

LAW 26

KEEP YOUR HANDS CLEAN

JUDGMENT

You must seem a paragon of civility and efficiency: Your hands are never soiled by mistakes and nasty deeds. Maintain such a spotless appearance by using others as scapegoats and cat's-paws to disguise your involvement.

PART I: CONCEAL YOUR MISTAKES—HAVE A SCAPEGOAT AROUND TO TAKE THE BLAME

Our good name and reputation depend more on what we conceal than on what we reveal. Everyone makes mistakes, but those who are truly clever manage to hide them, and to make sure someone else is blamed. A convenient scapegoat should always be kept around for such moments.

CHELM JUSTICE

A great calamity befell the town of Chelm one day. The town cobbler murdered one of his customers. So he was brought before the judge, who sentenced him to die by hanging. When the verdict was read a townsman arose and cried out, “If your Honor pleases—you have sentenced to death the town cobbler! He’s the only one we’ve got. If you hang him who will mend our shoes?” “Who? Who?” cried all the people of Chelm with one voice.

The judge nodded in agreement and reconsidered his verdict. “Good people of Chelm,” he said, “what you say is true. Since we have only one cobbler it would be a great wrong against the community to let him die. As there are two roofers in the town let one of them be hanged instead.”

**A TREASURY OF JEWISH FOLKLORE, NATHAN AUSUBEL, ED..
1948**

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW I

Near the end of the second century A.D., as China's mighty Han Empire slowly collapsed, the great general and imperial minister Ts'ao Ts'ao emerged as the most powerful man in the country. Seeking to extend his power base and to rid himself of the last of his rivals, Ts'ao Ts'ao began a campaign to take control of the strategically vital Central Plain. During the siege of a key city, he slightly miscalculated the timing for supplies of grain to arrive from the capital. As he waited for the shipment to come in, the army ran low on food, and Ts'ao Ts'ao was forced to order the chief of commissariat to reduce its rations.

Ts'ao Ts'ao kept a tight rein on the army, and ran a network of informers. His spies soon reported that the men were complaining, grumbling that he was living well while they themselves had barely enough to eat. Perhaps Ts'ao Ts'ao was keeping the food for himself, they murmured. If the grumbling spread, Ts'ao Ts'ao could have a mutiny on his hands. He summoned the chief of commissariat to his tent.

"I want to ask you to lend me something, and you must not refuse," Ts'ao Ts'ao told the chief. "What is it?" the chief replied. "I want the loan of your head to show to the troops," said Ts'ao Ts'ao. "But I've done nothing wrong!" cried the chief. "I know," said Ts'ao Ts'ao with a sigh, "but if I do not put you to death, there will be a mutiny. Do not grieve—after you're gone, I'll look after your family." Put this way, the request left the chief no choice, so he resigned himself to his fate and was beheaded that very day. Seeing his head on public display, the soldiers stopped grumbling. Some saw through Ts'ao Ts'ao's gesture, but kept quiet, stunned and intimidated by his violence. And most accepted his version of who was to blame, preferring to believe in his wisdom and fairness than in his incompetence and cruelty.

Interpretation

Ts'ao Ts'ao came to power in an extremely tumultuous time. In the struggle for supremacy in the crumbling Han Empire, enemies had emerged from all sides. The battle for the Central Plain had proven more difficult than he imagined, and money and provisions were a constant concern. No wonder that under such stress, he had forgotten to order supplies in time.

Once it became clear that the delay was a critical mistake, and that the army was seething with mutiny, Ts'ao Ts'ao had two options: apology and excuses, or a scapegoat. Understanding the workings of power and the importance of appearances as he did, Ts'ao Ts'ao did not hesitate for a moment: He shopped around for the most convenient head and had it served up immediately.

Occasional mistakes are inevitable—the world is just too unpredictable. People of power, however, are undone not by the mistakes they make, but by the way they deal with them. Like surgeons, they must cut away the tumor with speed and finality. Excuses and apologies are much too blunt tools for this delicate operation; the powerful avoid them. By apologizing you open up all sorts of doubts about your competence, your intentions, any other mistakes you may not have confessed. Excuses satisfy no one and apologies make everyone uncomfortable. The mistake does not vanish with an apology; it deepens and festers. Better to cut it off instantly, distract attention from yourself, and focus attention on a convenient scapegoat before people have time to ponder your responsibility or your possible incompetence.

I would rather betray the whole world than let the world betray me.
General Ts'ao Ts'ao, c. A.D. 155-220

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW II

For several years Cesare Borgia campaigned to gain control of large parts of Italy in the name of his father, Pope Alexander. In the year 1500 he managed to take Romagna, in northern Italy. The region had for years been ruled by a series of greedy masters who had plundered its wealth for themselves. Without police or any disciplining force, it had descended into lawlessness, whole areas being ruled by robbers and feuding families. To establish order, Cesare appointed a lieutenant general of the region—Remirro de Orco, “a cruel and vigorous man,” according to Niccolò Machiavelli. Cesare gave de Orco absolute powers.

