

*JACKAL:  
THE TRICKSTER OF  
DESERT FOLKLORE*

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Arts & Sciences Class  
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# ***IN OUR DESERT, COYOTE IS THE WISE AND WILEY TRICKSTER. IN THE OLD WORLD'S DESERT LANDS, IT IS JACKAL...***

- ❖ Early jackal stories appear on paper in the *Panchatantra*, an ancient Indian collection of animal fables written in Sanskrit around 200 BCE.
- ❖ Those jackal stories traveled or sprang up in the Middle East, in Persia, and in Africa, wherever the animal appears as a pesky predator and scavenger of livestock.
- ❖ This image is of the golden jackal of the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East.
  - ❖ By Steve Garvie from Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland - Golden Jackal, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11460994>



# THE JACKAL TRAVELS TO PERSIA, THEN THE ARAB-SPEAKING COUNTRIES IN AFRICA AND THE IBERIAN PENINSULA



- ❖ By the time the animal fables reach Persia, the jackal appears in a collection of such fables compiled, and eventually translated from Persian to Arabic in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, called *Kalila and Dimna*, this collection of fables given to young princes to teach them how to behave and how to rule.
- ❖ The jackal tales, whether in or out of the *Kalila and Dimna* collection, tell of a creature who lives by his wits, and often tell of how he gets a comeuppance for not being careful or considerate in his ways.
- ❖ This image is of the African side-striped jackal.
  - ❖ By Reshlove - [1], CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=121825955>



