

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BOOGY - WOOGIE

*“Stretch forth your hand toward the heavens, and there shall be a darkness on the land of Egypt, and the darkness will be tangible.” (10:21)*

Nothing is more frightening than nothingness. As young children, our last request at bedtime is “Daddy, don’t close the door!” And what if the door accidentally closes and we find ourselves alone and in the dark? What is the fear that lurks in the darkness? Some vast and hideous monster two inches from our face? Some huge slimy insect hiding under the bed? Or worse — the remnants of last night’s midnight feast?

Maybe it’s something much more fundamental that frightens us.

Even when we grow to adulthood, we never quite lose our fear of the dark. If we no longer fear it as we did when we were children, it’s because we have the means to restore the light. We know we can get out of bed and flick the switch. We’re in control. But if we were placed in a darkness over which we had no control, if we were powerless to restore the light, all those primordial youthful fears would immediately take hold.

Why is the dark so frightening? More than large furry spiders or the famous, but rarely-spotted, *Boogy* man, what really frightens us about the dark is that we are in a world where nothing exists outside ourselves. Nothing exists. Only the sound of our own breathing. The thump, thump of our heart. And after a few minutes of

silence, the low whistling of the blood flowing in our ears. The sound of nothing. In Hebrew the word for darkness is connected to the word “to withhold.” (*“And you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.” — Bereishet 22:12*)

Darkness is the absence, the withholding, of the world outside.

In this week’s *Parsha*, the Torah records the penultimate plague inflicted on the Egyptians — the plague of darkness. Ostensibly, this was a very benign plague. No blood turned to water. No-one suffered excruciating boils. Just darkness. A darkness that at first prevented you from seeing someone even if they were right in front of your face, and then it became even thicker until it literally froze people. How can darkness freeze someone?

The answer is that, in the dark, I perceive that there is nowhere outside of me. I have nowhere to go. If I extend my little finger, it will vanish. There is nothing there. No place, no space outside.

I often think that our present situation in Israel is rather like those Egyptians in the plague of darkness. We are paralyzed, incapable of action. We are living in a world of darkness. A world where the *Boogy* man wears an Arab kafia on his head and has a permanent three-day stubble on his face. A world where G-d is so hidden from us that we feel that if we move at all we will simply vanish into nothingness — like some medieval sailor’s nightmare of sailing off the edge of the

world.

One of G-d’s names is *Hamakom*. “The Place.” The mystics teach that G-d doesn’t exist in the world — The world exists in G-d.

G-d is the place of the world. He is the place of all existence. He causes existence.

The nations of the world repeat the same message to the Jewish People down the ages: “You have no place in this world.” You are trying to Judaize the Haram el-Sharif. You don’t belong here. You stole the land. Your destiny is to wander, to be the Wandering Jew of Christian mythology.

In every lie, there is a grain of truth.

It is true that the Jewish People have no place in the world — in the natural order of things. We are an anti-historical people. By all the “laws” of history and probability, the Jewish People should have faded out long ago. One of historical theory’s biggest problems is our survival. Because we shouldn’t be here. We have no place in the world. Our biggest problems start when we think that we belong here, when we want to play at being a nation just like any other nation.

G-d didn’t make us that way; we are a supernatural people. We are His “inheritance,” His “portion” in this world. Our entire existence is only in Him. It is only when we realize that our place in this world is to be in *Hamakom* — to be in the Place of the world — we will emerge from our paralyzing darkness to a world of light and security.

**H**ashem tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. Hashem ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. Hashem again

hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. Hashem tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when Hashem strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays Hashem's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. Hashem sends the final plague, killing the first born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first born son) and *tefillin*.

## YIRMIYAHU 46:13- 28

### EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY

**M**uch attention is given in the Torah to the ten plagues and to Egypt's downfall. We are not rejoicing at our enemies' ruin. Rather,

this is part of Israel's education: We had to learn that even the great super-power, Egypt, could fall. Each plague demonstrated how the mighty empire was like putty in G-d's hands.

