

TO SAVE OR NOT TO SAVE ONE'S SKIN **THAT'S THE QUESTION!**

Intent of the Fable..

- ✓ *In our daily living all of us are faced with difficulties, opposition and conflicts. We may feel threatened, attacked, trapped.*
- ✓ *On such occasions, people opt for different 'strategies' to face those difficulties. Some strategies are good, others are dishonest, some are fair, others are unfair, some are constructive, and others are destructive.*
- ✓ *In the fable, we exemplify those strategies by the behavior of different animals, namely, **The Elephant, The Tiger, The Deer, The Snake, The Tortoise .The Dog , The Chameleon.***

THE FABLE.

Narrator: Many, many years ago the animals in the forest lived friendly and peacefully. On an unhappy day, a man came to the forest with some strange instrument in his hands and killed a deer. Next day, another man appeared and killed a tiger. From that time on, men killed, enslaved and caged now one, then another of the forest dwellers.

To protect themselves from the menace of men, the animals called for a meeting to discuss how better to defend themselves from man's cruelty. Because of his size and imposing appearance the Elephant spoke first, then the others animals spoke in turns:

The Elephant said: "My, dear friends, my tactic is to scare men. When I see them, I run towards them flapping my ears, showing my formidable tusks and crushing under my feet everything on my way"

Then The Tiger spoke: "I believe that the best defense is offence. My strategy is to attack! Before man knows what's happening. I am on him with lightning swiftness, my paws and my jaws do the rest."

Next The Deer remarked:: "Well, my way is running away. My security rests in my speed. You know, I practice a lot of jogging. Whenever faced or seen by men. I run like the wind. Soon, I am out of their sight."

then, The Snake said:: "I hate man! My method is cunning. I lie quiet and unseen in the grass. I do not mind to wait for hours on end. When I see a man approaching, my heart craves for revenge. No sooner he is close enough, I spring up and instantly I bite him with my poisonous fangs. O! What joy I experience to see him dying writhing in agony."

The Tortoise was next: "My method is very simple. I withdraw. I have built for myself a very thick and strong protective shell which I always carry on my back. Whenever I see man, I go inside it. Once there, I see nothing, I hear nothing, I fear nothing!"

Smilingly The Dog said: "My friends bear up with me. Facts are facts. We have to accept that men are superior to us. They are a great threat to us. Let's not fool ourselves. Why do you want to fight men, or to scare them? or to run away from them? Or to destroy them?"

There is no use of all these tricks! For our skin sake, for our peace of mind, let us submit to men; let us become their allies and friends! I, for one, have decided to allow myself to be domesticated by them, to stay in their homes and serve them. It's worth losing one's freedom to secure shelter, food and peace of mind. Let us be practical my friends."

Lastly The Chameleon, proudly and full of complacency upbraided them all: "You fools! Why do you want to fight, or run away, or kill, or withdraw from, or to scare, or to serve men? You need nothing of the sort! My method is the best. I just keep changing colors according to convenience. I change the color of my skin any moment, any lime, any place. I always put on the color that suits me best. I do not care what color I take. I couldn't care less for my identity and my looks. The all important thing is to save my skin!"

POINTS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the intent of this fable? Find it out and explain it?
2. What tricks and defense mechanisms each animal displayed when under attack? Mention them.
3. Do you find those tricks helpful? Honest? Rational? Explain.
4. What do you think is the best attitude to take when one is under attack, criticized and threatened? Explain.
5. According to your experience, what are the most common reactions people display when they face opposition and difficulties? Describe.
6. When under attacked or faced with difficulties, with which of the animals of the story would you seem to identify? What makes you say so? Are you happy about it? Why?
7. Are you at this moment of your life faced with some opposition, conflict, confrontation or the like? Would you mind to share it with us? How do you face it?
8. How do you intend to face difficulties, hardships and opposition in future?

Attitudes adopted by different animals when under attack

- **Discuss the pros and cons of each stance taken by the different animals.**
- **What could the best stance be?**

1. **The elephant:** Force or show of force, noise intimidation, threats...

2. **The tiger:** Frontal attacks, violence, mindless cruelty, destruction, aggression, assault....
3. **The deer:** Running away, keeping off, avoidance, cowardice, shyness, hiding, timidity, avoiding confrontation, escapism,
4. **The snake:** Crookedness, slyness, revengefulness, backbiting.....
5. **The tortoise:** Withdrawal, false security, cutting oneself off from reality, Day-dreaming, escapism, psychosis....
6. **The dog:** Compliance, subservience, blind obedience, a yes -man, submissiveness Obliging, surrendering, currying favor, giving up the fight, giving up one's freedom, Looking for security above all,.
7. **The chameleon:** Opportunism, lack of principles, lack of values, turned-coat,. Inconsistency, party politics.....

Note:

- It is not possible to apply a uniform strategy to deal with all situations. Each situation may demand a different approach, yet whatever approach you take has to be assertive, constructive, dignified, human, and rational.
- The two essential elements in any good approach are: **assertiveness** and **self-esteem**. We mean by assertiveness the will always to have one's rights respected, while at the same time respecting the rights of others.
- We mean by **self-esteem** the will never to do to anything that would lower our worth.

