

The Story of Kalila and Dimna (aka The Lion and the Bull)

Folk Story

A man had two bulls and he would take both of them when he travelled. One of the bulls fell into some mud on the road and the man struggled to pull him out. But the bull, whose name was "Shartarbeh", was unable to walk easily so the man released him and went on his way with the other bull. Shartarbeh stayed alone near the road and everyday he would drink water and eat grass and little by little he got better. Sometimes he would "moo" loudly and the lion that lived nearby and ruled the animals in the jungle would hear him. The lion, which had never seen or heard a bull before, was afraid of Shartarbeh's voice. He imagined that the owner of such a voice must be a more wild and fierce animal than he was.

It was for this reason that he became depressed and he would rarely go hunting. The tiger, leopard, wolf, rhinoceros and the other animals that were under the lion's control were not aware of his unhappiness.

But one of the jackals that was at the service of the lion perceived the change in the lion's mood. The jackal's name was Dimna. One day Dimna said to another jackal who was an old friend, "I don't know why the lion has become upset and I would like to find out". The other jackal, whose name was Kalila, became upset and replied, "You and I are not very important animals of the jungle and shouldn't approach the lion. We don't even have the right to be curious about him or his affairs!"

Dimna paid no attention to his friend and one day when the lion was alone he went before him and bowed. The lion gave him a friendly greeting. Dimna gathered his courage and asked the lion, "Sir, why have you become upset?"

The lion wanted to explain the reason for his worry when at the same time the clamor of Shartarbeh's voice arose and he began shaking from fear. He was forced to answer, "I am afraid of the owner of that sound!"

Dimna, who knew the sound was that of a bull, smiled slightly and said, "Your fear is without cause my king. This is an animal that eats grass and is food to you! I can go right now and bring him to you". The lion was pleased and said, "If you do this for me, I will take you as one of my advisors".

Dimna went and found Shartarbeh and told him stories about the good and friendly lion-king. Finally, he took Shartarbeh to the lion.

A short time passed and Shartarbeh showed the lion how clever and intelligent he was. The lion was impressed and he put Shartarbeh in charge of many of his

affairs. The other animals were upset about this and became jealous of Shartarbe. But of all the animals Dimna was the most upset and jealous. He regretted bringing Shartarbe to the lion.

One day Dimna went to Kalila and said, "However it is possible I want to take Shartarbe away from the lion". Kalila, who unlike Dimna was a calm and rational animal, replied, "Don't do it. I told you from the beginning it wasn't a good thing to go before the king!"

But Dimna didn't listen to his friend and went before the lion and said, "Your highness, you did a great favor for Shartarbe by giving him a worthy position as your advisor but he has a plan to destroy you. He wants to take your place as king."

The lion was very surprised and asked, "What proof do you have to make this claim?"

Dimna answered, "If you watch closely you will see that when Shartarbe approaches you he shakes his head from side to side. In truth, this is to show you his power."

The lion didn't know that this was the character of bulls when they walked so he believed what Dimna had said. When he saw Shartarbe again he immediately leapt on him and killed him. Dimna was pleased and he returned to his nest. But Kalila objected and was very upset by what Dimna had done. At the same time the leopard was passing in front of Kalila and Dimna's nest and he heard them talking. He realized that everything that Dimna had said to the lion was a lie. The cheetah immediately went to the lion's mother and told her everything. The lion's mother then told her son. The lion threw Dimna into prison, where he died. Kalila, upon hearing of Dimna's death, became so upset that he too passed away.

Translation by Larry Klein