This was not the last time Egypt would suffer devastation. The Prophet Yirmiyahu foretells Egypt's fall to Babylon. Her armies will turn and flee from the invaders who will appear more numerous than locusts; they will cut her down like so many axes reduc-

ing a forest to nothingness.

Egypt gives way to Babylonia, and Babylonia later falls to Medio-Persia. All are transient. They rise to the greatest of heights, but disappear without a trace when G-d so decrees.

Israel, however, will never be wiped out. We live on to fulfill our eternal mission as the Chosen People.

There is no human super-power for us to put our trust in. The higher they rise, the bigger their fall.

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## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**"At approximately midnight I will go out amidst Egypt, and every first born will die..." (11:14)**

Hashem's "clock" is set to Jerusalem time. The plague of the first-born took place at exactly midnight, Jerusalem time. But because Egypt is west of Jerusalem, midnight there occurs later. When Moshe said the plague would be at "approximately midnight," he was referring to local Egyptian time.

• *Kehillat Yitzchak; thanks to Rabbi Sholem Fishbane*

לע"נ

מרת לאה בת ר' יצחק אייזיק ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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# The Torah Universe

by Rabbi Nosson Slifkin  
(<http://www.zootorah.com>)

“Crazed Boa Constrictor Attacks Deputy Mayor In Bizarre Religious Celebration”

The above headline may appear, along with “Elvis Found On The Moon” and “Ross Perot Kidnapped By Space Aliens,” to have been taken from the National Enquirer. But in fact it refers to an inspirational event that took place in Jerusalem a few weeks ago. (It should be noted at this point that the boa constrictor attack was an unexpected occurrence and was not the source of the aforementioned inspiration.)

The event was a reception to mark the launch of a book that I wrote for the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo entitled *In Noah’s Footsteps: Biblical Perspectives on the Zoo*. Since this is my book, it is not for me to write of any possible beneficial effects produced by the book itself. Instead, I would like to write about other aspects of the evening that provided a personal inspiration — and also about the boa constrictor, because it was most surprising.

Arriving at the zoo in the evening, my wife and I were met by Shmulik the zoologist. Ordinarily a lean and fit man, he now sported an extraordinarily large paunch. A paunch that was pulsating and squirming in a way that paunches normally don’t. My wife was aghast; I was prepared for this, and merely asked him why he was keeping the snake under his shirt.

“Because it’s cold,” he replied. “And, by the way, when you use it in your lecture, be careful. It’s not in a very good mood. If it bites, just stay still until I can get to you.” This made my wife very nervous indeed, but I reminded her that I had handled countless boa constrictors in the past without any difficulties whatsoever.

The guests began to arrive — and this was the first source of inspiration.

There’s a lot of talk about the supposedly terrible animosity in Israel between the religious and secular Jewish public. Well, here we were at the zoo, a secular establishment that does not close on Shabbat (although tickets can only be purchased in advance or elsewhere), yet among the guests were numerous prominent “ultra-Orthodox” rabbis and politicians. Apparently we haven’t yet totally lost Jewish unity after all.

The first speaker was the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Rabbi Uri Lupoliansky. He heads an organization called Yad Sarah which is an outstanding tribute to the Jewish People. It grants free loans of all kinds of medical equipment, from wheelchairs to beepers for expectant fathers, to all kinds of Israelis (religious and secular, Jewish and Arab). Is there any other country in the world that can boast of such a thing?

The Deputy Mayor spoke of another source of inspiration. Israel is currently under siege. The community of Gilo, a few hundred yards from the zoo, is under gunfire from the Palestinian village of Beit Jalla. Israelis are living in fear of lethal barrages of rocks and Molotov cocktails, as well as suicide bombers and regional instability. Yet life goes on; and politicians, councilmen and others meet at the zoo to celebrate the launch of a book. *Am Yisrael Chai!*

The second speaker was the zoo director, Shai Doron, who related some amusing anecdotes about his job as director of the world’s only Biblical Zoo. For example, the zoo benefits from a commandment in the Bible which mandates that tithes of all produce grown in Israel be given to a priest. The priest himself may only eat the produce if he is ritually pure, something that is impossible to attain since

the destruction of the Temple. However, his animals may eat the produce, and all of the zoo’s animals have therefore been sold to a priest so that the zoo can receive free produce. The director wryly commented on the difficulties that he has in explaining this to other zoo directors, one of whom frantically begged if he could “convert his zoo animals to Judaism” in order to receive free vegetables!

