It Could Always Be Worse
A Yiddish Folktale

Once there was a poor Jewish man who had come to the end of his rope. So he went to his rabbi, a holy teacher, for advice.

"Holy Rabbi!" he cried. "Things are in a bad way with me, and are getting worse all the time! We are poor, so poor, that my wife, my six children, my in-laws and I have to live in a one-room hut. We get in each other's way all the time. Our nerves are frayed and, because we have plenty of troubles, we quarrel. Believe me—my home is awful, and things could not possibly be worse!"

The rabbi pondered the matter gravely. "My son," he said, "promise to do as I tell you and your condition will improve."

"I promise, Rabbi," answered the troubled man. "I'll do anything you say."

"Tell me—what animals do you own?"

"I have a cow, a goat and some chickens."

"Very well! Go home now and take all these animals into your house to live with you.

The poor man was amazed, but since he had promised the rabbi, he went home and brought all the animals into his house.

The following day the poor man returned to
the rabbi and cried, "Rabbi, what misfortune have you brought upon me! I did as you told me and brought the animals into the house. And now what have I got? Things are worse than ever! The house is turned into a barn! Save me, Rabbi-help me!"

"My son," replied the rabbi calmly, "go home and take the chickens out of your house. God will help you!"

So the poor man went home and took the chickens out of his house. But it was not long before he again came running to the rabbi.

"Holy Rabbi!" he wailed. "Help me, save me! The goat is smashing everything in the house-she's turning my life into a nightmare."

"Go home," said the rabbi gently, "and take the goat out of the house. God will help you!"

The poor man returned to his house and removed the goat. But it wasn't long before he again came running to the rabbi, crying loudly, "What a misfortune you've brought upon my head, Rabbi! The cow has turned my house into a stable! How can you expect a human being to live side by side with an animal?"

"You're right-a hundred times right!" agreed the rabbi. "Go straight home and take the cow out of your house!"

And the poor unfortunate man hurried home and took the cow out of his house.

Not a day had passed before he came running again to the rabbi. "Rabbi!" cried the poor man, his face beaming. "You've made life sweet again for me. With all the animals out, the house is so quiet, so roomy and so clean! What a pleasure!"
Discussion Questions

1. What was wrong with the poor man’s house that he went to the Rabbi?

2. What did the Rabbi tell him to do?

3. Did the man follow the Rabbi’s advice? Was he happy about it at first?

4. Why did the man think things were better in the end? Were they?