

Keep Your Heart as Light as a Feather

a discussion guide for the ideas found in

The Book of the Shepherd

by *the Scribe*

Joann Davis

THE LAW MUST BE OBEYED

1. When his son oversleeps and arrives late to market, the merchant explodes in a blind rage. Have you ever completely lost your temper? When? Why? And did it serve any purpose? How did you feel later? How did others around you feel? What techniques do you have for controlling your anger? Is blind rage ever justified?

2. Seeing the merchant beat his son makes some people chant for more violence. What does it mean to be “carried away” by the crowd? Are your emotions ever hijacked? What techniques do you have for preventing this from happening?
3. The shepherd’s first impulse, when he sees the merchant whipping the boy, is to stop the violence. But he hesitates. Have you ever second-guessed yourself? How did you feel about your action or inaction later?
4. The law in the shepherd’s world permits the taking of an eye for an eye. Do you believe there is any place for extremely harsh punishment?

A STILL, SMALL VOICE

1. The shepherd wonders why God didn’t spare the child who was beaten in the market. Do you look at our world, full of struggle and strife, and wonder why God “allows” violent and painful things to happen? Do you think God has the power to stop the wars, hurricanes, infant deaths, and other cruelties and doesn’t do anything about it? Discuss what role you think God plays in allowing bad things to happen to good people.
2. The shepherd hears a still, small voice whisper in his ear as he is drifting off to sleep. Have you ever heard a still, small voice? Where do you think it came from? Write down some of your experiences and discuss them.

3. The shepherd hears a still, small voice saying, “I did send help. I sent you.” How do you interpret this message? Do you think sometimes we underestimate ourselves and overestimate others? If so, give examples.

AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER

1. In the shepherd’s dream, the wizened Old Man weighs the shepherd’s heart against a feather and says it is better to travel light, without sadness, anger, or fear. What emotions do you carry each day? Is your heart as light as a feather? Or is it heavy with grief, spite, and judgment? What’s in your heart? Are you keeping your heart light? Do you think it matters?
2. The Old Man tells the shepherd to make a habit each day of promising the dawn that he will keep his heart as light as a feather, and then committing again each night. Do you have your own cleansing rituals? What are they?

MAP TO THE TREASURE

1. When the shepherd first meets Elizabeth, she notices that he shows great tenderness for his animals, running his fingers through each of their coats, gently combing for burrs and bristles. Do you consider yourself tenderhearted or know anybody who is? What is the value of tenderness? Do you think there is enough of it in our world? Keep watch for the most tender people you

encounter this week. How do they make you feel when you interact with them?

2. The shepherd tells Elizabeth that he has been called by his dream to seek a new way. Keep a diary of your dream life and the most important insights your dreams have yielded.
3. Elizabeth says that the new way is powerful and the powerful fear it because it can change everything. Do you believe that people in power fear change? Give an example of what people will do to preserve their entrenched power.
4. The shepherd feels at ease with Elizabeth. Are you the kind of person who makes an effort to put other people at ease? Do you think it is important to do so? Who makes you feel at ease in your own life? What specific qualities in that person lead you to this conclusion?
5. When David is disowned by his father, Elizabeth becomes “his keeper.” Who is your responsibility “to keep?” What does it mean to you?
6. Joshua suggests that the merchant’s heart has become misshapen, a lockbox of hostility. What causes a human heart to become misshapen? How can each of us avoid having and creating a misshapen heart?

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

1. When Joshua is a boy, his father tells him he needs to develop a thicker hide, like that of the cattle, to survive

in the world. Do you agree that living in our world today requires a thick hide? What does a person with a thick hide look like? Are they tough? Insensitive? Is it really a good thing to have a thick hide? Do you have one, or know anybody who does?

2. The herdsmen laugh at the young Joshua because he cares for the runt. Have you ever taunted someone for being caring? Have you ever been taunted? Why do people pick on others who are kind? What should we do about people who laugh at others and pick on them?
3. When Joshua's father refers to the "way of the world," Joshua asks if we cannot "remake the world." Have you ever bucked the way of the world and tried to refashion it? When? How? Do you believe you have the "power of one"? How have you manifested that belief and capacity? How did you develop it? How can we foster it in our children?
4. When Elizabeth tells her tale, she suggests that greatness lies in the ability to love. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? Do you think we live in a society where most people believe that position and status confer greatness? What evidence do you have to support your answer?
5. Elizabeth says she is her brother's keeper. What do you think she means?
6. Hearing David tell his tale, the Storyteller says that a narrator makes choices. What does he mean? Can you give

an example of a time when you saw yourself as victim
but could just as well have viewed yourself as survivor?

THE STORYTELLER'S TALE

1. Kulfi the Snake Charmer is held in awe by many people who have never laid eyes upon him. Who do you hold in awe? Why? What standards do you apply in doling out your reverence for people? Do you think the people you hold in awe need to earn it? Or do you put faith in general reputation as awarded by word of mouth or the media? Make a list of who you revere and why.
2. The crowd watching the snake charmer are “mesmerized.” Have you ever been mesmerized by someone? Who was it, when, and why?
3. The Storyteller speaks of the People of the Lie who charm and seduce. Have you ever met such a person, or acted as one yourself? Why do so many people fawn and simper over people who say they have special gifts?
4. What do you think the Storyteller means when he speaks of the importance of bringing forth what is within you, “for what you bring forth will save you”? Do you believe you possess hidden inner resources? If so, what are they and how can you tap them?