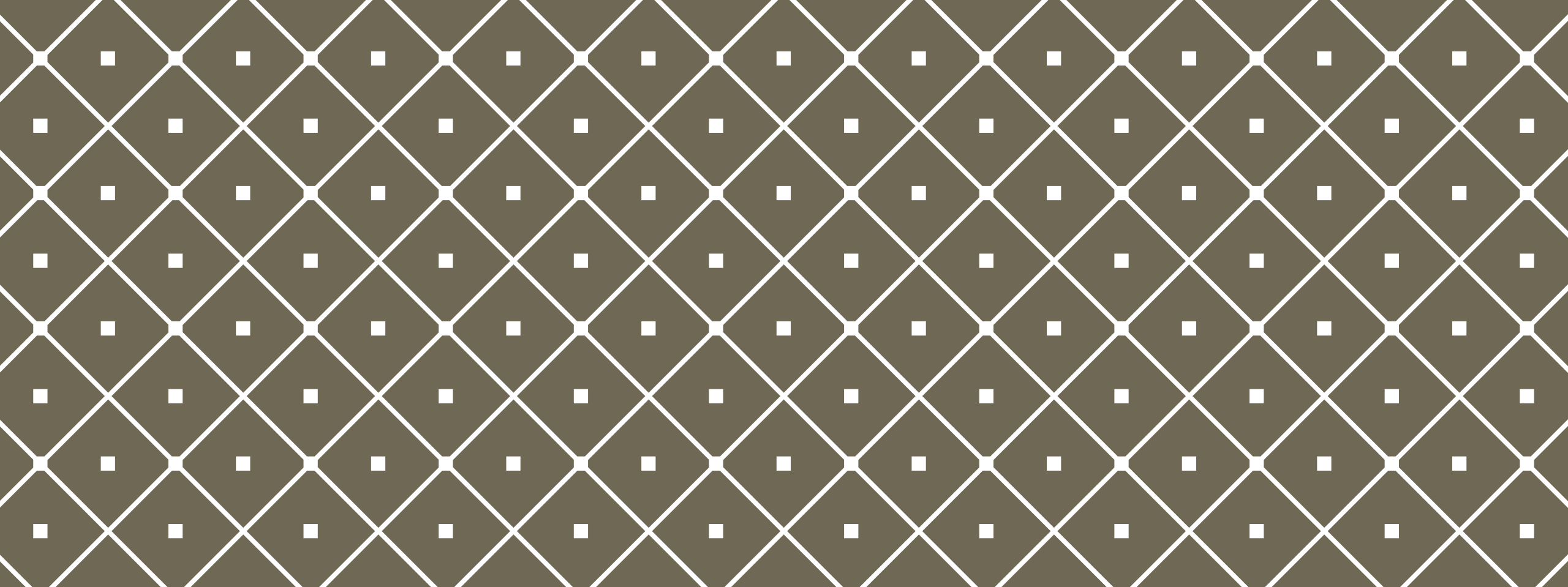
# THESE ANIMAL FABLES FIRST REACH THE WEST THROUGH CHRISTIAN SPAIN



- ❖ When King Alfonso X of Castilla was still a prince, he commissioned a translation of the Arabic version of *Kalila and Dimna* to Castilian in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- ❖ Kalila and Dimna are two jackals in the fables, done as stories within stories, as many tales are told in that time and from those places. They are narrators and protagonists.
- ❖ These two jackals work in the court of king Bankala the lion. Kalila is happy with his lot, but Dimna is ambitious, wishes to gain fame, and is not above gossip, chicanery, and treachery to get it.
- ❖ The stories they tell, and are a part of, are allegories of the human social and political condition.
- ❖ This is a page from a 13<sup>th</sup> century Arabic edition of the story, showing the two jackals of the title.
- ❖ By <https://essentiels.bnf.fr/fr/image/32465bbd-bd19-401d-9822-5e12c2101d28-deux-chacals-kalila-et-dimna-1>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=31991044>

# ELEMENTS OF MOROCCAN FOLK TALES

- ❖ Moroccan folk tales, stories of the people, are much like the stories contained in *Kalila and Dimna*, the stories meant for young princes. While the latter tales teach young princes how to rule wisely, the former teach children how to be of good character and how do right by their community, basically the same lesson.
- ❖ Moroccan folk tales show animals as having kinship with mankind, and with each other.
- ❖ They are given the title “uncle” as a sign of respect, especially if they are large or powerful beasts, such as “uncle lion,” when they are formally addressed.
- ❖ Like the tales within *Kalila and Dimna*, there is often a moral contained at the end of a story.
- ❖ *Kalila and Dimna* presents Kalila as being wise, and Dimna as being wily, and it is the wily one who gets his comeuppance for being too greedy and not doing right by his neighbors.



# ***THE JACKAL AS HE APPEARS IN MOROCCAN FOLK TALES***

You'd think he would learn from  
his mistakes . . .

