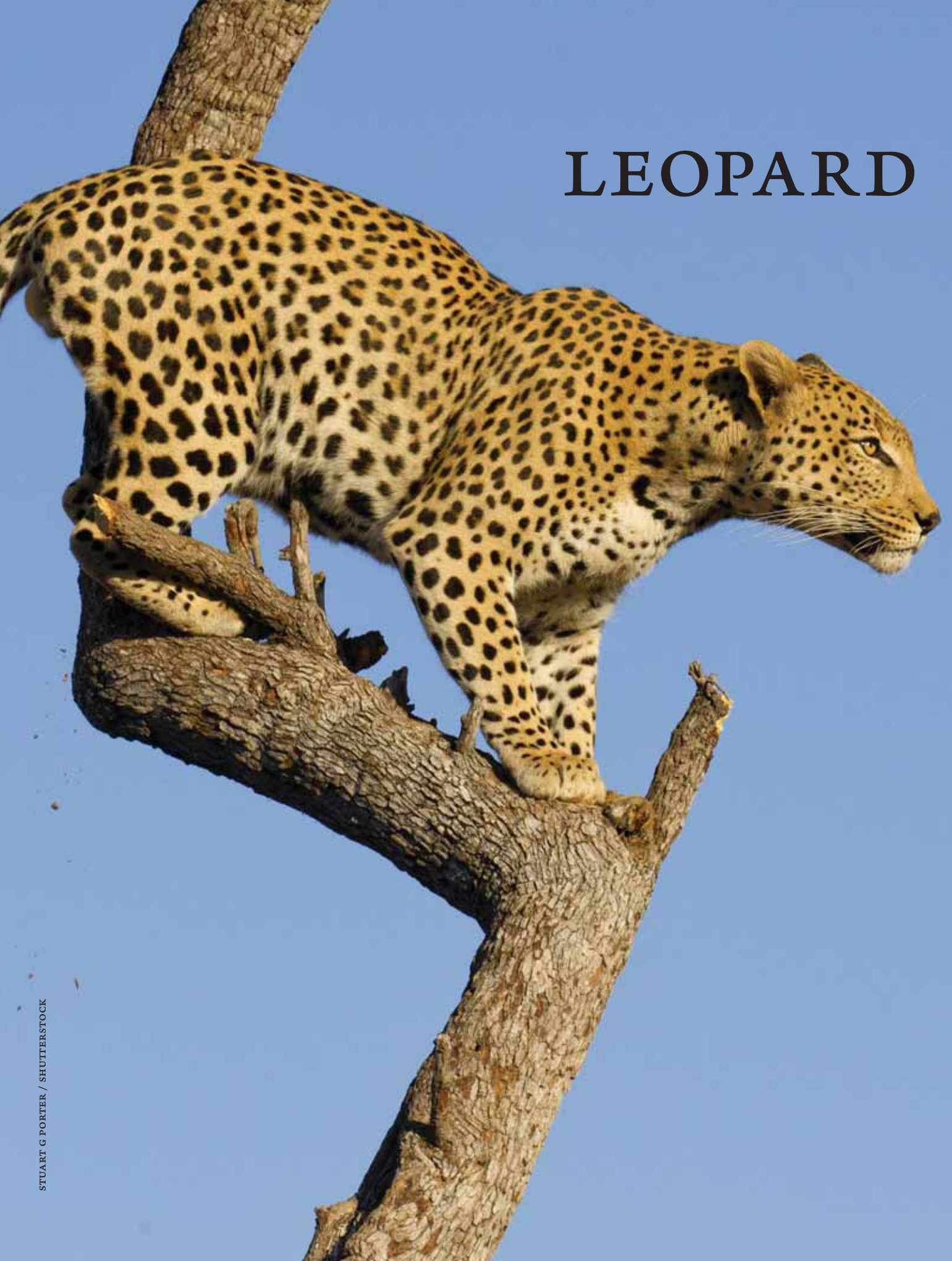


# LEOPARD





# Leopard

# Namer

## The Leopards of Israel

### NATURAL HISTORY

The strikingly beautiful leopard is the most widespread of all the big cats. It lives in a variety of habitats in much of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In former times, leopards were abundant throughout Israel, especially in the hilly and mountainous regions:

With me from Lebanon, O bride, come with me from Lebanon, look from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. (Song. 4:8).

The leopard of the mountains was the Anatolian leopard, *Panthera pardus tulliana*, which was found in much of the hilly regions of Israel. After the 1834 Arab pogrom in Safed, leopards moved into the destroyed town.<sup>1</sup> The Anatolian leopard was still recorded in the Carmel region in 1866,<sup>2</sup> and was found in the Galilee until as recently as the 1960s. These were one of the largest subspecies of leopards, weighing up to 170 pounds, and preying on wild boar, porcupines, hyrax, and livestock. They were also undoubtedly dangerous to humans; leopards of this size are known to

אֶתִּי מִלְכָּנוֹן כָּלָה אֶתִּי מִלְכָּנוֹן תְּבוּאֵי תְּשׁוּרֵי מְרֹאֵשׁ אֲמָנָה מְרֹאֵשׁ  
שְׁנִיר וְהֶרְמוֹן מִמְּעַנּוֹת אֶרֶצוֹת מִהָרֵי נְמוֹרִים:

שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים פֶּרֶק ד'

be man-eaters in other parts of the world, and are hunted as a result. In the first decade of the twentieth century, at least five leopards were killed in between Jerusalem and Beit Shemesh; one of them badly mauled a person after being shot.<sup>3</sup> The last specimen was killed by a shepherd near Hanita in 1965.<sup>4</sup> Another leopard subspecies that lived in the area was the Sinai leopard, *Panthera pardus jarvus*. It was hunted by the Bedouin upon whose goats it preyed, and is now extinct.

