



CHAYAT HASHAVUA: OWL

CAN ANYONE TEACH US THE HEBREW NAMES FOR THE OWL?

- The Bible contains at least 11 names of owls—but we'll only take time to mention a half-dozen of them.
- The *tinshemet* (תנשמט), *ka'at* (קאת), *kos* (כוס), *yanshuf* (ינשוף), *shalakh* (שלך), and *bat ya'anah* (בת יענה).
- They are all mentioned in the lists of birds in the Bible that aren't kosher—which we'll come back to in a minute.
- The *tinshemet* is the barn screech owl.
- The *ka'at* Hebrew name denotes vomiting (*meki*), an apparent reference to the fact that, as do other owls, it regurgitates the bones of its prey.
- The *kos* is probably the little owl without "ears," that is, no crest of feathers.
- The *yanshuf* or "great owl" inhabited devastated Edom and has been identified as the long-eared owl.
- The *shalakh*, according to the Talmud, "catches fish out of the sea" and has been identified with the fish owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*), the only owl in Israel that feeds on fish, found near Lake Kinneret.
- The *bat ya'anah* has been identified with one of the species of owl that utters a cry when calling to one other.
- The *tannim* lives in the desert and in ruins and emits a sighing cry, the name *tannim* being derived from *tanah* (meaning "to weep").
- The *o'ah* has been identified with the Palestinian eagle owl. It's the largest of the owls, found in the Jordan Valley, and feeds on hares and rats, reptiles and birds.
- The *kippod* has been identified as the short-eared owl.
- The *lilit*, sometimes called a "night monster," or "screech owl," refers nocturnal bird, perhaps the tawny owl.
- The *sa'ir* is apparently the smallest of the owls.

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE SOUND OF AN OWL AT NIGHT?

- What did it sound like?
- You remember that the Hebrew name for one of the owls is "*Bat haYa'anah*," which means "the daughter of one that answers"—because when they hoot, they answer one another.

- Do you know why you've probably never heard an owl during the day? (That's when most owls sleep.)
- Can you think of anything that might be special about an animal that hunts mostly at night?
- As with most birds of prey, they have very good eyesight.
- But owls, because they hunt at night, also have very good hearing.

IT'S TIME FOR THE OWL QUIZ!

- What valuable service do owls perform? (They destroy rodents that invade field crops and stored foods.)
- How many different kinds of owls are there in the world today? (There are 167 species of typical owls and 14 species of barn owls.)
- How many degrees can an owl turn its head? (270)
- Why does an owl need to turn its head in such a wide arc? (Because owls cannot move their eyes in their sockets, so they have to turn their heads.)
- What's the one place on earth where owls can *not* be found? (The Antarctic region.)
- Is the owl a herbivore, eating only vegetation; carnivores, eating only other animals; or omnivores, eating both vegetation and other animals? (Carnivores.)
- How small are the smallest owls and how large are the largest owls? (The smallest is the elf owl, which measures about six inches long; the largest is the great gray owl, which measures about 30 inches long and has a wing span of 54 to 60 inches.)

CAN ANYONE TEACH US IF THE OWL IS KOSHER?

- Are birds ever kosher?
- What about birds of prey?
- What is a "bird of prey"?
- Can anyone imagine why the Torah would teach us not to eat birds that hunt other animals for their food?

IN ANCIENT TIMES OWLS WERE THOUGHT OF AS A SIGN THAT BAD THINGS WERE GOING TO HAPPEN.

- Although people thought that dreaming of birds generally was a *good* sign, certain kinds of owls were thought to be a *bad* sign. (Ber. 57b).
- Why do you think they may have felt that way about owls? (Most owls make a hooting sound like a groan, and because they inhabit ruins, they sound like they're mourning over the devastation—and so in the Bible they are connected with destruction and desolation.)
- They often live in desolated places and ruins, or tree holes—who do you think made the holes?

- In fact, the Arabs call the owl "mother of ruins" because of where some of them live.
- Have you ever seen an owl and, if so, where was it?
- What do you think and feel about owls?
- Should owls be protected from hunters and other human predators and, if so, why?



Gather the People

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