**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**From Slavery to Redemption**

**Dr. Yael Ziegler**

**Shiur #07: Moses: Birth of a Leader**

**Fertility and Femininity: Courage and Compassion**

Birth stories in Tanakh follow a familiar pattern. They open with the problem of fertility: a barren woman looks toward a bleak future; her prospects for continuity are grim. Before long, she receives a divine promise, which is soon followed by pregnancy and birth. God resolves her problem, reversing her sterility and transforming bleakness into hope. In these stories, God illustrates that He is the exclusive address for alleviating infertility.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Moses’ birth deviates sharply from the usual tale. To begin with, Moses’ mother is not barren. Egypt is a land of ample fertility; both humans and earth supply abundant produce. Yet, Moses’ birth story contains a problem of its own; it may be easy to birth a child in Egypt but keeping him alive is not so simple. Surplus fertility may well clash with societal morality; a profusion of humans renders them less valuable, expendable. Just two verses prior to Moses’ birth, Pharaoh issues his nefarious decree (*Shemot* 1:22): “Every son that is born you shall cast into the Nile.” And now a son has been born into this morally bankrupt society; a decree of death casts an ominous shadow over his birth. The resolution of Moses’ birth story does not occur when his mother becomes pregnant, as in other birth stories. This story climaxes with the child’s maturation: “And the child grew up,” a conclusion that produces a sigh of relief. It was not at all certain that this child (or any Hebrew child in Egypt) would live to adulthood.

God is not the answer to this story’s problem. In fact, God is not mentioned in this story at all. In Moses’ birth story, the solution rests on human actions. Morality must be restored by human compassion, not divine fiat. Human compassion shapes this episode, as women (mother, sister, princess) whirl around a vulnerable child, swaddling him in their courage and humanity.

Until we encounter Pharaoh’s daughter, the episode appears to be on an inexorable downslide toward the child’s death. It is the princess’ appearance that facilitates the narrative pivot, as she unexpectedly steers events towards a felicitous conclusion. Her humanity bolsters the lesson learned from the midwives: as society’s moral fabric unravels, look to the women (and particularly those associated with childbirth) to restore society’s mettle. Although the princess does not birth the child, she simulates a birth-like scenario, extracting an infant from an ark that is nestled, womb-like, in the reeds, encircled by the waters of the Nile.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The princess’ humane response stabilizes a world teetering on the brink of moral collapse, providing a counterbalance for her father’s brutal decree and reassuring us that there is still hope. Remarkably, it appears that God acts in the wake of her deeds;[[3]](#footnote-3) the actions that the princess takes to save a Hebrew child, “And she **went down**… And she **saw**… And she **sent**” (*Shemot* 2:5), reappear in the next chapter, where God announces, “And I will **go down** to save [Israel] from the hand of Egypt… for I have **seen** the oppression that Egypt oppresses them and now, go, I will **send** you to Pharaoh!” (*Shemot* 3:8-10).[[4]](#footnote-4) Once humans display moral courage, God willingly enters the fray, joining forces with those who have shown that humanity is not lost.

**The Birth of the Hero: An Ancient Narrative Motif**

Moses’ birth story recalls motifs that are familiar from ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman stories of hero births.[[5]](#footnote-5) Although these stories are not identical, the birth and survival stories of Sargon of Akkad,[[6]](#footnote-6) Cyrus, king of Persia,[[7]](#footnote-7) Gilgamesh,[[8]](#footnote-8) Oedipus, and Romulus and Remus[[9]](#footnote-9) share several key elements with the Moses story. Following the birth of a child, a parent abandons their infant (in the case of Sargon, his mother places him in a waterproofed basket on the river, similar to Moses). The child is rescued by a stranger, who raises him. This infant eventually becomes a powerful figure, wielding his power in a manner that affects his biological family, even if he is unaware of the familial ties that bind them.