Today, the Arabian leopard, *Panthera pardus nimr*, is the only subspecies of leopard to be found in Israel. It is one of the smallest subspecies of leopards, weighing only up to about seventy pounds. The Arabian leopard usually preys on ibex and hyrax, and rarely attacks livestock. But it, too, faces extinction. Some leopards of this subspecies formerly inhabited the popular Ein Gedi area, and learned that an easy source of food was to be found in the dogs and cats of the local kibbutz. As a result, two females were



trapped and taken into captivity, causing the collapse of the leopard population in that area. A DNA study of leopard droppings, performed in 2006, showed an estimated population size of just five males and three females of the Arabian leopard in the Negev and Judean desert regions. The chances of encountering a leopard in Ein Gedi today are so slim that, on the sign warning visitors about leopards, somebody once scribbled, “Watch out for polar bears too!”

There are also some names of places in Scripture that are derived from the leopard. There was a fortified city of the Tribe of Gad named Nimrah (leopardess),<sup>5</sup> and there was a region in Moab referred to as Nimrim (leopards).<sup>6</sup> The Talmud refers to cities named Namer and Nameri.<sup>7</sup> With regard to names of people, Nimrod’s name may relate to the leopard; but although the lion, bear, and wolf have long been popular as Jewish names (Aryeh, Dov and Zev), the leopard has never received such an honor.<sup>8</sup> This may be because naming people after animals was a European custom, and leopards were absent from Europe.

## Leopards, Tigers, and Cheetahs

### IDENTIFICATION

There is both a strong tradition and clear evidence that the *namer* of Scripture (pronounced *nah-mehr*) is the leopard. This animal is often cited in Scripture as one of the great predators in the Land of Israel, along with lions, bears, and wolves, which is indeed the status of the leopard. The coat of the *namer* is described as spotted; as we shall see later, perhaps “blotched” is a more accurate translation, and this perfectly describes the leopard. There is also evidence for the leopard from cognate languages; in Akkadian and Arabic, the leopard is known as *nimr* (plural, *nimrin*). The Aramaic name for the leopard is *nimra*.

However, today there is some confusion regarding the term *namer*. Beginning in at least the nineteenth century, and possibly earlier, the word *namer* was commonly understood to refer to the tiger.<sup>9</sup> Illustrations of the Mishna’s maxim that one should be “as bold as a *namer*” sometimes depict a tiger instead of a leopard. Even in Modern Hebrew today, the word *namer* is often used for the tiger, despite the fact that *tigris* is the more correct term.<sup>10</sup> However, tigers are natives of central and eastern Asia and are not found anywhere near the Land of Israel. They would not therefore be the subject of discussion in Scripture.

There is one reference to the *namer* in Scripture that might not refer to the leopard. It occurs in the context of a prophecy describing the terror of the Chaldeans:

וְקָלוּ מִנְמָרִים סוֹסֵי וְחֲדוּ מִזֵּאֲבֵי עֶרֶב וּפָשׁוּ פִּרְשֵׁיוּ וּפְרָשָׁיו מִרְחוֹק  
יָבֹאוּ יַעֲפוּ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ חֶשׁ לֹאֲכֹל:

חֲבִיקוּק פֶּרֶק א':ח

■ Their horses are lighter than *nemerim*. (Hab. 1:8)

The description of the horses tells us that the *namer* is a creature that is renowned for being “light.” The definition of this is a little difficult to pinpoint with accuracy. It could mean “agile.” Leopards are certainly very agile creatures, able to lightly bound up trees and pounce on their prey. However, it more likely means “swift.” Leopards are very fast over short distances; they catch their prey either by ambush or by stalking it to within a close range and then making a very short and fast rush. But this description would certainly far better apply to the cheetah. The cheetah, which is described more thoroughly in the following chapter, is able to run much faster than the leopard, reaching speeds of up to seventy miles an hour over short distances.

The name *namer* could not refer exclusively to cheetahs; there are references to the *namer* that do not match the cheetah at all. As we shall see later, the Mishna describes the *namer* as being brazen, which can only refer to the leopard; cheetahs, being relatively weak animals, are wary and shy. It seems most likely that the term *namer* is a generic term for both leopards and cheetahs. The very name of the leopard in Hebrew appears to refer to the variegated coloring of its coat, which would also be applicable to the cheetah. The Mishna uses the term *hamenamer* to describe someone who sows his field in uneven patches, which is explained to be based on the word *namer*:

“*Hamenamer*” – that he sows in various places in the field, like the appearance of the skin of a leopard, which is spotted. (Rambam, commentary to Mishna *Pe’ah* 3:2<sup>11</sup>)



DR. JEFFREY M. LEVINE

In the historic Rymanow synagogue, the *namer* is illustrated as a tiger instead of a leopard

◀ This Arabian leopard is poised on a hill in the Judean Desert



הַיִּהְפֹּךְ בּוֹשֵׁי עוֹרָו וְנִמְרֵי חֲבַרְבּוּרָתָיו גַּם אִתָּם תּוּכְלוּ לְהִיטִיב לְמַדֵּי הָרֶעַ:  
 ירמיה יג:כג

Cheetahs and leopards are basically similar in terms of their coloration; although cheetahs have spots and leopards have blotchy markings, both would certainly be described as variegated in their coloration. However, it is interesting to note the wording of the famous verse that refers to the leopard's markings:

Can the Cushite change his skin, or the leopard his blotches (*chavarburotav*)? So too, can you, in whom evil is ingrained, do good? (Jer. 13:23)

The word used to describe the leopard's markings, *chavarburotav*, is conventionally translated as "spots," but this is not a precise translation. Amongst the traditional commentators, some translate *chavarburotav* as *ketem*, which

is used elsewhere to refer to a stain.<sup>12</sup> Others relate it to the term *chabura*, "wound," and explain that it refers to the mark left by a wound.<sup>13</sup> Thus, this particular verse seems to specifically refer to the bruise-like blotching of the leopard rather than the more perfect circular spots that a cheetah possesses.

