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Aesop's Fables and the Parables of the Sages

31-39 minutes

In Hebrew the term מָשָׁל (*māshāl*) can refer to a proverb (a commonly used wisdom saying), or to a fable that concludes with a moral (a wisdom narrative that teaches a lesson). And from the very outset of this inquiry I ought to point out that the distinction between these two classifications of *mashal* is by no means absolute. Rather, the distinction between these two uses of the Hebrew term *mashal* is based on a rather late development in the cultural history of humankind in general and in the history of Semitic peoples in particular.

Originally there was no distinction at all between a proverb or adage on the one hand and a fable or parable on the other, since, for the most part, proverbial sayings sketched the outlines of a scenario that alluded to a fuller story or legendary example. In every Semitic language the term מָשָׁל (*māshāl*) and its cognates—e.g., מַתְלָא (*matlā'*) in Aramaic and مثل (*mathal*) in Arabic—has the double meaning of proverb/adage and fable/parable. But the primary meaning of the term is this: an anecdotal wisdom saying told to illustrate and describe a particular truth, a certain lifestyle, or a familiar ethical principle. Picturesque and vivid proverbs that teach their lessons by

encapsulating a distinct narrative with a specific plot are found in great abundance in the literature of the Sumerians. The Sumerians, in turn, passed on their cultural achievements to the Semitic Akkadians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians.

In recent years archaeologists have revealed a treasure trove of animal proverbs that were in common use among the Sumerians four thousand or more years ago. Usually these occur in the form of pithy sayings or proverbs that make clear allusions to scenes and scenarios in the animal world, similar to those described in Aesop's fables. Some of these proverbs are preserved in the form of individual sayings that were incorporated into books with varied content. Others are found is special collections or anthologies of such proverbs. The Sumerian examples suggest that the two classifications of *mashal* we mentioned above were not initially two different literary forms, but constituted a single genre without differentiation. In the Sumerian proverbs collected, translated into English, analyzed, and annotated by Edmund I. Gordon, we find proverbs such as this:

The smith's dog could not overturn the anvil; it overturned the water-pot [instead]. (*Sumerian Proverbs* 2.112 [ed. Gordon, 259])[1]

This proverb, a form of which also appears in the *Satyricon* of Petronius (first century C.E.), reminds me of a proverb in Midrash Tanhuma, which states:

The one who cannot strike the donkey strikes the saddle." (Midrash Tanhuma, *Pekudey* 4)

Or take another Sumerian proverb:

Upon escaping from the wild-ox, the wild-cow confronted me! (*Sumerian Proverbs* 2:94 [ed. Gordon, 244])

It is clear that such proverbs are common folk sayings that envision a specific scenario, fact, or anecdotal incident. This last-mentioned proverb is reminiscent of the words of the prophet Amos:

As when a man escaping a lion and a bear meets him, and coming home he rests his hand on the wall and a snake bites him. (Amos 5:19)[2]

Within rabbinic sources there likewise remain examples and fragments of proverbs in the form of anecdotal incidents, such as this concise proverb cited in the Babylonian Talmud:

Rabbi Papa said, "As the saying among the people goes, 'The rodent and the cat had a feast on the fat of the luckless.'" (b. Sanh. 105a)

Here we have a proverb that was well known and oft quoted ("As the saying among the people goes"); it is an adage and story rolled into one: The mouse (or the rat) and the cat made peace with one another and feasted on the fat of their common enemy, who had run out of luck. The talmudic proverb, therefore, is akin to the Aesop's fable of the two enemies who made peace because a common foe rose up against them. In so doing, they succeeded in defeating their adversary and they, too, prepare a great feast from the fat of their enemy's misfortune. We ought to emphasize that the proverb Rabbi Papa claimed was a common folk saying occurs as a fully developed story in the famous Indian epic *Mahabharata*, so the roots of the talmudic proverb are quite

ancient. It greatly influenced folk literature in Europe by means of a work known as *Kalila and Dimna* (the *Panchatantra*).[3] Thus, the Talmudic proverb that Rabbi Papa quoted, as well as the versions in the *Mahabharata* and *Kalila and Dimna* belong to the international cultural heritage of folklore.[4] In the fully developed versions of the *mashal*, the friendship and brotherhood between the cat and the mouse lasts only as long as their shared danger persists. The moment the danger is past, their alliance dissolves.

