exactly which ones they are.

Yet the Midrash exploits this number, three hundred. In Genesis Rabbah we learn, "Rabbi Levi said: A lion was angry with the cattle and the beasts. Said they: 'Who will go to appease him?' Said the fox, 'I know three hundred fables and I will appease him.' 'Let it be so' they replied."[19]

Ecclesiates Rabbah relates a story about Bar Kappara at a banquet: "At every course which was placed before them Bar Kappara related three hundred fox-fables, which were so much

enjoyed by the guests that they let the food become cold and did not taste it."[20]

The following are two of the most well-know fox fables in rabbinic literature. The first is the story of the fox and the fish. In Berachot, Rabbi Akiva tells of the fox who tries to lure swarms of fish out of the water so they can be safe from human traps. The fish reply that although the water is dangerous, even more dangerous would be to abandon their home and go onto dry land (where the fox would eat them). They challenge the fox's wit, and remain in the water. This parable responds to the conflict between civil authority and Jewish religious jurisdiction.

Another fable common to folk motif is from Ecclesiates Rabbah:

> "'*He must depart just as he came. As he came out of his mother's womb, so must he depart at last, naked as he came.*' Genibah said: It is like a fox who found a vineyard which was fenced in on all sides. There was one hole through which he wanted to enter, but he was unable to do so. What did he do? He fasted for three days until he became lean and frail, and so got through the hole. Then he ate [of the grapes] and became fat again, so that when he wished to go out he could not pass through at all. He fasted again for another three days until he became lean and frail, returning to his former condition, and went out. When he was outside, he turned his face and gazing at the vineyard, said, 'O vineyard, O vineyard, how good are you and the fruits inside! All that is beautiful and commendable, but what

[19] Gensis Rabbah LXXVIII, 7.
[20] Ecclesiastes Rabbah I, 1.

enjoyment has one from you? As one enters you so he comes out.' Such is this world."[21]

In later chapters, we shall see familiar stories and their motifs in various renditions as different cultures mold them though time. The same animals from Bible and Talmud return with the same characteristics, but small changes distinguish the those models from their medieval counterparts.

Medieval writers targeted a distinct audience. Only a select group would engage in Torah. But the folk-literature appealed to the general public. Fables writers chose to weave Jewish ethics into their animal stories. We shall see how animals continue to embellish Jewish literature as they flourish in medieval writings.

[21] Ibid. V. 12. 1.

Chapter Two

Excerpts from Mishlei Shu-alim: *World Fable-Motifs meet Jewish Texts*

As we have seen in Chapter One, especially in the section of proverbs, Jewish writings ascribe specific traits to certain animals. The doe is young and graceful. The ox toils like a fool. The spider has access to both peasants and royalty. The lion is king... . Even today, we use phrases such as, "Wily as a fox" or "stupid as a mule." In modern stories, the lion is always the king of the forest, and the ant is constantly carrying a load on its back in preparation for the winter. These characteristics, along with the others of Biblical and Rabbinic literature, are fairly consistent through the medieval genre of fables. In this period, animal folk-lore among Jewish and secular writers became a popular medium for reflecting upon the ethical standards of daily life.

In this chapter, we shall study fables from Mishlei Shu-alim. These stories depict animals who advise, lure, and trick one another. One theme that pervades all the fables in Mishlei Shu-alim in this thesis is the status-quo of social order. We shall discover that each tale attempts to redirect and refocus the animal who covets what it does not possess.

In the fables, we are looking for the consistencies that link a donkey, for example, from one episode to another. Is it possible that the donkey from one story is, in fact, the "same"

donkey that appears in another story, as though it were an animated cartoon with familiar characters? At times it seems that this is the case. We shall explore the possibilities.

We begin with some background on Mishlei Shu-alim. Much, but not all, of the roots of Mishlei Shu-alim lie outside of Judaism. Raphael Patai writes,

> "In post-Talmudic times, the development of Jewish legend and tale shows a close parallel to that of Jewish custom and usage. On the one hand, the legend material was excerpted from Talmud and the Midrashim and published in separate volumes. . . .. On the other hand, an independent literature grew up consisting of collections of tales and legends with either follow the narrative portions of the Bible . . . or deal with non-Biblical themes and show traces of outside influences to varying degrees. An important variety in this latter category is the collections of fables (e.g. the *Mishle Shu'alim*, or Fox Fables, of Berekhya ben Natronai Hanaqdan in the 13th century) which continue a trend found in the Talmud and even earlier in the Bible itself."[22]

Some stories derive from Indian and Asian motifs, such as Kalilah va Dimna. Many of the stories match those of the Aesop tradition. But the motifs are also common to those we saw from Jewish tradition is Chapter One. It becomes apparent that folk-literature does not necessarily evolve from one culture. Clearly, many folk-motifs exist simultaneously in many

[22] Raphael Patai Raphael, Francis Lee Utley, and Dov Noy, (editors), *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1973), 18-19.

hermitages. Here, we shall briefly explore the forging of cultures that came together in Mishlei Shu-alim.

First, the very name, Mishlei Shu-alim, is an allusion to the fox fables of Rabbi Meir in the Talmud. As we saw in chapter one, he was reported to have written three hundred fables, although only a handful of those appear in the Talmud itself. Only one story in of the Talmud, the one of the fox and the fish, corresponds directly in Mishlei Shu-alim as well. But whereas this one story passed almost unchanged from the Talmud to the Medieval corpus, Talmudic style and Biblical language exists in all stories of Mishlei Shu-alim.

And yet. And yet Jewish authorship does not always mean Jewish ownership in literature. The themes of Mishlei Shu-alim extends well outside Jewish borders. Many of the stories appeared in the Aesop tradition of Greece. Aesop's fables, in turn, borrowed from Middle and Near East sources, one of which is Kalilah va Dimna. Some stories have the French and German prototypes in The Lais of Marie de France (of which the author was familiar) and Roman de Renart.

Born in France in the late twelfth century, Rabbi Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Nakdan compiled and translated the diverse fables into the current Mishlei Shu-alim. Historians dispute the materials from which Berechiah catalogued his book, in part because so much of the folklore was oral. W. T. H Jackson introduces Moses Hadas' translation:

> "Although the exact dates of the life of the author of the *Fox Fables*, Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Nakdan, are much disputed, it can be stated with certainty that the fables were written at the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth and that the author must therefore have been dependent on the collections of fables then available in western Europe. The Greek texts of Aesop were available in Constantinople, but there is no evidence of their being known in the West at that time. . . ..
>
> The *Panchantantra* . . . was . . . a frame story into which various animals fables were fitted. The form remained constant in the numerous adaptations into other languages, of which the most important for western Europe was the *Novus Aesopus* of Baldo (c. 1190). . . .. It is unlikely that there was any direct influence. Few of Baldo's fables have any direct counterparts in . . .the Hebrew *Fox Fables* but it is possible that his work was known to Berechiah."[23]

Jackson does not provide any definitive information, and he himself seems unsure of the origins of Mishlei Shu-alim. He does draw comparisons further in the Introduction between Mishlei Shu-alim and the fables of Marie de France. He notes that both appeared around the same time (late twelfth century) and that seven of the stories shared the same plot. Jackson concludes that Berechiah formulated Mishlei Shu-alim from the fables of Marie de France, Kalilah va Dimna, and perhaps from some of his own authorship.[24] There is also a close connection to the stories here and those of Aesop.

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[23] Moses Hadas (translator), *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1967), v-vii.

[24] Ibid., ix.

What Berechiah did to stamp the fables with Jewish ownership was to weave biblical phrases into the existing stories. He wrote in couplets of rhymed prose. At the end of each fable, he wrote a short moral to encapsulate the essence of the fable. This moral is also in poetic form. Some of the fables have yet another poetic coda that summarizes the entire lesson in a short and easy-to-remember manner. Many of the lines that form part of the verses come directly from the Bible, and the morals often allude to phrases of Mishna.

But to this thesis, the migration and evolution of fable literature is not so important as the fables themselves. The donkeys, the lions, the foxes, and the oxen are far more compelling and endearing than the history and evolution of the text and its transmission. So here we shall discuss the animals themselves, drawing conclusions about specific animals based upon their roles in the fables. I shall include extensive excerpts of the text itself. The stories and their poetry deserve recognition and appreciation. They are what make the fables so compelling.

One would imagine that the bulk of Mishlei Shu-alim portrays foxes. The reality is that only a handful do. Berechiah's fables highlight many creatures of the animal kingdom. We shall explore fables of the donkey, the insect, and the as well as those of the fox. In the process, we shall search for commonalties. The fables I chose respond in part to the social

message and in part to personal interest. To begin, we shall take three fox-fables, one whose roots exist in Talmud, and two whose counterparts belong to non-Jewish culture.

(Unless otherwise noted, the Hebrew text is from the 1921 Berlin edition of Mishlei Shu-alim, and the English translations are my own. Biblical citations are noted by the Hebrew. Parallel English translations correspond in **boldface**. Neither the Hebrew nor English printed editions cite the biblical excerpts at all).

Story number six is שועל ודגים. Here is the medieval version of Rabbi Akiva's tale we discussed in chapter one. It begins, however, with a different scenario. A fox watches as one fish pursues another. It notices how the larger fish eats the smaller. So the fox talks smoothly to both fish, hoping they will leave their native water and join him on the land. The fox guarantees peace, yet desires in his heart to eat the fish. But the fish prefer dangers on their own turf, in a familiar environment. Here is an excerpt of the fox's sweet, scholarly words:

"שמעו נא את טעם מלי
הטו אזנכם ולבו עלי. (Is. 55:3)

צאו משם ובאו חלום
בשמחה תצאו ובשלום. (Is. 55:12)
ואם תשמעו לעצתי
וברכתם גם אותי.
צאו משם ליבשה
וירשו את הארץ נרשה.
ואז שלום לכם ירב
ולא ישא גר אל גר חרב. (Is. 2:3)

"Listen, now, to the flavor of my words. **Incline your ear and come to me**
Get out of there and come here. **You shall leave in joy and in peace.**
And if you hearken to my advice, you shall also bless me.
Get out of there and onto the land. Together we shall inherit the earth.
Then shall peace greatly increase for you. **And nation shall not lift sword against nation,**

for none shall cause utter dissension. **All the world shall abide untroubled.**
Thus the joy of wild asses will be ours, **reviving the hearts of the contrite,**
and all dwellers of the earth with gladness shall shout upon their resting places.
Day and night they will not cease, **nothing evil or vile shall be done.**"

כי אן כנו פורין פרין
נחה שקטה כל הארין. (Is. 14:7)

הן אתנו משוש פראים
להזחות לב נרכאים. (Is. 57: 15)

וכל שוכני ארין בחדותם
ירזנו על משכבותם.

יומם ולילה לא ישבותו
לא ירעו ולא ישחתו.

"(Is. 11:9 and Is. 65:25)

This is a prime example of how Berechiah adds pearls of Jewish religious wisdom into familiar stories. The Talmudic version does not cite these passages from Isaiah. Yet by putting these words into the fox's mouth, Berechiah creates a new dimension to the parable. In this case, the fox entices the fish with words of religious inspiration. Those passages create what might be a sense of security to the scared fish. They provide gentle wisdom with comfort and allusions to salvation.

But in this fable, we find the underlying message of most of Berechiah's collection. Do not step beyond the bounds of the existing social order. The fish know that while they face danger in the water, it is their own danger. Life beyond their home would be inappropriate territory for them. So they stay within their own dominion. Berechiah, in his concluding words, refers to the fox as a spy, but neither a Joshua nor a Caleb. Indeed, the fox advises with righteous words, but righteousness does not enter his thoughts.

Haim Schwarzbaum explains that the motif in this fable, the dialogue between the fox and the fish, is not exclusive to Jewish writings. He cites various European, Middle Eastern, and Asian

fables with a similar theme. In fact, Schwarzbaum writes that Rabbi Akiva's version is one of many borrowed from an already extant model.[25]

In the proceeding fables, folk motifs from around the world meet Berechiah's artistry. None are so tied to Jewish lore as the above example. But almost all intertwine biblical text with a universal motif. This and the message therein is what makes the fable Jewish. It is not the story-motif itself.

The next fox fable we shall discuss is story thirteen, entitled, משל עורב ושועל. This fables depicts the wily fox who attempts to lure a piece of cheese out of a crow's mouth. The crow perched itself in a fig tree while the fox gazed from below:

And he called to the crow Beloved, beautiful and sweet:	ויקרא אל העורב. הדר תפה והערב:
Goodly and lovely and nice, Are all who cling to you:	השב ונעים ותחמד. אשר כל אליך נצמד:
Even if all beautiful creatures were at your side, they would not compare to you.	אך אם כל יפים אצלך. לא דמו ביופים אלך:
And if you try to sing songs, better than all the birds would you sing.	ואם נסה שרים לשורר. על כל העופות תשתורר:
And it would be entirely perfect, for there is no flaw in you.	ותהה כליל ביופי. באשר אין בך כל חסרון:
See if your voice is as beautiful and as great as your plumage. For no fault is seen not can be found in you.	ראה אם קל לך לפי יפי קומה ויפי נוצה. או לא יראה ולא ימצא בך כל שמצה:[26]

[25] Haim Schwarzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah Ha-Nakdan. A study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore*, (Kiron: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), 33.

[26] Berekhja Ben Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1921), 24-25.

Drawn by the seduction, the crow opens its mouth to sing, and the cheese falls to the earth. The fox claims this cheese to be from the most precious source of heaven. He picks up the cheese and runs off.

While the fox does not directly quote scripture here, his doting of attributes on the crow resembles the words and rhythms of our prayer towards God in *T'fillah*. The fox gives one compliment after another. The lesson here is to avoid falling victim to the sweet words of the enemy. The crow should not have listened to the fox. But pride obscures its reason, and it sings in order to perpetuate the praises of the fox. We learn form this to approach the seducer with skepticism.

Another fable which features the cunning of a fox is number forty-eight, entitled, משל שועל ועטור. Here, the fox entices the crane to dine with him. He kills a hen for their supper, and reasons that the crane should not eat all of the delicious food that the fox had prepared. So he grinds the food into fine meal and sets the table for his guest. Of course, the crane with its long beak could not eat such food, and he returns home still hungry. There, he thinks of a way to retaliate:

And while he was devising tricks at his home, a tree that was plotted taught him.	ובחרתו בביתו בתחבולות יעץ.
Full of openings were all its limbs, **and those holes (lairs) were filled with torn meat.**	וירד שיטתו עין:
	מלא נקבים בכל עבריו.
	וימלא טרף חוריו (Nah. 2:13):
And the food which he prepared he thrust into the opening, so deeply that no one would be able to find	והמאכל אשר הכין בנקב יתקעו.
	עמק עמק מי ימצאנו:

it.
It would be his; no stranger would share with him. **And he bored a hole in his door/ its lid,**
the way in which he went into his frontier, and there he placed his food.
And he called the fox and urged him to come with him, misleading him
And he said to him, "Eat what is good in your sight, for it is spread out before you."

