

Cut Them Loose

An old farmer in northern India brought his goods to sell at the village bazaar. Among the items was a whole covey of quail. In order to keep them together, he tied a string around one leg of each bird and attached the strings to a ring that fit over a stick driven into the ground. The farmer exercised the birds by training them to walk around and around in a circle.

For most of the day, the farmer had no offers on the quail. Then along came a devout religious man of the highest Hindu caste. He had great reverence for all of life and felt deep, profound compassion for the little birds walking in a never-ending circle.

The religious man asked the farmer the price of the quail and then offered to buy them all. The farmer was elated. As the holy man handed him the money, however, the farmer was startled to hear him say, "Now, please, set them all free."

"What did you say?" the farmer asked.

The holy man repeated himself, saying, "You heard me. Cut the strings from their legs and turn them loose. Set them all free!"

Without another word, the farmer did as he was told. After all, the birds were no longer his. He had been compensated for them.

Now, what do you think the quail did? They continued their circular march around the center pole. When the religious man attempted to shoo them away, they landed not too far away and resumed their march.

Before we consider the folly of the quail, we must ask ourselves: Are we guilty of the same behavior? Old habits and thought patterns can keep us from being whom God wants us to be and from doing what He wants us to do.

To be set free, there are times we must give ourselves a gentle push, and other times we must receive a nudge from someone else.

As Charles Kingsley, Church of England parson and novelist, observed: "There are two freedoms – the false, where a man is free to do what he likes; the true, where a man is free to do what he ought."

--Beecher Hunter