Finally, it was my turn to speak, and my topic was the question of why conservation is important. Of course, we all feel that it is important, but it’s difficult to pin down the reasons for it. What’s the point? Why spend so much effort and expense to save species? What difference if one or two become extinct?

One answer is that animals can prove to have extraordinary uses to human beings. For example, scientist Michael Zasloff discovered that African clawed frogs secrete antibiotics; he called these substances magesinins, after the Hebrew word *magen*, “shield.” Cancer fighting molecules are obtained from the liver of the dogfish shark.

Yet this answer is limited in its application. Virginia Morell, writing about efforts to save the entirely unremarkable Cape Sable sparrow, admitted: “The Cape Sable sparrow, of course, is not likely to lead to a cure for cancer or to any other earthshaking discovery...Nor are most species around us. Why would it matter if this little bird...became extinct?”

Morell left this question unanswered. There doesn’t seem to be any good answer.

Of course, if you’re Jewish, then it’s a whole different story.

One of the commandments in the Torah is that we are prohibited from taking both a mother bird and her

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*continued on page eight*

## BLESSING WITH LOVE

**B**efore the *kohanim* bless the congregation, they say a blessing in which they praise Hashem for “sanctifying us with the holiness of Aharon and commanding us to bless His people Israel with love.”

The commentaries call attention to the closing phrase of this blessing, which seems to indicate that this mitzvah to bless the congregation must be done with love. Why, they ask, is it only regarding *this* mitzvah that our sages established the text of the blessing preceding it to include the prerequisite of “love?”

Two sources are cited as explanation. One is a midrash (*Devarim Rabbah 11:4*) which focuses on the word “*amor*” in the Torah passage (*Bamidbar 6:23*) instructing the *kohanim* in what to say in their blessing. This word, meaning “say” (to them), is written with a “vav” to make it “full.” The message, says the midrash, is that Hashem wanted the *kohanim* to know that when He delegated to them the power to bless Israel, He insisted that they not do so in a haughty and impatient, half-hearted manner, but rather with wholehearted sincerity.

The other source is a quote from the Zohar cited by Magen Avraham (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128:18*): “Any *kohen* who does not love the people or is not loved by them should not lift his hands in prayer.”

Both of these sources indicate that this is not simply a mitzvah for *kohanim* to lift their hands and pronounce the blessing written in the Torah. There must be a genuine desire on the part of the *kohanim* to see the people blessed and reciprocally on the part of the people to receive the *kohanim*’s blessing. The *kohanim* must therefore prepare for this by stressing in the praise they give to Hashem for commanding this mitzvah the need to do so with love.

Two supports of this approach may be suggested. One is the custom of the *kohanim* saying a special prayer before ascending the podium to bless the congregation, in which they ask that they be able to perform the mitzvah without any obstacle or flaw. This unusual preparation for a mitzvah may be necessary because of the challenge it provides to human emotions. Another support for the symbiotic relation between blesser and blessed is the requirement for *kohanim* to lift their hands. Rabbi Yosef Elbo, in his *Sefer Haikarim*, explains this as a virtual placing of hands on the head which is an integral part in every blessing.

• *Sotah 39a*

## A POINT OF HONOR

**E**very seven years Jews fulfilled the mitzvah of *hakhel*. On the first day of Chol Hamoed (Intermediate Days of) Succot following the *shemitta* year, all men, women and children of Israel gathered in the *Beit Hamikdash* to hear

the king read aloud selected chapters of the Torah.

Although the king had the royal prerogative of sitting while he did this reading, the *mishna* tells us that King Agripas stood, a gesture which gained for him the praise of the sages. The *gemara* challenges the praise given to this king for waiving the honor due him from the ruling of Rabbi Ashi that a king cannot waive the honor due him from his subjects. The response to this challenge is that he may do so in regard to a mitzvah such as this in which he showed honor to the Torah he was reading.