לו יהיה אין זר אתו.
ויקב חור בדלתו (II Kings. 12:10):
דרך אשר יבא בגבולו.
שם מנה את מאכלו:
ויקרא את השועל ויענהו.
לבא עמו הטעהו:
ואמר לו אכול במוב בעינך.
הרי שלך לפניך:[27]

Now just as the crane could not eat the food that the fox had prepared, neither could the fox eat the food the crane had made, for that food required beak to reach into the tree. This is an illustrated example of מדה כנגד מדה. The crane repays the evil of the fox with a similar evil. Further, it also represents עברה טורדת עברה. The malevolence of the fox infects the otherwise upright crane to retaliate with evil. The fox breeds corruption, but in the end receives the same evil he gives.

We now move to fables of donkeys. The archetype donkey in Jewish literature is Balaam's ass. Midrashic commentary to this character denotes it as the "stupidest of all animals."[28] In Mishlei Shu-alim, the donkey appears as a pathetic character numerous times. In story number fourteen, משל חמור כלב ואדם, we read of a man, his dog, and an ass. The ass longingly observes the close relationship of the man and the dog. We read,

"And the ass said to himself, 'I am not inferior to the dog.

"ויאמר החמור בלב,
לא נפל אנכי מכלב.

[27] Ibid., 57.
[28] Jacobs, *Legend*, 3:366

I shall also go to my master.	אלך גם כן לאדוני.
Perhaps he will befriend me as he does the dog.	אולי כבלב יקרבני.
And I shall hug him and kiss him.	ואחבקהו ואנשקהו,
And with my tongue I shall lick him!	ובלשוני אלחכהו.
And I shall put my eyes to his eyes, and my mouth to his.	ואשם עיני על עיניו,
	ואת פני אצל פניו.
And I shall befriend him whenever his friends are around.	ואתחבר אתו ,
	לעומת מחבריו.
And I shall slobber over all his clothes and trample over them.	וכל מלבושו אגאל ואדרוך ,
Even to each shred and shoe-string."	מחט החוך ועד השרוך."[29]

One can't help but feel sorry for this donkey. He sees the treatment of the dog and wants the same. But the ass and the dog are two distinct animals serving specific duties. Each has a rank, and in the ass's eyes, the dog's rank is higher. So the ass tries to break rank by imitating the dog. To the modern reader, this appears to be an early example of upward mobility, a tale of self-improvement. But this story shows that one should not aspire beyond a given rank. When the ass sees the master, he does all that he plans above, annoying the man to no end. The master calls to his friends and has them stone the poor ass but not kill it.

Berechiah uses a quotation from Proverbs 24:20 in his summation, "There shall be no reward to the evil." And in the coda, he alludes to Saul in I Samuel, chapters 9-10, saying,

> "Before destruction comes crookedness of ways;
> Sloth is a stumbling block on the path to honor.
> Recall the man who found a kingdom, and uttered prophecy
> As he returned from seeking asses."[30]

[29]Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 26.

There, Saul is admonished for acting like a prophet when he is not a prophet. Here, too, the donkey is admonished for trying to be what it is not. This is a fable for anyone who tries to gain power in a back-handed way. It is a fable version of the Korach story in the Bible. More important, it is to remind us to be ourselves, and not imitate others. Haim Schwarzbaum writes, "The jealous Ass . . . symbolizes many a human being trying to ape the behavior and actions of other people."[31]

Story forty-seven of Mishlei Shu-alim, משל חמור בעור אר, also features the ass. Again we find it yearning to gain status. This time it strays from its master's house and comes across a lion's skin. The ass throws the skin over its back and parades like a king:

"And his heart was uplifted. With pride he stalwartly walked saying, 'I shall rule.'
And he went to terrorize living creatures everywhere.

And like a lion he hunted and tracked man and beasts he would find in the field.
For fear of him, the shepherds abandoned their watch of their flock, for they thought it was a lion when it was actually an ass.
And the workers of the soil fled before it, and they, too, did not pasture their sheep and cattle.
And the men cried to one another, 'Listen to me! **Cast out the sheep which are in your wealth,**
For that which is found in the field

"וירם לבבו בתאוה ילך הלוך,
מתגשא לאמר אני אמלוך.

וילך להשחית הזחות,
על הזרים ועל הנאוות
ובארי ישרוף לדם אורב וצודה
האדם והבהמה אשר ימצא בשדה.

מפחד הרועים צאנם עזבו לשמור,
כי חשבוהו לאריה והנה חמור.

ועובדי האדמה מפיו נסעו
,גם הצאן והבקר אל ירעו.

ואיש לאחו צועק אם שומע לי הנך ,
שלח העז את מקנך. (Ex 9:19)

כי את אשר ימצא בשדה לא יחה ,

[30] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 34-35.

[31] Schwarzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim. . .*, 85.

will not live.' For the ass was to them a lion."

והיה החמור להם לאריה."[32]

Whereas in the first story, the ass mimics the dog to garner attention, here it puts on a costume, attempting to trick everyone else. If it at least looks like a more important animal, perhaps it will earn the respect of that animal. The master, however, recognizes the ass by its tail, ears, and overall stance. He rebukes the ass, commanding it to disrobe its lion skin and stand naked before all whom it tricked.

In his conclusion to this story, Berechiah warns that pride often eclipses wisdom. Further, he stresses how wrong it is that the animals serve the donkey in ignorance. When the ass puts on the lion's skin, it forsakes its own family and heritage. In the previous episode, it had tried to imitate a dog in order to gain acceptance. It sought human compassion. This time it struts like a lion, trying to scare others into submission. It attempts to breach class structure by proclaiming royalty. Neither method works for the poor donkey. And though the donkey only wants respect, the community marks it as evil and rebellious.

We may find this quite disturbing. In our culture, most everyone would want to advance in status. But in Mishlei Shualim, Berechiah warns against abuse of authority. One more story with an ass will illustrate this again.

In story sixty-five, משל אריה וחמור, a lion invites the ass to be his hunting assistant. Rather than showing humility, as any

[32] Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 55-56.

subject should do before a king, the ass sees himself as the best animal for the job. "To whom doth the king desire to show greater honor than to me,"[33] he says. The lion allows this attitude and asks the ass to roar aloud in the field. The ass roars loudly, with passion! All the animals scurry about, filled with panic. But as they turn to run away from the ass's roar (which they think to be the lion's), the lion is there to eat them. This continues until the lion is full. The ass, feeling rather smug, declares:

"Surely you have heard the majesty of my roar! And you have seen that a mane adorns my neck.	"הלא שמעת הד נחרי, וראית כי רעמה לבוש צוארי.
In your wisdom, you shall choose me, **and tomorrow at this time**	בחכמתך אותי תבחר, והיה כזה יום מחר (Is. 56:12)
I shall frighten the cattle and cause their victory to tumble to the earth. **For it is not in the king's interest to tolerate them.**	ואפחיד הבהמות ואוריד לארץ נצחם, ולמלך אין שוה להניחם. (Est. 3:8)
Neither them nor their roaring. **Now these are the rules that you shall set before them:**	לא מהם ולא מהמהם, (allusion to Ezek. 7:11) ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם. (Ex. 21:1)
From my rebuke they shall flee they shall be afraid of it. **We shall make our lips strong. Who can be our master?**	מגערתי ינוסו ויחתו ממנו, נגביר שפתינו אתנו מי אדון לנו? (Ps. 12:5)
Hear me, my lord the king, **surely my words are for those who walk straight."**	שמעני אדוני המלך, הלא דברי עם הישר הולך. (Mic. 2:7)"[34]

The lion's response to this homily reminds the ass who is truly in charge. The lion says that any animal who knows the ass would never run away from it's bellow. Further, the lion asks, "Do you

[33] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 115.
[34] Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 71.

presume to provide a Lion with prey? I am sure that many critics will censure my slaying the Sheep and sparing the Ass."[35] This wretched donkey-character yet again fails. In this episode he tries to befriend the lion. But even association with royalty can not help the donkey. He remains lower-class, the buffoon of society.

This fable, unlike the previous two, contains many biblical citations. Each one occurs as the second half of the rhyme - pattern. One who is well-versed in bible could perhaps anticipate the upcoming line based on context and rhyme.

Each quotation appropriately corresponds to the original biblical context. For example, the quotation from Esther 3:8 alludes to Haman's conversation with King Ahasuerus. Haman tells the king that it is not in his interest to tolerate the Jews. The parallel is obvious: Haman is the ass who roars along side the king, harnessing a false sense of security.

The verse from Psalms 12:5, in context, warns us against flattery. Psalm 12:4 says, "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, every tongue that speaks arrogance." And then verse 5 continues, "They say, 'By our tongues we shall prevail; with lips such as ours, who can be our master?'" In this fable, Berechiah puts this presumptuous phrase into the ass's mouth. Though the ass speaks words of tradition, it ignores the lesson of the psalmist.

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[35] Schwarzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim* . . ., 334.

So, according to the fables of Berechiah, the ass indeed is the most stubborn yet ambitious of all creatures. It consistently tries to be an animal is not, never through careful thought, but rather by ill-conceived notions. The ass craves to transcend being a beast of burden. It wants to be loved like the dog. It desires to have power like the lion. But rather than attempt to work within his social system, he tries to escape it, and therefore can never ascend above that which it is. In Pirkei Avot, Ben Zoma asks, "Who is rich?" He answers, "One who is happy with his lot." The ass is constantly unhappy with its lot, and therefore is never a satisfied animal.

And on the other hand, one can't help but feel compassion for the donkey. Its desire's extend beyond the pages of a Medieval story book. It seeks love, freedom, and authority. So while the antics of the donkey may not be acceptable in society, we all can relate to the donkey because, in a way, we all have been the donkey.

In the first two donkey fables, none of the animals actually gave advice. We learned by watching the actions of the donkey why he could not succeed. In this last story, however, the lion counsels. We thus can learn from the lion's perspective as well. It teaches that a leader should hire a competent worker. For example, a senior rabbi should hire the most competent assistant to be effective. If the senior hires an ass, the congregation will have no respect for either leader. In our fable, the lion

knows that the animals could never trust a king whose assistant is this donkey.

We shall find in the next few stories more examples of one animal guiding another. The following three stories all involve insects.

Story ninety, <u>משל זבוב והשור</u>, portrays a comparable situation to story sixty-five. Here, a fly sits between the horns of an ox as the ox plows a field. Even though the fly contributes nothing to the process, it enjoys its post as a self-appointed aide in the plowing. And unlike the donkey, it is able to take advantage of its sham and even support itself with Jewish text! As this is a shorter fable, I shall transcribe it in its entirety, omitting only Berechiah's concluding words:

"זבוב מתהלך בשדה וירא השור
אשר על צוארו איכר במותרותז קשבור.

ואגודות מטה וחרצובות
ומלהציב הדרבן לצלעותז לא ישבות.

והשור לחרוש שת את פניו
והזבוב הלך וישב לו בין קרניו.

ואם השור על תלמי שדה הלך ישב
הזבוב תמיד על קרנו ישב.

ותבט אליו דבורה קרובתו
ותתצב מנגד לראותו

מה בין קרני השור חורש
כל היום יחרוש החורש.

ותאמר לזבוב הקרני השור לך למותים
למה ישבר בין המשפתים? (Ju. 5:16)

A fly was walking in the field and saw an ox on whose neck a peasant had bound ropes
and bows and bands. And the peasant did not refrain from binding the goad also on the ox's ribs.
And when the fox set his face to the grind, the fly came and sat on it between its horns.
And as the ox traced the fields, going and returning, the fly continued to sit on its horn.
The bee, a relative of the fly, then approached and stood from a distance to see
what was between the ox's horns and if the plowing would continue all day.
And she (the bee) said to the fly, 'Are the ox's horns your encampment? **Why did you stay among the sheepfolds?'**

And the fly responded, 'Know that all this field which is in front of us, I and the ox have plowed with our strength! You do as we have done, if you have the strength. **Awake, awake, Deborah.**'"	רעו הבוב דע כי כל השדה אשר לפנינו אני והשור חרשנוה בכחנו. ועשׂ כמנו אם לך הגבורה עורי עורי דבורה. [36] (Ju. 5:12)

Even though the great ox is a central figure in the fable, it does not open its mouth. It is a silent character, not one who suffers from its toil, but one who is persistent to finish the job. The tiny fly, on the other hand, does no work. Yet merely because it speaks, it can assume the credit as though it had toiled. Berechiah writes in his conclusion to the fable, "By the utterance of mouth [of the lowly] he is joined with [the mighty] to make his might equal to theirs and his wisdom to their wisdom."[37] How is the fly different than the donkey in our last fable? Both assume stature they do not deserve. But this fable is from the employee's perspective, not the boss's. Thus we can cheer the fly's "accomplishment."

The quotations from Judges both originate from the same biblical poem that Deborah and Barak sang after the Jael killed Sisera. They rebuke those of Israel who stayed "among the sheepfolds" as the tribes established our nation. In the fable the bee accuses the fly of lying back while the ox works.

The fly's retort is truly poetic. Berechiah employs a play on words with דבורה. In the Bible, we read, "Awake, Deborah," but in the fable, we read, "Awake, bee.". While in the biblical context, Deborah's call implores her to assist in Israel's

[36] Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 96.

victory, in the fable, the call admonishes the bee because she is not alert to take advantage of an opportunity.

Indeed, the fly here is a nouveau riche and chides the bee for its lofty, albeit hardworking, position. Even though the fly has not earned its place, it assumes credit. Yet that is okay. Those who walk along with the upright can do no harm. When the lowly associate with the mighty, they do stand on the shoulders of those giants. There is no apparent restoration for social order. Those who are able to climb, through whatever means, may do so.