SELF-EXAMINATION FORM

When faced with attack, opposition and danger, usually. I *(Tick off the items below that express something of your behavior)*

I am afraid	I bluff
I assert myself	I withdraw
I stick to my conscience	I adopt delaying tactics
I give in	I sulk
I give up	I act "non-cooperative"
I submit easily	I pretend to be unconcern
I leap into action	I grumble
I shy	I curse and swear
I yield to opportunism	I stand up for my rights
I become spiteful	I shout
I turn violent	I become angry and
I take a firm stand	I loose my cool
I adopt devious means	I go with the crowd

I keep mum
I take the line of least resistance
I try to avoid the issue
I indulge in self-pity
I day-dream
I have a feeling of defeatism
I drink
I dialogue with those concerned
I blame others
I lie
I retaliate
I hide
I pass the buck
I take risks
I dilly-dally

I threaten vengeance
I act the coward
I hesitate
I play the crook
I shirk
I take to drinks, drugs,
I Smoke.
I weigh the pros and cons
I wait and see
I blame myself
I look for the easiest way out
I try to forget the problem
I pooh-pooh the whole thing
I become vindictive
I adopt a critical stance

1. **Are you happy about the reactions your display when under attack? Why?**

2. **What's the behavior you would like to display?**

3. **Are you at this moment of your life, faced with some serious problems, opposition, conflict, confrontation, danger or misunderstanding
Would you like to share it with us?**

4. **How can you face them?** -

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5 What steps will you take in this direction from today and how?

ALONE WITH GOD PRAY FOR STRENGTH AND LIGHT.TO ACT ON

- 1) The discoveries you made about yourself.
- 2) The things you wish to change and improve.
- 3) The steps you intend taking to change your behavior

Ask God for his grace to succeed.

APPENDIX ACTIVITIES Optional

Time available, you can hold some activities. Activities are very effective if properly conducted. We offer, here below, some hints on how to conduct them.

Suggested Activities

The best activities for this exercise will be either role playing” Imaginary life situations” or re-playing “real life incidents” recounted by the participants

Role-playing Imaginary Life Situations

Divide the participants into small groups of 4 or 5 each.

Keeping your audiences in mind, find some relevant “cases” to be role played. For instance, if your audience consists of school children your “cases” could be these or similar ones:

1. A boy/girl is victimized in school by an unfair teacher because he/she is the child of a a neighbor whom she hates.
2. A child at home is being discriminated against by his or her parents because he or she is weak in studies and does not measure up to their expectations.
3. A child is being teased in school because of his or her dark complexion or some disfigurement.
4. A student feels very depressed because he or she stammers. When he or she tries

to speak, the other students giggle.

First: Give the same “case” for role-playing to all the groups, asking them to portray in it different kinds of wrong behaviors. One group will portray the behavior of the elephant, another that of the tiger, still another that of the tortoise, and so on.

Next, Request the groups to role-play the same case again, showing now a proper behavior, one in which the person in conflict reacts “assertively” and with “self-esteem”.

Re-playing Real Life Incidents Reported by the Participants

- ✓ Ask volunteers to recount incidents or situations of their lives in which they experienced opposition, conflict and adverse criticism.
- ✓ Choose some of the experiences, recounted by the participants, which seem best suited for “re-playing”.
- ✓ Let the person whose experience is going to be replayed choose from among the participants some individuals who will play the role of his dad and mum, brothers and sisters, teachers, school principal, school-mates, etc. as the case may be.
- ✓ All the characters or persons involved in the incident in question should be impersonated.
- ✓ He, whose experience will be replayed, will brief his partners as much as possible of the particulars of that situation and the of the characteristic traits of the persons involved in it.
- ✓ Soon after that, the situation will be “re-played” before the house.
- ✓ After the replay an analysis and evaluation will follow.
- ✓ The person whose “real life situation” is replayed most likely, will be helped to understand himself better
- ✓ If need be, the moderator may have the incident replayed again, suggesting to the person who is being helped, new “strategies” or new types of behavior to the better cope with his situation.

-- The gist of this step is as follows:

- We take instances from the N.T. where we see people reacting to extreme provo-cation, difficulties and conflict. Some react in a destructive or self-defeating manner, others do so in a very assertive and self-respecting way.
- We study those cases and learn from them.

-- Give to each group one text from Section (a) and another from Section (b). Ask them to study them, to discuss, compare and contrast.

-- When the groups have finished their work, call them for a general session.

N.T. Texts

Section (a) Destructive Ways of Behaviour

- The Shrewd Manager : {Crookedness, Shrewdness} Lk 16:1-8
- Peter denies Jesus : {Lies, Fear} Mk 26:69-74
- Emmaus : {Defeatism, Running away
From Life} Lk 24:13-32
- Herod : {Deception, Cruelty} Mt. 2:1-8; Mk
4:16-18