## The Greek Leopard

SYMBOLISM

One of the most intriguing appearances of the leopard in Scripture is in a prophetic vision of Daniel:

Daniel told the following: "In my vision at night, I saw the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. Four mighty beasts, each different from the other, emerged from the sea.... The first was like a lion... and behold, another beast, a second one, similar to a bear.... Afterwards I beheld, and there was another, similar to a leopard...

"Afterwards I beheld, and there was another, similar to a leopard, which had upon its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it."  
 (Daniel 7:1–6)



ard, which had upon its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads; and dominion was given to it.” (Dan. 7:2–6)

In classical Jewish thought, the four beasts in Daniel’s vision represent the four exiles to which the Jewish people have been subjected.<sup>14</sup> The leopard was the parallel of *Yavan* – Ancient Greece.<sup>15</sup> The four wings on its back symbolize the rapid expansion of the Greek empire to all four corners of the world;<sup>16</sup> alternatively, they represent the division of the empire after Alexander’s death into four regions.<sup>17</sup> The four heads of the leopard refer to the four generals between whom the empire was divided after Alexander’s death: Lysimachus, Cassander, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.

But what is the inherent similarity of leopards to Ancient Greece? Is it just that the leopard was the third greatest predator in biblical Israel, and Greece was the third oppressive empire? There may also be symbolic similarities between leopards and Ancient Greece. One possible explanation for this is that leopards are strikingly beautiful animals. Greece, too, was renowned for its aesthetic values; and the Torah itself speaks of beauty being promised to Japeth, one of whose descendants was Yavan.<sup>18</sup> Another explanation is that, as we have seen earlier, Scripture highlights the *namer* (whether leopard or cheetah) for its swiftness. This may represent the amazingly rapid expansion of Alexander’s empire. But, as we shall now see, there may be a more fundamental reason why the leopard represents Ancient Greece.

## The Brazen Leopard

### SYMBOLISM

The Mishna describes the fundamental character traits of various animals, including the leopard:

Yehuda b. Teima said: Be as brazen as a leopard, as light as a vulture, as swift as a gazelle, and as powerful as a lion to fulfill the will of your Father in Heaven. (Mishna *Avot* 5:20)

The term used here for “brazen” is the word *az*, which generally means “strength.” However, leopards are not the strongest of animals, and thus it must relate to inner rather than outer strength. Some translate the Mishna’s use of the term as “energetic,”<sup>19</sup> but it is usually understood as referring to “boldness,” “brazenness,” or “*chutzpa*.” Leopards are often described as “boldly marked,” but their boldness is not limited to their coloration; it is their fundamental nature. In the words of the former curator of the Hai-Bar nature reserve in Israel, Bill Clark: “They don’t have the speed of a cheetah, nor can they claim the brute force of

בְּאַתֵּר דָּגָה חֲזָה הָיִיתָ וְאַרְוֹ אַחֲרֵי כְּנָמֶר וְלֵה גִפִּין אַרְבַּע דֵּי עוֹף עַל  
גִּפִּיהָ וְאַרְבַּעָה רִאשֵׁין לְחֵיטָא וְשִׁלְטָן יְהִיב לָהּ:  
דְּנִיטָא לָהּ

a lion. Instead, they rely on their wits. They’re smart, and, pound for pound, they’re the scrappiest of the big cats. . . . No other predator confronts its victims with such rampaging fury.”<sup>20</sup> Famous lion hunter Colonel John Patterson, who later became a heroic commander of Jews in Palestine,<sup>21</sup> records that a leopard once broke into his shed and killed his entire flock of thirty sheep and goats.<sup>22</sup> It had no desire or capability of eating so many animals; the attack was an act of brazen aggression.

This brazenness, in Hebrew *azut*, of the leopard is mentioned on several occasions in rabbinic literature. We shall explore some of these references later, but for now we shall cite just one such instance. The Midrash expounds the verse that we mentioned earlier, “With me from Lebanon, O bride . . . from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards” (Song. 4:8) as referring to a variety of people and nations in our history:

“From the mountains of leopards” – These are the Canaanites. Just as the leopard is brazen, so too the Canaanites were brazen. This is as it is written, “Not a man was left in Ai or in Beth-El who did not go out after Israel” (Josh. 8:17). (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 4:8)

The brazen aggression of the leopard also explains why this animal was chosen as a symbol of Ancient Greece.



This 1500-year-old mosaic of a leopard is from the ancient Maon synagogue at Nirim in Israel.



Alexander of Macedon began his reign by killing all potential rivals to the throne. Under his military direction, the Greek Empire expanded its conquests with unparalleled ferocity.

The word *az* also carries the connotation of defiance. The brazen defiance of the leopard is presented by Maharal of Prague as symbolizing the clash between Ancient Greece and the nation of Israel.<sup>23</sup> Although the early Hellenistic kingdom of Ptolemaic Egypt, and the Syrian Seleucid dynasty of King Antiochus III, were relatively tolerant vis-à-vis Judaism, this was not to last. The tolerance toward the Jews ended with Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who promulgated various decrees against the practice of Judaism along with cruel measures. The Greeks defiled the Temple, and they forced the Jewish people to discard their Torah lifestyle:

“I saw in my vision... another, like a leopard” (Dan. 7:1, 6) – this refers to Greece, which set up decrees and told Israel: “Write on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the World to Come!” (*Vayikra Rabba* 13:5<sup>24</sup>)

## Good and Brazen

### SYMBOLISM

The evil nature of *azut* was not limited to the Greeks; it is something that is a danger for all of us. Brazenness stands at odds with a person's sense of shame, which is supposed to keep him from sin. Yet no character trait is *entirely* good or bad. All traits can be used either way, and *azut* is no exception.