Tosefot raises a problem with this response from two different sources. One is from an incident concerning this very same king. The *gemara* (*Mesechta Ketubot 17a*) rules that a king’s procession takes priority over that of a bride’s in regard to right of way. King Agripas, however, once waived his royal prerogative and gave the bride’s procession right of way in order to honor her. When the *gemara* challenges the praise given him by the sages for this gesture on the grounds that a king may not waive the honor due him, the response given is that the two processions met at a crossroads such that the royal procession’s turning to another road was not a blatant display of forfeiting royal dignity and could be construed as a genuine need to head in that direction. Why did the *gemara*, asks Tosefot, not simply answer, as it does here, that in regard to the mitzvah of honoring the bride, the king may waive his honor?

The second challenge comes from a *gemara* (*Mesechta Kiddushin 32b*) about Rabban Gamliel, the head of the Sanhedrin, serving the sages who were his guests at a wedding feast for his son. Although there was initial disagreement amongst these sages as to whether it was proper to accept this service, the conclusion of the *gemara* is that although a king may not waive the honor due him, a *nasi* (Sanhedrin head) may do so. The clear inference of this conclusion is that a king in the same circumstance of honoring Torah sages would be restrained from doing so. Why, asks Tosefot, would it not be proper for a king to waive his honor to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring Torah sages?

As a solution, Tosefot distinguishes between a mitzvah which is an expression of respect for Hashem and one which is respect for humans. By reading the Torah in a standing position Agripas was placing the honor of Hashem and His Torah above his own. (A similar example is found in *Mesechta Sanhedrin 19b* where Rabbi Yehuda contends that although a king is not obligated to perform *yibum* or *chalitza* with his childless brother’s widow, it is praiseworthy if he does so because by doing such a mitzvah he places the honor of Hashem above his own.) But when it comes to the mitzvah of honoring a bride or a Torah sage, the honor of the king takes precedence because of their obligation to honor him. There is therefore no mitzvah involved in the king deferring to them.

• *Sotah 41b*

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
6. Why did the firstborn of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the firstborn?
8. Hashem told Moshe "so that my wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was Hashem referring to?
9. Why did Hashem command the *mitzvah* of *Rosh Chodesh* to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a *Pesach* offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did Hashem give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their *matzah* on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose firstborn is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when Hashem punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the firstborn, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a firstborn.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of *matzah* was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

## BRISK IT IS

**From: Richard Brisk in Boston, MA**  
<rbrisk@iqnsi.com>

Dear Rabbi,

In your wonderful Ohr.edu "Torah Weekly" commentary on Parshat Vayeshev, you wrote: "Rabbi Chaim of Brisk once asked..." This caught my attention because, throughout my childhood, my father told me the story of how his father's birthplace became our family name during his passage through Ellis Island, New York. Although I never doubted my father's story, I was never able to objectively verify it by either locating Brisk on a map or talking to someone who knew of such a town.

Your reference to Rabbi Chaim of Brisk changed that. I would greatly appreciate it if you would tell me something about where the city of Brisk is located, and something about the city itself. I am sorry to bother you about this trivial detail, but your reference to Rabbi Chaim of Brisk is a concrete information that lends credence to that dream-like story my father used to tell me. With great respect from Boston, Mass,  
Richard A. Brisk

Dear Richard A. Brisk,

Yes, Brisk in Lithuania was a famous Torah center, and home of the illustrious family of Talmudic scholars, the Soleveitchik family. Perhaps the best known of this family was Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik, renowned for his novel and penetrating analysis of the Talmud. Today, there are sev-

eral "Brisk" yeshivot in Israel and abroad.

I have been told that what we refer to as Brisk is today known as the city of Brest.

And did you say you are from Boston? Boston was home to the renowned Torah Scholar Rabbi Yosef Ber Soleveitchik who recently passed away. He was a grandson of the Rabbi Chaim of Brisk mentioned in our article.

## KOHANIM

**From: E. Robe**

<Erobe56491@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,

What are Kohanim? Does it have any connection to the name "Cohen?"