Now we look at another situation of a small creature siting upon a larger one. In story seventy-three, entitled, משל פרעוש וגמל, the flea rides on the camel who is traveling a long distance. The camel is unaware that the flea is there. When they reach the destination, the flea jumps off of the camel and thanks it for its trouble. At first, the camel does not know why the flea is grateful, for it had not seen the flea before at all. The flea explains that it had mounted the camel, thanking it once again. The story continues:

"And the camel said, 'Woe is me,
for you have laid the burden of
your yoke upon me.
You are an abomination and you are
abhorred, **yet you nest as high as
the eagle**!
How is it that you were not afraid
to lie down upon me? Make yourself
ready to fly away.
Does it befit me to associate with

"ויאמר הגמל אללי
כי העמסת עולך עלי.
נבוה ונמאם הנך
כי תגביה כנשר קנך. (Jer. 49:16)
אך לא יראת עלי לשכון
לברוח את פעמך הכון.
תאות לי לקרב בצלנך ובדמות

[37] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 164.

one of your image and likeness?
One the day when you see my face again, you shall die.
Woe to the day I was so greatly burdened. Because of carrying you, my back has become chafed.'
And so the flea was sent away from the camel, who spent no effort to carry it."

ביום ראותך עוד פני תמות.[38]

הה ליום אשר היתי מאוד עמום ומסובל
ממשאך את כי חובל.

ויפטר פרעוש מן הגמל
אשר לשאת אותו לא עמל."[39]

In this fable, Berechiah stresses that the camel felt no burden. Nevertheless, it melodramatically complained about the effort it exerted to carry such a load. This aria belongs on stage! In his conclusion, Berechiah compares the camel's lament to the relationship between the poor and the rich. Often the poor ask for advice or assistance from the wealthy. The poor express their gratitude for the service, which in most cases far more helps them than deprives the rich. Yet often in exchange for the gratitude comes scorn. Berechiah writes, "For hatred of the poor is inscribed in the heart of the rich."[40] While this is a cynical point of view, it illustrates a truth, a warning perhaps, for Jews in the larger society. In the previous story, there was no restoration of social order. Here, we learn to stay within certain boundaries. It calls to mind the episodes with the donkey, whose lessons taught that one could not climb a social ladder at all.

Another fable in which the insect mixes with larger creatures is number one hundred eleven. Its English title is *Spider, King, Slave*. (The Hebrew editions I have acquired for

[38] Derived from Ex. 10:28, God speaking to Moses
[39] Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 80.

this study do not contain this fable. According to Haim Schwarzbaum, the printed editions of Mishlei Shu-alim do not contain the Hebrew version. It may be found only in some manuscripts.[41] We shall look here by way of Hadas' translation).

Here, a spider dwelt in the palace of a king. The king fumes as he eyed the spider's webs whenever he sat to eat. When the slave approached to clean the house, he said to the spider, "We cannot dwell together, with the king and his servants. **I shall sweep thee out with the broom of destruction.**"[42] Dejected, the spider then goes to contaminate all the water and other liquids of the palace with her venom. This poisons the slave, who reports the news to the king. The king has all the liquids thrown into the streets. People in the streets die from the water. Berechiah writes, "By means of a small insect a man as big as a giant had been strangled."[43] But the king's life is spared. So he tries to reconcile with the spider:

> "'Come and lodge where I lodge. How beautiful are thy feet with shoes! Lo, this house have I built thee to live in return for the evil I did thee. Thou shalt no more sorrow forever, and no more shall evil or deception against thee enter my heart, for thou hast brought me far as this and hast made my remembrance peace, if thou do to me and thine anger against me is abated.' The spider answered with harsh words: 'There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.[44] Thou hast driven me out from abiding in thine inheritance; lo, I shall send against thee and thy house a heavy plague

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[40] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 134.
[41] Schwarzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim . . .*, 527 and note 1 p. 529. Schwarzbaum cites the Oxford and Budapest manuscripts among others in his note.
[42] This last sentence is from Is. 14:23.
[43] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 210.
[44] Ecc. 3:7, though the order is in reverse.

of flies. Thou shalt not avail to stand before me, nor yet to be healed, for thou wilt be destroyed by death."[45]

This fable reminds us of the text in Proverbs which says, **"You can catch the spider in your hand, yet it is found in royal palaces"** (Prov. 30:28). Berechiah takes that phrase and builds from it a story. Further, he manipulates the quotation and interprets it to mean, "The spider can catch you in its hand." Indeed, this is what transpires in the fable. The slave and the king become as flies, entangled in the spider's web.[46]

Berechiah writes in his conclusion that the spider represents the poor, who take vengeance on the rich when treated badly. "They (the poor) become pricks in their (the riches') eyes and thorns in their sides."[47] Berechiah continues to write that as the rich become baser and shamed, the poor will ascend . Thus in this fable, we find an escape clause to the otherwise stagnant rules of social order. The venom of a spider does not discriminate king from slave. The lesson is that we should be aware of how we treat every human being.

I have chosen two fables as concluding selections from Mishlei Shu-alim for this thesis. They further illustrate Berechiah's message of maintaining social order.

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[45] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 210-211.
[46] Schwarzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim. . .*, 529.
[47] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 211.

Fable number twenty-eight is משל עכבר ושמש ועננים ורוח ותשמה. This is a circular and quite humorous story of a mouse who seeks the perfect mate. But he can not find a woman without fault. So he goes to the sun and basks in her light. He says to the sun:

> **"With an everlasting love I have loved you."** [48] "אהבת עולם אהבתיך." (Tal. Ber 11b)

The sun rhetorically asks the mouse if he would want a light that goes away every night. She answers her own question with:

> **"The sun rises and the sun also sets."** [49] "זרח השמש ובא השמש." (Ecc. 1:5)

The sun emphasizes that even the cloud is more powerful than she because the cloud can block her rays. And so the mouse goes to the cloud.

The cloud listens to the attractive words of the mouse, who lures the cloud with the words of Song of Songs. But the cloud tells the mouse that she is at the mercy of the wind. Wherever the wind blows, the cloud follows. She tells the mouse:

> "And if you so want a wife like me, **a wonderer and a vagrant you will be upon the earth."** ואם אשה כמוני תרין תהית נע ונד בארין." [50] (Gen. 4:14)

So the mouse goes to the wind. But she says that she has no strength to force down a wall with her voice.

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[48] Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 40.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

Finally, the mouse goes to the wall and asks her hand in marriage. One can anticipate to whom the wall will send the mouse:

"And the wall answered with anger, 'Just to demonstrate my shame and my disgrace they sent you to me to make a fool of me. You came to remind me of my woes. For they (the sun, cloud, and wind) ascend and descend while my stones and my dust does not move. For there is no power nor strength in me, and every mouse and creepy thing digs at my source and uncovers my foundations to mark in it paths. **I am a wall and my breasts are as towers.** But with their mouths and their feet the mice, according to their families, chip away at me And they sleep in me, mothers with their children, more than two hundred of them. And I can not bear it! Do you really want a wife such as I?"

"ותען החמה בחמה
להכיח לי חרפתי וכלמה.
שלחך אלי להבאישני
כי באת להזכיר עוני.
באשר המה עולים ויורדים
ואבני ועפרי לא נדים.
וכי אין כח ולא גבורה
וכל עכבר ורמש מקרי העירה.
וגלו יסדי לשם בו מסילות
אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות. (SOS. 8:10)
ונפצוני בפיהם וברגליהם
העכברים ומשפחותיהם.
וישכנו אם על בנים
יותר משני מאות קנים.
ולא יכולתי נגרם לעמוד
האשה כמוה תחפוד."[51]

With this the mouse goes to take another mouse for his wife. And he does not have to look far. He finds a wife from his very own neighborhood and vicinity.

This fable is familiar to all cultures. We search the world to find what has always been in our own back yard. This theme is familiar to contemporary Americans from the message in The Wizard of Oz. Only after a journey can we appreciate what we already have. The cycle-motif also resonates with a Jewish flavor. Each year we move from one Shabbat to the next, from one life-cycle to another, only to consistently return to Rosh Hashanah. Yet in

the process, we ascend to a point above where we begin. So by the next High Holiday, we are not in the same place, but rather elevated, as in a spiral, to new promises. In other words, to be satisfied with what we have, we often need to take the journey. That journey is often more important than the destination.

Louis Ginzberg relates this fable to Abraham's search for God. Abraham looked to all the elements and found how one subdued the next, finally understanding that God transcends the elements.[52] But Abraham had to question all the elements before he could begin to probe the essence of God.

Berechiah's message, however, is that a person should stay within social boundaries. He writes in his conclusion, "Whoso exalts himself beyond his proportions is destined to return to his vile origins, for each returns to his own station, the honorable to honor and the lightly esteemed to his own sort."[53]

The last fable from Mishlei Shu-alim for this thesis number five, entitled, כלב וגבינה ושם derives from Aesop. It portrays a dog carrying a piece of cheese in its mouth. As it crosses over the water on a bridge, it looks down to its reflection. The dog thinks its sees another dog with another cheese. Greed takes over reason, and the dog opens its mouth to grasp the cheese in the reflection. OF course the real cheese falls to the water, and the dog remains with no cheese at all.

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[51] Ibid., 40-41.

[52] Schwarzbaum, *The Mishlei Shu'alim. . .*, 174.

[53] Hadas, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop*, 60.

Berechiah quotes from Proverbs in his conclusion, "Be thou content with what thou hast in thy hand and thy possession; and envy not that which is another's." (Prov. 13:7)[54] Once again, this is a warning not to overstep boundaries. Usually Berechiah counsels regarding social situations. But here he cautions specifically against coveting in a personal situation.

In the previous fables we have examined, I have omitted the poems that Berechiah often adds to the end of many stories. These poems paraphrase the stories and their morals into a short lesson. Here is how Berechiah closes this fable:

"טרף לכל חי נברא שמים כפל בטרפם חמדו פעמים
חמם וחטר טרפו על חק ימצא ככלב בגבעת מים
אמר להוסף לו ונרע אוכל חשב להשב נפשו יומם."[55]

"Food for every living creature was created by heaven. But often they covet twice what they need.
One who robs and covets more than his prey will find himself as the dog with the cheese in the water.
He spoke of adding to what was already sufficient. Yet he lost food that was to last two days."[56]

Thus we conclude the section on Mishlei Shu-alim. Berechiah was indeed a poet and an artist to encapsulate such endearing fables into a Jewish unit. Yes, they do resonate with worldly motifs. But the Jewish voice, through text and through moral, allows this to become a Jewish guide. The fables do evoke the animal characters of the Bible: the ox toils, the donkey gets no

[54] Ibid.,15.
[55] Natronaj, *Mischle Schualim*, 15.

respect, the common spider mixes with royalty. The themes exist concurrently in the non-Jewish culture in which Berechiah lived. Did one influence the other? Most certainly. But to say which culture invented these animal traits is not possible nor important to this study.

Primary here is that Berechiah takes the wisdom so often in the domain of the learned men, and presents it to a much wider audience. Though they did not know the Hebrew to read the the text, women and children could listen to the stories and learn the embedded text because of the simple rhyme. While Jewish folk-tales are not generally intended for youth entertainment, they certainly assist in education. The fables depict common situations, not directed towards royalty nor scholars. All can learn from what the animals offer. Indeed, the stories are gems that could adorn society today as well.

In Mishlei Shu-alim, the original intended audience was literate Jews, who lived within the structure of a larger non-Jewish society. The fables we studied respond directly to the concerns of the Jew in medieval society. In chapter three, we shall look at the stories of Kalilah va Dimna. The fables of this corpus elaborate some of the same themes we saw in this chapter, but the audience is distinct, namely royalty. Kalilah va Dimna provides additional perspective through animals that enhances our blueprint for a better society. The study of both

[56] This alludes to manna story (double portion), even though the text is not the same.

these genres equips Jews with wisdom whether they live in freedom or in ghettos.

Chapter Three

Excerpts from Kalilah va Dimna: *Animals of Indian Legend Guide and Entertain Jewish Audiences*

In chapter two we discussed animal fables in the Jewish collection of Mishlei Shu-alim. Chapter three will explore Kalilah va Dimna, a book of animal lore whose primary claim to Jewish identity is that it was translated by Jews.[57] While the Hebrew version has some biblical allusions, it is not as consistently filled with biblical text as is Mishlei Shu-alim. Rather than present entire phrases, the Hebrew often uses two-word constructions that conjure biblical situations.

The corpus is from India and as it traveled west, became popular among the Arab-speaking world. The following explains in part why Jews embraced this Arabic literature:

> "The reason that Jewish popular literature was so ready to absorb large sections of its Arab counterpart was that the same phenomenon had already occurred in reverse. The Koran alludes to many Jewish stories, biblical and otherwise, but only rarely, as in the case of the Joseph story, does it tell them in full."[58]

Indeed, Jews have embraced the stories in Hebrew translation as our own.

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[57] Jews, in fact, translated the Indian text into many languages (according to EJ).
[58] Morris Epstein, *Tales of Sendebar*, (Philadelphia: JPS., 1967), 15.

Kalilah va Dimna represents an entirely distinct genre of literature. The guidance that the animals illustrate is specifically intended for leaders of a people. Some motifs, however, exist in other folk-lore collections, such as Mishlei Shu-alim. Before looking at specific stories, we shall survey the history of Kalilah va Dimna. Even that contains lore.

Kalilah va Dimna has long been an endearing literary work. It is both a story-book and a guide conceived in India. It reached the Middle East and later Europe. In many of the Arabic versions of Kalilah va Dimna, Ali ibn al-Shah al Farisi presents a preface on its history. The preface, like so many accounts in history, combines fact with fiction.[59] Ali begins with the conquest of Alexander the Great in India in the forth century BCE. Before leaving India, Alexander designated one of his officers to rule the land. But the natives were not happy:

> "[Alexander] had scarcely withdrawn his troops, when the people of the country, growing impatient under the weight of the yoke which he had imposed upon them, determined to shake off all obedience to the viceroy whom he had appointed, regarding it both as dishonourable, and an insufferable hardship, to be obliged to submit to the authority of a stranger, who . . . [was not] interested in their welfare and prosperity: they therefore deposed him, and chose for their sovereign a descendant of their ancient kings, whose name was Dabschelim."[60]

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[59] Esin Atil, *Kalilah wa Dimna. Fables from a Fourteenth-Century Arabic Manuscript*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press., 1981), 56.
[60] Rev. Wyndham Knatchbull (translator), *Kalila and Dimna*, (Oxford: W. Baxter., 1819), 5.

Dabschelim's rule, however, was corrupt. He "proved to be a very cruel and capricious man."[61] He abused his power as king of India by invading foreign territories while abandoning domestic issues.

