

# FARMER JONES AND THE MULE TRAINER

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

Back in the beginning of the twentieth century, even before the automobile had reached America's remote rural areas, Farmer Jones had his farm out in the mid-western part of the country. Out in those parts, where the country is almost as flat and featureless as a pancake, the roads stretched straight as an arrow endlessly from horizon to horizon.

It was in the middle of one of those dusty dirt roads that Farmer Jones stood with his new mule one day. Together with him stood the Mule Trainer, who had just arrived there from town.

In those days, and in those parts, the folks thought long and hard before they spoke. As a matter of fact, they hardly spoke at all, and so the conversation went something like this:

"Howdy, Farmer Jones."

After a few minutes had passed, Farmer Jones responded:

"Howdy, Mule Trainer."

More minutes passed in dead silence.

Finally, the Mule Trainer spoke:

"Fine mule you got there."

The minutes ticked by. Finally, after almost an eternity, Farmer Jones responded and said:

"Yep."

Well, to make a long story short, the Mule Trainer finally got out a two-by-four, and went and stood right in front of the mule, face to face. He lifted the two-by-four above his head, and WHAM!, brought it down on top of the mule's head with all his strength.

The mule blinked.

Again, he lifted the two-by-four above his head, and WHAM!, brought it down with all his strength on the mule's head, right between the mule's ears.

The mule blinked again

Again, a third time, the Mule Trainer lifted the two-by-four above his head, about to bring it down once more. But, just then, Farmer Jones spoke up in his slow drawl:

"Excuse me, Mule Trainer, just what are you trying to *do* to my mule?"

After a few moments, Mule Trainer replied and said:

"Farmer Jones, when you're training mules, the *first* thing you gotta do is *get their attention!*"

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People often ask: Why does God allow sickness, disasters, accidents, and the like to come upon us? There are a number of good reasons for these calamities.

One good reason is humility. Sometimes, God needs to remind us that, as the Psalms say, "we are but men" (cf. Ps. 9:20). The Prophet Esaias says: "Add more evils upon

them, O Lord; add more evils upon them that are glorious upon the earth" (Es. 26:15). We are mere mortals, not immortal gods, or supermen. Oftentimes, we forget that.

Other times, as the Athonite Elder Joseph the Cave-dweller would have said, "God is filing away the rust (i.e., our sins), so that we will shine in the Resurrection." We have a lot of rust, and so we need a lot of filing.

On other occasions, bad things happen to us because we are living, after all, in "occupied territory." When you are living under the heel of a cruel oppressor, a dictator, your privileges are taken away; you have no more rights; you suffer. Nobody wants to suffer, but when you are a slave in occupied territory, you have no choices. The enemy of mankind brings many evils upon us.

And finally, God sometimes allows terrible things to happen to us, so that He can get our attention. Remember how "religious" America became for a couple of weeks after 9/11? Everyone, suddenly, was saying, "God Bless America," — for a while, at least. Everyone was frightened and subdued.

When you are trying to train a mule, it takes a lot to get its attention.

And, as we have learned, its attention span is not very long.

Usually.

I should like to think — hope — that we are smarter than mules.