



- ⌘ Guess the meaning of 'fierce' in this context.

Think and answer :

- ⌘ Why must a king have a court?
- ⌘ What qualities are necessary in the following? Why?
 - king
 - adviser
 - bodyguard
 - messenger
- ⌘ What is oath of loyalty?
- ⌘ Write and read aloud the oath that each of the courtiers must have taken?

1.4 The King's Choice

THERE was once a lion who was king of the forest. He was big and strong and very fierce.

All the other animals in the forest called him king. They brought him gifts from every corner of the forest.

But the more the lion had, the more he wanted.

'A king must have a court,' he said to himself one day.

He called a fox to his side.

"You are known to be a wise and clever creature, fox," said the lion. "I want you to be my adviser."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," said the fox, bowing low.

The lion next called a leopard to his side.

"You are known to be watchful and swift of foot, leopard. I want you to be my bodyguard."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," said the leopard, bowing low.

The lion then called a vulture to his side.

"You are a bird, vulture, and can fly high. You are to be my messenger."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," said the vulture, bowing low.

The fox, the vulture and the leopard took an oath of loyalty to the king. The king promised to give them food and protection.

For some time all went well in the court of the lion king. The three courtiers never opposed the king. His wishes were law. Whenever he roared, they stood in awe. Whenever he took a walk, they followed him.

When the lion king went hunting, they found the animals for him to kill. And after he had his

meal, he left the remains for them. So they always had enough to eat.

One day the vulture came back from a flight.

“Your Majesty, have you ever eaten a camel?” he asked. “It is very tasty. I ate it once in the desert.”

The lion had never seen a camel, but he liked the idea of trying camel’s meat.

“But where can we get a camel?” he asked.

“There is a desert some miles away.” said the vulture. “I was flying over it when I saw a lone camel not far away. It looked big and fat.”

The lion looked at his other advisers. They were wise and experienced. He wanted their opinion. Now the fox and the leopard did not know the desert. But they did not want the vulture to seem wiser than them. So they said, since it was the vulture’s idea, he should lead the way.

Early next morning the lion and his court started off on the camel hunt.

They reached the edge of the desert easily. But after they left the shelter of the forest, the day became very hot. The sun shone down with fire-hot rays.

- lone : only one

- ⌘ Why was the vulture told to lead the way?

Think and answer :

- ⌘ Why had the lion never seen a camel?
- ⌘ What advice did the fox and the leopard give? Was it based on good and sound thinking?



⌘ Do you think the vulture was enjoying the search?

⌘ Do you think the king's decision to go back was right?

⌘ Can you guess the plan that the fox had thought of?

⌘ Why does the fox address the camel as 'friend camel'?

⌘ What qualities of the courtiers emerge in this part of the story?

High up in the cooler air the vulture flew.

"Hurry along," he called, "the camel is not far off."

But the lion could not hurry any more. The hot sand had burned his paws. He could go no farther.

"Stop!" he shouted to the others.

"Let us go back to the forest. I do not care to try camel meat."

The lion king's advisers were frightened. The forest was far behind them and they did not know how to get the lion back home.

The leopard wanted to run away.

The vulture wanted to watch and wait and eat the lion later on.

But the clever fox thought of a plan. Off into the desert he ran saying, "I will bring some help."

After running for some time, the fox found the camel. The camel was indeed surprised to see him.

"Hurry up, friend camel," said the fox. "Our king wants you at once."

"Your king?" said the camel. "Who is that? I do not know any king. I only know my master, for whom I carry goods across the desert."

"Our king, the lion, has killed your master," said the fox. "Now you are free, and the lion has invited you to live at his court. Come along."

The camel followed the fox.

When the fox and the camel reached the lion's camp, the vulture and the leopard were surprised. Even the lion looked pleased, in spite of his burned paws.

The camel was presented to the king. He agreed to serve the lion in return for a home at his court.

"Get on the camel's back, Your Majesty," said the fox. "We will return home."

The lion at once jumped on to the camel's back. His courtiers, the fox and the leopard, jumped

up behind him. And with the vulture flying ahead as a guide, they set off on the long journey back to the forest.

When the travellers reached the forest, they were all tired and hungry.

The fox, the leopard and the vulture looked at the camel. Then they looked at each other and smiled hungry smiles.

They had brought the camel for the king's dinner. Now it was time for the feast.

The lion king knew what his courtiers were thinking. He called the camel to him.

"Friend camel," he said, "I have to thank you for saving my life. You are welcome to live at my court as long as you like. I promise you my protection."

The lion's courtiers were shocked. Had they not risked their lives so that he could try camel meat? And the king wanted to let the camel live!

The courtiers were not pleased with his decision. Yet they could do nothing.

Now the lion's paws were so badly burnt that he could not go hunting. But that did not keep him from growing very hungry indeed.

"Fox! Leopard! Vulture!" he shouted.

"Don't you see that I am ill and hungry? Go and get me some food!"

The courtiers had to obey the king. So out they went. But they did not go far. They sat down in a safe place and discussed what they could do.

"I know," said the fox after a while, "we shall make the camel ask to be eaten."

He told the others of his plan. They all agreed, so back they went to the king.

First the vulture stepped forward. "Your Majesty," he said, bowing low, "we have found no food. But we cannot let Your Majesty suffer. I am a poor creature. Eat me."

⌘ The fox, the leopard and the vulture have the same thought about the camel. Why is it so?

⌘ Did you expect the lion to be kind to the camel? Do you think his decision was right?

⌘ Why did the courtiers have to obey the king?

⌘ Were the courtiers being loyal to their king? Discuss.

- ⌘ What qualities of the camel are seen in his speech?

Think and answer :

- ⌘ Why did the lion laugh to see the courtiers go?
- ⌘ Is 'friend' a position at a court? How is it different?

The fox pushed the vulture aside, "I have more meat on me," he cried. "Eat me, Your Majesty."

Now the leopard rushed forward. "I am not much good," he cried. "But I could make a meal for the king."

The camel listened to all these offers. He must do as much, he thought.

"Your Majesty," he said. "I too am willing to give my life for you. Please eat me instead of these old friends of yours who will be more useful than I am."

This was what the fox, the leopard and the vulture were waiting for. They prepared to jump at the camel. But the lion stopped them.

"You are all good and loyal subjects," he said. "My heart is touched by your offers. I accept them all. I shall eat you in the order in which you offered yourselves."

The vulture, the fox and the leopard were shocked.

Away flew the vulture. Away ran the fox and the leopard. They were never seen in the forest again.

The lion laughed to see them go. Then he turned to the camel and said, "You have been loyal and good. You shall be my friend as long as we are alive."

The camel was happy and grateful. The lion thought to himself, 'To be king is good. But to be kind is better.'

– Shankar
(From 'Folk Tales Retold')

* * *

**'To be king is good.
But to be kind is better.'**