With energy and violence, de Orco established a severe, brutal justice in Romagna, and soon rid it of almost all of its lawless elements. But in his zeal he sometimes went too far, and after a couple of years the local population resented and even hated him. In December of 1502, Cesare took decisive action. He first let it be known that he had not approved of de Orco’s cruel and violent deeds, which stemmed from the lieutenant’s brutal nature. Then, on December 22, he imprisoned de Orco in the town of Cesena, and the day after Christmas the townspeople awoke to find a strange spectacle in the middle of the piazza: de Orco’s headless body, dressed in a lavish suit with a purple cape, the head impaled beside it on a pike, the bloody knife and executioner’s block laid out beside the head. As Machiavelli concluded his comments on the affair, “The ferocity of this scene left the people at once stunned and satisfied.”

Interpretation

Cesare Borgia was a master player in the game of power. Always planning several moves ahead, he set his opponents the cleverest traps. For this Machiavelli honored him above all others in *The Prince*.

Cesare foresaw the future with amazing clarity in Romagna: Only brutal justice would bring order to the region. The process would take several years, and at first the people would welcome it. But it would soon make many enemies, and the citizens would come to resent the imposition of such unforgiving justice, especially by outsiders. Cesare himself, then, could not be seen as the agent of this justice—the people's hatred would cause too many problems in the future. And so he chose the one man who could do the dirty work, knowing in advance that once the task was done he would have to display de Orco's head on a pike. The scapegoat in this case had been planned from the beginning.

With Ts'ao Ts'ao, the scapegoat was an entirely innocent man; in the Romagna, he was the offensive weapon in Cesare's arsenal that let him get the dirty work done without bloodying his own hands. With this second kind of scapegoat it is wise to separate yourself from the hatchet man at some point, either leaving him dangling in the wind or, like Cesare, even making yourself the one to bring him to justice. Not only are you free of involvement in the problem, you can appear as the one who cleaned it up.

The Athenians regularly maintained a number of degraded and useless beings at the public expense; and when any calamity, such as plague, drought, or famine, befell the city ... [these scapegoats] were led about ... and then sacrificed, apparently by being stoned outside the city.

The Golden Bough, Sir James George Frazer, 1854-1941

KEYS TO POWER

The use of scapegoats is as old as civilization itself, and examples of it can be found in cultures around the world. The main idea behind these sacrifices is the shifting of guilt and sin to an outside figure—object, animal, or man—which is then banished or destroyed. The Hebrews used to take a live goat (hence the term “scapegoat”) upon whose head the priest would lay both hands while confessing the sins of the Children of Israel. Having thus had those sins transferred to it, the beast would be led away and abandoned in the wilderness. With the Athenians and the Aztecs, the scapegoat was human, often a person fed and raised for the purpose. Since famine and plague were thought to be visited on humans by the gods, in punishment for wrongdoing, the people suffered not only from the famine and plague themselves but from blame and guilt. They freed themselves of guilt by transferring it to an innocent person, whose death was intended to satisfy the divine powers and banish the evil from their midst.

It is an extremely human response to not look inward after a mistake or crime, but rather to look outward and to affix blame and guilt on a convenient object. When the plague was ravaging Thebes, Oedipus looked everywhere for its cause, everywhere except inside himself and his own sin of incest, which had so offended the gods and occasioned the plague. This profound need to exteriorize one’s guilt, to project it on another person or object, has an immense power, which the clever know how to harness. Sacrifice is a ritual, perhaps the most ancient ritual of all; ritual too is a well-spring of power. In the killing of de Orco, note Cesare’s symbolic and ritualistic display of his body. By framing it in this dramatic way he focused guilt outward. The citizens of Romagna responded instantly. Because it comes so naturally to us to look outward rather than inward, we readily accept the scapegoat’s guilt.

The bloody sacrifice of the scapegoat seems a barbaric relic of the past, but the practice lives on to this day, if indirectly and symbolically; since power depends on appearances, and those in power must seem never to make mistakes, the use of scapegoats is as popular as ever. What modern leader will take responsibility for his blunders? He searches out others to

blame, a scapegoat to sacrifice. When Mao Tse-tung's Cultural Revolution failed miserably, he made no apologies or excuses to the Chinese people; instead, like Ts'ao Ts'ao before him, he offered up scapegoats, including his own personal secretary and high-ranking member of the Party, Ch'en Po-ta.

Franklin D. Roosevelt had a reputation for honesty and fairness. Throughout his career, however, he faced many situations in which being the nice guy would have spelled political disaster—yet he could not be seen as the agent of any foul play. For twenty years, then, his secretary, Louis Howe, played the role de Orco had. *He* handled the backroom deals, the manipulation of the press, the underhanded campaign maneuvers. And whenever a mistake was committed, or a dirty trick contradicting Roosevelt's carefully crafted image became public, Howe served as the scapegoat, and never complained.