Yehuda b. Teima said: Be as brazen as a leopard, as light as a vulture, as swift as a gazelle, and as powerful as a

lion to fulfill the will of your Father in Heaven. (Mishna *Avot* 5:20)

An example of this positive application of brazenness is discussed in the Talmud, discussing a person who is too poor to afford delicacies for Shabbat:

The School of R. Eliyahu taught: Even though R. Akiva says that it is better to make one's Shabbat like a weekday rather than to receive charity, one should do something small in one's home to honor Shabbat. What is “something small”? Rav Pappa said: It is fish fried in its own oil with flour. This is as R. Yehuda b. Teima taught: Be as brazen as a leopard...to fulfill the will of your Father in Heaven. (*Pesachim* 112a)

Rashi explains that the Talmud is urging a person to strengthen himself in the commandment to honor Shabbat beyond his natural ability. He should brazenly purchase something beyond his means, albeit something small, in honor of Shabbat. This is analogous to the leopard, which boldly exceeds its limitations in its willingness to tackle animals much larger than itself.

The brazenness of the leopard is explained by the fourteenth-century halakhic authority Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher to refer to the need for a person not to be intimidated by those who would dissuade him from doing the right thing:

It specifies four areas in the service of the Creator, blessed is He, and it begins with “Be as brazen as the leopard,” for it is a great principle in the service of the Creator. For there are times when a person desires to do a mitzva, but he refrains from doing it, because there are people who are mocking him. Therefore, it instructs that a person should be brazenfaced against all those who mock him, and he should not refrain from doing the mitzva. (*Tur, Orach Chayim* 1)

Just as the leopard is not intimidated, so too a person should not be intimidated. This, too, is explained to relate to the battle between the Greeks and the Hasmoneans. In mystical Jewish thought, victory does not just mean military or even ideological conquest; it means that one takes the enemy's evil trait and uses it for the good. Then one has truly conquered the enemy, which is really the enemy within.

The Greeks used brazenness in a negative way. But the Hasmoneans took the trait of brazenness and used it for the good. The leopard stands unafraid of creatures that outweigh it or outnumber it. Likewise, even though the Hasmoneans were far outnumbered by the gigantic Greek army, they brazenly stood firm and fought back.<sup>25</sup>



caption needed

*"Be as brazen as a leopard... to fulfill  
the will of your Father in Heaven."*

*(Mishna Avot 5:20)*



## Leopard Infidelity

SYMBOLISM

The word “leopard” is a combination of the words “leo,” which refers to the lion, and “pard,” which refers to the panther (based on the Greek *párdos* and Latin *pardus*). It was believed that the leopard was a hybrid of the lion with the panther, and this is how the leopard received its name.

But what exactly is a panther? The Midrash refers to a “panther” that was sent amongst the Egyptians, but it is difficult to know which animal is being referenced:

“He sent the swarms amongst them to devour them” (Ps. 78:45) – ...R. Chama and R. Yehoshua both say that it was a type of wild beast, called *panther*, that the Holy One brought. (*Midrash Tehillim* 78)

The Midrash is borrowing the Greek term *panthēr*. Today, the name “panther” is often a source of confusion; it usually refers to the American cougar, while the term “black panther” is often used to describe a black leopard or black jaguar, which are two entirely different species. In antiquity, the term “panther” is likewise of unclear meaning (though it could not refer to the cougar or jaguar, which are both American species). It appears that in antiquity, the distinctions between lions, leopards, and cheetah were not necessarily the same as those of modern zoology. This relates at least in part to a belief that hybridization was an ordinary occurrence with these creatures.<sup>26</sup>

It is not only with the Greeks and Romans that the leopard was thought to be a product of crossbreeding. Two prominent fifteenth-century rabbinic authorities write that the leopard is a product of such infidelity:

The leopard is born from a wild boar and a lioness. For when lions come into heat, the lioness pokes her head into the forest thickets and roars to summon a mate, and the boar hears her voice and cohabits with her; the offspring of this pair is the leopard. (Rabbi Ovadiah MiBartenura, commentary to *Pirkei Avot* 5:20; also Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, *Magen Avot* 3:4)

Yet as Rabbi Samuel Strashun (Rashash) already noted in the nineteenth century, this is problematic from a scientific standpoint.<sup>27</sup> It is possible to crossbreed some animals, such as wolves and dogs, because they are genetically closely related. Likewise, one can crossbreed horses, donkeys, and zebras because all of these are closely related (although the offspring are mostly sterile). But it is impossible to crossbreed pigs and lions, because they are genetically very different from each other. Ramban likewise notes that it is inconceivable for animals that are very different to produce offspring.<sup>28</sup>

However, others see a metaphor in these rabbinic references to the leopard being a hybrid of the lion and boar. Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin interprets this explanation allegorically, writing that the lion, which often symbolizes Babylon, here represents the talmudic knowledge of the Jewish academies in Babylon. The boar represents the wisdom of the Edomite Empire, Rome. The leopard therefore represents Greece, which caused the adulteration of the wisdom of Torah with the wisdom of Rome.<sup>29</sup>

Although, in a biological sense, leopards do not originate from interspecies hybridization, they do seem to have a propensity for interbreeding with other big cats. Koshien Zoo in Japan bred a leopard to a lioness, which subsequently gave birth to a litter of “leopons.” The Hagenbeck Tierpark in Hamburg mated a puma with a leopardess, producing “pumapards,” and a tiger with a leopardess, producing a “tigard.” A facility in the US first mated a jaguar with a leopardess, giving birth to a single female “jagulep,” which was in turn mated by a male lion, producing a litter of “lijaguleps”!