The *mashal* (in the form of a proverb) quoted by Rabbi Papa appears in close proximity to another *mashal* (this time in the form of a parable), which the gemarra (i.e., the talmudic discussion) cites in connection with the biblical verse that states: *And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian went*… (Num. 22:7). According to the gemarra, Midian and Moab never enjoyed cordial relations, so to explain their surprising alliance the rabbinic sages told a parable about two dogs in a kennel who were always at odds with one another. When a wolf came against one of the dogs, however, the other dog said to himself, "If I do not help him today, the wolf will kill him and then come against me and kill me tomorrow!" So the two

dogs fought side-by-side and killed the wolf (b. Sanh. 105a).[5]

In a large collection of Armenian fables a parallel to this talmudic-midrashic parable occurs in the form of a proverb as follows:

Dogs quarrel among themselves, but against the wolf they are united.[6]

In Aesop's fables we have another fable, further developed, about a lion and a wild boar who come to drink water at a spring on a hot day. They quarrel over which of them should drink first, and soon the verbal dispute escalates into a bloody battle. But all of a sudden they notice vultures circling overhead, watching to see which of them will fall so that they can devour its carcass. Immediately the lion and the boar put an end to their quarrel, saying, "It is better that we should be friends than that we should fall prey to vultures and ravens."[7] This fable, too, belongs to our international folklore heritage.[8]

In Babrius' collection of *Aesopic Fables in Iambic Verse* (end of the first century B.C.E.)[9] we find a fable (No. 117) that seeks to justify actions of the gods that are incomprehensible to humans and lesser mortals. According to the fable, a ship was smashed at sea and with it all its passengers sank to the depths. A certain man who saw what happened protested that the acts of the gods are unjust, for otherwise they would not have caused a whole ship full of passengers to drown on account of a single wicked person who happened to be on board. "Is it right," he asked, "that for the sake of punishing one wicked person so many innocent human beings should be sent to destruction?" While he was still speaking in this manner, a swarm of ants approached and covered the area around him. One ant bit the man and, enraged,

he trampled the entire ant swarm. Then Hermes, the messenger of the gods, appeared and proclaimed to the man who had denounced the actions of the gods that he should consider his own behavior. "Was it right for you to trample the entire swarm of ants on account of the one ant that bit him? So let mortals judge the gods justly when they pour out their wrath on so many innocent persons on account of one wicked man's transgressions!" So much for the Aesopic fable.

In Jewish aggadah, by contrast, the inclination was to explain the works of God in a far more rational and intellectually acceptable manner. Take, for example, the rabbinic account of two merchants who agreed to travel to a certain city across the sea in order to buy luxurious merchandise there (b. Nid. 31a).[10] According to the rabbinic tale, on the day the merchants were setting out on their journey one of them fell from a ladder and broke his leg.[11] As a result, he was unable to go with his fellow on the journey. While his fellow sailed off without him, the injured merchant stayed at home and lamented his misfortune, going so far as to reproach God (much like the man in the Aesop's fable described above) for the injustice he had suffered. But after a few days news arrived that the very ship on which the other merchant sailed had sunk into the sea and all its passengers had perished. When he heard this news, the injured merchant gave thanks and praise to the Holy One, blessed be he, because he now saw that it had been for his own good that he had fallen and broken his leg. So he repented of the reproaches he had made against God. According to the Jewish legend the argument of the man who repented is quite logical, whereas in the Greek fable the example

of the ants fails to answer why the gods punish the righteous on account of the misdeeds of the wicked.[12]

The rabbinic legend (b. Nid. 31a) and the Aesopic fable (*Babrius*, No. 117) are important for understanding a passage in the Quran (*Al-Kahf*; Sura 18) about the strange deeds of the mysterious unnamed servant (the "servant of the Lord," identified as al-Khidr and Elijah the prophet according to some Islamic traditions). Like Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in Jewish aggadah, so Moses journeys with the mysterious servant and observes his strange behavior. According to the story, in the course of their journey they embarked on a boat and the servant punctured a hole in its side. Moses asks him, "Have you punctured the boat in order to drown the people on board?" In the end the mysterious servant gives a reasonable explanation for his odd behavior. A tyrannical king was in the habit of seizing every seaworthy vessel. The mysterious servant was attempting to sabotage the boat so that it would not fall into the hands of the tyrant, for the boat belonged to poor seafaring folk.