# ***THE TALE OF THE JACKAL AND THE EWE WHO FARMED TOGETHER***

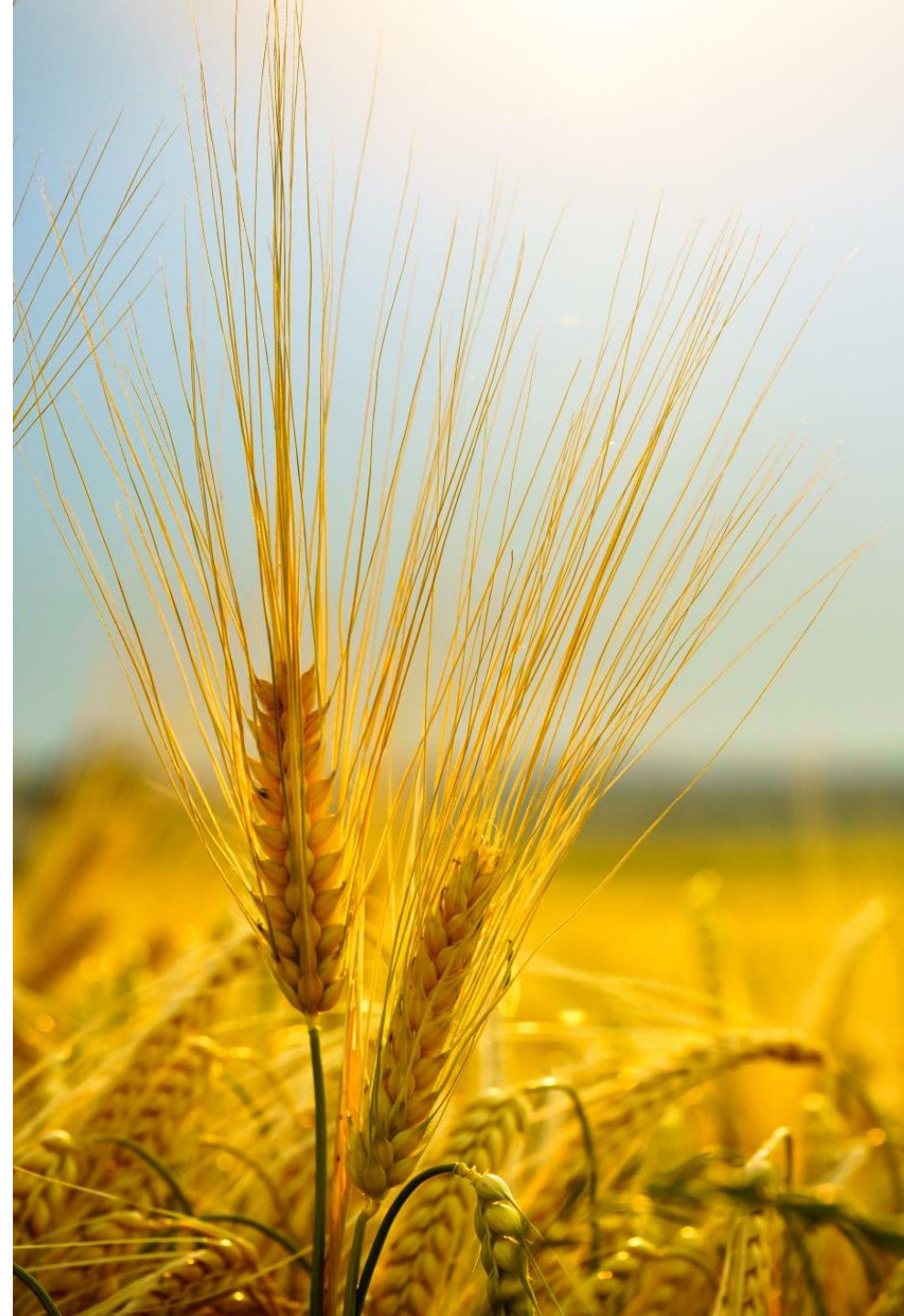
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Beware of making deals with one who is  
more likely to be your enemy than your  
friend.





- ❖ It may or may not have happened that a jackal and ewe decided to farm together. They plowed their field and they sowed it, and when the wheat turned yellow in the sun, they cut it to separate the grain from the straw.
- ❖ “Why don’t you divide our harvest?” the ewe asked the jackal.
- ❖ “In the name of God, here goes,” said the jackal. “One share for me, one share for you. Two shares for me, one for you. Three shares for me, one for you. Four shares for me, one for you. Five shares for me, one for you.”
- ❖ “I thought we were partners,” cried the ewe, “each with a right to half a share of the reward for our toil!”
- ❖ “We are partners, indeed,” said the jackal, “but our needs are different. Your portion should be enough to make you happy—or may God curse you and those who got you!”





- ❖ The ewe said nothing, but when the jackal had divided the grain into two mounds, one large, one small, she said, “Will you wait for me here while I ask the donkey to come help me carry my share home?”
- ❖ Then she ran to the sloughi dog and addressed him thus, “I come to you as a supplicant and place myself under your protection. Will you help me redress the wrong I have suffered?”
- ❖ “How have you been wronged?” asked the sloughi.
- ❖ “The jackal invited me to be his partner. We plowed and sowed together, we harvested and threshed together, my hand alongside his. But when it came to dividing the grain, he took the greater part for himself and left me with five shares to his fifteen.”
- ❖ The sloughi agreed to help. So the ewe took him to the donkey who was to carry her share of the harvest. The dog jumped into one of the donkey’s panniers, and the ewe covered him with an empty grain sack.
- ❖ When they reached the place where the jackal was waiting beside the wheat, the ewe called, “Uncle jackal, come and lift down my little lambs. I brought them to help me load the grain.”