The differences between these legends and the story of Moses’ birth are no less striking than the similarities. The non-biblical birth story features a divine oracle indicating that the as-yet-unborn child will constitute a threat to the power of the birth parent. It is in a bid to quash the threat presented by the child’s birth that the parent decides to abandon that child to die. The abandoned child is found and raised by a lower-class person (a laborer, a shepherd, a gardener, and in one case, a wolf or alternatively a prostitute), who seems unlikely to propel that child to a powerful position. Nonetheless, the child attains great power and eventually unseats his biological parent. The message is clear: no one can escape their fate; humans are inescapably swept along on the tides of life’s trajectory toward their predestined fate.

Although the story of Moses deviates sharply from the classic story, the thematic similarities between them has led some scholars to suggest that the Bible consciously alters a familiar tale in a bid to draw attention to its unique message.[[10]](#footnote-10) The biblical story of the birth of the hero contains no hint of a power struggle between the parent and the child; Moses’ birth is not seen as a threat to anyone – neither his parents, nor the Pharaoh.[[11]](#footnote-11) Moses’ mother surrenders her infant reluctantly, not to save herself but to save him from Pharaoh’s cruel decree.[[12]](#footnote-12) Even after she relinquishes him, Moses’ mother does not expose the infant to the elements to die but carefully prepares a protective ark for him. His sister’s watchful eye illustrates the family’s continued concern for him and ultimately enables his mother to serve as her own child’s wetnurse. Moses is adopted by a high-class person (a princess), whose subversive actions ring with moral clarity as she defies a corrupt regime.

Moses’ birth story is not the story of humans who have no choice other than to submit to their fate. Instead, this story features active subjects who shape their own destiny by means of their conscience and actions. Furthermore, when Moses overturns the existing power structure, it is not to obtain power for himself. The biblical hero serves as a messenger and servant of God, designated to bring about Pharaoh’s downfall due to the moral bankruptcy of his regime.

***Shemot* 2:1-22: Structure and Meaning**

A triumph of literary artistry, the Torah’s story of Moses’ birth and burgeoning adulthood is easily divided into two discrete units. The first ten verses (2:1-10) describe the fateful events that swirl around the oblivious, anonymous child. The keyword of this unit is *ha-yeled*, or “**the** infant,” appearing seven times in the unit, and culminating in the pronouncement in 2:10 that “the infant grew up (*va-yigdal* ***ha-yeled***).” The child finally receives a name in verse 10 – Moses – giving him concrete identity that augurs durability. Moses’ naming prepares us for his role as emancipator of slaves; only one who himself has identity can restore identity to an enslaved people.

The second half of the story (2:11-22) picks up where the first half left off, using the same words that closed the first unit to open the second: “And Moshe grew up (*va-yigdal* ***Moshe***).” The key word of the second unit is “*ish*,” or man, which also appears seven times.[[13]](#footnote-13) No longer a passive infant content to allow events to roil around him, these twelve verses (2:11-22) describe Moses in a veritable whirlwind of activity.

The episode surrounding Moses’ infancy (2:1-10) arranges its main characters in a tight chiastic structure.[[14]](#footnote-14) His mother emerges as the initial figure, birthing and concealing her infant – at first, presumably, in her home, and then in a waterproof ark placed carefully in the reeds of the Nile. The narrative then turns its attention to the sister, who stands from afar to keep watch over her brother.[[15]](#footnote-15) But the narrative reserves its spotlight for Pharaoh’s daughter, whose appearance at the core of the episode marks her as its central figure.

The suspenseful slowdown of the story occurs in a magnificent literary flourish, as we draw in a breath, watching the princess slowly making her way to the river, her maidens strolling alongside her as she spies the ark bobbing in the reeds. The narrative unhurriedly describes Pharaoh’s daughter sending her maidservant to retrieve the ark, then opening it, and finally, seeing the child. This represents the point of highest tension in the story, released only when the text informs us that the princess feels compassion for the infant despite his evident Hebrew ethnicity. The princess’ actions function as the narrative hinge, rotating the child’s fortunes and the narrative in a propitious direction. At this juncture, the sister re-enters the frame, offering to find a wet nurse for the crying infant. The princess agrees, and the sister fetches the mother, who receives the child once again in her arms.