Dear E. Robe,

Kohanim is the plural of *kohen*, which means "priest." In Judaism, the *kohanim* are the male descendants of Aharon, Moses' brother, and when the ancient Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the *kohanim* were the ones who performed the service.

There are still many *kohanim* among Jews today. They get special honors in the synagogue, such as being called up first to read from the Torah.

Many people — but not all — whose last name is "Cohen" are indeed *kohanim*, meaning they are direct descendants of Aharon. Amazing to be able to trace your lineage to one particular individual who was born 3,396 years ago, isn't it?

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

**How would you answer this question on the Parsha?**

**Kasha:** "And B'nei Yisrael did as Moshe told them, and they borrowed from the Egyptians vessels of silver, vessels of gold and clothing." (Exodus 12:35)

How could the Israelites borrow from the Egyptians, knowing that they would not repay? Isn't that stealing?

**Answer:** In Hebrew, "borrow" and "ask for" are the same word. Thus, some commentaries explain that the Jews didn't "borrow," but rather "asked for" these items as outright gifts. (*Rashbam*)

The Talmud notes that the Egyptians owed the Jews wages for centuries of unjust slavery, and that the Jews took only what was rightly theirs as partial payment. This money also partially compensated them for their lands and homes in Egypt which the Egyptians confiscated. (*Sanhedrin 91, Genesis 47:27*)

A third answer: The Egyptians pursued the Jews to the Red Sea, attempting to annihilate and plunder them. Egypt being the aggressor, the Jews won all property in question as spoils of war, as is the case in any war that the spoils of the pursuers belong to the pursued. (*Sforno*)

Do you have a KASHA? Write to [kasha@ohr.org.il](mailto:kasha@ohr.org.il) with your questions on any Parsha!

**Re: Jump in the Lake (Ohrnet Vayigash):**

I don't wish to make anyone mad but I disagree with what you told the person who stood by while his friend almost drowned. It may have been a "test" or maybe not. I have seen this happen several times, that when a traumatic event happens a person shuts down or some call it "freezing up." It does not mean that the person doesn't care for the person in desperate need, nor is it a sign of not having courage. It is a physical/mental shutdown that cannot be helped or controlled. The reason I know this is that I myself was saved from harm not by my mother (who froze) but by my sister who did not freeze. No other human on earth ever loved me more than Mom and she was also the most courageous person I have ever known. Also, my brother-in-law was in Vietnam and could not "move" either, until his best friend got his head blown off sitting less than two feet from him. Out of pure terror he jumped up and killed them all, saving his whole platoon. It made him sick to his stomach and he will tell you himself it was not done out of "courage" but fear of dying. So please, do not let that young man who wrote to you think that he has no courage!!

• C. <withheld@aol.com>

**Re: The Rabbi With the Sense of Humor:**

Just a thank you to all the rabbis — especially the one with the sense of humor — your Ask the Rabbi column is a source of interest, knowledge and even a few laughs as I continue

my research on a book I'm writing, a dictionary of "Jewish" words — Hebrew Yiddish and English. *Toda!*

• Ellen Scolnic <scolnic@erols.com>

**Ohrnet Responds:** Thanks for your thanks. But we're having a bit of a problem passing along your special thanks to "the Rabbi with the sense of humor," because all the rabbis here claim that you meant him!

**Re: Solomon's Wisdom (Ohrnet Miketz):**

It was not necessarily only jealousy that made the one woman wanted the other woman's child to be cut in half. Rabbi Mordechai Miller gave the following explanation, based on the commentaries: The two women were mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law was the mother of the dead child. Her husband had also died. As a childless widow, she was therefore bound to "yibum," the requirement that she remain single until she either marries her deceased husband's brother or "divorces" him.

Therefore, the daughter-in-law was determined that the living child not be recognized as her mother-in-law's child — i.e., her husband's brother, or else she would have to wait until the child grew up when it would be possible to perform *yibbum* or dissolve her relationship to him through *chalitza* with him, before she could remarry. Many thanks for your wonderful articles.