It is difficult to determine whether Muhammed had heard something about a boat that sank and about some kind of religious backlash in connection with an incident such as this. Until now scholars have not been able to identify the source from which Muhammed drew the story about the boat that the mysterious prophet intentionally punctured. But the words of the sages in b. Nid. 31a and the Aesop's fable in Babrius' collection (No. 117) deserve greater attention in connection with this motif in the story from the Quran.[13]

The *meshalim* (proverbs and parables) of the sages are of

particular interest because they shed light on various issues related to the essence and character of the narrative fables and on their history and development within the framework of the prevailing tradition within the cultural atmosphere of the Ancient Near East and India. They are also a rich possession within the Jewish aggadic (folklore) tradition. The *meshalim* of the sages also shed light on the development of Aesop's fables and on variant versions of the fables within the complex Aesopic tradition. In talmudic and midrashic literature there are many parallels to ancient Greek fables that are preserved as self-contained units in classical sources (e.g., Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristotle, Plato, etc.), and also in special compillations such as Phaedrus' poetic collection of Aesopic fables in Latin from the first century B.C.E., or in Babrius' collection in Greek from a generation later than Phaedrus. These two are the most ancient extant collections of Aesop's fables, aside from the prose anthology called the *Augustana* from the first century B.C.E. The collection of Demitrius of Phalerum from the fourth century B.C.E. has been lost, but doubtless many of the fables in Demitrius' collection are represented in the poetic works of Phaedrus and Babrius.

Nevertheless, we must emphasize that the rabbinic sages did not slavishly imitate or mechanically reproduce the fables found in the ancient Indian, Greek, or Roman collections. On the contrary, they made an effort to pour new content into these ancient vessels—a deeper spiritual and religious content. For instance, sometimes the sages gave an ordinary Aesop's fable a potent new eschatological interpretation. Thus, an international fable

tells how the stomach and the feet debated with one another over which was the strongest.[14] In a rabbinic parable a similar dispute is described between the stomach and the mouth, but this dispute takes place *in the future*, and the disagreement pertains to each organ's *moral responsibility* for a person's transgressions on the day of judgment (Gen. Rab. 100:7).[15]

The rabbinic sages also knew how to expertly apply Aesop's fables in an original and artistic manner. Rabbi Akiva's parable about the fox and the fish (b. Ber. 61b) is an excellent example.[16] In Rabbi Akiva's parable the fox attempts to lure the fish out of the water by means of flattery. He says to them, "Wouldn't you like to come up on the dry land, so that we can live together in peace and harmony as our ancestors did?" To which the fish reply, "How is it that you are known as the most clever of animals? Surely you are the most stupid! If we are in danger in the water, how much greater will our danger be on dry land?" As I noted in my monograph on rabbinic fox parables,[17] Rabbi Akiva's parable is told with great skill and sensitivity, making it is a pearl of great worth within the world's fable literature. Rabbi Akiva's parable has roots in the earliest

proverb-fable tradition within which the fox appears not as the most clever of animals, but as a complete fool.

Rabbi Akiva also hit the mark with the interpretation he gave to this famous parable (that Jews who forsake Torah are like fish out of water), and in this regard he reminds me of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananyah who expertly "exploited" a well-known fable in order to pacify the agitated congregation (Gen. Rab. 64:10). In fact, *meshalim* have long been used for practical purposes. Herodotus (*History* 1:141) reported that Cyrus, the king of Persia, gave a winning answer to the Greek emissaries by means of a fable that, to a certain extent, is reminiscent of Rabbi Akiva's parable of the fox and the fish. Unfortunately, this is not the place to discuss this issue. Instead, we must go on to illustrate the artistic dimension of the rabbinic *meshalim* by citing another parable for which other scholars have not been able to find parallels in international fable literature. In my opinion, however, there are many parallels, especially in the Aesopic tradition. I refer to a parable that occurs in the lingua franca, Aramaic, told by Rabbi Pinḥas about a lion who prepared a feast for the domestic beasts and the wild animals. It was held under a tent covering made from the hides of lions and wolves and other ferocious animals. During the feast the animals ask, "Who will compose a song for us?" And when everyone's eyes turned to the fox he said, "I will agree if you will sing the words of the song I teach you along with me." The animals agree to the fox's stipulation, so the fox sings, or chants, the following couplet: "He who has shown us (the things) above"—referring to the animal hides hanging above them—"will show us (the same things)

