

Hey Diddle Diddle

Hey Diddle Diddle
The cat and the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon
The little dog laughed to see such sport
And the dish ran away with the spoon

Explanations

The cat and the fiddle

On the Ark of the Covenant there were two cherubim, and cherubim elsewhere are said to have one of their faces being a lion (Ezekiel 10:14). However, in Ezekiel's futuristic temple vision he describes the images on the walls:

“And it was made with cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Each cherub had two faces, so that the face of a man was toward a palm tree on one side, and the face of a young lion toward a palm tree on the other side; thus it was made throughout the temple all around.” (Ezekiel 41:18-19)

However, in Greek the word for ‘palm tree’ and Phoenix are the same (Van den Broek, 1972, p. 25), so any Greek speaking Christian would have been able to make the connection¹. As such, this passage could have been read as saying that there would have been images of cherubim with the faces of a lion and a man between images of the Phoenix bird. Jewish tradition also links cherubim and Phoenixes, “In the midst of them are seven phoenixes, and seven cherubim, and seven six-winged creatures, singing with one voice” (Ginzberg, 1909, vol. 1, ch. 3, ‘The Ascension Of Enoch’; Ginzberg, 2003, p. 125). Finally, the word Phoenix can mean both the mythical bird and a “musical instrument, like a guitar, invented by the Phoenicians” (Liddell & Scott, 1940; Van den Broek, 1972, p. 22 note 5 cont., where it is translated as ‘harp’)². Hence the cat is the lion and the fiddle is the Phoenix.

The cow jumped over the moon

Solomon built a large washing basin called the ‘Sea’ which stood outside the door of the temple. It stood upon twelve oxen (1 Kings 7:23-25). ‘Silvery’ water was symbolised by the crescent moon symbol in Jewish mysticism (Von Welling, McVeigh, & Duquette, 2006, p. 75). Additionally, the crescent moon with its ‘horns’ was likened to a heifer and to a bull with horns (Farbridge, 2013, pp. 193, 200). Hence the twelve oxen represent the cow and the water is the moon.

¹ Ezekiel wrote in Hebrew, and in Hebrew the words for Phoenix and palm tree are not related. Yet the ancient Hebrews had links with Egypt, and in Egyptian the words are the same (Van den Broek, 1972, p. 21 note 5) implying that the connection could still have been known.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dfoi%3Dnic>
(accessed 23 October 2016).

The little dog laughed to see such sport

“At the gate of the [second] temple two brazen dogs were placed ... so that whenever a person who had acquired the knowledge of the Name [of God] would pass, they began to bark. Frightened by this sound, the person would forget the knowledge of the Name. Jesus, however, had written the Name on paper, which he hid under his skin. He forgot the Name while passing the dogs, but later learned it again from the paper which he pulled out from under his skin. By means of the Name he was able to perform all the miracles.” (Ginzberg, 2003, p. 11 note 39)

The ‘little dog’ could then be one of the bronze dog statues – whatever we make of this story! The reference to laughing can be understood by comparing Islamic and Jewish legends. Aisha, the wife of Muhammad, was described in different traditions about the same incident as either panting, being breathless, bursting into laughter, or saying, ‘Ha, ha (as if I was gasping)’³. However, why should panting-being breathless-bursting into laughter-saying ‘Ha, ha’ be linked? Breathing in and then breathing out twice through the mouth – ‘huffing and puffing’ – could sound like ‘ha, ha’, as indeed could laughing. And it is the sound of the letter ‘H’ repeated twice which is the key to understanding this reference.

There is a Jewish legend that before the Flood a demon had two children, called Hiwwa and Hiyya. On hearing that the Flood would come they were frightened, but their father consoled them, saying, “As often as men cut or haul stones, or launch vessels, they shall invoke your names, Hiwwa! Hiyya!” (Ginzberg, 1909, vol. 1, ch. 4, ‘The Punishment Of The Fallen Angels’; Ginzberg, 2003, p. 136). Clearly, exerting yourself causes you to breathe heavily, ‘huffing and puffing’. Yet the names Hiwwa and Hiyya are a thinly veiled reference to the sacred name of God, Yahweh (traditionally in English, Jehovah), spelled backwards, with consonants YHWH (the ‘H’ is the Hebrew letter ‘He’, which is equivalent to the Arabic letter used in the tradition, ‘Ha’). So the high priest pronounced the sacred name of God before entering the temple which was symbolised by the ‘ha ha’ sound, or laughing.

And the dish ran away with the spoon

On the Day of Atonement, the first time the high priest went into the Holy of Holies he took a shovel of coals and a spoon of incense (Oppen, 1995, pp. 42-44; cf. Leviticus 16:12-13). The second and third times he took a bowl or similar container with the blood of a bull and a goat respectively (Oppen, 1995, pp. 48-51; cf. Leviticus 16:14-15)

Possible Meaning

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest performed the usual morning service in his golden vestments (Oppen, 1995, p. 116). However, the high priest was likened to a cherub (Barker, 2003, p. 250, explaining Ezekiel 28:13-14) – and cherubim have lion faces – and the “righteous” are described as being like a “palm tree” (Psalm 92:12),

³ Sunni Hadith:

(Sunan Ibn Majah, ‘The Chapters on Marriage’, #1876/1950), Sahih (Darussalam),

(Sahih Bukhari, ‘Merits of the Helpers in Madinah (Ansaar)’, #3894/120/234),

(Sunan Abi Dawud, ‘General Behavior (Kitab Al-Adab)’, #4933/161/4915), Sahih (Al-Albani),

(Sahih Muslim, ‘The Book of Marriage’, #1422a/81/3309).

i.e. a Phoenix or a “stringed instrument” (as explained in section “The cat and the fiddle” above).

He then took off his golden vestments and immersed himself in the bronze ‘Sea’ basin, under which were the twelve oxen. He then symbolically ‘became’ the oxen and when he came out of the water, it was as if the oxen had risen above the moon symbolised by the water.

He then pronounced the sacred Name of God, Yahweh or Jehovah (Oppen, 1995, pp. 117, 120), which was symbolised as laughing, as described above. This took place in front of the temple where there were bronze dog statues.

The sacrificial bull was then slaughtered and its blood collected in a bowl (Oppen, 1995, p. 120). He then took a shovel of burning coals in his right hand and a spoon-shaped vessel with incense in his left hand (Oppen, 1995, p. 121). These three vessels were taken into the Holy of Holies afterwards for the ceremony. Hence the dish ran away with the spoon (or shovel).

As such, the ‘Hey Diddle Diddle’ nursery rhyme does seem to match exactly the order of events at the start of the Day of Atonement.

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