❖ “A sheep with her young lambs,” the jackal said to himself. “God is good to me indeed! His will be done!” And he trotted over to the donkey to seize the tender-fleshed lambs. But when he lifted the sacking and saw the sloughi with his sharp teeth glinting as he grinned, the jackal turned and fled. Without pausing to pick up his shares, he abandoned the whole wheat harvest.

❖ The ewe shouted after him, “If you are not content with little, God will take from you much!”

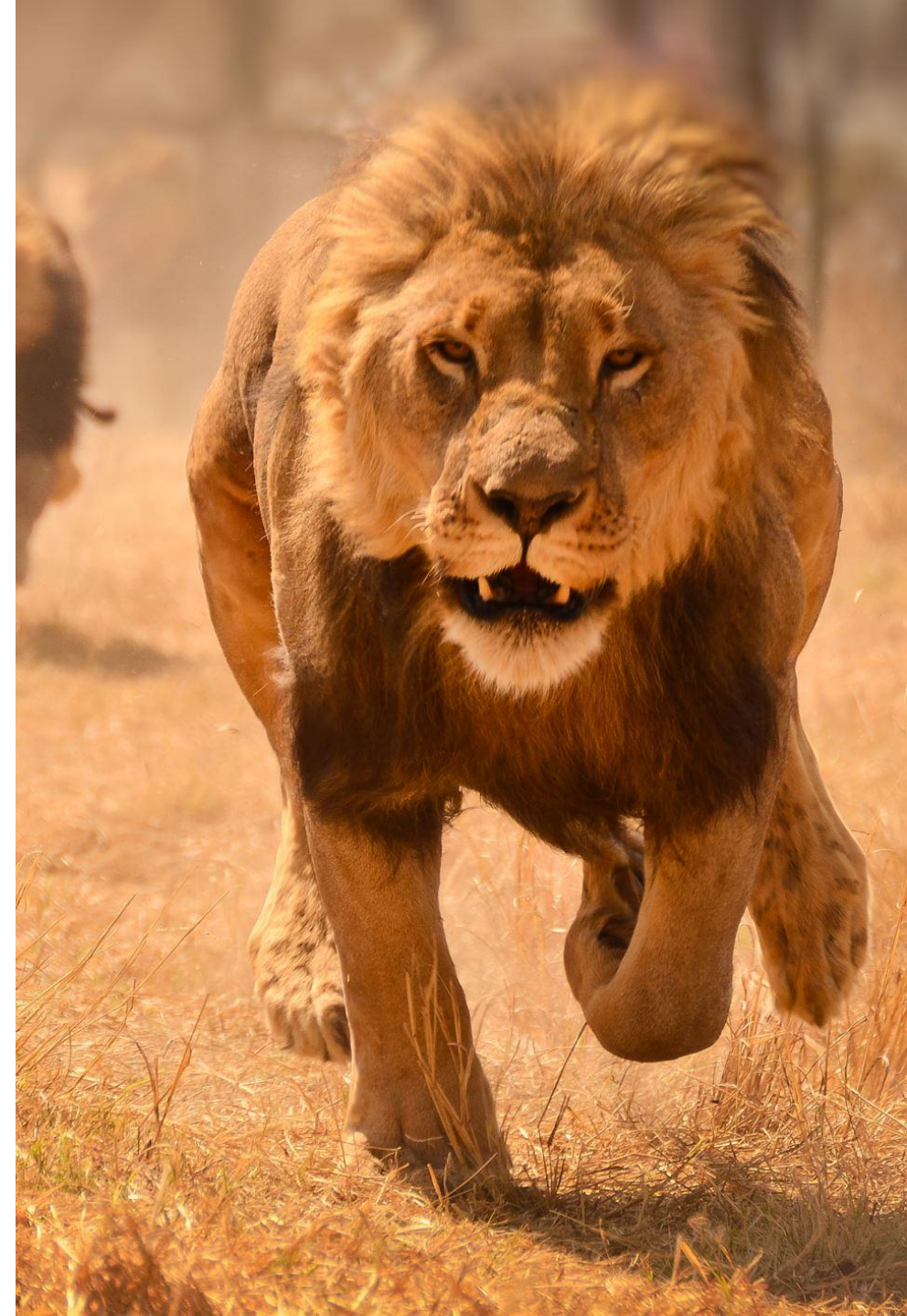
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# ***WHEN A JACKAL, A FOX, AND A LION DECIDED TO HUNT TOGETHER***

