**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**MIDRASH ON THE PARASHA**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

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**Parashat Vayikra:**

**Moshe and Pharaoh’s Daughter**

**The Derasha:**

**The Structure and General Message**

The first sections of *Vayikra Rabba* deal with the figure of Moshe Rabbeinu, in the wake of the opening verse of *Vayikra*: "And the Lord called to Moshe, and spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting, saying.”[[1]](#footnote-1) *Vayikra Rabba* 1, 2 and 1, 3 are two Midrashic units that together constitute a long and complex *petichta*, constructed of expositionsof two verses — one from the Book of *Hoshea* and one from the Book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*:

Rabbi Abbahu opened: "They that dwell under His shadow shall again make grain to grow, and shall blossom as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon" (*Hoshea* 14:8).

"They that dwell under His shadow shall again" — these are the converts who come and take refuge in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He.

"Shall make grain to grow" — they became as essential as Israel.

This is what is stated: "Grain shall make the young men flourish" (*Zekharya* 9:17).

"And they shall blossom as the vine" — like Israel.

This is what is stated: "You did pluck a vine out of Egypt; You did drive out the nations, and did plant it" (*Tehillim* 80:9).

Another explanation: "Shall make grain to grow" — with Talmud.

"And they shall blossom as the vine" — with aggada.

"The scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Precious to Me are the names (*shemot*) of the converts like a wine libation (*yein nesekh*) offered on the altar before Me.

Why is its name called Lebanon? Because of: "That goodly hill country, and Lebanon" (*Devarim* 3:25).

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught: Why is its name called Lebanon? Because it whitens (*malbin*) the sins of Israel like snow.

This is what is stated: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (*Yeshayahu* 1:18).

Rav Tavyumi said: Because all hearts (*levavot*) rejoice in it.

This is what is stated: "Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth; even Mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the north" (*Tehillim* 48:3).

And our Rabbis said: "Because of: "And My eyes and My heart (*einai ve-libi*) shall be there perpetually" (I *Melakhim* 9:43).

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Rabbi Shimon said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and Rabbi Chama father of Rabbi Hoshaya said in the name of Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-nasi]:

The Book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* was given only to be expounded.

"And his wife from the tribe of Yehudabore Yered Avi Gedor, and Chever Avi Sokho, and Yekutiel Avi Zanoach – and these are the sons of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh whom Mered took" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 4:18).

"And his wife from the tribe of Yehuda" — this is Yokheved. But was she from the tribe of Yehuda? Surely she was from the tribe of Levi. Why then was she called "from the tribe of Yehuda?" Because she gave rise to Jews in the world.

"She bore Yered" – this is Moshe. Rabbi Chinena bar Papa and Rabbi Simon [disagreed].

Rabbi Chinena said: Yered, because he brought down (*horid*) the Torah from heaven to earth. Another explanation: Yered, because he brought down (*horid*) the *Shekhina* from heaven to earth.

Rabbi Simon said: The term Yered means nothing but kingship. This is what is stated: "May he have dominion (*ve-yerd*) also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (*Tehillim* 72:8). And it is written: "For he had dominion (*rodeh*)over all the region on this side of the River" (I *Melakhim* 5:4).

"Avi Gedor." Rabbi Chuna said in the name of Rabbi Acha: Israel had many fence-makers (*goderim*), but he was the father of all of them.

"And Chever" – who joined (*chibber*) the children to their Father in heaven.

Another explanation: Chever, who removed (*he'evir*) punishment from entering the world.

"Avi Sokho*" –* he was the father all the prophets who see (*sokhin*) with the holy spirit.

Rabbi Levi said: This is an Arabic term. In Arabia a prophet is called *sikhvaya*.

"Yekutiel." Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Simon [disagreed].

Rabbi Levi said: He made the children hope (*mekavin*)in their Father in heaven.

Rabbi Simon said: When the children broke the power (*hikhu*) of God in the Sin of the Golden Calf, "Avi Zanoach," Moshe, came and made them abandon (*hiznichan*) that sin. This is what is stated: "And he strewed it upon the water" (*Shemot* 32:20).