below" (Esth. Rab. 7:3). By highlighting the fox's cleverness, the sages hit the mark, for with his lyrics the fox subtly alluded to the danger that their host, the lion, posed to all the other animals. The animals who were guests at the feast were liable to pay dearly for their supper by adding to the number of hides that hung, as though on display as a warning, in the tent above.

From among the many parallels I have found to this rabbinic parable, I will cite here only one Aesopic fable about the lion who plotted against a huge bull and decided to capture him with cunning.[18] The lion told the bull that he had slaughtered a lamb and would like to have the bull dine with him. But when the bull arrived at the lion's feast, though he saw many cauldrons and large skewers, the bull did not spot a lamb anywhere. The bull did not say a word, but turned tail and fled. Sometime later, the lion reproached the bull, asking why he had gone away without even a word. Then the bull (with great insight) said to the lion, "It was not without cause that I left so abruptly. For at your feast I saw utensils suited not for a lamb, but for a bull!"

A comparison of the rabbinic version of the story to the Aesopic fable shows how the sages made good use of their association of the fox (rather than the bull) with cleverness and wisdom, such that from the very beginning the fox perceived the peril that loomed over all the animals the lion had invited as guests to his feast.[19] This midrashic fable belongs to our international folklore heritage.[20]

Regarding Aesop's fables and the parables of the sages we find that they were an excellent device for holding the attention of an audience listening to a lecture. Concerning Demades, the

famous Athenian orator, statesman, and diplomat who lived in the fourth century B.C.E., it is reported that he delivered a discourse to the assembled citizens of Athens, but when he noticed that the citizens were not paying attention to his oration, he asked their permission to tell one of Aesop's fables. When they gave their consent, he said: "The goddess Demeter, a swallow, and an eel were going along their way together when the came upon a stream. The swallow flew over the stream in the air and the eel swam through the stream in the water." After Demades had said this he paused and when everyone asked him, "But what happened to the goddess Demeter?" "She became angry with those who ignored matters of state and attended to Aesop's fables!"[21] A similar story is told regarding the famous orator Demosthenes.[22]

It is of interest to note that the sages, too, would persuade their listeners and direct their attention to the words of the Torah by means of parables and amusing stories. And so we read in the Talmud that "Rabbah used to say something humorous to his scholars before he commenced [his discourse] in order to amuse them; after that he sat in awe and commenced the lecture" (b. Pes. 117a; trans., Soncino). In other words, Rabbah would begin in a lighthearted manner and the sages would attend to his words, and only after having softened them up with some humor, would he turn to serious halakhic matters. Likewise, it is told that Rabbi Akiva was once sitting and expounding the Torah and his audience dozed off, so he said, "Why did Esther deserve to rule one hundred and twenty-seven provinces? It is because Esther was the many times great granddaughter of the matriarch Sarah

who lived one hundred and twenty-seven years, that Esther deserved to rule over one hundred twenty-seven provinces" (Gen. Rab. 58:3). Similarly, it is told of Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi that as he was sitting and expounding the Torah the people dozed off, so in order to awaken them he said, "A certain woman in Egypt gave birth to six hundred thousand children in one birthing." A certain disciple by the name of Rabbi Yishmael ben Rabbi Yose was there. He asked Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi, "Who was this woman?" "It was Yocheved, who gave birth to Moses," Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi replied. "Moses was equivalent to the six hundred thousand of Israel." Stories describing similar methods for retaining their audience's attention are told about homilists in medieval Europe. And indeed, the same is true everywhere, and the stories we have mentioned above (both Greek and Hebrew) belong to the heritage of international folklore tradition.[23]