Witness to the corrupt nature of Dabschelim was Bidpai, a philosopher of Brahman. We compare the printed Hebrew and English translations in Ali's introductory description Bidpai:

"It happened during this time period there was a man amongst the Brahmins a philosopher named Bidpai,
a man so distinguished a reputation for wisdom
that his opinion was asked in all matters of great difficulty."[62]

"בימים ההם היה בהודו איש פילוסף שרהמני ושמו בידבה,

והאיש חכם ונבון-רוח, תם וישר, צדיק וסר מרע." (Job 1 and 2)
וכל-העם מקצה פונה אליו (Ber. 19:4)
לבקש עצה ותורה מפיו."[63]

The English translation does not include these rich biblical allusions to Job and to Genesis. The Job reference reminds us of Job's upright character. The Genesis quotation refers to the people from every quarter in Sodom who do not heed Lot's advice. These two passages in juxtaposition create a fascinating tension. Bidpai is as pure Job while all others are as impure as those in Sodom. The Hebrew version of Kalilah va Dimna contains this and other allusions to the bible that the Jewish translators superimposed into the original text.

Bidpai consulted all of his wise pupils, searching for ideas with which to approach Dabschelim. None wanted to leave their native India, especially in the hands of a corrupt king. In their answers, they drew on animal characteristics, virtues of

[61] Atil, *Kalilah wa Dimna. . .*, 55.
[62] Knatchbull, *Kalila and Dimna*, 6.
[63] Avraham Elmaleich, (ed.), *Kalilah V'Dimna*, (Tel Aviv: DVIR Co. Ltd.., 1926), 5.

patience, trust, and prudence, to illustrate their thoughts on how a wise king should rule.

The day came when Bidpai approached Dabschelim. he said to the king:

> "A man . . . is distinguished from the beasts by four qualities, wisdom, temperance, understanding, and justice. . . .. And when a person is in full possession of these bright qualities, neither the excess of good fortune is capable of betraying him . . . nor does he wantonly indulge in complaints against Providence. . . .. **You, O king, are in the full enjoyment of the dignities of your ancestors, those great men who laid the foundation of the monarchy**. . .. You, O king, were born to be the heir of [your ancestors'] high renown . . .; but you have stopped short in the path in which you were advancing towards the summit of glory, and you have sullied the good name which was your inheritance, by acts of oppression and injustice towards your subjects. . . .. A king is deceived in the expectations which he forms from the exercise of arbitrary power. . . .. Lay to heart therefore, O king, the advice which I offer you . . . with the purest intentions . . .."[64]

Bidpai continues in his discourse with direct advice. He hope that Dabschelim will accept his words. Ironic is that he begins with this separation of man and beast. Yet, as we shall see, his advice involves almost exclusively the guidance of animals. These four qualities, wisdom, temperance, understanding, and justice, are what the animals attempt to attain through the course of the fables.

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[64] Knatchbull , *Kalila and Dimna*, 15-19.

In the Hebrew version, we read in the **bold** section of the above passage,

"**מלך רם ונשא! הנך יושב על כסא ואבות אבותיך הגבורים אנשי השם מסדי הממלכה הזאת.**"[65]

As with the previous example of the Jewish phraseology, here we find hints of liturgical wordings: "**רם ונשא**" echoes the **נאולה**. Even coupling the words "**אבותיך**" with "**הגבורים**" alludes to the Tefillah. Again it is an example of how the Jewish editors of non-Jewish literature espoused it and adopted it as their, as <u>our</u> own.

Dabschelim's response to Bidpai was negative. He says:

> "I could not have supposed that any one of my subjects would have ventured to address me in the terms which you have used, and to have united so much audacity with such inconsiderable powers. I cannot considerably wonder at the haughty and presumptuous tone which you have assumed, and make it necessary to make you an example for the admonition of others who may hereafter aspire to the honour which you have abused to your own disgrace. Upon which he commanded that Bidpai be put to death."[66]

While Bidpai was in jail, Dabschelim could not sleep as he thought of the perplexing ways of the universe. He remembered Bidpai and called upon him. Dabschelim expressed his guilt for his rash decision to send Bidpai to jail. Subsequently,

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[65] Elmaleich, *Kalilah V'Dimnah*, 9.
[66] Knatchbull, *Kalila and Dimna*, 19-20.

Dabschelim appointed Bidpai to be his personal minister for advice on how to behave as a prince.

Intriguing here is the obvious parallel of Bidpai's rise from prison to the ascent of Joseph in Egypt. This motif, according to Everett Fox, is "an old and favorite motif in folklore."[67] We shall not dwell on this motif, however, as I am eager to move towards the roles of the animals and their motifs rather than those of human characters.

Dabschelim subsequently commissions Bidpai to write a book for rulers. The guide was to help those rulers attain and retain the allegiance of their citizens. Bidpai thus wrote Kalilah va Dimna, a book of fourteen chapters, each addressing pertinent issues for a king, and each resolving those issues with sound answers. The medium Bidpai uses to convey his wisdom is through the animal kingdom.

Kalilah and Dimna are the names of two jackals in Bidpai's fables. Bidpai employs them to relate lessons through stories. Both were wise, but Kalilah was better able to channel his passions. Dimna consistently wished to improve his social status. Kalilah and Dimna recount stories of the animal kingdom within the context of the larger stories. So while the jackals give advice, they are involved in a plot themselves. Though the book is named for them, they only appear in the introductory narrative.

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[67] Everett Fox, (trans). , *The Five Books of Moses*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 188.

Kalilah va Dimna became more than a guide for rulers. Its popularity expanded into the arena of folk-literature, and its audience soon extended beyond India and into the Middle East. Esin Atil explains why animal fables lure so many:

> "The behavior of the animals reflects human weaknesses and strengths, ambitions and achievements. We can relate to the justice and injustice of their world and to the cruelty and kindness shown by friends and enemies since we face similar circumstances in our own lives. We are touched by their endearing personalities; we appreciate their intelligence, resourcefulness, and compassion... ."[68]

Atil then continues with specifics of Kalilah va Dimna. He praises the work as a search for truth and justice by not only royalty, but by all humanity. He writes:

> "The underlying theme of the work is that all creatures, big or small, are a part of creation and each society is a microcosm of a much larger entity that controls the destiny of its members. This perhaps was the essence of the worldwide popularity of the *Kalila wa Dimna*, appealing to all peoples at all times."[69]

So the fundamental element of these stories is quite similar to those we saw in Mishlei Shu-alim: the inherent harmony of the social order, in both a small and large context, guides us each day.

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[68] Atil, *Kalilah wa Dimna*. . ., 10.

[69] Ibid.

In the latter half of the sixth century, Khosrau Nushirvan of Iran heard of the book and commissioned his physician, Burzoe, to travel to India and obtain it. Historians believe it was Burzoe who translated the text into the Pahlavi language in about the year 570. Consequently, Kalilah va Dimna appeared in many more languages.

Of course, there is speculation concerning this entire chain of events. No one is certain that Bidpai wrote all the original tales. With every translation and transmission through cultures and generations, stories expand and change. Underlying this is the following statement:

> "The Pahlavi version was most likely expanded by additional stories. It has been argued that the Sanskrit Kalila wa Dimna contained only five stories from the *Panchatantra;* the Pahlavi version added three stories from the *Mahabharata,* together with four or five tales from other Indian sources."[70]

(The *Panchatantra* and the *Mahabharata* are two corpi of early folk literature). Jewish writers, when they adopted Kalilah va Dimna, continued this process of molding the stories. We saw this above with the comparisons of the English and Hebrew translations.

In Mishlei Shu-alim we categorized fables by animal. With Kalilah va Dimna, we shall examine the fables in the order they

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[70] Ibid., 56.

appear in the text. Though the plot is not so important to the scope of this thesis, it noteworthy. Of two sections, the first gives the story of Kalilah and Dimna, the jackals. Within the larger narrative are individual fables as well. The second section depicts direct questions that Dabschelim asks Bidpai. There we shall explore only the specific fables and their lessons. In the process, we shall explore fables that advise on friendships and foes, fables that warn against greed, and fables that counsel general good leadership. As we saw above, the printed translations do not always reflect the Hebrew flavor. Thus I shall provide an original translation. Many of the synopses will derive from Rev. Wyndham Knatchbull's English translation and Esin Atil's English collection of Kalilah va Dimna.

Appropriately, we begin with a story featuring Kalilah and Dimna, the jackals. It happened in the court of the lion-king that two bulls, Shanzabeh and Banzabeh, got stuck in the mud when pulling a merchant's wagon. The merchant was in a hurry and asked an attendant to free the oxen while he left on foot. The attendant did not have the patience to wait, and left the oxen on their own to die. Shanzabeh, however, freed himself from the mud and found a pasture where he was able to live. He had sufficient food and water, but no companionship. When he was lonely, we would bellow loudly.

The lion would hear the horrible sound of Shanzabeh and tremble. He was so afraid that he would not leave his den, which

was quite embarrassing for a king! Dimna, always wanting to rise in status and closer to the king, attempted to ease him. Dimna told the lion stories:

"It is not right for a king to hide in his holy den whenever there is a contaminated sound.
For **you will not fear the terror** of the sound, goes the saying.

To what can this be compared? To a fox who came to a dense forest and saw a drum hanging from the trees above.
And when the wind blew on their branches and stirred them, they beat on the skin of the drum. But the fox detected nothing immense surrounding him.
And the fox approached to contemplate the drum. And he looked and saw that the drum was very thick.
And he thought it may have been filled will milk and meat. And he worked hard until and he tore it.
And he saw that it was empty, and there was nothing inside. And he said, 'Whatever is (truly) insignificant, its roar is great and its body is enormous.'"

"אל למלך לעזב את-מקום משכן בבודד
ולהבעת מפני קול נאלח

כי 'אל תירא מפחד (Prov. 3:25) קול'
יאמר הפתגם.

משל למה הדבר דומה?
לשועל שבא ליער-עבות
וירא תף תלוי ממעל לעלים

ומדי נשב הרוח בענפיהם והניעם
והתופפו על עור התף
ונשמע שאון עצום מסביב.

ויגש השועל להתבונן בתף
וירא והנה הוא עבה מאד,

ויחשב כי מלא הוא חלב ובשר
ויעמל מאד ויקרעהו וירא

כי רק הוא ואין בו מאומה, ויאמר
'כל דבר רק שאגו נחל וגופו עצום.'"[71]

In other words, that which can lure and seduce are often empty of any substance.

When he finished the story, Dimna offered to go and see what the sound was that the lion feared. Indeed, when Dimna returned, he reported that the tremendous noise emanated from the bull, an insignificant creature. The lion then asked Dimna to fetch the bull. Dimna complied, and the lion subsequently invited the bull to live in his court. The two developed a close friendship of which Dimna grew jealous. Kalilah reminded his brother Dimna

[71] Elmaleich, *Kalilah V'Dimnah*, 43.

that not only did he bring the two together in the first place, but also that a jackal should not complain in the face of a lion and a bull! Dimna responded that power of the mind far outweighs strength of body.

The motif of social order pervades this story. The lion expects that his kingdom perceive him as brave, yet he cowers at a strange noise. His embarrassment at his fear compels him to remain where no one will see him. Dimna is a nothing, yet he seeks companionship with the king in order to rise above his status.

The moral of the story within the story is one and the same as the response that Dimna gave to Kalilah: that which appears to be large and powerful may actually be trivial. But this lesson proves itself ephemeral. One can not use this alone as a guide for leadership because it lacks responsible perception. There are cases in which one should be cautious of that which is great or unfamiliar. In the course of the book, Dimna continues attempting to elevate his status. This leads in the end to a premature death. So while the moral gives a certain truth, it is not an accurate principle by which to base one's administration. This shows that the wisdom of Kalilah va Dimna involves knowledge of the entire anthology. The stories give accurate guidance to specific circumstances. Dimna uses the wisdom inappropriately.

One final word on this story. It is similar to the Midrash we read in chapter one of the fox from Ecclesiastes Rabbah.

There, the fox must fast to fit through a fence to gain access to grapes in the vineyard. After he eats, he fasts again to pass through the fence. He then questions the vineyard as to what enjoyment one can attain from it. The Midrash illustrates that one must leave the world just as he enters. But the motif is similar to our fable here in Kalilah va Dimna; the fox in both stories complains after not procuring what it covets.

Dimna then relates another story warning against coveting through the episode of the lion and the hare. All the animals of the forest feared the powerful lion who would eat any animal it could find. The animals decided to take matters into their own hands and choose one creature each day to sacrifice to the lion. They chose the animal by drawing lots. This way, the other animals could live in peace, having at least a little control of their own destinies.

When the lot fell on the hare, she devised a plan so that the animals would never have to suffer this terrible arrangement anymore. The animals agreed to allow the hare to free them of this yoke. The hare loitered until after lunch-time before approaching the lion. The lion was quite hungry and angry by the time the hare arrived. She told him that she had escorted another hare, a fatter hare, to be his meal. On their way, another lion had seized the fat hare and ran off. The lion was furious that food designated for himself, the king, had been purloined. The hare offered to lead the king to where the other lion had brought the other hare.

"And the hare went with the lion, and she brought him a large deep well filled with pure and clear water.
And she looked into the well and said to the lion, 'Do you see, my lord-king? It is the den of one of your relatives!
He escaped to this cave, and he is sitting in it now.
This is certain, that he will not share with you. So you must go there to get (the food) from him.
Then the lion-king went up to the wall of the well and bent his head and saw the water.
And the hare crept and came up stealthily and stood between its legs. And the lion saw his reflection and the reflection of the hare in the water.
And he roared: "indeed the matter is true! Here is my enemy and here is the rabbit with it!
Look, it is standing in the depths of the den.
He fixes his eyes on me as though he has contempt for me. But now I know that his long hairs are no match for me.'
And as he spoke these words, he sought to storm the lion to take revenge from it. And he leapt into the middle of the well and sank like earth in mighty water."

"ותולך הארנבת את-הארי.
ותביאהו אל באר גדולה ועמקה
מלאה מים צחים וזכים
ותבט לתוך הבאר ותאמר לארי:
'ראה אתה, אדוני המלך?
הנה מאורת-קרובך.
אל המירה הזאת נמלט ובה ישב עתה.
בטוח הוא, כי לא ימלאך
לבבך לבוא שמה לבקשו.
ויעל האריה על חוטת הבאר,
וישח את-ראשו, ויבט המימה,
והארנבת התגנבה ותבא
בלאט ותעמד בין רגליו
וירא האריה את-בבואתו
ואת-בבואת הארנבת במים
וישאג :אבן ,אמת הדבר!
הנה צרי והנה השפן עמו!
הנה הוא עומד בתוך מעמקי המאורה.
ילטש עיניו לי וכמו בוז יבוז לי.
ואולם עתה ידע
כי שערותיו הארכות לא תבעתנה אותי.
וכדברו את-הדברים האלה,
אמר להשתער על האריה לקדת ממנו נקם
ויקפץ אל תוך הבאר
ויצלל כעפרת במים אדירים."[72]

The hare returned to the other animals, content with his success.

