



## **Recovered King of Beasts Returns to His Home, Thanks to Hebrew University Veterinary Hospital Operation**

Jerusalem, March 21, 2005 – Samson the lion from the Hai-Kef zoo in Rishon Lezion, Israel, who had undergone a brain operation – unique in the world -- at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has recuperated and has returned to his cage and to his sister, Delilah.

“The meeting between Samson and his sister Delilah was joyous and emotional,” said the director of the zoo, Bezalel Porath. “Samson now has many visitors. We also received letters from kindergartens and telephone calls from many who inquired about his welfare. I want to thank the entire staff of the veterinary Hospital of the Hebrew University for their wonderful work.”

Dr. Merav Shamir, a specialist in veterinary neurology and neurosurgery at the Koret School of Veterinary Medicine of the Hebrew University Faculty of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Quality Sciences, who diagnosed Samson’s medical problem and operated on him, said: “Samson’s illness was brought to my attention after symptoms of damage to his nervous system appeared. I was asked to carry out a neurological examination. I saw that he stood on his legs with difficulty. When he tried to walk, he fell after a few steps. He also had no appetite and appeared generally to be in poor condition. I diagnosed that Samson was suffering from damage to the posterior portion of his skull, which applied pressure on his cerebellum and the upper sector of the spinal cord.”

This type of damage is known to occur in lions living in captivity and is expressed in abnormal skull growth, exerting pressure on the rear portion of the brain, said Dr. Shamir. A CT exam confirmed that the lion was indeed suffering from a serious distortion of the rear portion of his skull and subsequent brain pressure.

According to veterinary medicine literature, this situation is caused due to a vitamin A deficiency. Even though lions in captivity, (including those at the Rishon Lezion zoo) receive vitamin supplements in their food daily, the symptoms that Samson suffered appear, although rarely, among these animals. In all of the previous cases of this type, the animal died due to the disease, either because of the lack of proper medical treatment or because of imprecise diagnosis. In most of the cases, the nature of the problem was revealed with certainty only after death.

“We decided to carry out this operation that had never before been performed anywhere,” said Dr. Shamir, “and in doing so we removed part of the thickened skull tissue, thus freeing the tremendous pressure on the rear portion of the brain.” The operation lasted six hours.”

# Press Release



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After the operation, the lion was taken for recovery to his heated enclosure in the Rishon Lezion zoo. Under the care of the zoo's veterinarian, Dr. Limor Miara, and the animal's caretaker, he was able to again stand on his legs. Even on the first day after the operation one could already see an observable improvement in his situation. Samson began to walk steadily, without stumbling, and one could hardly see traces of his previous illness. During the following ten days he received intensive care from the zoo staff, which included special food, antibiotic medicine, vitamin supplements and other "special treatment."

"The results as they look today are more than we could have expected," said Dr. Shamir. "Samson is walking around as a fully healthy lion, and our final worry is that the impressive mane which covered his head before the operation will return and cover any traces of our surgical work."

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