Besides conveniently shifting blame, a scapegoat can serve as a warning to others. In 1631 a plot was hatched to oust France's Cardinal Richelieu from power, a plot that became known as "The Day of the Dupes." It almost succeeded, since it involved the upper echelons of government, including the queen mother. But through luck and his own connivances, Richelieu survived.

One of the key conspirators was a man named Marillac, the keeper of the seals. Richelieu could not imprison him without implicating the queen mother, an extremely dangerous tactic, so he targeted Marillac's brother, a marshal in the army. This man had no involvement in the plot. Richelieu, however, afraid that other conspiracies might be in the air, especially in the army, decided to set an example. He tried the brother on trumped-up charges and had him executed. In this way he indirectly punished the real perpetrator, who had thought himself protected, and warned any future conspirators that he would not shrink from sacrificing the innocent to protect his own power.

In fact it is often wise to choose the most innocent victim possible as a sacrificial goat. Such people will not be powerful enough to fight you, and their naive protests may be seen as protesting too much—may be seen, in other words, as a sign of their guilt. Be careful, however, not to create a martyr. It is important that *you* remain the victim, the poor leader betrayed by the incompetence of those around you. If the scapegoat appears too weak and his punishment too cruel, you may end up the victim of your own

device. Sometimes you should find a more powerful scapegoat—one who will elicit less sympathy in the long run.

In this vein, history has time and again shown the value of using a close associate as a scapegoat. This is known as the “fall of the favorite.” Most kings had a personal favorite at court, a man whom they singled out, sometimes for no apparent reason, and lavished with favors and attention. But this court favorite could serve as a convenient scapegoat in case of a threat to the king’s reputation. The public would readily believe in the scapegoat’s guilt—why would the king sacrifice his favorite unless he were guilty? And the other courtiers, resentful of the favorite anyway, would rejoice at his downfall. The king, meanwhile, would rid himself of a man who by that time had probably learned too much about him, perhaps becoming arrogant and even disdainful of him. Choosing a close associate as a scapegoat has the same value as the “fall of the favorite.” You may lose a friend or aide, but in the long-term scheme of things, it is more important to hide your mistakes than to hold on to someone who one day will probably turn against you. Besides, you can always find a new favorite to take his place.

Image: The Innocent Goat. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest brings the goat into the temple, places his hands on its head, and confesses the people’s sins, transferring guilt to the guiltless beast, which is then led to the wilderness and abandoned, the people’s sins and blame vanishing with him.

Authority: Folly consists not in committing Folly, but in being incapable of concealing it. All men make mistakes, but the wise conceal the blunders they have made, while fools make them public. Reputation depends more on what is hidden than on what is seen. If you can’t be good, be careful. (Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

PART II: MAKE USE OF THE CAT'S-PAW

In the fable, the Monkey grabs the paw of his friend, the Cat, and uses it to fish chestnuts out of the fire, thus getting the nuts he craves, without hurting himself.

If there is something unpleasant or unpopular that needs to be done, it is far too risky for you to do the work yourself. You need a cat's-paw—someone who does the dirty, dangerous work for you. The cat's-paw grabs what you need, hurts whom you need hurt, and keeps people from noticing that you are the one responsible. Let someone else be the executioner, or the bearer of bad news, while you bring only joy and glad tidings.

THE MONKEY AND THE CAT

*A monkey and cat, in roguery and fun
Sworn brothers twain, both owned a common master,
Whatever mischief in the house was done
By Pug and Tom was contrived each disaster...*

*One winter's day was seen this hopeful pair
Close to the kitchen fire, as usual, posted.
Amongst the red-hot coals the cook with care
Had plac'd some nice plump chestnuts to be roasted,
From whence in smoke a pungent odor rose,
Whose oily fragrance struck the monkey's nose.*

*"Tom!" says sly Pug, "pray could not you and I
Share this dessert the cook is pleased to cater?
Had I such claws as yours, I'd quickly try:
Lend me a hand—'twill be a coup-de-mâitre."
So said, he seized his colleague's ready paw,
Pulled out the fruit, and crammed it in his jaw.*

*Now came the shining Mistress of the fane.
And off in haste the two marauders scampered.*

*Tom for his share of the plunder had the pain.
Whilst Pug his palate with the dainties pampered.*

FABLES, JEAN OF LA FONTAINE, 1621-1695

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW I

In 59 B.C., the future queen Cleopatra of Egypt, then ten years old, witnessed the overthrow and banishment of her father, Ptolemy XII, at the hand of his elder daughters—her own sisters. One of the daughters, Berenice, emerged as the leader of the rebellion, and to ensure that she would now rule Egypt alone, she imprisoned her other sisters and murdered her own husband. This may have been necessary as a practical step to secure her rule. But that a member of the royal family, a queen no less, would so overtly exact such violence on her own family horrified her subjects and stirred up powerful opposition. Four years later this opposition was able to return Ptolemy to power, and he promptly had Berenice and the other elder sisters beheaded.