The lion's desire for more food recalls the story in Mishlei Shu-alim of the dog and the cheese. Common to both fables are the reflection and greed motif. The dog saw in the water its reflection, yet thought it was looking at another dog with another piece of cheese. When the dog opened its mouth, the cheese fell out, leaving the dog with nothing. Here, the lion

[72] Ibid., 52.

saw the reflection, and actually attacked the image, falling into the well and dying.

Two lessons ensue from this fable. One is that which we learned from the story with the dog and the cheese: to be content with what we have. The second lesson returns us to the drama itself: that cunning is more powerful than might. The small hare is able to escape the wrath of the great lion. Again, Dimna offers this moral of mind over matter. But as we shall see, this lesson proves limited as Dimna suffers because of his trickery.

Dimna's goal is to break the friendship between the lion-king and Shanzabeh. He lies to the bull, trying to pit it against the lion. The lies take root, and when the two meet, they engage in a fierce battle, the lion wounding and ultimately killing his friend. When the lion learned that it was Dimna's maliciousness and deceit that caused him to kill Shanzabeh, he imprisoned the jackal and arranged for a trial. Kalilah, distressed by his brother's arrest suffered a heart attack and died.

At the trial, Dimna first entices the judge with delightful stories and fables. His cunning won the hearts of the judge, and it appeared that he would procure his freedom. But after ten days of trial, a leopard, who had witnessed the conversations between Kalilah and Dimna, spoke up about Dimna's plot to separate the lion and the bull. Then another witness testified with the same accusation. Dimna's trickery could not free him from their words. The lion condemned Dimna to a cell where he

soon after died of starvation. It shows that when used inappropriately, wisdom breads corruption. Dimna used wisdom to raise his own status, and ultimately pits friends against one another and condemns himself to death. Again, this teaches that the understanding the guidance of Kalilah va Dimna requires an awareness of the wisdom of the entire corpus.

Thus Kalilah and Dimna both die in the first section of the fable collection. The rest of the fables respond to specific questions that Dabschelim poses to Bidpai. We shall study them on an individual basis rather than as they apply to the larger plot.

Dabschelim, having heard the story of Dimna's perversion, wanted to know if it was possible for members of various tribes to embrace as one. Bidpai relates the story of the Ring-dove. A group of doves became caught in the net of a hunter as they were eating seeds. The ring-dove, the leader, suggested that if they all collaborated, they could still fly off as a united group rather than try to escape each on his own. A crow witnessed the spectacle and decided to follow them.

When the flock finally landed in a safe place, the ring-dove called to her friend Zirak, the mouse. (The name "Zirak" appears in the printed English but not the Hebrew). Zirak came out of one of his holes to see what was going on. He asked the ring-dove:

"'Who threw this net on you?' She answered him saying,

'"מי השליך ברשת זו?'
ותענה לאמר:

'Are you not yet aware that evil and good only come upon man when the matter is decreed on him by heaven?

Upon us, too, does this decree apply, and there is no escape.'

Then the mouse began to gnaw at the net on the side where the ring-dove was. But she wanted him to begin on the side where the other doves were and then to finish on her side. And though she repeated her words more than once, he paid no attention, for he wanted to free her quickly."

'הטרם תדע (Ex. 10:7)
כי לא תבוא רעה או טובה
על האדם בלתי
אם נגזר עליו הדבר מן השמים?
וגם עלינו נגזרה טורה זו
ואין מידה מציל.'
ויחל העכבר לכרסם את-הרשת
מצד נברת-הזנים.
אך הוא בקשה ממנו
להחל מצד הזנים ולכלות בצדה.
ותשנה את-דבריה אלה אחת ושתים
והוא לא שמע בקולה,
כי חפץ להצילה מהר."[73]

Zirak saw that the ring-dove was entirely self-less. She feared that if he freed her first, that he would become too tired to free the other doves. This act of compassion towards her flock enchanted Zirak so much that he pledged her his true friendship. With passion he worked to free the entire flock of birds.

Having witnessed the entire ordeal, the crow also wanted to befriend Zirak. At first, Zirak hesitated, remembering that crows and mice traditionally are enemies.[74] But the crow replied that

> " . . . it was not with the intention of eating him that she had come; that she had a more important object in view, which was to secure his friendship; and that the truth and sincerity with which she courted it did not deserve to be repaid by distrust."[75]

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[73] Ibid., 84.
[74] Atil, *Kalilah wa Dimna. . .*, 33.
[75] Knatchbull, *Kalila and Dimna*, 196-197.

Once the crow and the mouse understood the value of friendship, they became inseparable. Thus Bidpai responds to Dabschelim's question. Members of different tribes can share a friendship.

The most intriguing line of the Hebrew fable is that which gives the theology of free-will versus destiny. The crow spoke of Heaven as the arbitrator of good and evil that fall upon human beings. No matter what we do, Heaven will always be in control. It returns us to the theme of social order that permeates this entire literature.

Additionally here is the folk-motif of an animal freeing another, larger animal, from a net. The theme exists in a story we did not study from Mishlei Shu-alim: the parable of the Lion and the Mouse. So popular is this fable that it is common to modern animation. The premise is that a mouse disturbs a slumbering lion. Angered at his disrupted sleep, the lion threatens to eat the mouse. But the mouse pleads for mercy, and the lion relents and sets him free. Later, the lion becomes ensnared in a hunter's net, and the mouse returns to free the lion by gnawing open its ropes. True, the cyclical pattern of animals helping one another is not a part of the Kalilah va Dimna fable. But the theme of a mouse working its way through a net does connect the two corpi.

Dabschelim understood that the mouse and the doves and the mouse and the crow were able to forge a strong friendship. This certainly was important to know when leading a country: when to make allies with another nation. But Dabschelim's next request

of Bidpai was to understand when not to trust the foreigner. So Bidpai relates a number of stories within stories, one of which was the Elephant and the Hare.

A herd of elephants once lived by a lake. One season, a drought plagued the region and the water in the lake dissipated. The king of the elephants moved his troop to a new lush spot called the Fountain of the Moon.

Also living in the Fountain of the Moon was a kingdom of hares. At night, when the elephants first arrived, they trod over many of the hares and killed them. The hares convened with their king to determine how to prevent this from occurring again. One the hares, Firouz, had a reputation for sound judgment. She volunteered to go before the elephants and address them:

"And the hare came to the elephants on a moon-lit night. And she feared approaching them lest they trample her.
So she went up to the top of a high mountain and called to the king of the elephants by his name saying to him, 'By the advice of the moon I have come to you.'
And the king of the elephants responded, 'What has happened?'
And the hare answered, 'Whoever gages his strength by seeing another who is weaker, he fools himself and his strength will be his downfall.
And you, o elephant, as you think you are stronger than all the other beasts and animals, **let your heart inspire you** to come to the fountain that is named for me, and drink water from it?'"

"ותבא הארנבת אל הפילים בליל ירח,
ותירא לגשת אליהם פן ירמסה.

ותעל על ראש הר-גבוה,
ותקרא את-מלך הפילים בשמו,
ותאמר לו:
מטעם הירח באתי אליך.
ואמר מלך הפילים: ומה קרה?
ותאמר הארנבת:
כל-אשר יראה את-החק ממנו
כראות את-החלש - את-דעת עצמו
הוא טנב וכוח יהה אסטו.

ואתה הפיל, כדעתך
כי בחך נחל מכח הבהמה והחיה,
השאך לבך[76] לבוא אל המעין
אשר שמו נקרא עלי,
ותשת ממנו ותעכר את-מימו."[77]

[76] This phrase alludes to Obadiah 1:3 but is in a variant word arrangement.
[77] Elmaleich, *Kalilah V'Dimnah*, 97.

The hare then warned the elephant that the Moon would blind him and the others elephants if they continued to drink from the fountain. Firouz brought the elephant to the fountain to meet the great Moon:

"And he looked into the fountain and saw the reflection of the moon. And Firouz said to him:

'Take up water with your trunk and wash your face and your hands. And purify yourself and bow before the moon.'
And the elephant did so. He dipped his trunk in the water causing it to ripple. And the reflection of the moon, which was in the water, swayed to and fro.
And the elephant said, 'This can only mean that the moon is angry with me because I made the water sway.'

And he asked the hare, 'Why is the moon trembling? Is his heart angry with me because I dipped my tunk in the water?'

And the hare answered, 'Yes."
And the elephant was frightened. And he bowed before the moon, **and he prostrated** again in order to allow his soul to turn from its evil ways. And he would not drink ever again from the water of the fountain, he nor his companions because of what he heard."

"...ובהביט אל המעין
וירא את-דמות הירח.
ותאמר לו פיחזה:
שאב מים בחרטמך
ורחצת את-פניך ואת-ידיך
וטהרת והשתחוית לירח.
ויעש הפיל כן,
ויטבל את-חרטמו במים ויזעזע,
ודמות הירח
אשר במים התנודדה הנה והנה.
ויאמר הפיל:
אין זאת כי-אם עלי
התעבר הירח על-כן יתעודד.
וישאל את-הארנבת:
למה זה התעודד הירח?
העלי יועף לבו,
כי טבלתי את-חרטמי במים?
ותאמר הארנבת: הן.
וירא הפיל מאד
ויקד לפני הירח
וישתחו אפים ארצה,[78]
ויתודה על כל-אשר הרע לעשות,
ויקבל על נפשו לשוב מדרכו הרעה,
לבלתי שתות עוד ממי המעין,
הוא וכל-הסרים למשמעתו.[79]

This story echoes the one that Dimna told of the lion and the hare. One can imagine that the hare is the same character in both stories. Common to both is fooling the enemy through a reflection motif. It appears to be a favorite method of the hare

[78] Expression which appears numerous times in Bible.
[79] Elmaleich, *Kalilah V'Dimnah*, 98.

to eliminate the antagonist. (Again, this conjures animated icons, such as Brer Rabbit). Dimna told his fable to show that wit is more important than strength. But here, Bidpai stresses not so much that lesson, but rather that one should not take the advice of the enemy, "even when he seem[s] week and harmless"[80] as the hare. Thus Dabschelim learns when never to trust a member of another tribe.

We shall share one more fable from Kalilah va Dimna. Dabschelim wanted to learn how to escape from a situation where enemies surround him on all sides. Bidpai related the story of the Cat and the Mouse.

A mouse named Feridoun and cat named Roumi both lived in holes at the foot of a great tree. One day, Roumi stepped into a hunter's trap and could not escape. When Feridoun came out of his hole, he reveled when he saw his enemy the cat in the net:

"But his joy did not last. For the weasel (lit. 'rat') was standing there ready to ambush him to seize him. And the bat was in the tree, plotting against him to devour him.

And there stood the mouse, amazed, with no idea of what to do!

If he were to turn around, the weasel would tear him apart. And if were to turn right or left, the bat would plot against him. And if he were to stay where he was, the teeth of the cat would devour him"

"אך שמחתו לא ארכה,
כי החלדה אשר עמדה שם
ארבה לו לתפשו
והעטלף מעל העץ התנכל לו
גם הוא לטרפו.
ויעמד העכבר כנדהם,
מבלי דעת מה יעשה:
אם ישוב אחור
וקרעתהו החלדה לטרים,
ואם ימנה או שמאלה ית
וטרפו העטלף,
ואם נבוז ינוס
והחה טרף לשני התנול."[81]

[80] Atil, *Kalilah wa Dimna . . .*, 43.
[81] Elmaleich, *Kalilah V'Dimnah*, 119.

Finding no way of escape, Feridoun figured that the best chance for survival was to befriend Roumi. He approached the cat and reminded him that the weasel and the bat were common enemies to both of them. He offered to gnaw the net and release the cat. In return, the two of them would earn trust from one another. Roumi agreed to this plan.

As Feridoun ate away at the ropes, the weasel and the bat departed because their food was no longer available to them. At this point, Feridoun slowed his work, for he was now out of danger. Accordingly, Roumi grew impatient and implored that Feridoun not betray him. By this time the hunter was approaching. So Feridoun quickly finished his work and the cat ran free. It took some time for the cat and the mouse to learn to truly trust one another, but because they became friends when trouble lurked, their bond lasted forever.

Again, we have a mouse gnawing at a net in order to free a traditional enemy. The motif of befriending the adversary in a time of distress is central to a guide for leadership. One must know when it is safe to approach the enemy and when it is foolish. This fable teaches us to always look for an escape clause when doom seems inevitable. It stresses the need to have our eyes open to all situations.

Additionally, this fable shows that what seems insignificant can actually be of service. We should not underestimate those who appear weak. This corresponds to the lesson Dimna told of the fox who anticipated that food was in the drum that hung from

the tree. Dimna taught that the bark is often greater than the bite. Here, we learn not to dismiss that which is small. Both fables warn against judging another based solely on appearance.

Indeed, the wisdom of Bidpai focuses on methods of good leadership. His advice concerns both knowing his subjects as well as his enemies and understanding how to use wisdom and not always strength. Paramount to the morals is a quest to maintain social order and peace. Mishlei Shu-alim instructed us not to aspire to non-conventional social boundaries. Here, the plea for social order takes a different shape. We learn here to pursue peace, preserving order even if it means stepping outside of normal guidelines. In Kalilah va Dimna, the animals constantly use wisdom to protect themselves. They do not seek to rise in status. Dimna applied the fables for this purpose and it worked against him. Rather, they hope to safeguard their own lives from the enemy. As Bidpai applied those same morals of Dimna's stories to specific situations, the lessons took on a new meaning.

Very few biblical citations appear in the Hebrew, though every once in a while there is some biblical flavor. Kalilah va Dimna is not like Mishlei Shu-alim in this way. But the book is still a rich ingredient in the Jewish anthology of lore and legend.

For the leader, Kalilah va Dimna is a textbook. Rulers require knowledge of all the guidance in the stories in order to discern what standards should accompany which specific

situations. But the contemporary reader can enjoy and learn from the fables because the animals speak to all men, women, and children as well because of the witty plots and escapades and the universal common sense of the morals.