The chiastic structure is arranged thus:

Mother

 Sister

 Pharaoh’s Daughter

 Sister

Mother

A masterful construct, this chiastic structure directs our attention to the significance of the figure at its nucleus, namely, Pharaoh’s daughter. It also illustrates the encroaching danger as the child moves gradually away from the safety of his mother’s womb. The farther the distance between the child and his mother, the greater the peril. Following the story’s pivot, the child returns slowly back to his mother, illustrating the resolution of the story’s tension.

**Women Who Save**

Female actions shape the saga of Moses’ salvation. This story links up to a familiar biblical type-scene in which women conceal men to save them from a threat of death. Rahab saves Joshua’s spies from the king of Jericho by hiding them under the stalks of flax on the roof (*Yehoshua* 2:6), and Michal saves David from Saul’s messengers by covering a statue with a garment and pretending that it is a sickly David in the bed (I *Shmuel* 19:13-14). The unnamed woman of Bachurim saves Ahimaaz and Jonathan from Absalom by covering her well (where they have hidden) with a sheet that has dried grain on top (II *Shmuel* 17:19). In our story, the pursued is not a military warrior, but a helpless child, caught in the maelstrom of Pharaoh’s genocidal scheme. Yet, like the women above, Moses’ mother conceals her son in an ark to save him from death. She functions with boldness and savvy, obeying Pharaoh’s technical order to cast the child into the Nile even as she disobeys its essence.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Questions of loyalty play an important role in each of these stories. The women must choose where their allegiances lie, and their decisions are not necessarily what we would anticipate. Rahab betrays her countrymen due to her belief in God (*Yehoshua* 2:9-11). Michal chooses loyalty to her husband over loyalty to her father, Saul, who castigates her harshly for her treachery (I *Shmuel* 19:17). The anonymous woman from Bahurim saves David’s servants, even though Bahurim has been a stronghold of loyalists to Saul, David’s avowed enemy (II *Shmuel* 17:18-20).[[17]](#footnote-17) This motif of diverted loyalty draws attention to the actions of Pharaoh’s daughter in our story. After all, the efforts of Moses’ biological relatives seem unremarkable, or at the very least, foreseeable, while the disloyal actions of the princess toward her father introduce an unexpected twist. Undaunted by the watchful eyes of her maidens, the king’s daughter blithely undermines her father’s royal decree, functioning as an agent of life where he brought death. *Shemot Rabba* 1:23 portrays the princess’ maidens scolding her indignantly: “Our mistress! The way of the world is that when a king makes a decree, even if the entire world does not obey it, at least the members of his household uphold it! But you are transgressing your father’s command!”

**Anonymous Women; Daughter of Pharaoh, Daughter of God**

Throughout this episode, the heroic women remain unnamed. Anonymity may indicate a desire to conceal their actions; subversive behavior calls for minimal exposure. Like the midwives of chapter one, perhaps these women are better left unidentified. On a darker note, their anonymity suggests that the impact of these women may easily vanish, consigning their courageous actions to a forgotten fate. Possibly, the desperate bid to save an infant occurred in many Hebrew families, lost to history due to their failures.

The anonymity of these figures also links up to Egypt’s political structure; in a tyrannical society, only the person at the top has a name or agency, while all others remain subordinate to him. This certainly holds true for the Hebrew slaves, whose inferior position erases their dignity, their autonomy, and their names. Stirrings of liberation will produce revived identity. In *Shemot* 6:20, Moshe’s mother, Yocheved, will finally be named; individuals begin to come into focus as the hope for freedom emerges.

But what of Pharaoh’s daughter? Why is she unnamed? The king’s daughter may wish to remain anonymous, both to cloak her seditious act and perhaps, more poignantly, to distance herself from her primary identity, the family who named her but whose moral decrepitude she rejects. In an ironic twist, the text chooses to label her “daughter of Pharaoh,” underlining her courageous choice to rebel against her father’s decree and choose a moral path. Her namelessness, however, allows *Chazal* to bestow upon her a new name, one that better reflects her loyalties and newfound identity: as a reward for her deeds, God calls her Bitya, daughter of God:[[18]](#footnote-18)

R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi. “God said to Bitya, daughter of Pharaoh: Moses was not your son, but you still called him your son. So too, you are not My daughter, but I call you My daughter, as it says, ‘These are the children of Bitya’ (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 4:18) – bat Y-a [literally, daughter of God].” (*Vayikra Rabba* 1:3)

No longer Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses’ adoptive mother is now God’s daughter, having exchanged her biological affiliation for a values-based path, laced with moral courage that links her to God.