• R. Geller <rgeller@netvision.net.il>

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

**RAMBAN**

10:14 Locusts and Crocodiles  
 10:23 A Different Darkness  
 12:2 Jewish Months  
 12:3 Symbolism of the *Korban Pesach*  
 12:31,51 Timetable of the Exodus

13:5 Five and Two – Seven Canaanite Nations

**SEFER HACHINUCH**

7, 16 Eating Like Kings  
 18 Recognizing Hashem's Gifts  
 The Significance of the Exodus

The Ohr Somayach Web Site  
**WWW.OHR.EDU**

young. (*Deuteronomy 22:6*)

Nachmanides explains that if one takes a mother bird together with its young, one destroys two generations of animal life and leaves no possibility of future descendants. Doing so indicates disregard for the perpetuation of the species.

But why is it so important to care for the perpetuation of the species? The answer is alluded to in a statement of King Solomon: "Look at the work of G-d, for who can rectify that which he has damaged." (*Ecclesiastes 7:13*) The Midrash explains: "When God created Adam, He took him around the trees of the Garden of Eden, and He said to him, 'Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! Everything that I created, I created for you; take care that you do not damage and destroy My world, for if you damage it, there is no one to repair it afterwards!'" (*Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7*)

If a person is aware that the world is not some sort of random accident, but was created for a purpose, then everything in it is precious. The Midrash spells this out: "Even things which appear to you to be superfluous in the

world, such as flies, fleas and mosquitoes, they are also part of the creation of the world, and G-d performs His operations through the agency of all of them, even through a snake, mosquito or frog." (*Midrash Bereishet Rabbah 10:7*)

To illustrate the value of all animals, even those that may repulse us, I pulled out the boa constrictor from its sack. (I later discovered that at this point, the zoo veterinarian turned to the head keeper in horror and said, "Isn't that the snake which bites, the one that we're getting rid of?" The veterinarian, an Orthodox woman who lives across the road from me, told me this a few days later. I'm thinking that we need better communication.)

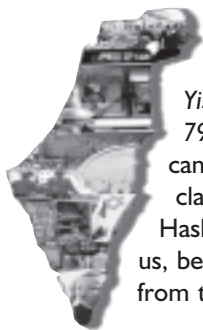
A particularly fascinating aspect of boas is what some theorize to be their vestigial spurs, remnants of legs they once possessed. The snake, especially in its loss of legs, is the source of many different lessons in Jewish philosophy, for example the idea of treachery and falsehood being something that doesn't have a leg to stand on. On this evening, however, the reptile was the source of a lesson in common sense: If a snake is

known to be in a bad temper, it's not a good idea to hold it upside down and prod its rear end in an effort to show its vestigial spurs. It's also not a good idea to do this six inches away from the face of an important dignitary, such as a Deputy Mayor. Suffice it to say that, thank G-d, when it struck, for some reason it missed all humans in the vicinity, and we quickly wrestled it back into the sack.

It seems that the only moral one can learn from this is that one should never hold an irascible boa constrictor in front of a Deputy Mayor, but there are times when this is unavoidable. Still, as I mentioned at the beginning, there may be other lessons to take from the event. At a time of national emergency, a group of religious and secular Jews gather together to celebrate the insights of the 3,300-year-old Jewish tradition into the animal kingdom. That's a lesson of the lasting value of Jewish tradition and the remarkable nature of the Jewish people if there ever was one. It's a shame that this wouldn't be considered interesting enough to make it into the National Enquirer.

**LOVE OF THE LAND** Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

**UNCHALLENGABLE CLAIM**



There are three places in *Eretz Yisrael*, say our Sages (*Bereishet Rabbah 79:7*), where the nations of the world cannot even begin to press their false claim that we "stole" the land which Hashem, the Master of the World, gave to us, because they were all actually purchased from their owners. Avraham purchased the

Machpela Cave in which the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried, Yaakov purchased the field in Shechem where Yosef is buried, David purchased the site on which the *Beit Hamikdash* was built by his son.

How tragically ironic it is that it is in regard to these very areas — Hebron, Shechem and Temple Mount — we are forced to stand up against the world to defend our rights of ownership.

שאלו שלום ירושלים  
 Seek the peace of Jerusalem  
 Psalms 122