"And these are the sons of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh." Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh: Moshe was not your son, but you called him your son. So too you are not My daughter, but I call you My daughter — “These are the sons of Bitya [*bat Y-ah,* daughter of God].”

"Whom Mered took" — this is Kaleiv. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana and Rabbi Yehuda bar Simon [disagreed].

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: He rebelled (*marad*) against the plan of the spies, and she rebelled against the plan of her father. Let this rebel come and marry that rebel.

Rabbi Yehuda bar Rabbi Simon said: He saved the sheep and she saved the shepherd. Let he who saved the sheep come and marry her who saved the shepherd.

Moshe was called by ten names [beginning with]: Yered, Chever, Yekutiel, Avi Gedor, Avi Sokho, and Avi Zanoach.

Rabbi Yehuda Bar Ila'i said: He was also called Toviya. This is what is stated: "And she saw that he was a goodly child (*tov hu*)" (*Shemot* 2:2) — he is Toviya.

Rabbi Yishmael bar Ami said: He was also called Shemaya.

Rabbi Yehoshua bar Rabbi Nechemya came and explained this verse: "And Shemaya ben Netanel the scribe, who was of the Levites, wrote them in the presence of the king, and the princes, and Tzadok the priest, and Achimelekh ben Evyatar" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 24:6). "Shemaya" — that He heard (*shama*) his prayer; "ben Netanel" — the son to whom was given (*nitena*) the Torah from hand to hand; "the scribe" — who was the scribe of Israel; "who was of the Levites" — who was of the tribe of Levi; "in the presence of the king" — this is the King of Kings’ kings, blessed be He, and His court; "and Tzadok the priest" — this is Aharon the priest; "Achimelekh" — who was the brother (*ach*) of the king (*melekh*); "ben Evyatar" — the son because of whom the Holy One, blessed be He, waived (*vitter*) the sin of the Golden Calf.

Rabbi Tanchuma said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha and Rabbi Menachem said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: He was also called Levi for his family of origin, "Is there not Aharon your brother the Levi" (*Shemot* 4:14).

And Moshe — in total, ten.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: By your life, of all the names by which you are called, I will call you only by the name by which Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh called you: "And she called his name Moshe" (*Shemot* 2:10).

"And He called to Moshe" (*Vayikra* 1:1).

)*Vayikra Rabba* 1, 2-3)

The first part of the *derasha* deals with the issue of converts in general, while the second part deals with Moshe's rescue at the hands of the daughter of Pharaoh. The *derasha* at the end links these issues to the beginning of *Parashat Vayikra* by way of the parallel between the wording of the verse, "And He called to Moshe," and the daughter of Pharaoh's naming of Moshe when she finds him in the river: "And she called his name Moshe, and she said, ‘For I have drawn him (*meshitihu*) from the water.’"

On the face of it, it seems forced to find a link between two such common verbs. The same might be said about noting God's calling to Moshe with that name in this place in the Torah, after Moshe is called by that name throughout the Book of *Shemot.* It seems that the whole point of the *derasha* is the very linkage of the image of the daughter of Pharaoh as she draws Moshe from the river to the image of Moshe when he enters the *Mishkan.* But for what purpose does the *derasha* draw a connection between them?

**Part One:**

**Converts**

Let us analyze the *derasha*. Due to the length of the *derasha*, we will discuss each of the sections separately, and afterwards address the overall message arising from the two of them.

The first part of the *derasha* opens with a *derasha* of Rabbi Abbahu, a disciple of Rabbi Yochanan, that expounds the verse "They that dwell under His shadow shall again make grain to grow, and shall blossom as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon" (*Hoshea* 14:8) in connection with the firm standing of converts among the people of Israel. The converts who "take refuge in the shadow of the Holy One, blessed be He," merit not only to join themselves to the inheritance of God, but also to be the "essence" just like Israel. That is to say, they are absorbed into body of the nation of Israel and become an organic part of it.