As we have already noted, the most ancient form of the *mashal* was that of an adage or maxim, and we find a classic example of this phenomenon in the Talmud's discussion of the biblical verse that states, *And they slew the kings of Midian among their slain… and they slew Balaam son of Beor with the sword* (Num. 31:8). The gemarra asks, "What was Balaam doing there?" According to Rabbi Yohanan, Balaam went to collect his pay for the twenty-four thousand Israelites who died by his counsel. Mar Zutra bar Toviyah said in the name of Rav, "This is what folk say: When the camel went to demand horns, which he had not, they cut off the ears, which he had (and that is why camels appear to have no ears)" (b. Sanh. 106a).[24] This proverb is related to the fables of Aesop, where a parallel occurs as a fully developed story as

follows: The camel saw the bull showing off his horns. He became jealous and wished that he, too, possessed such horns. So he went to Zeus and asked that he might cause horns to sprout from his head. But Zeus was angry with the camel for not being content with its large size and great strength and for desiring such unnecessary accoutrements. So not only did Zeus not grant the camel horns, he caused its ears to shrink. And the moral of the fable is: So it goes for many who envy the powerful. They do not realize that by doing so they may lose everything they have.[25] This moral is in keeping with the talmudic proverb as applied to the wicked Balaam.

We must point out that this Greek fable, which was already included in the collection of fables from the first century known as the *Augustana*, has roots that are firmly planted in the Ancient Near East. Long before Aesop, the Sumerians told a story of a fox that asked Enlil, the chief god of the Sumerian pantheon, to give him horns like those of the wild ox. Enlil was kind enough to grant the fox's request, but before long a heavy rain fell on the earth and because of the horns the fox was unable to enter his den or to find shelter from the storm. All night he remained out in the tempest as the winds raged furiously against him. And with the light of dawn…. Unfortunately, the story breaks off at this point, but we can surmise that the bitter experience in the storm caused the fox to ask Enlil to relieve him of the horns he had so recently desired.

This Sumerian fable reminds us of another ancient Greek fable that is found in the *Augustana*,[26] and also in the collections of Phaedrus (6:6) and Babrius (No. 31). This fable appears to be

among the most ancient of Aesop's fables, for according to Perry it was also included in the collection of Demetrius of Phalerum from the fourth century B.C.E. This fable tells that there was a great battle between the mice and the cats, and because the mice were always at a disadvantage they held a council to figure out what should be done. At the council they decided that they were always defeated because they lacked leaders. So they chose some from their number to be generals, and for these they affixed horns on their heads as a signal of their superior rank. But the mice were once again defeated, and in their retreat to their holes all but the generals escaped. The mouse generals could not do so because their horns prevented them. And so they were caught by their enemies and torn to pieces. The moral of the fable is: False pretenses and vain glories are the cause of many a calamity and disaster.

We should point out that in the medieval collection of Aespo's fables called *Romulus Roberti*,[27] it is told that a hare saw a deer boasting of its antlers, so the hare went to the god Jupiter and asked that he might also give him antlers for show and self-defense. Jupiter warned the hare that antlers are heavy and would not be comfortable, but the hare persisted in pestering him for antlers until Jupiter granted his request. The sad outcome was that on account of the antlers the hare was not able to escape from his pursuers, and finally he was caught and torn to pieces by the predators that hunted him.[28]

We read the following story in the Babylonian Talmud: When Rabbi Ammi and Rabbi Assi were sitting before Rabbi Yitzhak the Smith, one of them said to him, "Let the master teach us

halakhah." But the other said, "Let the master teach us aggadah." When he began to teach aggadah he was prevented by the one, and when he began to teach halakhah he was prevented by the other. Finally their master said to them, "I will tell you a parable. To what may my situation be compared? To a man who has two wives, one young and the other old. The young one plucked out all his white hairs and the old one plucked out all his black hairs, so between the two he ended up bald!" (b. Bab. Kam. 60b). Parallels to this beautiful parable are found in the earliest collections of Aesop's fables of the first century B.C.E., both in the poetic style of Phaedrus (2:2) and Babrius (No. 22) as well as in the prose style of the *Augustana*.[29] There is also an ancient source from the second century B.C.E. in which this fable occurred,[30] and it appears that it also occurred in a source from the end of the fourth century B.C.E. According to the first century B.C.E. Greek prose version of the fable, a certain man had two lovers, one young and the other old. The older was too proud to associate with the younger, so she would pluck her lover's black hairs, while the younger, who disliked the older, would pluck her lover's grey hairs. As a result, the man ended up bald, just as in the parable of Rabbi Yitzhak the smith, who was fully acquainted with this ancient Greco-Roman fable.[31]

It would be possible to supply many more examples to demonstrate the sages' knowledge of ancient Greek fables, but I shall conclude with just one last parable, this one relating to the biblical commandments pertaining to taking captives in war (Deut. 21:10ff.): The sages explained that Moses told the Israelites, "If you spare the captives they will rise up against you."