Nor are such hybrids necessarily limited to artificial circumstances. A rare spotted lion, known as the *marozi*, is thought by many to be an example of natural crossbreeding between the lion and the leopard, although other explanations have been offered. And in the early 1900s, Indian natives regularly spoke of an animal they knew as the *doglas*, which was claimed to be a natural hybrid between the leopard and the tiger. Although it was never established that hybridization was the cause, there were reports of some large leopards in the area with striping on their abdomens.

Whether in ancient ideas about its ancestry, its crossbreeding ability with other big cats, or mystical imagery, the leopard is a symbol of hybridization and infidelity. This



A rare photograph of a leopon (a hybrid of a leopard with a lioness)





An artist's rendition of the legendary marozi, believed by some to be a naturally-occurring hybrid of a leopard with a lion

is a theme found in Jewish sources. The Talmud refers to leopard-like behavior when describing a dark period in the history of the Jewish people:

The Lord said, "I said that Israel should be considered before Me as the cherubs, and they set themselves as a leopard."<sup>30</sup> Another version: R. Avahu said, The Lord said, "Even though they put themselves as a leopard, they are considered before Me as the cherubs." (*Kiddushin* 70a)

God wanted the Jewish people to be as cherubs, which represent innocence and fidelity. But instead, the Jewish people "set themselves as a leopard." What does this mean?

Some explain that just as the leopard is full of dark spots, so too were the Jewish people spotted with sinners.<sup>31</sup> But Rashi explains that the Jews were disloyal to God in the same way that a leopard is disloyal to its partner.<sup>32</sup>

This may be another reason why the leopard represents the Greek empire in Daniel's prophecy and in Jewish mystical thought. The Jews' preference for keeping apart from other nations led to resentment and persecution.<sup>33</sup> The Greeks did not want to kill the Jewish nation, but there was a creeping Hellenizing influence upon the Jewish religion. Judaism was under the threat of hybridization, symbolized by the leopard.

The infidelity of the leopard is also inherently linked by some to the leopard's brazenness. The progeny of forbidden relationships, such as a mother and son, brother and sister, etc., is known as a *mamzer*. According to the Mishna, this person will also possess certain character traits: "A *mamzer* is brazen" (*Masekhet Kalla* 2).<sup>34</sup> Later, we shall return to this Mishna's linkage of the *mamzer* with brazenness.

The Jews were threatened by Ancient Greece with hybridization, with merging into Hellenistic culture. They won by remaining separate, by retaining their identity as Jews. This is part of the symbolism of the olive oil that is lit in the menorah:

Other liquids mix together, but olive oil remains separate. So, too, Israel is separate from other nations. (*Shemot Rabba* 36:1)

## Can the Leopard's Spots Disappear?

A lion has spots at birth, which quickly fade. So does the Florida panther. But a leopard never, ever, changes its spots:

Can the Cushite change his skin, or the leopard his spots? So too, can you, in whom evil is ingrained, do good? (*Jer. 13:23*)

Yet although a leopard cannot change its spots, it does have a way of making them effectively disappear. With melanistic (black) leopards, which are a color variety of normal leopards, the spots are still present, but they are mostly obscured by the dark color of the rest of the animal's coat. Irregularities no longer stand out when the entire area resembles them. Homiletically, if we recall the idea that the leopard symbolizes hybridization with other cultures, and that a leopard's spots represent a person being "spot-



ted" with sin, there is an analogy here. Adulterations of Torah that begin with hybridizations with other cultures, and small distortions of religion, can end up losing any and all resemblance to Judaism.

הַיְהוּדִים כְּפִי עֶזְרָא וְנִמְדָּר חֲבֵרָא בְּרִיטָא גַם אֲתָם תְּנוּכְלוּ לְהִיטִיב לְמִדֵּי הָרָע:  
ירמיה יג:כג



*A Persian leopard, the largest subspecies*

Olive oil represents the singularity of Jewish identity. Rather than succumb to Greek culture, a significant number of Jews remained true to the Torah. The Written Torah was translated into Greek and stolen from Israel; but with the Oral Torah, they retained their uniqueness. The thirty-six lights that are lit in total over Chanukka also represent the thirty-six tractates of the Babylonian Talmud with which the Jews resisted Hellenism. Chanukka thereby also symbolizes victory over the leopard, symbol of Greece and hybridization.

## Brazenness in Torah

### SYMBOLISM

As we mentioned earlier, brazenness does have its positive applications. One of these relates to Torah study:

It was taught in the name of R. Meir: Why was the Torah given to Israel? Because they are brazen. (*Beitza* 25b)

Some explain this to mean that Torah was given to the brazen Jews in order to temper them and keep them in line.<sup>35</sup> But others explain precisely the opposite: that the

Jewish peoples' brazenness enables them to stick it out in plumbing the depths and truths of the Torah.<sup>36</sup> Brazenness is an essential tool for success in Torah:

■ A bashful person cannot learn. (Mishna *Avot* 2:5)

Although a sense of shame is usually a virtue, and one of the hallmarks of the Jewish people, it is not always desirable in the study of Torah. Someone who is afraid to ask questions, fearful of being mocked for his ignorance, will always remain with doubts and ignorance. A person needs to be courageous enough to ask about that which he does not understand, or he will never learn.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, when learning Torah, one must seek the truth. When two people are arguing over the correct understanding of a section of Talmud, each must be concerned only with reaching the true explanation. A person must never cower into submission to accept an explanation he has reason to feel is incorrect.<sup>38</sup>

As we noted earlier, Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher discusses the maxim that one should be brazen as a leopard. He presents King David as the quintessential example of the type of brazenness that is required:

He begins with "Be as brazen as the leopard," for it is a great principle in the service of the Creator. . . . Similarly, he is speaking regarding embarrassment; that sometimes, a person is more embarrassed in front of people than he is before the Creator. Therefore, he warns that a person should be brazen in front of those who mock him, and not be ashamed. In this vein, David said, "And I shall speak of Your statutes in front of kings, and I shall not be ashamed" (Ps. 119:46). Even though he was pursued and was fleeing from the heathens, he strengthened his Torah and studies, even though they were mocking him. (Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, *Tur*, *Orach Chayim* 1)

King David spoke that which he felt to be the truth, and was not ashamed to do so. This is one of the reasons why he is described as embodying the essence of the Oral Torah.<sup>39</sup> This trait of brazenness, which also enabled David to stand in combat against the giant Goliath, was his heritage from his ancestors Boaz and Ruth.

