

Perek Shira: The Snake's Song

Special thanks to revach.net for the article

No creature in history has taken a fall like the snake. This, once a companion of man, with legs that would carry him all over the world and a mind to match, went from top of the totem pole to the bottom after he persuaded Chava to eat from the *eitz hadaas*. With his legs chopped off, he not only became worthless to man but he is now hunted as man's arch enemy. Some would say he got off easy. After all, he wrecked history and brought evil into people. Annihilation and extinction seem like a fair punishment. Nevertheless the snake has survived even in its low state.

How did it manage to continue to live and eat after having his legs removed? Only through Hashem's goodness. Hashem gave the snake the ability to survive on any form of food—even the dust that it slithers around in. Does it mind the bland diet? Not really. Hashem made it so, that even if it ate the finest delicacies it would still taste like dust. This eases the snake's pain and longing for better food.

From Perek Shira we know that the snake sings "*Someich Hashem L'Chol Hanoflim*" - Hashem supports all those who fall. Even if you are the root cause of your own falling, Hashem not only preserves you, he also gives you new tools to adjust to your new status. Should you one day face a challenge in this world that came about from your own mistake, learn from the snake and hang in there. You can go forward. Hashem will see to it. ♦

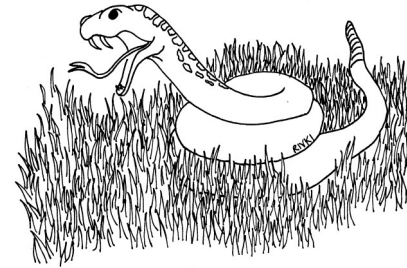
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Halacha Challenge



"And Hashem sent fiery serpents..."

Killing / Trapping a Snake on Shabbos

by Shlomo Epshteyn
reviewed by Rav Chaim Malinowitz

The Goldstein family was enjoying their Shabbos afternoon in the backyard of their house. Suddenly, Shmuli, the youngest brother pointed his finger to the grass near the blueberry bush and screamed out – "snake!" Everyone turned their heads. They witnessed that Shmuli was not joking.

Question

What are the Goldsteins permitted to do in this situation?

Answer

If it's a venomous snake, the Goldsteins are permitted to kill* it. This is true even if the snake is trying to escape.

If the Goldsteins are not sure if it is a venomous snake, they are nevertheless allowed to trap it* by turning over a vessel (e.g., a bowl) on top of it. Furthermore, if necessary, even such a snake may be killed if it is making its way towards a person.

* Note: In many situations, killing or trapping a snake can be very dangerous (i.e., snakes attack when provoked), and therefore, a "snake expert" should be asked to remove the snake.

Explanation

Let's first look at the issue of killing a snake. When a venomous snake attacks, it's a case of *pikuach nefesh* (life threatening). Therefore, killing it is certainly permitted.

Why is it permitted to kill a venomous snake when it is not attacking a person? There is an interesting Braisa quoted in Gemora Shabbos¹ that will help us



This week's issue is dedicated

anonymously

Halacha Challenge

Answer this question. The Braisa states: "Five [creatures] may be killed on Shabbos, and they are: the fly that's in the land of Egypt; the wasp that's in Nineveh; the scorpion that's in Chadyav, the snake that's in Eretz Yisroel (probably this is referring to the infamous *tzafa* snake (Palestine viper)); and a mad dog in any place". Based on the explanation of Gemora² and Rishonim³, this Braisa is referring to cases when the creature is not coming to attack a person; and the five creatures listed in the Braisa are just examples of those animals that have a deadly bite. Why is it permitted to kill these creatures? The Rishonim⁴ explain that when a person comes in contact with a creature that has a deadly bite, even though the creature is not moving towards a person to attack him, it is nevertheless a case of *pikuach nefesh*, or more specifically a case of *sofek pikuach nefesh* (a potential threat to life), since this creature could potentially attack the person.

With the same principal we can also understand why the later *poskim* permit killing a venomous snake that is running away from us⁵. Such a scenario is also a case of *sofek pikuach nefesh*, because this snake can harm someone later on. Similarly, even if we're not sure if the snake is venomous, but the snake is crawling towards a person, if necessary, it is permitted to kill it⁶, because here again we are facing a case of *sofek pikuach nefesh*⁷.

Why is it permitted to trap any snake even if it's stationary? The Mishna⁸ teaches: "We may invert a bowl over a scorpion so that it not sting." The *poskim* explain that this is referring to a case where the scorpion's bite is not deadly, but it is very painful⁹. One of the explanations that are offered for this permission is as follows: The purpose of the *melacha* of Tzod (trapping) is to confine an animal in order to eventually benefit from the animal. In other words, he traps an animal because he wants it. However, when a person traps a harmful creature, he is trapping it because he does **not** want it, which means that his purpose is completely **opposite** of the purpose of the *melacha* of Tzod¹⁰. Chaza"l permitted doing Tzod in such a way in a case where an animal can bring a significant harm to a person. ♦

1. שבת קכא 2. שם 3. עיין בב"י סימן שטז ד"ה ה' נהרגין 4. שם 5. מ"ב סימן שטז ס"ק מ"ה ושה"צ עב 6. שו"ע סימן שטז סעיף י 7. ב"י שם 8. שבת פרק טז משנה ז 9. עיין במ"ב שם ס"ק כ"ז ו ס"ק מ"ו 10. מ"ב שם ס"ק כ"ז

Kids Ask, Zeidy Answers

 Zeidy, in this week's parsha we learn that Bnei Yisroel had to look at a copper snake in order to be healed. Why?



Since the snake was on a long stick, by looking at it, Bnei Yisroel were looking upwards and were inspired to realize how they should request a *refuah* from Hashem. They were saying, "Hashem, please send us a *refuah* so that we can continue serving you!" From here we learn a major lesson - when a person needs a *yeshua*, he should ask Hashem to grant it to him, because it will help him to live a life of Torah. [based on *peirusuh* Tifferes Yisroel (R"H 3:8)]

Wonders of Creation

Tzafa (Palestine Viper)

Special thanks to Jerusalem Zoo for the content




Tzafa needs no introduction. This species is the most common venomous snake in Eretz Yisroel. The Viper has a triangular head structure due to its large venom glands located on either side of the head. It is also characterized by zig-zag shaped patches - covering its back from head to tail. To ensure that it deters its enemies the viper announces its presence by lifting its head and makes hissing sounds.

The viper is not only dangerous to humans, but mainly to other animals including animals that can be its potential prey. Many animals recognize the viper, its wide head with the distinguishing triangular pattern and body with yellowish color and zigzag stripe. When animals encounter a snake with this model most of them choose to stay away from it and avoid trouble.

Tzafa feeds mainly on rodents, amphibians and other small animals. It uses its venom to kill prey. The venom affects the blood vessels and lymphatic system. The Viper is a nocturnal snake. During the day it will choose to stay cool hiding in various niches: under bushes or rocks. It may penetrate the vicinity of the humans and even enter homes to find a cool place to hide during the day. ♦

Riddles

Riddle

 When a water from a sea and an atonement that was like a cow met, they said to each other "Hey, we have something in common!" What do they have in common?

Answer to last issue's riddle:

(Riddle: If you think that I am not the same all year round, you are wrong - I always have the same number of words in me. If you think that I am the same all year round, you're wrong - I have a season when I have an extra word in me. What am I?)

The Half Kadish. It always has 28 words. Between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, an extra word *u'l'eila* is added, but the total word count still stays the same (28) because we combine "*min kol*" to be "*mikol*".