It may be compared to a shepherd who was tending his flock in the forest. He found a wolf pup and he cared for it along with his goats. His overseer came and saw the pup and said to him, "Kill it! Do not spare the pup, or else that it will endanger the flock." But the shepherd did not listen to him. When the wolf pup grew up it saw a lamb and killed it, a kid and ate it. The overseer said to him, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not spare the pup'?" Likewise, Moses said to Israel… (Yalkut Shim'oni, Deuteronomy §923). A parallel to this magnificent parable is found in a drama by the ancient Greek poet Aeschylus (d. 456 B.C.E.).[32] Aeschylus alluded to this fable to prove that Helen's coming to Troy would end in tragedy (*Agamemnon* 790ff.). In a prose version of the fable it is told that a shepherd found a newborn wolf pup and raised it with his dogs. When it was grown it chased the wolves like other dogs. Nevertheless, a wild wolf would sometimes manage to snatch a sheep from the fold. Sometimes when the dogs were unable to keep up with the wild wolf the tame wolf would continue in pursuit until he had overtaken it, and then they would share the meat between them. And if a wolf did not come from the outside to steal from the flock, he would stealthily kill a sheep on his own and eat his meat with the dogs. In the end the shepherd discovered what was happening and learned who was responsible. So he took the tame wolf and hung it from a tree. And the moral of the fable is: Nothing with an evil nature is able to cultivate positive virtues. There can be no doubt that the ancient Greek fable known to Aeschylus had deep cultural roots in the Ancient Near East, which in my opinion was the birthplace of the *mashal* in both his proverbial and narrative forms.

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Notes

[*] This article originally appeared as:
חיים שורצבום, "משלי איסופוס ומשלי חז"ל" *מחניים* קיב (תשכז): 112-117
(Haim Schwarzbaum, "The Fables of Aesop and the Parables of the Sages," *Maḥanayim* 112 [1967]: 112-117).

[1] Translation according to Edmund I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1959).

[2] See my comments on the reception of this Sumerian proverb in *Mahanayim* vol. 105, p. 122. See also Haim Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities in Some Aesopic Fables," *IV International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research in Athens (1.9-6.9 1964): Lectures and Reports* (Athens, 1965): 466-483, esp. 467ff.

[3] See, for instance, the medieval (12th cent. C.E.) Hebrew translation produced by Rabbi Joel (critical edition by Joseph Derenbourg, *Deux Versions Hébraïques du Livre de Kalîâ et Dimnâh* [Paris, 1881], 151). See also the Arabic version in the critical edition by L. Cheikho, *La version arabe de Kalilah et Dimnah* (Beirut, 1923), 205 ff. The French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine produced an excellent poetic version of this Indian

fable. See, *Fables de La Fontaine*, vol. 5 No. 22.

[4] See Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (6 vols.; rev. ed.; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1955-1958), J 426.

[5] This parable also appears in Sifre de-be Rav §153 (ed. Friedmann, 59; Vienna, 1864); Midrash Numbers Rabbah 20:4; Yalkut Shim'oni Numbers §765 (and cf. §785); Midrash Tanhuma, Balak 5:4. See also Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, J145. We should point out that this talmudic parable also entered European literature of the Middle Ages, being found, for example, in the famous collection *Gesta Romanorum* (ed. Herman Oesterly; Berlin, 1872), No. 133, and the familiar collection by Johannes Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst* No. 400. (See the edition by Johannes Bolte [Berlin : Herbert Stubenrauch, Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924]).

[6] See Robert Arnot, *Armenian Literature* (rev. ed.; New York: Colonial Press, 1901), 3.