In 51 B.C. Ptolemy died, leaving four remaining children as heirs. As was the tradition in Egypt, the eldest son, Ptolemy XIII (only ten at the time), married the elder sister, Cleopatra (now eighteen), and the couple took the throne together as king and queen. None of the four children felt satisfied with this; everyone, including Cleopatra, wanted more power. A struggle emerged between Cleopatra and Ptolemy, each trying to push the other to the side.

In 48 B.C., with the help of a government faction that feared Cleopatra's ambitions, Ptolemy was able to force his sister to flee the country, leaving himself as sole ruler. In exile, Cleopatra schemed. She wanted to rule alone and to restore Egypt to its past glory, a goal she felt none of her other siblings could achieve; yet as long as they were alive, she could not realize her dream. And the example of Berenice had made it clear that no one would serve a queen who was seen murdering her own kind. Even Ptolemy XIII had not dared murder Cleopatra, although he knew she would plot against him from abroad.

Within a year after Cleopatra's banishment, the Roman dictator Julius Caesar arrived in Egypt, determined to make the country a Roman colony. Cleopatra saw her chance: Reentering Egypt in disguise, she traveled hundreds of miles to reach Caesar in Alexandria. Legend has it that she had herself smuggled into his presence rolled up inside a carpet, which was

gracefully unfurled at his feet, revealing the young queen. Cleopatra immediately went to work on the Roman. She appealed to his love of spectacle and his interest in Egyptian history, and poured on her feminine charms. Caesar soon succumbed and restored Cleopatra to the throne.

Cleopatra's siblings seethed—she had outmaneuvered them. Ptolemy XIII would not wait to see what happened next: From his palace in Alexandria, he summoned a great army to march on the city and attack Caesar. In response, Caesar immediately put Ptolemy and the rest of the family under house arrest. But Cleopatra's younger sister Arsinoe escaped from the palace and placed herself at the head of the approaching Egyptian troops, proclaiming herself queen of Egypt. Now Cleopatra finally saw her chance: She convinced Caesar to release Ptolemy from house arrest, under the agreement that he would broker a truce. Of course she knew he would do the opposite—that he would fight Arsinoe for control of the Egyptian army. But this was to Cleopatra's benefit, for it would divide the royal family. Better still, it would give Caesar the chance to defeat and kill her siblings in battle.

Reinforced by troops from Rome, Caesar swiftly defeated the rebels. In the Egyptians' retreat, Ptolemy drowned in the Nile. Caesar captured Arsinoe and had her sent to Rome as a prisoner. He also executed the numerous enemies who had conspired against Cleopatra, and imprisoned others who had opposed her. To reinforce her position as uncontested queen, Cleopatra now married the only sibling left, Ptolemy XIV—only eleven at the time, and the weakest of the lot. Four years later Ptolemy mysteriously died, of poison.

In 41 B.C., Cleopatra employed on a second Roman leader, Marc Antony, the same tactics she had used so well on Julius Caesar. After seducing him, she hinted to him that her sister Arsinoe, still a prisoner in Rome, had conspired to destroy him. Marc Antony believed her and promptly had Arsinoe executed, thereby getting rid of the last of the siblings who had posed such a threat to Cleopatra.

THE CROW-HEN, THE COBRA, AND THE JACKEL

Once upon a time there was a crow and his wife who had built a nest in a banyan tree. A big snake crawled into the hollow trunk and ate up the chicks as they were hatched. The crow did not want to move, since he loved

the tree dearly. So he went to his friend the jackal for advice. A plan of action was devised. The crow and his wife flew about in implementation. As the wife approached a pond, she saw the women of the king's court bathing, with pearls, necklaces, gems, garments, and a golden chain laying on the shore. The crow-hen seized the golden chain in her beak and flew toward the banyan tree with the eunuchs in pursuit. When she reached the tree, she dropped the chain into the hole. As the kings' men climbed the tree for the chain, they saw the swelling hood of the cobra. So they killed the snake with their clubs, retrieved the golden chain, and went back to the pond. And the crow and his wife lived happily ever after.

A TALE FROM THE PANCHATANTRA, FOURTH CENTURY, RETOLD
IN THE CRAFT OF POWER, R. G. H. SIU, 1979

Interpretation

Legend has it that Cleopatra succeeded through her seductive charms, but in reality her power came from an ability to get people to do her bidding without realizing they were being manipulated. Caesar and Antony not only rid her of her most dangerous siblings—Ptolemy XIII and Arsinoe—they decimated *all* of her enemies, in both the government and the military. The two men became her cat's-paws. They entered the fire for her, did the ugly but necessary work, while shielding her from appearing as the destroyer of her siblings and fellow Egyptians. And in the end, both men acquiesced to her desire to rule Egypt not as a Roman colony but as an independent allied kingdom. And they did all this for her without realizing how she had manipulated them. This was persuasion of the subtlest and most powerful kind.