The letter *chet* in the word *yichyu*, "shall make to grow," is read as if it were a *hei*, “*yihyu*,” "shall be," and the words "shall make grain to grow," is expounded as "shall be essential," like grain which is man's main food. These verses are cited as a proof-text to the assertion that converts are essential to Israel:

And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, glittering over His land. For how great is their goodness, and how great is their beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women. (*Zekharya* 9:16-17)

This points to "grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women," as the beauty and goodness — that is, the core of the majesty, or "the essence" of the people or the land.[[2]](#footnote-2) The words "they shall blossom as the vine" in the expounded verse from Hoshea expresses the blossoming and blessing merited by converts when they become part of Israel, like the people of Israel themselves who are called a "vine."[[3]](#footnote-3) The *derasha* suggests another possible exposition of "they shall again make grain to grow, and shall blossom as the vine": "They shall make grain to grow" — with Talmud; "and shall blossom as the vine" — with aggada. This shifts the area of success of converts into a realm that is entirely the "essence" in the world of the Sages, the world of the *beit midrash.*

Let us examine how Rabbi Abbahu expounds the fourth part of the verse from *Hoshea*:

“The scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Precious to Me are the names of the converts like a wine libation offered on the altar before Me. Why is its name called Lebanon? Because of: “That goodly hill country, and Lebanon” (*Devarim* 3:25).

The word "Lebanon" in the verse: "Let me go over, I pray You, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, this goodly hill country, and Lebanon" (*Devarim* 3:25), is already expounded in the Tannaitic literature as relating to the Temple:

"Let me go over, I pray You… the good land" — this is Eretz Israel; "this goodly hill country" — this is the royal mountain; "and Lebanon" — this is the Temple. As it is stated: "Open your doors, O Lebanon" (*Zekharya* 11:1); and it is written: "And Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one" (*Yeshayahu* 10:34).

(*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Beshalach, Amalek* 2)

Rabbi Abbahu uses this identification and expounds "the wine of Lebanon" as referring to the wine libations offered in the Temple. The term "the scent thereof" (*zikhro*) in the verse in *Hoshea* parallels "the names of the converts" in the *derasha*, and thus is created the image of: "Precious to Me are the names of the converts like a wine libation (*yein nesekh*) offered on the altar before Me."

The original meaning of the phrase "*yein nesekh*" in rabbinic literature is wine poured before idols, but it relates also to the wine of a non-Jew, which is forbidden to a Jew. Such wine is certainly forbidden to be used as a libation on the altar. What then is the meaning of this *derasha*?

Rabbi Abbahu uses halakhic terminology within a conceptual *derasha*, sketching a situation that cannot actually exist. His *derasha* refers to the miraculous process that the convert undergoes from being a non-Jew to connecting to the Jewish people and taking refuge under the wings of the *Shekhina*. As a non-Jew, this individual is *yein nesekh*, who because of this process may be offered on the Altar. The reference to names indicates that each and every convert is precious to God in a personal manner.[[4]](#footnote-4)

At this point, Rabbi Abbahu's *derasha* comes to an end.

Afterwards, there are additional Tannaitic and Amoraic *derashot* of the word Lebanon, all of which are based on the identification of Lebanon as the Temple. The latest scholar appearing in this section is Rav Tavyumi, a Babylonian Amora of the fifth century, a disciple of Rava who moved to Eretz Israel.

**Part Two:**

**Moshe and Pharaoh’s Daughter**

The *derasha* before us is also built out of statements of Tannaim and Amoraim of various different periods. It mentions no less than sixteen Sages: four Tannaim (Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi, Rabbi Yehuda bar Ila'i, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha, and Rabbi Acha), six Amoraim from Eretz Israel of the third to fourth generation (Rabbi Simon, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, Rabbi Levi, Rabbi Yehuda bar Rabbi Simon, Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin and Rabbi Yehoshua bar Rabbi Nechemya), and three Sages belonging to the intermediate generation between the Tannaim and the Amoraim (Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, Rabbi Chama, and Rabbi Hoshaya). The latest scholar appearing in the *derasha* is Rabbi Tanchuma, one of the most important Amoraim in Eretz Israel of the sixth generation.[[5]](#footnote-5)

According to this, it may be determined that the entire *petichta* with its two parts, as it appears in *Vayikra Rabba*, receives its final form at the end of the period of the classical Midrash, close to the generation of Rabbi Tanchuma.

Over the course of the *derasha*, the following verse is expounded: "And his wife from the tribe of Yehudabore Yered Avi Gedor, and Chever Avi Sokho, and Yekutiel Avi Zanoach — and these are the sons of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh whom Mered took" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 4:18). This appears in a complicated genealogical report relating to Kaleiv ben Yefuneh (vv. 15-18), but it is removed from its plain sense, based on the rule recorded in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi: "The Book of *Divrei Ha-yamim* was given only to be expounded."

The *derasha* identifies the sons of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh with Moshe, and expounds their names accordingly. For example: "'Avi Gedor — Israel had many fence-makers (*goderim*), and this was the father of all of them. 'And Chever' — who joined (*chibber*) the children to their Father in heaven." In the continuation, it refers to Moshe's two mothers — his biological mother and his adoptive-savior mother — while emphasizing the Divine selection of the name given by the latter by virtue of her act of rescue.[[6]](#footnote-6)

According to the *derasha*, the ten names of Moshe are: Yered, Chever, Yekutiel, Avi Gedor, Avi Sokho, Avi Zanoach, Toviya, Shemaya, Levi and Moshe. The *derasha* is built around the number ten, which testifies to Moshe's perfection.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Another issue that arises from the *derasha* is the identification of Bitya's husband as Kaleiv. It seems that in the wake of the emphasis placed on Bitya's marriage in the expounded verse, "whom Mered took," it may be said that her very marriage to a man of Israel ratifies the conversion of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh and her acceptance into the Jewish people. The identification of Mered with Kaleiv allows us to point out the focal point of Bitya's character in the eyes of the Sages: as a rebel against her natural environment in the act of rescue, and in the result of that action, namely, Moshe's survival.

The daughter of Pharaoh's act of rescue is a ray of light in the kingdom of darkness, the exile in Egypt. It operates in the simple human realm of mercy, of seeing the suffering individual, regardless of nationality or ethnicity, or the slave-master hierarchy. This basic connection, on which the world stands, is embodied in the princess's connection to an infant destined for destruction. She emerges from her father's abominations, from her standing, from her people, and connects to Moshe by way of compassion. Her ability to see the living creature before her as a subject rather than an object draws from her feminine-maternal side, which brings life into the world.

In doing so, the daughter of Pharaoh continues the work of the Hebrew midwives and mothers (*Shemot* 1), and precisely at this point she also joins the Jewish people. In the Book of *Divrei Ha-yamim*, she appears in the tribal lineage in the classic maternal role — within the lineage of the Jewish people. The Midrash departs from the plain sense of the text and focuses on her initial connection to the people of Israel, through the rescue of Moshe.

**A Call for Love and Compassion**

The motif of names is interwoven throughout the *petichta*. From "the names of the converts," through the multitude of Moshe's names and God's calling the daughter of Pharaoh by the name of Bitya, to God's choosing the name Moshe given by her. One may add to this the very fact that Pharaoh's daughter, who appears "as the daughter of Pharaoh" in the Book of *Shemot*,[[8]](#footnote-8) merits a personal name in the book of *Divrei Ha-yamim.* The reference to the names of the converts indicates that each and every convert is precious to God in a personal manner.

Moshe's ten names point to the perfection of his person and leadership. The name Bitya demonstrates the power of a person's deeds to bring one closer to God, and God's choice of the name Moshe teaches the value of Moshe's image, the value of compassion for and rescuing others. It seems to me that the common ground for all the instances of a name here is not only as an expression of sublime essence, but as an expression of a subject-to-subject relationship. Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin's statement in the name of Rabbi Levi in the *derasha* serves as a good example of this: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh: Moshe was not your son, but you called him your son. So too you are not My daughter, but I call you My daughter — ‘And these are the sons of Bitya.’”

Here we come to the conclusion of the *derasha* and to the question of the connection between God's calling to Moshe at the beginning of the Book of *Vayikra* and the daughter of Pharaoh's naming of Moshe. It seems that the words of the Sages here come to establish within us the consciousness that the connection of the Divine to our world is made possible through mercy and seeing the other as a subject rather than an object. Mutatis mutandis, the calling of God Who dwells in the tent built by man to His chosen one to enter inside is a call that embraces love, compassion and intimacy.

Human compassion for others develops abundant treasures within whoever benefits, as the mercy and compassion of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh allow for the existence of Moshe. This *derasha* expresses, as it were, God's gratitude — not that of Moshe himself, but of the Torah — towards those people by virtue of whose humanity all of humankind merits to realize its full potential.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The phrase "And [He] called to Moshe" appears in two climactic points of God's revelation to Moshe, when the *Shekhina* rests upon Mount Sinai at the time of the Revelation at Sinai, and when the *Shekhina* rests upon the *Mishkan*: "And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moshe out of the midst of the cloud" (*Shemot* 24:16); "And the Lord called to Moshe, and spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting, saying" (*Vayikra* 1:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In his commentary to this verse, Rabbi Abbahu understands the verse as referring to young men and young women, whereas there he explains the verse as referring to the yield of Eretz Israel. These two modes of exposition appear also in *Bereishit Rabba* 66, 3:

“Of the dew of heaven” — this is manna… “and plenty of grain” — these are the young men, as it is stated: “Grain shall make the young men flourish”; “and wine” — these are the young women, as it is stated: “and new wine the young women”…

Another explanation: “Of the dew of the heaven” — this is *Mikra*; “and of the fat places of the earth” — this is Mishna; “and plenty of grain” — this is Talmud; “and wine” — this is aggada. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It is possible to point to the parallel between the people of Israel, who are strangers in Egypt, and the converts, both of whom merit blossoming like a vine. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The positive, even enthusiastic attitude towards the phenomenon of converts in rabbinic literature that arises from Rabbi Abbahu's *derasha* is typical of sources originating in Eretz Israel. Compare with Rav Chelbo's statement on BT *Yevamot* 47b: "Converts are as hard for Israel [to endure] as a leprous sore." Yehudit Baskin, a scholar of Rabbinic literature, explains the sympathetic attitude of the Tannaim toward Rachav in light of the phenomenon of educated Roman men and women converting to Judaism in the wake of their exposure to Judaism throughout the empire.

Another statement of Rabbi Abbahu regarding converts appears in *Ruth Rabba* 3, 5-6:

Rabbi Abbahu said: Come and see how precious converts are before the Holy One, blessed be He. As soon as she decided to convert, the verse put her at the same level as Naomi [as it is stated]: “So they two went until they came to Beit Lechem” (*Ruth* 1:19). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The identity of two of the Sages mentioned here is in question: Rabbi Chinena bar Papa and Rabbi Yishmael bar Ami. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Compare what is stated in this source about Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh to *Kalla Rabbati* 3, 23:

Seven entered into the Garden of Eden during their lifetimes, and they are: Serach the daughter of Asher, Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh, Chiram the king of Tzor, Eved Melekh Ha-Kushi, Eliezer the servant of Avraham, the grandson of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi, and Ya’avetz. Some say: Also Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi…

And Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh, as it is written: “Yered Avi Gedor, and Chever Avi Sokho, and Yekutiel Avi Zanoach — and these are the sons of Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I will call Moshe only by the name that she gave him, as it is stated: “God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said: Moshe, Moshe” (*Shemot* 3:4).

This is what David said: “He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out of many waters” (*Tehillim* 18:17). “He took me” – “And she sent *amatah* to fetch it” (*Shemot* 2:5) — this teaches that her arm (*amatah*) lengthened until it reached the ark. “He drew me out of many waters” — “Because I drew him out of the water” (*Shemot* 2:10).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Since this one brought salvation to Israel and took them out to life, I will extend her life with Israel. I made a covenant with your fathers, and they follow the laws of their fathers. She who came and left the kingdom of her father’s house, and cleaved to them, should I not reward her?

It should be noted that *Kalla Rabbati* is a later source. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It would have been possible to expound the names differently, e.g., to count "Chever Avi Sokho" as one name. So too the exposition of the term "the Levite" as a name indicates a desire to create a pattern of ten. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *Shemot* 2:5-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)