[7] See C. Halm, *Fabulae Aesopicae Collectae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1852), No. 253; Émile Chambry, *Ésope Fables* (Paris, 1927), No. 203; Solomon Span, *Mishle Aesopos* (Jerusalem: Balik, 1960 [Hebrew]), No. 11; B. E. Perry, ed., *Aesopica* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), No. 338. See also Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, J 218.1 and J 624.

[8] See my comments in, Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities in Some Aesopic Fables," 479ff.

[9] For the text and translation, see Ben Edwin Perry, trans., *Babrius and Phaedrus Fables* (Loeb Classical Library;

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).

[10] See also the shorter version of this story in Midrash Tehillim on Ps. 136.

[11] According to an alternate version of the story, the merchant tripped over a stone and broke his leg.

[12] On Jewish aggadot dealing with divine justice, see Haim Schwarzbaum, "The Jewish and Moslem Versions of Some Theodicy Legends (Aa-Th. 759)," *Fabula* 3.1 (1960): 119-169. See also Rabbi Yosef Shabatai Farḥi, *'Ose Pele'* (Jerusalem: Ḥanana ve-Tsafya, 1902 [in Hebrew]): 3:24; Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kaidanover, *Kav Ha-Yashar* (in Hebrew), 5:18.

[13] See Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, N 178.1.

[14] See Halm, No. 197; Chambry, No. 159; Perry, *Aesopica*, No. 130.

[15] See my article in *Mahanaim*, vol. 105, p. 124; and also Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities in Some Aesopic Fables," 473.

[16] See See Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, J 758. 3.

[17] See Haim Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shualim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah Ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron, Israel: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), No. 6. See also Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic Affinities in Some Aesopic Fables," 474ff.

[18] See Babrius, No. 97; Chambry, No. 211; Halm, No. 262; Perry, *Aesopica*, No. 143.

[19] See my discussion in Schwarzbaum, "Talmudic-Midrashic

Affinities in Some Aesopic Fables," 476ff. See also the Arabic fables of Lukman (No. 5) and Julius Landsberger, *מִתְלִיא דְסוֹפוֹס Die Fabeln des Sophos* (Posen: L. Merzbach, 1859), 46ff.

[20] See Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, K 2061 ("Treacherous plan of hypocritical animal detected and prevented") and cf. story types B 74 and B 163.

[21] See Perry, *Aesopica*, No. 63; Chambry, No. 96; Halm No. 117.

[22] See Perry, *Aesopica*, No. 460.

[23] See Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, K 477.2. See also, *Fables de La Fontaine*, vol. 8 No. 4.

[24] Compare the versions of this saying in Tanhuma, *Mattot* 3 and in Yalkut Shim'oni Numbers §785.

[25] See Babrius, No. 161; Perry, *Aesopica* No. 117; Halm, No. 184; Chambry, 146. This fable also occurs in the writings of Lucian, the fables of Aphthonius of Antioch, and in the collection of Avianus (fourth century C.E.). As I argued in *The Mishle Shualim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah Ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore*, 102, Avianus influenced the medieval Hebrew fable.

[26] See Perry, *Aesopica*, No. 165.

[27] See Léopold Hervieux, *Les Fabulistes Latins* (5 vols.; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1893-1899), 2:559ff. See also Osterly, 100; Perry, *Aesopica*, No. 658. And see the collection of fables by Marie de France, No. 96.

[28] Unfortunately, this is not the place to discuss all the versions

and permutations of this fable, which belongs to our international folk heritage.

[29] See also Halm, No. 56; Chambry, No. 52; Span, No. 231; Perry, *Aesopica*, No.31; Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, J 2112.1.

[30] See Ben Edwin Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fables," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 93 (1962): 287-346, esp. 327.

[31] See (אסע"י) ארכיון הסיפור העממי בישראל על שם דב נוי (Israel Folktale Archives named in honor of Dov Noy [IFA]), no. 1323 (Druze) and also no. 1418 = Hanina Mizraḥi, *Yehude Paras [The Jews of Persia]* (Tel Aviv, 1958), 1:187 [in Hebrew].

[32] Cf. Halm, No. 374; Chambry, No. 314; Perry, *Aesopica*, No.267. See also Babrius, No. 175; Halm, Nos. 373 and 375. And see Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, J 1908 ("Absurd attempt to change animal nature") and U 120 ("Nature will show itself").

Would you like to offer a correction or suggest an improved translation? You may do so below: