

## WHAT THE FOX SAID TO THE FISH -- Children's Sermon

AFTER THE BIBLE, THE JEWS WROTE A MUCH LARGER BOOK CALLED THE TALMUD, T-A-L-M-U-D. IN THE TALMUD THERE ARE MANY RULES TELLING US HOW TO LIVE BEST, AND THERE ARE ALSO MANY STORIES. ONE OF THE STORIES IS ABOUT RABBI AKIBA. THIS IS THE BACKGROUND OF THE STORY.

ABOUT 1900 YEARS AGO, THE JEWISH NATION WAS RULED BY THE ROMANS. THE ROMANS HAD THEIR OWN LAWS AND THEIR OWN GODS. THEY WANTED THE JEWS TO FOLLOW THE ROMAN LAWS AND NOT THE JEWISH LAWS. THEY WANTED THE JEWS TO WORSHIP THE ROMAN GODS AND NOT THE GOD THAT THE JEWS KNEW. SO THE ROMANS MADE A LAW WHICH SAID, IF ANY JEW IS CAUGHT STUDYING THE TORAH, HE WILL BE KILLED". SOME OF THE JEWS STOPPED STUDYING THE TORAH BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID THAT THEY MIGHT BE KILLED, BUT RABBI AKIBA DID NOT STOP. HE BROUGHT TOGETHER A NUMBER OF STUDENTS AND TAUGHT THEM THE TORAH AS HE HAD ALWAYS DONE. WHEN ONE OF HIS FRIENDS ASKED HIM, "RABBI, AREN'T YOU AFRAID TO BE TEACHING THE TORAH?", RABBI AKIBA ANSWERED WITH A STORY.

"ONCE", HE SAID, "THERE WAS A FOX WHO WAS WALKING ALONG THE SIDE OF A CANAL. THE FOX SAW SOME FISH WHO WERE RUNNING FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER. THEY LOOKED FRIGHTENED AS IF SOMETHING WAS CHASING THEM. 'WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID?', THE FOX ASKED THE FISH. 'WE ARE AFRAID', THEY REPLIED, "BECAUSE SOME MEN ARE TRYING TO CATCH US WITH NETS.' 'WELL, THEN,' SAID THE FOX, 'WHY DON'T YOU COME UP HERE WITH ME ON THE DRY LAND, AND I WILL HELP YOU.'" THE FISH, HOWEVER, KNEW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THEY CAME UP ON THE LAND. WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN? OF COURSE, THE FOX WOULD EAT THEM, SO ONE OF THEM ANSWERED, 'YOU ARE A CLEVER FOX, BUT WE ARE NOT SO DUMB. IF WE ARE NOT SAFE IN THE WATER, WHICH WE ENJOY, WHERE WE WERE BORN, AND WHERE WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED, WE CERTAINLY WILL NOT BE MORE SAFE OUT OF THE WATER.'

HAVING TOLD THIS STORY, ABOUT THE FOX AND THE FISH, RABBI AKIBA, THEN SAID, "THE JEW IS LIKE THE FISH, AND THE ROMANS ARE LIKE THE FOX. THEY WANT US TO GIVE UP THE TORAH WHICH IS OUR WATER, BUT I KNOW THAT ONCE I GIVE UP THE TORAH, THE ROMANS WILL NOT BE A BETTER FRIEND TO ME. THEY WILL TREAT ME THE WAY THEY WANT WHETHER I GIVE UP THE TORAH OR NOT. BUT IF I KEEP THE TORAH, AT LEAST I WILL HAVE SOME CHANCE TO LIVE A GOOD LIFE. AS LONG AS I STUDY THE TORAH AND FOLLOW ITS LAWS, SAID AKIBA, I WILL LIVE JOYFULLY AND PROUDLY.

RABBI AKIBA WAS SMART ENOUGH NOT TO BE FOOLED BY THE ROMANS WHO WERE AS CLEVER AS THE FOX, BUT ARE WE JEWS TODAY AS SMART AS RABBI AKIBA? TODAY, SOME PEOPLE SAY TO THE JEW, GIVE UP YOUR JEWISH WAYS. GIVE UP YOUR IDEAS ABOUT GOD AND BE LIKE US. GIVE UP YOUR JEWISH HOLIDAYS - AND CELEBRATE OUR HOLIDAYS INSTEAD. GIVE UP YOUR CUSTOMS AND CELEBRATE OUR CUSTOMS. THEN YOU NEED NOT BE AFRAID!! SOME JEWS HAVE LISTENED TO THIS PROMISE, AND THEY HAVE GIVEN UP THEIR IDEAS AND THEIR HOLIDAYS, BUT SOME JEWS ARE SMART LIKE THE FISH. SOME JEWS TODAY STILL STUDY THE TORAH AND FOLLOW THEIR OWN IDEAS, AND IN DOING THESE THINGS, THEY FIND HAPPINESS AND COMFORT. FOR JUST AS A FISH CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT WATER, SO A JEW CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT HIS BOOKS AND HIS CUSTOMS.