A queen must never dirty her hands with ugly tasks, nor can a king appear in public with blood on his face. Yet power cannot survive without the constant squashing of enemies—there will always be dirty little tasks that have to be done to keep you on the throne. Like Cleopatra, you need a cat's-paw.

This will usually be a person from outside your immediate circle, who will therefore be unlikely to realize how he or she is being used. You will find these dupes everywhere—people who enjoy doing you favors, especially if you throw them a minimal bone or two in exchange. But as they accomplish tasks that may seem to them innocent enough, or at least completely justified, they are actually clearing the field for you, spreading the information you feed them, undermining people they do not realize are your rivals, inadvertently furthering your cause, dirtying their hands while yours remain spotless.

HOW TO BROADCAST NEWS

When Omar, son of al-Khattab, was converted to Islam, he wanted the news of his conversion to reach everyone quickly. He went to see Jamil, son of Ma'mar al-Jumahi. The latter was renowned for the speed with which he passed on secrets. If he was told anything in confidence, he let everyone

know about it immediately. Omar said to him: "I have become a Muslim. Do not say anything. Keep it dark. Do not mention it in front of anyone." Jamil went out into the street and began shouting at the top of his voice: "Do you believe that Omar, son of al-Khattab, has not become a Muslim? Well, do not believe that! I am telling you that he has!" The news of Omar's conversion to Islam was spread everywhere. And that was just what he intended.

**THE SUBTLE RUSE: THE BOOK OF ARABIC WISDOM AND GUILLE,
THIRTEENTH CENTURY**

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW II

In the late 1920s, civil war broke out in China as the Nationalist and Communist parties battled for control of the country. In 1927 Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalist leader, vowed to kill every last Communist, and over the next few years he nearly accomplished his task, pushing his enemies hard until, in 1934-1935, he forced them into the Long March, a six-thousand-mile retreat from the southeast to the remote northwest, through harsh terrain, in which most of their ranks were decimated. In late 1936 Chiang planned one last offensive to wipe them out, but he was caught in a mutiny: His own soldiers captured him and turned him over to the Communists. Now he could only expect the worst.

Meanwhile, however, the Japanese began an invasion of China, and much to Chiang's surprise, instead of killing him the Communist leader, Mao Tse-tung, proposed a deal: The Communists would let him go, and would recognize him as commander of their forces as well as his, if he would agree to fight alongside them against their common enemy. Chiang had expected torture and execution; now he could not believe his luck. How soft these Reds had become. Without having to fight a rearguard action against the Communists, he knew he could beat the Japanese, and then a few years down the line he would turn around and destroy the Reds with ease. He had nothing to lose and everything to gain by agreeing to their terms.

The Communists proceeded to fight the Japanese in their usual fashion, with hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, while the Nationalists fought a more conventional war. Together, after several years, they succeeded in evicting the Japanese. Now, however, Chiang finally understood what Mao had really planned. His own army had met the brunt of the Japanese artillery, was greatly weakened, and would take a few years to recover. The Communists, meanwhile, had not only avoided any direct hits from the Japanese, they had used the time to recoup their strength, and to spread out and gain pockets of influence all over China. As soon as the war against the Japanese ended, the civil war started again—but this time the Communists enveloped the weakened Nationalists and slowly beat them into submission. The Japanese had served as Mao's cat's-paw, inadvertently ploughing the

fields for the Communists and making possible their victory over Chiang Kai-shek.

Interpretation

Most leaders who had taken as powerful an enemy as Chiang Kai-shek prisoner would have made sure to kill him. But in doing so they would have lost the chance Mao exploited. Without the experienced Chiang as leader of the Nationalists, the fight to drive the Japanese out might have lasted much longer, with devastating results. Mao was far too clever to let anger spoil the chance to kill two birds with one stone. In essence, Mao used two cat's-paws to help him attain total victory. First, he cleverly baited Chiang into taking charge of the war against the Japanese. Mao knew the Nationalists led by Chiang would do most of the hard fighting and would succeed in pushing the Japanese out of China, if they did not have to concern themselves with fighting the Communists at the same time. The Nationalists, then, were the first cat's-paw, used to evict the Japanese. But Mao also knew that in the process of leading the war against the invaders, the Japanese artillery and air support would decimate the conventional forces of the Nationalists, doing damage it could take the Communists decades to inflict. Why waste time and lives if the Japanese could do the job quickly? It was this wise policy of using one cat's-paw after another that allowed the Communists to prevail.

There are two uses of the cat's-paw: to save appearances, as Cleopatra did, and to save energy and effort. The latter case in particular demands that you plan several moves in advance, realizing that a temporary move backward (letting Chiang go, say) can lead to a giant leap forward. If you are temporarily weakened and need time to recover, it will often serve you well to use those around you both as a screen to hide your intentions and as a cat's-paw to do your work for you. Look for a powerful third party who shares an enemy with you (if for different reasons), then take advantage of their superior power to deal blows which would have cost you much more energy, since you are weaker. You can even gently guide them into hostilities. Always search out the overly aggressive as potential cat's-paws—they are often more than willing to get into a fight, and you can choose just the right fight for your purposes.

A FOOL AND A WISE MAN

*A wise man, walking alone,
Was being bothered by a fool throwing stones at his head.
Turning to face him, he said: "My dear chap, well thrown!
Please accept these few francs.
You've worked hard enough to get more than mere thanks.
Every effort deserves its reward.
But see that man over there? He can afford
More than I can.
Present him with some of your stones: they'll earn a good wage."
Lured by the bait, the stupid man
Ran off to repeat the outrage
On the other worthy citizen.
This time he wasn't paid in money for his stones.
Up rushed serving-men,
And seized him and thrashed him and broke all his bones.
In the courts of kings there are pests like this, devoid of sense:
They'll make their master laugh at your expense.
To silence their cackle, should you hand out rough
Punishment? Maybe you're not strong enough.
Better persuade them to attack
Somebody else, who can more than pay them back.*

SELECTED FABLES, JEAN DE LA FONTAINE, 1621-1695

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW III

Kuriyama Daizen was an adept of Cha-no-yu (Hot Water for Tea, the Japanese tea ceremony) and a student of the teachings of the great tea master Sen no Rikyu. Around 1620 Daizen learned that a friend of his, Hoshino Soemon, had borrowed a large sum of money (300 ryo) to help a relative who had fallen into debt. But although Soemon had managed to bail out his relative, he had simply displaced the burden onto himself. Daizen knew Soemon well—he neither cared nor understood much about money, and could easily get into trouble through slowness in repaying the loan, which had been made by a wealthy merchant called Kawachiya Sanemon. Yet if Daizen offered to help Soemon pay back the loan, he would refuse, out of pride, and might even be offended.

One day Daizen visited his friend, and after touring the garden and looking at Soemon's prized peonies, they retired to his reception room. Here Daizen saw a painting by the master Kano Tennyu. "Ah," Daizen exclaimed, "a splendid piece of painting.... I don't know when I have seen anything I like better." After several more bouts of praise, Soemon had no choice: "Well," he said, "since you like it so much, I hope you will do me the favor of accepting it."

At first Daizen refused, but when Soemon insisted he gave in. The next day Soemon in turn received a package from Daizen. Inside it was a beautiful and delicate vase, which Daizen, in an accompanying note, asked his friend to accept as a token of his appreciation for the painting that Soemon had so graciously given him the day before. He explained that the vase had been made by Sen no Rikyu himself, and bore an inscription from Emperor Hideyoshi. If Soemon did not care for the vase, Daizen suggested, he might make a gift of it to an adherent of Cha-no-yu—perhaps the merchant Kawachiya Sanemon, who had often expressed a desire to possess it. "I hear," Daizen continued, "he has a fine piece of fancy paper [the 300-ryo I.O.U.] which you would much like. It is possible you might arrange an exchange."

Realizing what his gracious friend was up to, Soemon took the vase to the wealthy lender. "However did you get this," exclaimed Sanemon, when

Soemon showed him the vase. "I have often heard of it, but this is the first time I have ever seen it. It is such a treasure that it is never allowed outside the gate!" He instantly offered to exchange the debt note for the flower vase, and to give Soemon 300 ryo more on top of it. But Soemon, who did not care for money, only wanted the debt note back, and Sanemon gladly gave it to him. Then Soemon immediately hurried to Daizen's house to thank him for his clever support.

THE INDIAN BIRD

A merchant kept a bird in a cage. He was going to India, the land from which the bird came, and asked it whether he could bring anything back for it. The bird asked for its freedom, but was refused. So he asked the merchant to visit a jungle in India and announce his captivity to the free birds who were there. The merchant did so, and no sooner had he spoken when a wild bird, just like his own, fell senseless out of a tree on to the ground. The merchant thought that this must be a relative of his own bird, and felt sad that he should have caused this death. When he got home, the bird asked him whether he had brought good news from India.

"No," said the merchant, "I fear that my news is bad. One of your relations collapsed and fell at my feet when I mentioned your captivity."

As soon as these words were spoken the merchant's bird collapsed and fell to the bottom of the cage. "The news of his kins-man's death has killed him, too," thought the merchant. Sorrowfully he picked up the bird and put it on the window sill. At once the bird revived and flew to a nearby tree. "Now you know," the bird said, "that what you thought was disaster was in fact good news for me. And how the message, the suggestion of how to behave in order to free myself, was transmitted to me through you, my captor." And he flew away, free at last.

TALES OF THE DERVISHES, IDRIES SHAH, 1967

Interpretation

Kuriyama Daizen understood that the granting of a favor is never simple: If it is done with fuss and obviousness, its receiver feels burdened by an obligation. This may give the doer a certain power, but it is a power that will eventually self-destruct, for it will stir up resentment and resistance. A favor done indirectly and elegantly has ten times more power. Daizen knew a direct approach would only have offended Soemon. By letting his friend give him the painting, however, he made Soemon feel that he too had pleased his friend with a gift. In the end, all three parties emerged from the encounter feeling fulfilled in their own way.

In essence, Daizen made himself the cat's-paw, the tool to take the chestnuts out of the fire. He must have felt some pain in losing the vase, but he gained not only the painting but, more important, the power of the courtier. The courtier uses his gloved hand to soften any blows against him, disguise his scars, and make the act of rescue more elegant and clean. By helping others, the courtier eventually helps himself. Daizen's example provides the paradigm for every favor done between friends and peers: never impose your favors. Search out ways to make yourself the cat's-paw, indirectly extricating your friends from distress without imposing yourself or making them feel obligated to you.

*One should not be too straightforward. Go and see the forest.
The straight trees are cut down, the crooked ones are left standing.
Kautilya, Indian philosopher, third century B.C.*

KEYS TO POWER

As a leader you may imagine that constant diligence, and the appearance of working harder than anyone else, signify power. Actually, though, they have the opposite effect: They imply weakness. Why are you working so hard? Perhaps you are incompetent, and have to put in extra effort just to keep up; perhaps you are one of those people who does not know how to delegate, and has to meddle in everything. The truly powerful, on the other hand, seem never to be in a hurry or overburdened. While others work their fingers to the bone, they take their leisure. They know how to find the right people to put in the effort while they save their energy and keep their hands out of the fire. Similarly, you may believe that by taking on the dirty work yourself, involving yourself directly in unpleasant actions, you impose your power and instill fear. In fact you make yourself look ugly, and abusive of your high position. Truly powerful people keep their hands clean. Only good things surround them, and the only announcements they make are of glorious achievements.

You will often find it necessary, of course, to expend energy, or to effect an evil but necessary action. But you must never appear to be this action's agent. Find a cat's-paw. Develop the arts of finding, using, and, in time, getting rid of these people when their cat's-paw role has been fulfilled.

On the eve of an important river battle, the great third-century Chinese strategist Chuko Liang found himself falsely accused of secretly working for the other side. As proof of his loyalty, his commander ordered him to produce 100,000 arrows for the army within three days, or be put to death. Instead of trying to manufacture the arrows, an impossible task, Liang took a dozen boats and had bundles of straw lashed to their sides. In the late afternoon, when mist always blanketed the river, he floated the boats toward the enemy camp. Fearing a trap from the wily Chuko Liang, the enemy did not attack the barely visible boats with boats of their own, but showered them with arrows from the bank. As Liang's boats inched closer, they redoubled the rain of arrows, which stuck in the thick straw. After several hours, the men hiding on board sailed the vessels quickly downstream, where Chuko Liang met them and collected his 100,000 arrows.

Chuko Liang would never do work that others could do for him—he was always thinking up tricks like this one. The key to planning such a strategy is the ability to think far ahead, to imagine ways in which other people can be baited into doing the job for you.

An essential element in making this strategy work is to disguise your goal, shrouding it in mystery, like the strange enemy boats appearing dimly in the mist. When your rivals cannot be sure what you are after, they will react in ways that often work against them in the long run. In fact they will become your cat's-paws. If you disguise your intentions, it is much easier to guide them into moves that accomplish exactly what you want done, but prefer not to do yourself. This may require planning several moves in advance, like a billiard ball that bounces off the sides a few times before heading into the right pocket.

The early-twentieth-century American con artist Yellow Kid Weil knew that no matter how skillfully he homed in on the perfect wealthy sucker, if he, a stranger, approached this man directly, the sucker might become suspicious. So Weil would find someone the sucker already knew to serve as a cat's-paw—someone lower on the totem pole who was himself an unlikely target, and would therefore be less suspicious. Weil would interest this man in a scheme promising incredible wealth. Convinced the scheme was for real, the cat's-paw would often suggest, without prompting, that his boss or wealthy friend should get involved: Having more cash to invest, this man would increase the size of the pot, making bigger bucks for all concerned. The cat's-paw would then involve the wealthy sucker who had been Weil's target all along, but who would not suspect a trap, since it was his trusty subordinate who had roped him in. Devices like this are often the best way to approach a person of power: Use an associate or subordinate to hook you up with your primary target. The cat's-paw establishes your credibility and shields you from the unsavory appearance of being too pushy in your courtship.