In the next chapter, we shall look at additional fables in various collection that draw from the motifs of both Mishlei Shualim and Kalilah va Dimna.

Chapter Four

Additional Jewish Animal Fables from Europe, Asia, and Africa

In the past two chapters we discussed animal fables from tow distinct literary collections. Here, we shall look at fables extending beyond the Middle Ages that derive mostly from Mishlei Shu-alim and in part from Kalilah va Dimna (through motif rather than story-line). Kurdish and Moroccan Jews both enjoy a rich folk literature. The Jews of Ashkenaz also delighted in animal fables. Much of what we shall explore are extensions of the fables we have already seen in the previous chapters. Intriguing is just how some communities adopt the tales and mold them into their own cultural Judaism. Jews wrote many of these stories in the vernacular or in local dialects. Translations exist in Hebrew, but this chapter shall present the English only.

We shall begin with stories from the Yiddish fables collection of Reb Moshe Wallich, known as Sefer Meshalim (SM). Again, we look to some background of the fables. In Eli Katz's introduction we read,

> "In 1697 there appeared in Frankfurt am Main a collection of thirty-four fables in Yiddish entitled, *Sefer Meshalim* [Book of Fables] and published by Moses ben Eliezer Wallich. . . .. On the title page, Wallich claims to have gathered the fables "from the holy tongue, from the book of *Meshal ha-Kadmoni* [Ancient Parable] and the book *Mishlei Shu'alim* [Fox Fables]. . ... In the first of the book's two prefaces,

> however, Wallich, while repeating his pretensions to having selected the fables (and, by implication, to having translated them from the Hebrew) also asserts a conflicting claim: 'It is also called *Ku-Bukh* [Cow Book] . . .' This obscure remark suggests that Wallich's *Sefer Meshalim* is in fact a reissue of an earlier collection, entitled *Ku-Bukh*, and no longer easily obtainable."[82]

(Ku-Bukh appeared in the sixteenth century, providing Jews with a "menagerie of scholarly fauna."[83]) In the text of Sefer Meshalim itself, Italian words and northern Italian city names appear, indicating that a local, Yiddish-speaking community comprised the book's first audience.[84] As with all literature, SM borrowed from many sources. Some Jewish scholars will argue that all the stories derived "from the holy tongue," as Wallich claimed. More likely is the "Judaization" of common folk-tales. Thus, these Jews of northern Italy knew of Ku-Bukh as well as other Jewish literature and extracted from both.

So, the fables of SM evolve from the Jewish, Aesopean, and Arabian traditions, the latter deriving from Indian sources.[85] Many of the stories will be familiar to those we have already seen in chapters two and three. One main difference is linguistic. In addition to employing biblical phraseology, Sefer Meshalim utilizes holiday themes and Yiddish-isms. At times, the Jewish cultural flavor seem rather transplanted into the familiar

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[82] Eli Katz, (editor and translator), *Book of Fables, the Yiddish Fable Collection of Reb Moshe Wallich*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press., 1994), 9-10.
[83] Elijah Judah Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1984), 230.
[84] Katz, *Book of Fables* . . ., 10.
[85] Ibid.

story. Other times, they are intricately woven into the text. The language itself is not only for the learned, but for women and children as well. Wallich writes in his preface, "I the writer do herewith call all women and pious folk."[86] Many of the stories of this corpus involve humans exclusively, but most perpetuate the animal fables. We shall explore the fables as they correspond to those primarily in Mishlei Shu-alim (MS), referring to that text in the process. We begin with two fox fables.

One tale that is common to both MS and SM is entitled The Fox and the Stork (in Mishlei Shu-alim it is called The Fox and the Crane). In that version, the fox entices the crane to eat dinner at his home. The fox grinds food finely that the crane can not eat it because of its long beak. In retaliation, the crane invites the fox to a meal that is deep in a hollow tree. The fox tries but fails at eating the food because he does not have the narrow beak necessary. The moral: evil deeds are contagious and will infect otherwise upright people. (The crane only became cunning because of the fox).

The Sefer Meshalim version begins with a different premise. Wallich begins by saying, "A fox and a stork were good friends such as one finds today; two good and faithful companions who liked one another."[87] In Mishlei Shu-alim, we never learn about the former relationship of the two. But in Sefer Meshalim we understand that the two are close. From here, the story

[86] Ibid., 36.

continues similarly, but with variations. Wallich illustrates the meals themselves with detail and humor. At one point, the fox asks the stork, who is unable to eat, "Do you need a shovel or a fork"[88] The story continues:

> "Whenever he opened his mouth the food would fall out. The stork could not enjoy his meal and was greatly vexed. But he didn't reveal it to the fox. He said, 'Is this all you've prepared for this meal? I'm sure I have a lot more food at my house; *kreplekh* and almond rice and all sorts of Purim delicacies.'"[89]

The stork then prepares the food and puts it into a long cruse with a narrow neck. While the fox salivates at the cruse, the stork makes similar jokes as the ones which he had endured.

Our moral gives the opposite message of the one in MS. Here, Wallich writes that what the stork did to the fox was appropriate. "Anyone who wants to trick or fool his friends . . . is surely not pious . . . and will soon be repaid in equal measure . . . ."[90]

This fable, so secular in motif, becomes Jewish simply by the addition of the traditional foods and the Purim holiday. It also teaches us the value of the Purim holiday for Jews. Mishlei Shu-alim had inserted biblical text to claim Jewish ownership. Sefer Meshalim appeals to a different audience, and thus targets cultural aspects of Judaism rather than biblical text. Common to both versions is the Jewish ethical value of מדה כנגד מדה.

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[87] Ibid., 40.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

We also remember the story about the fox, raven, and cheese from MS. A raven had a piece of cheese in his mouth, and the hungry fox wanted to somehow get the cheese. The fox enticed the raven with luring words, asking the raven to sing with his sweet voice. The raven's pride eclipsed his sense, and as he opened his mouth to sing, the cheese fell. The fox took the cheese and ran off. Here, in Sefer Meshalim, we find the same story, but with more cultural color. The fox has just spoken of the raven's beauty:

> "The raven was greatly pleased at the thought that he was so beautiful and fine. He felt very good about himself and was quite elated. He thought: 'The fox will praise me everywhere. I will be spoken of in distant places and everyone will be after me. They'll all be sending matchmakers to the raven.' The fox thought: 'If only I can confuse you enough to get you to start singing.' The raven now began to hop onto the most beautiful branches. He said to the fox: 'Now, would you care to be silent and listen to my beautiful singing? I won't make you wait; I'll sing a sweet ditty.' The fox stood up on his hind legs and prepared to catch the cheese. He was certain of it and he knew he couldn't miss. He said: 'You don't sing often, I'm looking forward to it.' He looked up at the stars above as though he were about to perform the blessing of the moon. He said: 'Tomorrow is *Rosh Hashone*. Let me hear how you can sing the prayer melodies.' He looked up with cheerful anticipation to the place from which the cheese would drop. With joy and exultation the raven opened his mouth wide, just as he does to this very day when he caws. He cawed so

[90] Ibid., 44.

loud and long that the cheese fell. In his own mind he was singing quite well. But the fox had enough of this singing. He took the cheese in his mouth (it must have weighed twenty pounds) and quickly departed into the greenwood."[91]

According to the editor's notes, the allusions to the new moon festival and Rosh Hashanah provide humor.[92] This tale certainly resonates for one who may not know scripture or liturgical proams intimately, but who does identify as a Jew. Indeed, that small addition, as well as the mention of the matchmaker, give a Jewish cultural flavor to the common folk-tale. The moral remains the same as it was in Mishlei Shu-alim. One should always be aware of what he is. In his conclusion, Wallich writes, " . . . you should consider well who you are and observe yourself in the mirror, so what happened to the raven won't happen to you."[93]

The next fable we shall explore is another cousin of a fable from MS. There, it is story number five entitled, כלב ונבלת וטם. Here, it is story number three, titled, The Dog's Reflection. The story line is almost identical, except that here, instead of carrying a piece of cheese, the dog has a piece of meat in its mouth. As soon as he finds the meat, he leaves the other dogs saying to himself, "Let them eat dry bones."[94] The fable continues much as it does in the MS version. The dog goes to a bridge and sees the reflection of the meat in the river below.

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[91] Ibid., 46.
[92] Ibid., 276.
[93] Ibid., 48.

Thinking it is actually another piece of meat, he opens his mouth to obtain it. The actual piece falls from the dog's mouth and into the water.

There is not much of a Jewish flavor to the story itself. But in the conclusion, Wallich provides a little theology:

> "This fable is directed toward one who covets much more than God has provided for him. He doesn't know that in the end he'll lose what he had at first as well. So it seems to me a bad trait and one that I don't like at all. For everyone should be satisfied with what God has decreed for him and not increase his possessions with unjust gain. And he should live cheerfully all his life with the possessions that God has given him. For it's all a matter of luck and fortune. Believe me; I swear it by Abonai. The end."[95]

First and foremost, this reference to "Abonai" begs attention. In the critical notes to this chapter, the editor writes, "אבוניה, obscure; possibly a euphemism for אדני 'Lord [God]' employed because of the general prohibition against taking the name of the lord in vain."[96] This euphemism is a Yiddish version of our contemporary "G-d."

While the dog of the parallel fable in Mishlei Shu-alim speaks with biblical allusions, the fable here does not. Instead, Wallich explains the lesson with an echo of the Tenth Commandment as well as the wisdom of Pirkei Avot, "Who is rich? . . ." But rather than directly quote Bible or Mishna, Wallich illustrates the warning through this fable. Thus, its moral

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[94] Ibid., 50.
[95] Ibid.

extends to larger audience, one not limited to those learned in text.

Another example of the same moral is story twenty two, entitled The Ass in the Lion's Skin. We remember this fable in Mishlei Shu-alim with the same title. In that version, the story opens with a donkey who strayed from his master's house for no apparent reason and found a lion's skin. The donkey paraded in the skin, scaring the other animals. In Sefer Meshalim, Wallich generates a little more compassion for why the donkey left home and for its motivation to be something else:

> "A man had a donkey in his stable. He seldom let it remain idle. It had to carry the sacks to the mill. And he often beat it with a staff. Yet he fed it only a little. He caused it much suffering. One time he drove it out to pasture. It searched everywhere for grass, on the hill and in the valley. It wanted to graze with the harts and the hinds and all the wild beasts. The donkey finally lost its way. It came into a great forest where a lion had left its skin while it was taking a bath. In the meantime the donkey took it."[97]

In the former version, the donkey was a much more rebellious figure. It was haughty and arrogant. But here, the donkey is tender. We feel sorry for him in his situation. It is only after the donkey in this fables finds the lion's skin and puts on that haughtiness seizes his demeanor. He equates himself to a lion. He hopes that the skin, the royal life of a lion, will

[96] Ibid., 277.
[97] Ibid., 126.

deliver him from carrying the master's loads. What transpires is identical to the MS version. All the animals and people flee from the donkey. But the owner recognizes his donkey by its ears. He flogs the donkey and strips off the lion's skin. The donkey remains just a donkey.

What is distinct in this version is the final advice that Wallich gives. He writes:

> "When God gives a little good fortune to someone who thinks he is something special, he won't give any peace to those around him. And he wants to subject everyone to himself as the donkey did here, behaving with great arrogance. . . .. Therefore one should not act arrogantly to one's companions, but should rather behave modestly."[98]

According to this tale, the donkey deserves his fortune. God puts it there for him. In the former version, the donkey had no right to put on the lion skin. It is how the donkey responds to the riches here that causes his downfall. The donkey can strive towards a better existence, but he must be aware of how his fortune will effect those around him. We learn that presumptuous people are punished and will be put back in their place. Additionally, this reminds us to rise according to what we are. The donkey should not try to be lion. Rather, the donkey should strive to be a good donkey.

[98] Ibid., 128.

The final story we shall explore from Sefer Meshalim has no roots in Mishlei Shu-alim. It is called, The Father, the Son, and the Donkey. It is unlike the other fables I include in this thesis because it involves an animal that does not talk or think at all. Yet it would be amiss to neglect it. The humor and coyness of the story blend well with the other fables of this genre. We will find that this particular fable belongs in the allegories from the Wise men of Chelm. The following is a synopsis:

A man is riding a donkey to town. His son follows on foot. But two men who saw this said, "What a foolish man is he. Surely he would do better to let the poor lad ride while he walked alongside." So the man and his son change places.

But then they come across two more men, who say to the son, "See here, my dear friend, this old fellow must be a foolish man to let the boy ride. He ought to pick up his heels and run, and let the old man ride." So the man figures that the strong donkey could carry them both.

But they meet two more men on the road. One man says to the other, "See the two of them riding on that little donkey. Upon my faith I think they'll soon kill it if he rides on it together with the boy. They would do better for one to walk and the other ride a while."

At this, the father tells the son, "Listen to me. We'll leave off riding and no longer be a mockery in people's eyes. For I can well see - and it makes sense - that we will make the donkey sick. So I can't think of a better idea than that we tie

the poor donkey's legs together and you and I will carry him on a pole. That way no one will be able to say anything about us riding and the donkey will be rested and won't arrive home all worn out. That way we'll have further use of him."

And so they carry the donkey together. They meet more people on the road who laugh at the ridiculous sight. The father can only respond, "What is one to do so that people don't always mock and scorn? Therefore I will turn only to God and care no more about the mockery of people. I will do only what seems right to me."[99]

Even though this story does resonate with the wisdom of Chelm, the serious moral Wallich suggests is that one should not be so intent on pleasing the world. He writes,

> "This fable I tell you in all sincerity for one who cannot please the world; and whatever he does appears wrong, and it does not please other people. For that is the custom in the world. One says it should be done in such a manner, but another also has his opinion about it. You cannot defend yourself against malicious babblers. Therefore, one should pay no attention to evil talk, for nowadays there is more than ever. Therefore one should let such talk go in one ear and out the other."[100]

True, the man is a fool, and we are supposed to laugh at his absurdity. But Wallich illustrates this situation as a prototype of Jewish life of the times. Jews often appeared as fools in front of others. They required direction to withstand banter of

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[99] Ibid., 102.

the non-Jews. While this fable makes us laugh, it also invokes sympathy.

On a different note, this fables gives a break to our donkey-figure, who has taken the brunt of so much brutality. Finally, he garners just a small piece of comfort and respect as the humans work to make his life easier.

So, the fables of Sefer Meshalim both echo the values of Mishlei Shu-alim and add new perspectives of timely situations. Still, the same animals emit the same values with the same antics. It shows that animal motifs are not frozen to one time or society. In rabbinic, early, and late medieval times, Jewish writers saw their own societies through the animal kingdom. Having studied some of the European models, we now make a transition to fables of the Kurdistani Jews. We shall see if some of the motifs reflect those we have already scene.

Kurdistan Jews are from the region of Southwest Asia. Mt. Ararat, to where the Bible ascribes the resting Noah's Ark, are called a part of the mountains of Kurdistan. Today, the Kurds live without a national home in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Russia. Most Kurdish Jews, however, are in Israel. Kurdistani Jews most likely date back to the exile by Assyrian kings.[101] These Jews maintained their religion primarily through oral tradition. So too, did they share in a rich oral folk-literature, most of which

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Yona Sabar, (translator and editor), *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistani Jews: An Anthology*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press., 1982), xvi.

existed in the Neo-Aramaic dialect.[102] The tales of this genre do not belong to one book, like Mishlei Shu-alim or Kalilah va Dimna, and there is no particular time-period ascribed to them. We learn them as interpreters wrote them while listening to the story-tellers.

In 1977, Professor of Folk-Literature Dov Noy of the Hebrew University held a conference under the Association for Jewish Studies. Out of the conference came a book titled, Studies in Jewish Folklore. In one of the collected papers, Donna Shai shares about the culture of the Kurdish folk tradition, A Kurdish-Jewish Animal Tale in its Sociocultural Context:

> "The Kurdish Jews were among the best narrators of folktales in Kurdistan and were sought after by Jews and Moslems alike . . .. They were able to narrate in several of the local languages . . .. Tales were told in the evenings, with guests gathered around a fire."[103]

Shai than adds:

> "Animal imagery is very common in all genres of Kurdish Jewish folklore. . . .. [There is a] concept of the fable as a message, [with] the emphasis on power imagery [that] may be a reflection of what Kurdish Jews have learned about the social world to which they have been exposed. The world view . . . is that of the animal kingdom, in which the larger animals are ever preying on the smaller ones. In such a world, it is only through clever maneuvering and faith that the small can survive.."[104]

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[102] Ibid., xxxii-xxxiv.
[103] Frank Talmage, (editor), *Studies in Jewish Folklore*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Association for Jewish Studies, 1977), 300.
[104] Ibid., 303-304.

This in mind, we shall look at two Kurdish animal fables. Again we note characteristics that link these fables to previous ones we have read, in terms of animal traits and folk motifs.

The first of the two is entitled, The Fox as Tailor and Weaver. The following is a summary of a translation of Dov Noy's transcription:

A wolf approaches a fox, asking what his occupation is. The fox tells the wolf he is a tailor, even though he is not. The wolf then asks the fox to sew him a fine suit. The fox asks for twenty-five lambs in return. He assures the wolf that the garment will be ready in one month.

The fox takes the twenty-five lambs and enjoys a great feast with his family. One month later, he meets the wolf, but has no suit for him. The fox, scared of the consequences, tells the wolf, "Oh yes, I have sewn it, and the trousers are ready, but there was not enough wool for the coat." The wolf gave the fox another twenty-five lambs, and allowed him another month.

When the wolf returned at the end of the second month, the fox had produced no clothes. He devises a plan with his family. The fox would send each family member, from the youngest bud to his wife, into their lair to get the suite for the wolf. But though they would enter, they would not return. They would all hide from the wolf. When none of the family members would materialize, the fox himself would enter the lair. This

transpired, and the wolf thought that a great beast lived in the lair and had devoured the fox family.

So the wolf left, without his suit, and the fox and his family enjoyed a great feast once again.[105]

This fable reiterates the fox's role as a wily animal. Further, it illustrates the premise that the small and meek can outwit greater beings. Here, the wolf is not preying on the fox. But it does pose a threat as it is a larger animal. The fox must employ a scheme to deceive the wolf. In the society in which the Kurdish Jews lived, they had to rely on life-experience and wit to survive the cruelty they so often faced. Fables like this could provide both humor and inspiration to their otherwise rural lives.

The other Kurdish animal fable we shall survey returns us to the King Solomon stories we saw in Chapter One. Solomon, as we remember, understood the languages of the animals. We saw three examples of one motif, in which Solomon overheard conversations between two animals scheming against the king. Here, we shall explore a version which is most similar to the one transcribed from Louis Jacob's The Legend of the Jews in Chapter One. This version, entitled, The Donkey who Gave Advice, the Ox who Became Sick, and the Rooster who was Clever, depicts the following:

[105] Sabar, *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistani Jews: An Anthology*, 166-167.

"There was a man who, like King Solomon in his time, knew all the languages of the world. However, all he owned was just a pair of oxen, a donkey, a dog, and a rooster.

"One day the donkey asked the oxen, 'Tell me, what kind of work do you do?' They replied, 'We plow the land from morning till night. When we return home we receive some straw to eat, and the next day we go back to our work.' The donkey burst into laughter, 'ha-ha-ha, hee-hee-hee! . . . As for me, only once a month am I taken to town carrying no more than one bag of barley. That is all the work I have to do.

"The oxen then asked, 'What should we do in order not to work so hard?' and the donkey advised them thus: 'Let one of you taste none of the food put in front of him. In the morning your master will think that he is sick and will not take him to work.'"[106]

The master overheard the scheme and laughed. His wife questioned the cause of the laughter, but the man replied that if he told her what had heard, and that he could understand the language of the animals, he would die.[107]

We see that the situation is not merely "like" Solomon's. It is identical. The story continues with the same scenario as the version from Legend. The master could not bear keeping the secret from his wife, and therefore assumed he would tell her and thus die. His dog, always loyal, cried at the thought of losing his master. The ending, however, is distinct here. In the

[106] Ibid., 181-182.
[107] Ibid., 182.

former version, the rooster, who had many wives, told the master to not take advice from a common woman, and implored him to beat his wife with a stick. The master complies, and thus the story ends. But in this version, the rooster adds, "I have twenty wives - hens- and yet every day I give them a write of divorce (*get*) and marry new ones."[108] The master decides to punish his wife. As he approached her with hot iron bars, she begged forgiveness. She told him he could laugh whenever he wished and not have to worry about her questioning. The fable concludes on a happy note. "Thus mourning was turned into celebration, and from that day on both of them lived a life of happiness, trust, and mutual understanding."[109]

Sure, the ending seems more positive than the one of the Legend version. But it is difficult for the modern reader to understand this as a life of understanding. The husband was clearly attacking his wife. She had to beg forgiveness. This hardly appears to be a life of mutual respect.

As for the animals in the fable, the donkey and the ox illustrate the same motifs they have in many of the other fables. The donkey schemes (this time on behalf of another animal) to instigate change. The ox toils the field endlessly. The dog is loyal.

Thus we have two stories from the Kurdish tradition. Now we shall conclude this chapter with one fable from Moroccan Jewry. First, we look at a little background on Moroccan Jewish

[108] Ibid., 182.

folklore. Dov Noy writes in the introduction to Moroccan Jewish Folktale:

> " . . . it was upon two ancient sources, Jewish and Arab, that the Jewish story-tellers drew for their repertoire in the Islamic countries. Their stories belonged to two distinct categories - those coming from the Talmud, and those of a more universal character, shared by all inhabitants of the region."[110]

We have seen the above through the scope of this thesis. Jewish fables most certainly take the characteristics of both the Jewish and the non-Jewish environment. Some of the fables flourish with Judaic folk-language or Biblical and rabbinic paradigms. The Moroccan animal fables tend to borrow from the more universal character.

We look now at a story quite distinct from any we have yet seen. It is called The Prince and the Deer. (There is a similar story-motif found in the fable Yonec of Marie de France, but I have not incorporated that into this thesis). This story begins with a king who was about to die. He left his three sons a fig tree, telling them that when the last leaves withered, they would know that the owner had died. The following is a synopsis:

The oldest son inherited his father's throne, including the fig tree. One day when he journeyed from the kingdom, he found a deer in the woods. He chased the deer but could not capture it. When he finally left the hunt to find food, he saw impaled heads

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[109] Ibid., 183.
[110] Dov Noy, *Moroccan Jewish Folktales*, (New York: Herzl Press, 1966), 14-15.

near the strongholds of the city. He inquired about them and found that there was a princess in the city who could not talk. The heads belonged to all the young men who tried to get her to speak. Had one succeeded the princess would have become his bride. But whoever failed was killed. No one had yet succeeded.

Of course the prince wanted a chance to marry the princess. But he failed. When witnesses saw that she had not spoken, they seized the prince and cut off his head.

Back at the kingdom, the younger brother saw that the leaves had withered again from the fig tree. This second son experienced the same situation his brother did with the deer and the princess. He, too, was killed.

The third son became ruler. He, too, found the deer. But unlike his brothers, he captured it. The brother demanded to know who the deer was. The deer answered that it was a spirit. The brother then asked the spirit how to win the hand of the princess. The deer told the brother to go to the king and ask permission to see the daughter. In the meantime, the spirit and its sister would turn themselves into doves and hide under the princess's bed. When witnesses would come to the chamber, the spirits would turn themselves into young men.

So the man went to the princess's room. There he told her a story about three artists who had asked judgment before him. Each artist had helped in creating a figure of a man; one had carved it into wood, one had dressed it, and one had breathed life into it. Which one should receive the figure?

The prince decided that the one who carved the figure deserved it. But when he said this, the princess jumped up in protest saying that the who breathed life into it deserved it. At that, the prince admitted that she was right, but added that because she had spoken, he had won her hand in marriage. The two married and lived happily ever after.[111]

This fable is quite distinct from the others we have studied. The focus is on the people, while the animal world is secondary. Most of our stories, but not all, have been the opposite.

The plot is common to fable literature. A princess will only marry the man who can make her talk or laugh. Two brothers fail while the third succeeds. Distinct is the metamorphosis that occurs with the deer. The deer in this story is a spirit, not actually an animal. The story-teller does not give any information regarding this phenomenon. (As I mentioned above, however, this story resembles Yonec from Marie de France in which an animal is also a spirit). The animal-spirit gives advice, but does not play much of a role after the prince goes to the princess's chamber. The spirit says it will be under the bed as a dove, and would later turn into two young men. We don't know why these changes occur as they do not seem pertinent to the plot.

Metamorphosis is a common folk motif. Ovid, for example, observed this theme in his Metamorphoses. Werewolf stories abound in medieval literature. Transmigration of souls was a

[111] Ibid., 85-87.

common theme for Kabbalists, though they usually associate this with death and reincarnation. The Kabbalists maintain that all spirits can rise from animal to human as an ultimate level of existence.[112] It is possible that the transformation in this story represents this ascent, a path towards a more perfect world. But all this does not tell us about this story as an animal fable. We gain no ethical perspective. It represents a distinct approach to animals in Jewish literature that this thesis has not explored.

Numerous genres of animal fables exist that we have not explored: Mashal Ha-Kadmoni, The Alphabet of Ben Sira, The Tale of Sendebar . . . these among others are also cornerstones of animal lore in Jewish tradition. But I have chosen a limited number of sources for this thesis. Further study of Jewish animal fables may involve those collections as well.

In our concluding chapter, we shall discuss some more contemporary animal fables, including modern midrashim and Agnon. Further, we shall solidify some of the themes we have seen and explore the connective tissue that is common among many of the fables.

[112] Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Thought and Tradition*, 240-242.

Chapter Five

Conclusion:
The Influence of Animal Fables in Judaism

As we have seen, animal fables have influenced Jewish literature since biblical times. Through the rabbinic and medieval periods, Jews invented, acquired, and rewrote many folk tales based on animals that talk or that symbolize a human system. In this concluding chapter, we shall discuss the intended audience of fable literature, distinguishing it from children's literature. In that process, we shall explore an example of animal lore in modern Hebrew literature. Also, we shall observe how Jewish thought classifies the animals in our study, and how that pertains to their demeanor in the fables. Finally, we shall conclude with thoughts on what makes this literature distinct as an ethical blueprint.

Regarding this literature, a primary distinction is the difference between a story for children and a fable. Both teach a lesson through illustration and at times animation. But the children's story generally uses simple language while the fable uses higher literary style or more mature values. We have seen this in Mishlei Shu-alim with the language and in Kalilah va Dimna with the values. Dov Noy explains the following:

> "Folktales are not primarily intended for the entertainment of children. In the past, and to a considerable extent

still in the present, they have served as the literature of adults. And . . . they are in fact told by adults. Had [folk-tales] been tape-recorded directly in the mother tongue of the tellers and just as they were told, they would appear as a highly crystallized folk literature in need only of stylistic and linguistic polish. The original language of the tellers is deeply rooted in a century-old tradition of story-telling, in which many metaphors and figures of speech are fixed. This style, of course, reflects a highly developed and unbroken tradition."[113]

The dense poetry and literary style of Mishlei Shu-alim intrigues the adult, not so much the child. The lessons of Kalilah va Dimna are specifically for leaders. Even in their oral nature, as Professor Noy shows, the style targets adults.

Nevertheless, the morals do espouse all ages. Children were among the ancient fabular audience. However, the fables we have studied were not taught to children as written texts. For example, all children learn about Aesop's Fables, but rarely do they read from the text. In fact, according to Joseph Jacobs, who translated one edition of Aesop's Fables, "The Aesopic fable was largely used for political purposes when free speech was dangerous."[114] Neither the story nor the language in written form is for children. Rather, children would learn from these fables orally, when the teller could manipulate the message to make it appropriate for them.

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[113] Dov Noy, in his introduction to *Moroccan Jewish Folktales*, 16-17.

[114] Mary Campbell, Mary, "The Three Teachings of the Bird", in *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore*, edited by Raphael Patai, Francis Less Utley, and Dov Noy, (Haskel House Publishers Ltd.: New York, 1973), 97.

The fables from Sefer Meshalim are also for adults, but they do not necessitate as literate an audience. As we saw, the language of those fables is much more common. The adventures and the morals attract the learned and uneducated alike.