THE UNWILLING SOLDIER

1. Joshua is described as a person who hopes to do justice, be merciful, and walk humbly on the earth. What is your great hope in life? Is it material, spiritual, or other? Discuss your deepest aspirations with someone you love and trust.
2. The captain calls Joshua “a peaceful warrior.” Do you know anybody who fits that description? Is it a good or bad thing to be?
3. The captain mentions giving “a taste of their own medicine” to warring neighbors. What is behind such a sentiment? Have you ever felt a desire to do so? When and why? What did it accomplish?
4. The King discovers that he can “lead by serving.” What does this mean? Have you ever been a servant leader? When, where, and why? How did you feel?
5. Joshua wonders what hope there is for a world where “violence flows as naturally as mother’s milk.” Why is our world so violent? What can you take to alleviate it?

A SILK PURSE FROM A SOW’S EAR

1. The Apothecary speaks of a woman who turns a sow’s ear into a beautiful purse as an act of transformation. Do you think people are capable of transforming? How can it come about? What forces are involved?

2. The Apothecary speaks of “naysayers” who steal our hopes and dreams. Do you know any? What can we do to lift the spirits of the naysayers?

SEEING IS BELIEVING

1. The Blind Man says that he can see with his ears, feel with his mind, and know with his heart. Can you? How? Describe how you experience the world in an extrasensory way.
2. The Blind Man says that a family of farmers tilled his soul with friendship and love. Has anyone in your life tilled your soul this way? Who are these special people and what role do they play in your life? Do you believe you have ever tilled anyone’s soul with friendship and love?

THE WISE SERVANT

1. Elizabeth likes the story of the baboons who force the royals to change the rules of their ball game and play the ball where the baboons drop it. What do you think of the strategy of adjusting to the situation at hand? Does it always make sense? Discuss the pros and cons of this approach.
2. Fighting fire with fire brings destruction, Elizabeth believes. Do you agree? Does honey taste better than vinegar? Have you ever tried being “recklessly generous?”

3. Do you think there is truth in the idea that “new rebellions drink from the vine of appeasement?”
4. Appearances can deceive, the Blind Man says. Do you agree? If you have discovered “a wolf in sheep’s clothing,” share details of how you handled the situation.
5. The Blind Man tells David to pay attention to his instincts. Do you believe something is amiss if a person’s smile doesn’t reach their eyes? Share details of a time when you received vital information from your instincts.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

1. When David gets a thorn in his foot, he wonders why he is being punished. Do you believe suffering is punishment from on high?
2. Elizabeth suggests that all things happen for the best. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss your view with someone who thinks the opposite.

THE GIFT OF A LOWLY THORN

1. The Stranger tries to manipulate David by feigning friendship and kindness. Have you ever used virtue to manipulate people? When, how, and what was the outcome? Was it worth it in the end?

2. Do you believe that suffering can be a teacher, as Elizabeth suggested to David? Support your answer with examples if you can.

RAISING DOVES

1. The shepherd says that many are killed in the name of righteousness. When—if ever—do you think killing another person is justified?
2. The Old Man suggests that gentleness is sometimes confused with—and even criticized as—weakness. Are they the same? Is there anything to fear in being gentle?
3. What does the Old Man mean when he says, “Raise doves, not wolves?” Discuss.

GOING INSIDE

1. Before Joshua enters the cave, he prays for strength. Do you ever pray for strength? Does it help? Share your experiences with people to whom you can entrust your deepest heart.

A TIME TO ACT

1. Before entering the cave, Joshua fears he might fail. Have you ever felt a similar fear? How did you handle it? Did other people play a role in fortifying you?

A SMALL BOY'S ADVENTURE

1. David is adamant about taking the risk of entering the cave with Joshua. Can you recall a time when somebody showed their altruism and bravery to you? How did their support make you feel?

OUT OF THE DEPTHS I CRY TO THEE

1. When Joshua and David enter the cave, their torch is extinguished and they must walk in darkness. Have you ever had to walk in darkness actually or symbolically? Did it wear on you? Which emotions were stirred and how did you handle them?

A NEW LAW

1. To deal with the rising waters inside the cave, Joshua needs to tap his inner resources and strength. Have you ever had to do the same? When? How did it turn out?
2. Joshua rallies David from catastrophic trouble by reminding him that Elizabeth is waiting for him outside the cave. What in your world makes life worth living and fighting for?

A FISH TALE

1. Joshua and Elizabeth say a prayer for David when he is hurt. Do you think prayer plays a role in our wellbeing?

What is prayer? Offer your personal definition and when it serves you best.

2. Do you agree with David that, “Anything is possible”? Or is he a naive child?
3. What do you make of The Law of Substitution? Are you a channel of peace? How?

THE MYSTERIOUS MONKS

1. Do you think our world can be transformed through acts of compassion and love? Or do you think the situation is beyond help and hope?
2. Elizabeth says that the authorities are fearful of teachings that are not their own. Do you agree that people in power try to put a monopoly on the truth?

TIPPING THE SCALES

1. The Old Man in the dream says that results can take time and change can come slowly. Do you ever give up hope because of impatience? Describe a specific incident in which you abandoned a cause because progress was slow in coming.

KNOWING “THE ONE”

1. Joshua discovers that one grain of sand can make the difference and tip the scale. Do you think you can

make a difference? Or do you think the problems in our world are too overwhelming?

2. If you agree in the power of good example, describe a person or an event that deeply influenced you to live a different way.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

1. The Storyteller says every ending is a beginning. Do you agree?