- ❖ Once it may or may not have happened that a jackal, a fox, and a lion agreed to go hunting together. They set out as soon as it was light, and by the time the dew had dried, they had caught a bear, a partridge, and a hare. When they stopped to rest, the fox said to the jackal, “Why don’t you divide the prey between us, uncle?”
- ❖ “In the name of the Creator, here goes,” said the jackal. So he pushed the hare in front of the lion, dragged the partridge in front of the fox, and sat himself next to the bear. “Let everyone enjoy the meal in front of him, and may God give him health and more health!” he said.
- ❖ But the lion growled, “Your kind is ever greedy!” and smacked the jackal with his paw. It tore the skin off the top of his head, and the jackal began to bleed.





- ❖ “Why don’t you divide the spoils then, fox?” said the jackal. So the fox pulled the carcass of the bear to the lion and said, “This shall be my for my master’s breakfast!” Next he pointed to the hare lying in front of the lion and said, “That shall be for my master’s dinner!” Then he brought the partridge and said, “And this shall be for my master when he feels hungry between meals.”
- ❖ The lion rumbled his contentment and asked the fox, “Who trained you in the law and taught you to divide so justly?”
- ❖ “It was the red crown on my uncle jackal’s head that taught me, O lion!”
- ❖ There is an implied moral here, other than learning from the mistakes of your elders and placating a superior who has been annoyed:
- ❖ Do not presume to trick your betters. It won’t end well.

# ***THE TALE OF THE GOAT, THE LION, AND THE JACKAL***

- ❖ One day, it may or may not have been that a he-goat was browsing on a mountainside. Toward noon, when the sun was high, he came to the mouth of a cave and went inside to escape the worst of the heat until it was over. To his horror, in this cool shade he came face to face with a lion!
- ❖ “What do you want?” growled the lion.
- ❖ Thinking fast, the goat stared fixedly at the lion for a while, and then said, “I am one of the angels of Heaven. The Lord of Creation has sent me to kill seven lions, seven jackals, and seven hyenas. I was checking to see if your markings fit the description of the animals I must destroy. No, you are not one of them. You are destined to live long. Take your ease here in your cave while I continue my search.” And the goat walked out of the cave.



- ❖ The lion was much shaken by what had passed. When he met a jackal a little while later, the jackal asked, “What is wrong?”
- ❖ “I’ve met an angel sent by God to devour seven lions, seven jackals, and seven hyenas. Luckily, it’s my destiny to be spared, but you’d better be on your guard and look out for him.”
- ❖ “What does this angel look like?” asked the jackal.
- ❖ “Black,” said the lion. “With a long white beard and thick matted hair.”
- ❖ “That sounds like a goat!” laughed the jackal. “You should taste his flesh, and then you’ll have a heavenly mouthful! Let’s go find him!”
- ❖ And off they went, one behind the other, until they saw the goat in the distance.

- ❖ “This time there is no escape,” the goat said to himself, and began to tremble for his life. Meanwhile, the lion and the jackal were closing in on him.
- ❖ When they were within earshot, the goat bellowed to the jackal, “Thou son of a cur! Why are you bringing me this lion? I have already examined him, and he’s not the right one! That’s not the lion I asked you to bring me!”
- ❖ When the lion heard the goat, he pounced on the jackal, took him in his jaws, lifted him to the skies, and dashed him to the ground until every bone in his body was broken. Then he went away while the goat returned to the safety of the tents.
- ❖ In this case, the jackal was not being dishonest, at least not then. He might well have tried to trick the lion out of his tasty *chèvre* meal later, but he met someone who thought faster on his feet than he did.



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