Among the popular animals of modern fables is the goat.[115] Jewish folk literature has always been fond of the goat (*Had Gadya*, for example). Dov Noy identifies goats in Midrash as animals that " ... offer their wool to the Tabernacle" and that "suckle Israel children in Egypt."[116] And in Modern times, Chagall depicted goats as common shetl animals in his paintings.[117] I. B. Singer and S. Y. Agnon both wrote fables about the goat. Agnon's Fable of the Goat depicts a delightful story involving a goat that mystically leads a young boy to Israel. But as his goat does not speak at all, we shall not explore this fable in detail. This thesis primarily discusses fables in which animals act as humans either in thought or in action. Agnon's goat neither gives advice nor takes on a human charactaristic, nor is a symbol of a human condition. We shall explore Singer's, Zlateh the Goat as the goat is a prime character that does, in its own language, speak so others can understand it. Indeed, Zlateh the Goat is a both a children's story and a fable. Here I shall summarize the narrative:

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[115] Stephen Charles Siporin, "Story Versus Movie: Comments on I. B. Singer's "Zlateh the Goat," in *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore*, 308.

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

The story begins just before Chanukkah. Twelve-year-old Aaron's family reluctantly had to sell Zlateh, their goat to the butcher. She was old and gave no milk. As Aaron walked with Zlateh to the city, a blizzard of hail and snow erupted. As the storm grew, Aaron knew he needed to find shelter. He dug a hole into a hay stack, and crawled in with Zlateh. The storm raged for many days. Zlateh nourished herself with hay, which enabled her to produce sweet milk for Aaron, whose food supply had diminished. Throughout their time together, Aaron would talk with Zlateh, and the goat would always respond "Maaaa." But Aaron could always understand exactly what Zlateh was saying in her heart. For this sound expressed all her feelings. Both were twelve-years-old, and they love one-another like sister and brother. When the storm finally ended, Aaron returned home with Zlateh. The family rejoiced together over potato pancakes, of which Zlateh partook. No one thought again of selling her.[118]

Singer drew on Jewish lore to create his goat. Stephen Siporin also draws a comparison between this story and a Polish Jewish folk tale, The Two She-Goats from Shebreshin. Here, the goats give milk that cures villagers from a fatal illness. Further, the goats lead a *Hasid* to Israel through an underground passage. (This, of course, is also a motif of Agnon's goat fable). Siporin relates,

> "The goat has an honored place in Eastern European Jewish folklore. These positive associations provide the basis for

[118] Adapted from I. B. Singer's Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories. New York: Harper Trophy, 1966.

> Singer's treatment of Zlateh and also reverberate in the mind of the reader who is even slightly attuned to Jewish folklore."[119]

Siporin also comments on the parallels between Zlateh the Goat and the Akedah. Just as Abraham took Isaac to be slaughtered, so too did Aaron take Zlateh to be slaughtered. Further, just before Abraham lifted his hand to kill his son, God sent an angel to stop him. Similarly, as Aaron and Zlateh walk to the butcher, a blizzard arises out of nowhere, preventing the sale. This comparison of the two narratives emphasizes the sanctity of both man and animal. Siporin writes:

> "Aaron and Zlateh are *identified* with each other. It is remarked that they are the same age (twelve years old) and therefore have had the same experience of the world. Identity rather than equivalency emphasizes that Zlateh is valuable because she is *like* a human, not because she can be substituted for a human. The story stresses her human-like quality. 'Zlateh's bleating began to sound like crying.'"[120]

Singer, a vegetarian, wrote this story in part to protest slaughtering of animals. For him it was as barbaric as human sacrifice. Siporin concluded that Singer's basis was that "humans can be nourished without slaughter and that love and gentleness redeem the world."[121]

So, Zlateh, even though she never utters a word, symbolizes humanity as a figure of sacrifice. We saw earlier that that animal kingdom is a mirror of our own society. Zlateh is the

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[119] Siporin, *Story Versus Movie. . ,*308.
[120] Ibid., 310-311.

ultimate example of this, reflecting a primary biblical story. But Singer magnifies the reflection. We never saw the nature of the Abraham-Isaac relationship. Singer illustrates the love between Zlateh and Aaron. We can often learn through animal fables what biblical models do not teach. Zlateh speaks into the heart of Aaron and into the minds of the readers. She represents love and companionship. She embodies safety and nurturing. She returns us to the quotation from Proverbs 5:19, " A loving doe, a graceful mountain goat. Let her breasts satisfy you at all times." Though this refers to a wild mountain goat, the proverb fits our domestic goat as well. (Rabbinic commentary correlates the nourishment of goat's milk to nourishment of Torah. Indeed, Zlateh becomes the saving grace of Aaron).

Having surveyed Jewish animal fables from biblical to modern times, we now look at some over-riding characteristics of specific animals we have studied from Mishlei Shu-alim and Kalilah va Dimna.

The most endearing, I believe, is the donkey. It has endured and suffered in almost every tale we have read. In Mishlei Shu-alim, the donkey could not overreach its social role. In Sefer Meshalim, there is a little more compassion for the donkey-figure. If we look to Jewish perspectives of the donkey, two images surface. First, the donkey is the beast of burden. But second, the donkey carries the spiritual charge of Torah. According to Genesis Rabbah 99:40, "Issachar is a large-boned ass

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[121] Ibid., 312.

…. As the ass carries burdens, so Issachar carries the yoke of Torah." Shlomo Toperoff adds, "Both the ass and the tribe of Issachar were strong, hard working, and resolute and were destined to serve mankind in different spheres of life."[122] The pinnacle of the donkey's spiritual career, according to biblical theology, is that it will carry the Messiah at the dawning of the World-to-Come.

So, for all the degradation the donkey receives, it has garnered a place of high stature as well. In our fables, this tension occurs over and over. The donkey may be a foolish animal. Yet it has always been a symbol of peace, who loyally carries the needs, both physical and spiritual, of humanity.[123] While the donkey was considered to be a valuable animal in the Middle East, European allusions to the donkey are not so endearing. The guidebook, Fauna and Flora of the Bible, illustrates this distinction:

> "The European ass of today cannot be compared with that of the Orient. The domestic asses of Europe are usually small, stubborn and malicious animals, often considered stupid. In the East the ass develops into a beautiful, stately and lively animal."[124]

So, the Bible portrays the donkey, specifically Balaam's, as an intelligent creature while European depicts it as ignorant. The Jewish fables of medieval times combine the two portraits. The

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[122] Shlomo Pesach Toperoff, *The Animal Kingdom in Jewish Thought*, (New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995), 12.
[123] Ibid., 13.
[124] *Flora and Fauna of the Bible*, (London, New York, Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1972), 5.

donkey is common yet aspires to raise its stature. It is stubborn, yet loyal to its master.

The ox belongs in a similar category to the donkey because it, too, is a beast of burden. In fact, some fables depict the two conferring with one another plotting against their master for all their burdens.[125] In Exodus 23:4 we learn, "If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again." Both animals were of great value to the owner.

The lion in practically all world fables is king. The Bible compares Judah, David, Israel, and the Temple to a lion. Talmud calls the lion the King of Beasts. Folk literature carries the motif as well. When the donkey clothed itself with the lion's skin, it strutted about like a king. Dimna wanted to be close to the lion king. Physically, the lion appears stately, above the other animals. In volume, it roars louder than the other creatures. It is logical that many cultures chose the lion to represent the king in lore.

The fox has been another main character in our fables. Jewish and world folk tradition alike depict the fox as a wily animal. Shlomo Toperoff writes that the fox and the jackal "resemble each other and are therefore mistaken for one

[125] Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 116.

another."[126] Toperoff adds, "The Soncino Bible informs us that the Hebrew word *shual* is derrived from the Persian *shagal*, the origin of the English jackal."[127] Thus, the characteristics of the fox also incorporate the jackals Kalilah and Dimna. We remember that Dimna, like the foxes in Mishlei Shu-alim, used cunning to trick others. One difference, however, is that while jackals often are in groups (Kalilah and Dimna), foxes are most often alone.[128]

Throughout Midrash, the fox quotes Scripture to lure other creatures. Medieval and Modern literature treats them as clever as well. The many examples of fox fables attest to this. Even in animation, stories involving the fox depict it as wily. One such example is the fox of the African-American lore of Uncle Remus, popularized through Walt Disney's Song of the South. True, the fox uses trickery with consistent success.

The hare is a main character in Kalilah va Dimna. In the stories we studied, the hare was able to escape danger when other animals were trying the catch it (for example with the lion and with the elephants). Jewish tradition recognizes that this characteristic is inherent in the hare. In fact, Rav notes that the Hebrew word *ornevet* most likely derives from the word *anav*, meaning "to spring." This signifies that the hare is able to spring free of those who try to catch it.[129] Thus, Kalilah va

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[126] Toperoff, *The Animal Kingdom in Jewish Thought*, 79.
[127] Ibid.
[128] *Flora and Fauna of the Bible*, 31.

[129] Toperoff, *The Animal Kingdom in Jewish Thought*, 103.

Dimna appropriately portrays the hare as an escape artist. Its wisdom is for the personal and communal safety.

In both Mishlei Shu-alim and Kalilah va Dimna we have seen fables with the mouse. In the former, the mouse learned it was valuable to marry another mouse only after trying to find a wife in the sun, wind, cloud, etc.. After a circular quest, the mouse finally settled with a wife who had grown up in the same neighborhood! They lived happily ever after. In Kalilah va Dimna, the mouse in one story gnawed through a net to free the doves, an action which secured a lasting friendship. In the other story, he befriended his enemy, the cat, in order to survive. Rabbinic literature echoes the qualities of the mouse as represented in both genres. In Tanchuma, Noah 18b, we learn that the mouse is not a promiscuous animal, but is one who preserves his family and seeks out its own kind. Therefore even the mouse has earned a reward in the world to come[130] The mouse of Mishlei Shu-alim taught that it is important to seek out our own kind. The mice of Kalilah va Dimna emphasize the importance of preservation and loyalty of friendships.

Finally, we shall briefly discuss insects, specifically the fly, the flea, and the spider. In one story from Mishlei Shu-alim, the fly sat atop the ox, and it shared in the glory of having tilled the soil with the ox. In the second story, the flea rode upon a camel, who subsequently complained at the heavy

[130] Ibid., 170.

load the flea added to his weight. Rabbinic literature treats the fly much as it does the spider (as we shall see below). Most Midrashic references question the significance of the fly and the flea. Most notably in Jewish thought, and in world thought for that matter, is that the fly is an unwanted pest! Berachot 61a compares a fly to the *Yetzer Ha-ra* because both return even after being shooed away.[131] But there is little in Jewish literature about the demeanor of the fly. The stories of Mishlei Shu-alim derive more directly from non-Jewish tradition.

The third story depicted a spider in the royal palace who threatened to poison all the potable water and other liquids of the palace in retaliation when the servant asked it to leave. The King did not believe that he should live in the same dwelling as an insignificant spider. This alludes to the story of King David who at one time questioned why God had created a creature so insignificant as a spider. A voice came down from Heaven telling the King, "David! You mock the Lord's creatures now, but a time will come when you see why [the spider] was created."[132] Later, when David was running from Saul, he hid in a cave across whose entrance a spider rapidly spun a web. When soldiers came to the cave, they reasoned that no one could be in the cave because the web there would have been torn. Thus the spider saved David's life.[133] This motif is quite common to fables of other cultures as well. Nevertheless, according to Yalkut

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[131] Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 112.

[132] Mark Podwal, *A Jewish Bestiary*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1984), 28.

[133] Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 134.

Shimoni 140c, the spider is the creature most detested by humanity. The fly is merely a pest.

We have explored many themes and motifs of animal wisdom and behavior across the ages. Additionally, we have probed the similarities that animal species share according to Jewish thought. In our stories, animals have either spoken or acted to provide ethical standards for how we can live a upright life. In some fables, the animals have given advice. In others, the animals have reacted to situations and taught us indirectly both by their means and by their actions. In either case, they add to our understanding of society, morality, and culture.

Our initial question remains. What do the animal fables add that the more traditional ethical rabbinic literature does not give us? We remember that there are animal fables in bible and midrash, but very little. Our fables provide memorable illustrations of human experiences in human guise. We can all relate to animal behavior. It is removed yet very close, sometimes opaque and sometimes transparent.

We have learned that in the Talmud, the Rabbis had many animal fables, most of which disappeared over time. Halachic literature eclipsed Aggadic, our stories with it. But the examples that do exist paved the road for a treasure of Jewish medieval tales. Jewish writers may have felt a need to reach beyond Halachic literature. The Middle Ages invited Jewish writers were able to focus on ethical culture rather than on the *pilpul* in which many rabbis engaged.

The fables that ensued, therefore, provided a creative outlet for the writers and a moral guide for the audience. In Europe, Jews were the ones who translated the fables of other cultures and brought them to the societies in which they lived.[134] This is how, for example, Kalilah va Dimna became a part of Jewish literature.

We saw how the literature shifted between the early and late Medieval periods. Mishlei Shu-alim emphasized Biblical citations to connect the fables to Judaism. Sefer Meshalim, however, incorporated Jewish culture. Both corpi involve the same stories, but target different situations, the latter being more accessible to the uneducated.

Most important, the fables provide endearing stories with memorable lessons. They illustrate Jewish wisdom that guides us by our imagination, not just theory. Our task is to uncover Jewish animal fables, because they are hidden behind conventional Jewish literature. They can be a tool for learning and teaching, for allegories in sermons, and for lessons in religious schools. They can teach us about the animal world, and more significantly, about our own.

There is little in modern Hebrew Literature that draws from the classic models of animal fables. Fable writers like Singer and Agnon are few and far between. Thus we need to bring Mishlei Shu-alim and Kalilah va Dimna back into the halls of Jewish learning. Without them as a guide, the art of animal stories may

[134] Nathan Ausebel, (editor), *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), xxiii.

dissipate. This has already occurred with general Hebrew literature. There is a lack of Jewish resonance.

We see in our society so much that classic animal fables influence. Disney stories, Warner Brothers . . .; animation has entertained children using the same motifs as those from our study. But again, continuing scholarship in this area is necessary to provide rich entertainment with an educational, or at least a substantive, background.

Animals that talk, animals that act and reflect our thoughts and deeds, animals that portray good or poor leadership skills, . . . these give us the ethical standards in a comprehensible and enjoyable manner that Biblical and Rabbinic literature often cannot. Like the traditional literature, Jewish animal fables uplift the soul and provide insights. What distinguishes them, however, is the fervent impact that the stories have on us. We become involved with the foxes, the lions, and the doves. We embrace the donkeys and the mice. The fables are all episodes of ongoing dramas that tap our emotions as did radio broadcasts of the 1940's and current television soap operas. The characters are familiar and we enjoy and learn from their repetitive actions. That emotional pull attracted audiences in earlier times. In our own age, we can continue to reap benefits from their endearing and enjoyable morals.

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