**The Infant Moses**

The narrative casts a spotlight upon the women, but what of the infant? We are told very little of baby Moses, whose tender age renders him without agency, passive and oblivious. The only thing we are told about the child is that his mother perceives him to be “good,” a seemingly subjective assessment made by a new mother in the flush of recent birth. Perhaps she observes that he is a viable child, healthy enough to invest the necessary effort to rescue him from Pharaoh’s decree.[[19]](#footnote-19) The infant’s health is especially notable considering the *midrash* that maintains Moses was born three months early.[[20]](#footnote-20) Shadal and Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch suggest the new mother sees that her newborn is placid, not given to loud cry out, and is therefore easily hidden.

The mother’s observation regarding the newborn (“And she saw him that he was good”) linguistically evokes God’s observation regarding the creation of light in *Bereishit* 1:4: “And God saw the light, that it was good.” Based on this, an oft-cited *midrash* posits that the house filled with light at Moses’ birth.[[21]](#footnote-21) Moses’ birth prepares us for the re-creation of the world that will occur after God destroys (uncreates) Egypt, plunging it into primordial darkness.

Renewal of the world is also alluded to by placing Moses in an ark.[[22]](#footnote-22) Like Noah, Moses survives a dark and immoral world slated for destruction. Exiting the ark obligates survivors to rebuild the world, to make it a better place, filled with light. The light that envelops Moses’ birth foreshadows his upcoming role. Moses will lead Israel out of the darkness of Egypt. He will then function as lawgiver at Sinai, disseminating laws designed to bring God’s light to the world. Ultimately, biblical passages indicate that to fulfill its role, Israel will be charged with dispelling the darkness that shrouds the nations and instead shining God’s light, His justice, upon the world:[[23]](#footnote-23)

“Rise and Shine, for your light has arrived and the glory of God shines upon you. For the darkness has covered the earth and clouds [shroud] the nations and upon you shines God’s light and His glory can be seen upon you. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by the brilliance of your radiance.” (*Yeshayahu* 60:1-3)

Another *midrash* suggests that the “good” that Moses’ mother saw is that he was born circumcised,[[24]](#footnote-24) a fortuitous omen of Moses’ spiritual persona. In another hint to the cosmic significance of this story (of re-creation), the above *midrash* seems to link Moses with the first man, Adam, who was likewise created circumcised according to a *midrash*.[[25]](#footnote-25) Some commentators see another reference to Moses’ circumcision when the princess’ first glimpse of the infant leads to her assertion: “This is one of the Hebrew children” (*Shemot* 2:6). Does she know this because he has been concealed, or because she sees that the unclothed infant is circumcised?[[26]](#footnote-26) These snippets constitute the sum total of what we know about the child, whose early life is defined by those who rescue him.

**Moses the Infant Develops into a Leader**

Moses’ tender age renders him blessedly oblivious to the hostile forces that surround him. Yet, this episode lays the foundations for the birth of the savior of Israel, who is encircled by valiant women at an early – and critical – stage in his life. It seems evident from this episode that the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing foster altruism and fierce benevolence; the womb (*rechem*) is designed to breed compassion (*rachamim*).[[27]](#footnote-27) Not just mother, but sister and surrogate mother too, act together to save a helpless child, harnessing the power of maternal ardor to defy a regal order.[[28]](#footnote-28) From these women, Moshe learns how to discover deep resources of strength within himself, a fierceness and conviction that fortifies him for his role.