The easiest and most effective way to use a cat's-paw is often to plant information with him that he will then spread to your primary target. False or planted information is a powerful tool, especially if spread by a dupe whom no one suspects. You will find it very easy to play innocent and disguise yourself as the source.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

At the turn of the year, when kings take the field, David sent Joab out with his other officers and all the Israelite forces, and they ravaged Ammon and laid siege to Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his couch and, as he walked about on the roof of the palace, he saw from there a woman bathing and she was very beautiful. He sent to inquire who she was, and the answer came, "It must be Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite...." David wrote a letter to Joab and sent Uriah with it. He wrote in the letter: "Put Uriah opposite the enemy where the fighting is fiercest and then fall back, and leave him to meet his death."... Joab... stationed Uriah at a point where he knew they would put up a stout fight. The men of the city sallied out and engaged Joab, and some of David's guards fell; Uriah the Hittite was also killed. Joab sent David a dispatch with all the news of the battle.... When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him; and when the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her into his house. She became his wife and bore him a son.

OLD TESTAMENT, 2 SAMUEL, 11-12

The strategic therapist Dr. Milton H. Erickson would often encounter among his patients a married couple in which the wife wanted the therapy but the husband absolutely refused it. Rather than wasting energy trying to deal with the man directly, Dr. Erickson would see the wife alone, and as she talked he would interject interpretations of the husband's behavior that he knew would rile the husband up if he heard them. Sure enough, the wife would tell her husband what the doctor had said. After a few weeks the husband would be so furious he would insist on joining his wife in the sessions so he could set the doctor straight.

Finally, you may well find cases in which deliberately offering yourself as the cat's-paw will ultimately gain you great power. This is the ruse of the perfect courtier. Its symbol is Sir Walter Raleigh, who once placed his own cloak on the muddy ground so that Queen Elizabeth would not sully her shoes. As the instrument that protects a master or peer from unpleasantness or danger, you gain immense respect, which sooner or later will pay dividends. And remember: If you can make your assistance subtle and gracious rather than boastful and burdensome, your recompense will be that much the more satisfying and powerful.

Image: The Cat's-Paw.
It has long claws to grab
things. It is soft and
padded. Take hold of the cat
and use its paw to pluck
things out of the fire, to claw
your enemy, to play with the
mouse before devouring it.
Sometimes you hurt the
cat, but most often it
doesn't feel a thing.

Authority: Do everything pleasant yourself, everything unpleasant through
third parties. By adopting the first course you win favor, by taking the
second you deflect ill will. Important affairs often require rewards and
punishments. Let only the good come from you and the evil from others.
(Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

REVERSAL

The cat's-paw and the scapegoat must be used with extreme caution and delicacy. They are like screens that hide your own involvement in dirty work from the public; if at any moment the screen is lifted and you are seen as the manipulator, the puppet master, the whole dynamic turns around—your hand will be seen everywhere, and you will be blamed for misfortunes you may have had nothing to do with. Once the truth is revealed, events will snowball beyond your control.

In 1572, Queen Catherine de' Médicis of France conspired to do away with Gaspard de Coligny, an admiral in the French navy and a leading member of the Huguenot (French Protestant) community. Coligny was close to Catherine's son, Charles IX, and she feared his growing influence on the young king. So she arranged for a member of the Guise family, one of the most powerful royal clans in France, to assassinate him.

Secretly, however, Catherine had another plan: She wanted the Huguenots to blame the Guises for killing one of their leaders, and to take revenge. With one blow, she would erase or injure two threatening rivals, Coligny and the Guise family. Yet both plans went awry. The assassin missed his target, only wounding Coligny; knowing Catherine as his enemy, he strongly suspected it was she who had set up the attack on him, and he told the king so. Eventually the failed assassination and the arguments that ensued from it set off a chain of events that led to a bloody civil war between Catholics and Protestants, culminating in the horrifying Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, in which thousands of Protestants were killed.

If you have to use a cat's-paw or a scapegoat in an action of great consequence, be very careful: Too much can go wrong. It is often wiser to use such dupes in more innocent endeavors, where mistakes or miscalculations will cause no serious harm.

Finally, there are moments when it is advantageous to not disguise your involvement or responsibility, but rather to take the blame yourself for some mistake. If you have power and are secure in it, you should sometimes play the penitent: With a sorrowful look, you ask for forgiveness from those weaker than you. It is the ploy of the king who makes a show of his own

sacrifices for the good of the people. Similarly, upon occasion you may want to appear as the agent of punishment in order to instill fear and trembling in your subordinates. Instead of the cat's-paw you show your own mighty hand as a threatening gesture. Play such a card sparingly. If you play it too often, fear will turn into resentment and hatred. Before you know it, such emotions will spark a vigorous opposition that will someday bring you down. Get in the habit of using a cat's-paw—it is far safer.