Boaz wished to marry Ruth, but faced opposition. For Ruth was from the nation of Moab. As such, it was thought that Boaz was prohibited from marrying her, since the Torah states that "an Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of God" (Deut. 23:4). Yet Boaz proposed that one must take into account the precision of the wording; the law was specifically speaking about a Moabite, and not a Moabite. The Talmud refers to Boaz's actions with particularly intriguing terminology:



He pounced like a leopard and explained the law... a Moabite, and not a Moabites. (Y. Yevamot 48b)

It is not by chance that the Talmud picks the leopard here as its metaphor; rather, it is due to the Sages' exquisite sensitivity to the nature of the animals around them. Boaz had the brazenness, *azut*, of the leopard within him – hence the name *Bo-az*, “in him is brazenness.” And Ruth herself was the product of an illegitimate relationship – Lot’s incest with his daughter gave rise to Moab, the ancestor of Ruth. As noted earlier, the Mishna states that the products of such relationships are prone to brazenness. Thus, their descendant David had a tendency to brazenness based upon both lines of his ancestry. He implemented this trait for the good, which enabled him to triumph in Torah against all opposition.

## Leopards and Goats

### SYMBOLISM

In a utopian prophecy of the Messianic Era, there is a description of some unexpected comradery between predators and their prey:

וְגַר זֶאֵב עִם כֶּבֶשׂ וְנִמְרָא עִם גְּדִי יִרְבֵּץ וְעֵגֶל וְכִפִּיר יִחְדּוּ וְנֶעֱרַר  
קִטְלָן נִהְיָ בָם:  
ישעיה יא:

The wolf also shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (Is. 11:6)

There is a dispute as to whether these verses are intended as literal description of biological changes, or if they are a metaphor for the future harmony of the nations represented by these animals.<sup>40</sup> In any case, it is interesting to note that later sources consistently present the same pairings of animals: the lion with cattle, the wolf with the lamb, and the leopard with the goat:

“God seeks the pursued” (Eccl. 3:15)... It is even so with offerings. The Holy One said: The ox is pursued by the lion, the goat is pursued by the leopard, the lamb is pursued by the wolf; do not bring offerings before Me from the hunters, only from the hunted. (*Vayikra Rabba* 27:5; *Pesikta DeRav Kahana* 9:4)



BRIDGENA BARNARD / SHUTTERSTOCK

When goats are not available, leopards readily eat other small hooved animals

In the statues of animals on the throne of King Solomon, the same pairings were made:

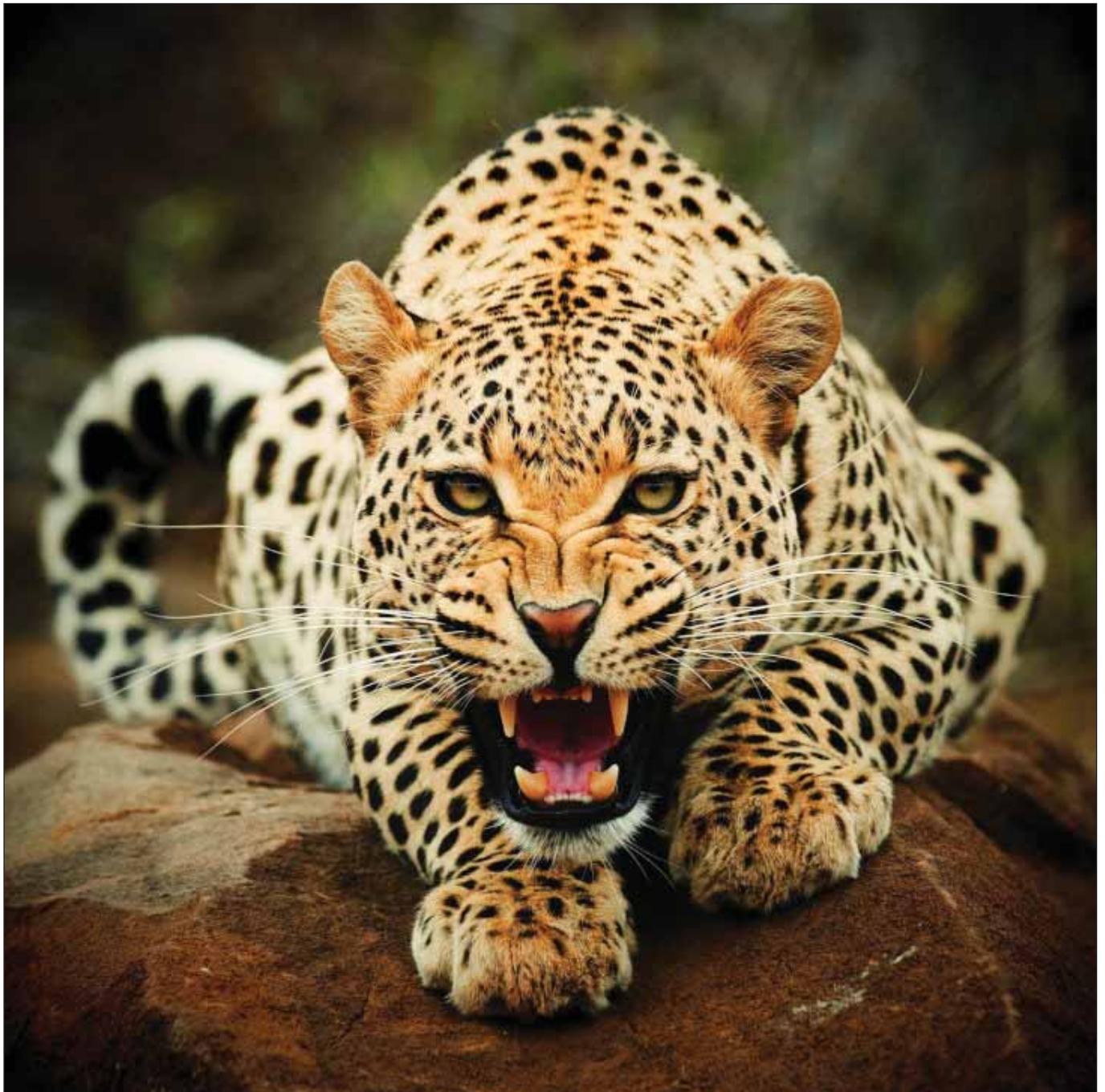
On every step there were kosher animals facing non-kosher ones. On the first step, an ox, and opposite, a lion; on the second, a lamb facing a wolf; on the third, a goat facing a leopard. (*Midrash Aba Gurion* 1)

These pairings can be simply explained as referring to each predator's preferred prey. Lions are the only predators big enough to take on cattle, while wolves must settle for sheep. Leopards habitually prey upon goats – not only

domestic goats, but also wild goats (ibex), since, unlike lions and wolves, they are agile enough to chase ibex in their steep terrain.

But the prey animals in these pairs are not only the preferred prey of each predator. In all these cases, the two are related in another way. Both animals in each pair represent the same attribute. The lion and ox both express the trait of pride. The wolf and sheep both live in groups. And the leopard and goat are both brazen:

The goat is the brazen one of the domesticated animals. (*Beitza* 25b)<sup>41</sup>



*A ferocious leopard, ready to spring*



## The Vigilance of the Leopard

### SYMBOLISM

Another attribute of the leopard highlighted in Scripture is its vigilance:

And I am the Lord your God since the land of Egypt, and you know no god but Me; for there is no savior beside Me. I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. When they grazed, they became full; when they were full, they became haughty; and so they have forgotten Me. Therefore I will be to them as a lion; as a leopard on the way I shall be watching (*ashur*). (Hos. 13:4–7)

Some understand the word *ashur* to refer to the name of a place: Assyria, which is the native home of the Anatolian leopard. Thus, the verse is read, “as a leopard on the way of Assyria.”<sup>42</sup> But others explain the word *ashur* here as deriving from the root *shur*, “to see,” as in “I shall observe him (*ashurenu*), but not from near” (Num. 24:17).<sup>43</sup> It thus refers to the leopard’s nature of stealthily stalking its prey. This technique enables them to catch a wide variety of prey, and is perhaps one the reasons that they are the most widespread member of the cat family.<sup>44</sup> This vigilance is referred to elsewhere in the Torah with a specific word:

וַיֹּאחֲזִי לָהֶם כְּמוֹ שָׂחַל כְּנָמִיד עַל דֶּרֶךְ אֲשׁוּר׃

הושע יגז

עַל כֵּן הָבִים אֶרְיָה מִיַּעַר וְאֵב עֲרֵבוֹת יִשְׁדִּים נָמִיד שָׂחַד עַל עֲרֵיָם כָּל הַיּוֹצֵא מִהֶנָּה יִטְרָף כִּי רַבּוּ פְשָׁעֵיהֶם עֲצֻמוֹ מִשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם׃

ירמיה הו

Therefore the lion from the forest shall slay them, and the wolf of the deserts shall destroy them, the leopard is poised alert (*namer shokeid*) over their cities; everyone who goes out there shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many, and their rebellion is great. (Jer. 5:6)

This verse refers to the leopard’s alertness and vigilance with the term *shekeida*. This is inherently linked to the leopard’s brazenness. It is all very well to possess the trait of brazenness, but one might not make use of this trait without the zeal of *shekeida*. It is not enough to just be able to stand up against the threat of an enemy – one has to actually *do* so. The Hasmoneans utilized the characteristic of brazenness only with the benefit of their *shekeida*. The combination of these two properties enabled them to defeat Ancient Greece.<sup>45</sup> The vigilance of the leopard was the key to the victory of Chanukka. ■

*A leopard vigilantly watching over its surroundings*



## Notes

- 1 Menachem Mendel me-Kamenitz, *Korot Halitim LiYeshurun BeEretz Yisrael* (Vilna, 1839), p. 2b; Rabbi Yosef Schwartz, *Tevuot HaAretz*, p. 371.
- 2 Henry Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (London, 1883), p. 113.
- 3 Pater Schmitz, writing in 1911, cited by Yossi Leshem, "Zoological Treasure in Jerusalem," in *Israel – Land and Nature* 4:2 (Winter 1978–79), pp. 56–61; translated from *Teva VaAretz* 20:3 (March–April 1978).
- 4 Heinrich Mendelssohn and Yoram Yom-Tov, *Fauna Palaestina: Mammalia of Israel*, p. 225.
- 5 Numbers 32:3. In Numbers 32:36 it is referred to as Bet-Nimrah.
- 6 Isaiah 15:6 and Jeremiah 48:34, describing the "waters of Nimrim."
- 7 *Bekhorot* 55a.
- 8 The leopard is also conspicuously absent from *Perek Shira*, the Midrash which records the "songs" of various creatures and elements of the natural world.
- 9 Yosef Schonhak, in *Toledot HaAretz*, p. 64, identifies the *namer* as the tiger, although he explains it to be a generic term that would also extend to the leopard (which he calls "panther") and the South American jaguar. Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Hurwitz of Vilna (d. 1821) in *Sefer HaBrit* 1:14:6 translates *namer* as "tiger," but he describes its coat as blotched and thus appears to be describing the leopard.
- 10 See Eliezer Ben Yehuda's dictionary.
- 11 This is as per the more accurate Kapach edition, which has *baherot*, whereas the regular edition has *nekudot*.
- 12 Radak and *Metzudat David* ad loc.
- 13 *Metzudat Tziyon* and Malbim. Cf. *Shabbat* 107b, which relates the term as used in this verse to a wound.
- 14 For an academic study of the symbolism of the animals in rabbinic thought, see Rivka Raviv, "Shaping the Four Kingdoms in Daniel in the Rabbinical Literature," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 5 (2006), pp. 1–20 (Hebrew).
- 15 *Midrash Vayikra Rabba* 13:5.
- 16 Malbim to Daniel 7:6.
- 17 Rav Saadia Gaon.
- 18 Genesis 9:26, 10:2.
- 19 See Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Talmud*, p. 1060, apparently contrasting the unqualified term *az* with the term *az panim*.
- 20 Bill Clark, *High Hills and Wild Goats* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), p. 110.
- 21 The extraordinary life of John Patterson is related by Denis Brian, *The Seven Lives of Colonel Patterson* (Syracuse University Press, 2008).
- 22 John Patterson, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1919), p. 114.
- 23 Maharal, *Ner Mitzva* p.16. The word "brazen" also refers to something made out of brass, a strong alloy of copper. Maharal also points out that in another prophetic vision, Greece was represented by copper.
- 24 Cf. *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni Vayikra* 11:546.
- 25 *Shem MiShmuel*, Chanukka 5673, sixth night; Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, *Or Gedalyahu, Mo'adam*, Chanukka 5, 6.
- 26 George Jennison, in *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1937), includes an appendix (pp. 183–7) dedicated to untangling the various Greek terms for big cats. He notes: "Ancient writers were faced with two great difficulties in putting correct names to these spotted cats great and small; they believed in the breeding of hybrid forms in nature, and the Romans had the additional difficulty of naming a foreign animal." See too Benjamin Moser, "The Roman Ethnozoological Tradition: Identifying Exotic Animals in Pliny's Natural History" (University of Western Ontario, 2013), Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository, Paper 1206, pp. 69–96.
- 27 *Rashash*, commentary ad loc. He describes it as "novel and bizarre," and aside from his objection that the offspring would be sterile, he further notes that he has not read any such thing in books of natural history. See too the comments of Rashash to *Chullin* 79b. Rabbi Chanoch Henoch ben Rabbi Yosef David Teitelbaum (1884–1943), in *Responsa Yad Chanoch*, questions Rabbi Ovadiah's statement based on the talmudic dictum (*Bekhorot* 8a) that they could not interbreed since their gestations periods are not equal. He claims that there is a printing error and that Rabbi Ovadiah was actually talking about a lion interbreeding with a tiger or leopard.
- 28 Ramban, commentary to *Leviticus* 19:19.
- 29 Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen, *Divrei Soferim, Likutei Maamarim, Siyum HaShas*, s.v. *ulekach parashiyot*.
- 30 The Talmud is expounding a verse, "These are the ones who went up from Tel-melach, Tel-charsha, Keruv, Adon, and Immer" (*Neh.* 7:61). The reference to the Lord is play on the word *Adon*, and the reference to cherubs is a play on the word *Keruv*. The reference to a leopard may be a play on *Adon Immer = Namer*. Another possibility is that the leopard is not directly alluded to in the verse, but is instead simply used a symbol of infidelity.
- 31 Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz, *Sefer HaMiknah to Kiddushin* ad loc.
- 32 Rashi, commentary ad loc.
- 33 Frank William Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 222–223, referring to the writings of the Greek historian Diodorus.
- 34 For a mystical explanation of why a *mamzer* is described as feeling no shame, see Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap, *Mei Marom*, vol. 13 p. 40.
- 35 Rashi, commentary ad loc.
- 36 *Pnei Yehoshua*, commentary ad loc.
- 37 Rabbi Ovadiah MiBartenura, commentary ad loc. and to *Pirkei Avot* 5:20.
- 38 In the words of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin: "It is forbidden for a student to accept the words of his teacher when he has difficulties with them. And sometimes, the truth will lie with the student. This is just as a small branch can ignite a larger one" (*Ruach Chayim* to *Avot* 1:4).
- 39 Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen, *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 167; *Dover Tzedek, Mitzvot ase* 1; *Kometz HaMincha* 2:6.
- 40 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Melakhim* 12:1, takes the position that the verses are allegorical.
- 41 It therefore comes as no surprise that the goat is also used as a metaphor for Ancient Greece: "And the rough goat is the king of Greece" (*Daniel* 8:21).
- 42 Cf. Malbim, who explains that this alludes to Ancient Greece entering the Land of Israel.
- 43 Rashi, Radak, *Metzudot*, Malbim.
- 44 Brian Bertram, in *The Unwin Encyclopedia of Mammals*, p. 45.
- 45 Note that almonds are called *shekeidim*. This is because the almond tree is the very first tree to blossom each year, as soon as the rains ease off. The almond thus represents assiduousness and zeal. It is explained that for this reason we find that the menorah, symbol of the Chanukka victory, is constructed with a design involving *shekeidim* (*Exodus* 25:31, 33; see Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, commentary ad loc.). And Maharal (*Netivot Olam* 1, p. 62), commenting on the Mishna which states that one should "Be vigilant (*shokeid*) in learning Torah, and know what to answer a heretic" (*Avot* 2:14) explains that an attitude of *shekeida* toward Torah is a prerequisite for dealing with Ancient Greece. Cf. Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain, *Shem MiShmuel, Mikeitz* 5680.