From his mother who suckles him, Moshe learns to be a nurturing leader, a maternal figure to the nascent nation. *Midrashim* describe Moshe (along with Aaron) metaphorically, as the nursemaid of Israel:

“Your two breasts” [*Shir Ha-shirim* 4:5]. This refers to Moshe and Aaron… Just as the breasts are filled with milk, so too do Moshe and Aaron fill the people with Torah. (*Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* 4:5)

What does it mean that, “Your breasts became ready” [*Yechezkel* 16:7]? This refers to Moshe and Aaron, who were ready to redeem [Israel]. (*Shemot Rabba* 1:35)

From his sister, Moshe learns courage and boldness, the ability to stand strong and use speech to rescue others. The word used to describe his sister’s stalwart position as her brother’s guard (*va-teitatzav*) appears several times in Moshe’s confrontations with Pharaoh, which often occur (like this one) on the bank of the Nile.

Moshe also functions as the nation’s surrogate mother, a devoted figure who draws Israel from the deep waters of the Reed Sea (*yam* *suf*) to emerge as a newborn nation. Moshe learns this willingness to shoulder responsibility from Pharaoh’s daughter, who draws an infant Moshe from the reeds (*suf*), thereby assuming responsibility for his care.

Moshe will grow to understand that to fulfill his role properly, he must incorporate the traits of the women who protected him in his infancy. Following the nation’s complaints in the desert, Moshe will undergo a crisis of leadership, declaring his unwillingness to assume the maternal role required for the job:

And Moshe said to God: “Why have You done evil to Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that You place this burden of all this nation upon me? Have I **conceived** this whole nation? Have I **birthed** them, so that you say to me, ‘Bear him in your **bosom** as a **nursemaid** bears the **suckling** **infant**?’” (*Bamidbar* 11:11-12)

Evidently, Moshe’s role as leader requires him to act as a compassionate mother, a courageous midwife, and a protective nurturer of Israel. In a moment of terrible crisis, Moshe denies his ability to fulfill this maternal role, thereby for the moment opting out of the leadership role that he was meant to learn from his birth story.

Moshe eventually overcomes his crisis and returns to guide the nation. Yet, we cannot forget that Moshe expressed his crisis of leadership in terms reminiscent of his birth story, implicitly acknowledging its role in shaping his later leadership. The women who shield Moshe at birth lay the foundations for his unique success and shape Moshe’s personality and eventual leadership, preparing him for his upcoming role as surrogate mother, midwife, and defender of Israel.

1. Many Rabbinic sources make this point. We have already noted the Gemara in *Taanit* 2a, which maintains that God retains absolute control over the key to childbirth. Other sources explain that God sometimes withholds fertility so that it will encourage prayer and communication (see, e.g., *Bereishit Rabba* 45:4; *Yevamot* 64a). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the waters of the sea as a parallel to the amniotic fluid of the womb, see *Iyov* 38:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp. 38-39 notes this remarkable linguistic parallel. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In a well-known Rabbinic debate (*Shemot Rabba* 1:23, and cited by Rashi), R’ Yehuda and R’ Nechemia argue as to whether the princess sent out her *servant* to fetch the ark or thrust out her own *hand* (the argument centers on the meaning of the word *amatah*). I wonder if this *midrash* is based on the observation of the parallel between the princess’ actions and God’s actions. When God sends Moses (His servant) to do His bidding, He is essentially extending His own arm, thereby blurring the line between God’s servant and His hand. Later in the narrative, we will see a similar blurring between God’s hand and Moses’ hand, which function together to rescue Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The motif of the birth of the hero appears with great frequency in Greco-Roman literature (see for example the births of Oedipus, Semiramis, Perseus, Telephus, Aegisthus). D. B. Redford (“The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (Cf. Ex. ii 1-10),” *Numen* 14, 1967, pp. 209-228) identifies thirty-two accounts in ancient literature (he includes Moses’ birth) with the motif of “the hero cast away in infancy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This account is found in a seventh-century BCE Neo-Assyrian cuneiform tablet entitled “The Legend of Sargon.” The tablet was found in the archeological remains in Nineveh, from the library of the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal (669 BCE – 631 BCE). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Herodotus (Book 1, 95-140) relates this story of Cyrus’ birth. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The story of Gilgamesh's birth is described in Aelian’s *De Natura Animalium* (*On the Nature of Animals*) 12.21. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Roman historians dated the founding of Rome to 753 BC, but the earliest known written account of the myth is from Dionysius’ account (*Roman* *Antiquities*, Book 1, chapter 79). In Book 1, Chapter 84, Dionysius offers an alternate account of the births and survival of Romulus and Remus. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For more on this, see Redford, *Literary Motif*, cited above, and Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In a *midrash* that coheres more closely to the non-biblical birth accounts (*Shemot Rabba* 1:24), Pharaoh is told by his astrologers of Moses’ birth and the danger that it will pose to his regime. His decree against the male infants results from his alarm over their ominous predictions. Josephus’ account of Moses’ birth story coheres even more closely to the traditional account (Book II, Chapter 9, Section 2): “One of these sacred scribes, who are very sagacious in foretelling future events truly, told the king that about this time there would be a child born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites… which thing was so feared by the king, that, in accordance with this man’s opinion, he commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites into the river.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. B. Jacob, *Exodus*, p. 28, regards this difference between Moses’ birth story and other ancient tales as an indication of the “ethical superiority” of the biblical tale as well as an illustration of its “emotional depth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This counting does not include the plural form of the word, which appears once in verse 13. The quest is for the child of the first section to find adulthood (not men, but **a man**). While it is tempting to neatly divide this narrative into Moses, the child (verses 1-10) and Moses, the adult (11-22) (see, e.g., Propp, *Exodus*, p. 146), I believe the second title is inaccurate. The word *ish* only twice refers to Moses in this section; in his bid to approach manhood, Moses searches for a man, a role model to emulate. Thus, the second section should be entitled: “Moses, in Search of a Man.” We will discuss this at greater length in an upcoming *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See D. Ti, “Moshe – The Infant and the Man,” *Megadim* 22 (1994), p. 31 [Hebrew]. I am indebted to this article (pp. 30-42) for its overall perspective on *Shemot* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I have disregarded the presence of the princess’ maids, who play a minor and seemingly insignificant role in the episode. Some scholars draw a parallel between their role as messengers of the princess and the sister’s role as messenger of the mother (see, e.g., Propp, *Exodus*, p. 153). In my opinion, the sister’s role in the story is of far greater significance than that of the maidservants. She assumes an active role in the protection of the infant, emerging as a full-fledged character, with speech and boldness. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Seforno’s comment on *Shemot* 1:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Although Saul is no longer alive, his loyalists in Bahurim still express loathing for David and celebrate the rebellion of his son, Absalom (II *Shmuel* 16:5-8), making the woman’s actions all the more surprising. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. She is identified with the daughter of Pharaoh named Bitya in I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 4:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Bekhor Shor, and Rashbam on *Shemot* 2:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This is based on the idea that the child was born three months prematurely; therefore, his mother was able to hide him for that amount of time (see Rashbam on *Shemot* 2:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Sota* 12a. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. These are the only two places in Tanakh that refer to a *teiva*, or an ark. The ark differs from different types of water vessels in that it has no steerage – a stark representation of its passengers’ dependence upon God. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Also note those passages in *Yeshayahu* that describe Israel as a light unto the nations (42:6; 49:6). Another passage describes Israel thus: “The nation that walked in darkness has seen a great light!” (*Yeshayahu* 9:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Sota* 12a. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Avot De-Rabbi Natan* 2:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See *Shemot Rabba* 1:24, and Rashbam and Ibn Ezra on *Shemot* 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For this linguistic relationship, see *Midrash Aggada* (Buber) *Devarim* 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Even though they are not presented as biological mothers, the child’s sister and the daughter of Pharaoh are both part of this schema. Like the midwives of chapter 1, their responses to close encounters with a vulnerable infant seem to draw on their maternal instincts (perhaps their own potential for childbearing, as well as the learned experience of being surrounded by women who have experienced childbirth) and they, too, act to nurture and rescue the child. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)