

The Verse of a Name. The passuk of Avraham Leib.



Artist: Shoshannah Brombacher

12 X 15 inches, pastel and India ink on paper, 2025

There is an old Jewish custom to teach a little child the “verse of their name” at an early age. This is a *passuk*, a verse from Tenakh, that begins and ends with the same letter as his or her name does. The underlying thought is the following. After a person dies, the soul is accompanied by angels to the heavenly court. There, the soul will be tried to see if he or she is fit to enter paradise immediately, or has to be punished for former earthly transgressions. The soul might be so scared, that it does not even

remember its own name. But the verse that it repeated daily from an early age and recited after the Shemoneh Esreh prayer it will certainly remember.

The little boy for whom this drawing is intended is named Avraham Leib ben Efraim haKohen. The verse for Avraham with an א aleph and a ם mem sofit is Nechemyah 9:7:

אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם וְהוֹצֵאתוֹ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים וְשִׁמְתָּ שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָהָם:

You are the the Eternal, God, who chose Abram, who brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and changed his name to Abraham.

We see this verse written around the biblical namesake of the boy, Avraham the Patriarch. He traveled extensively during his long life, obeying God's command to gather his family and go to where HaShem will direct him (Bereshit 12:1-3):

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן וּמִמְּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ:

HaShem said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאַגְדֹּלְךָ וְשִׁמְךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.

וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶעָר וְנִבְרְכֻךָ בְּכָל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאֲדָמָה:

I will bless those who bless you and curse the one who curses you; And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."

Avraham Leib's (extended) family has traveled a lot as well, like many Jewish families. The Patriarch in the drawing carries his luggage containing his belongings on his back. It is not the usual dull burlap or linen sack, however, but rather a colorful one filled with memories and good deeds.

Avraham is surrounded by sheep and goats, because he had acquired wealth and herds. Near his right foot in the desert landscape is his famous tent with its four openings, which he had designed to spot travelers who came from every direction. He would go out to meet them and invite them for a meal and talk about the One God. Abraham and his wife Sarah became the epitome of hospitality. Over his head are shiny stars to remind him that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars (Bereshit 22:17-18):

כִּי־בָרַךְ אַבְרָם וְהָרְבָה אַרְבָּה אֶת־זַרְעוֹ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכִחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שָׁפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׂ זַרְעוֹ אֶת־זַרְעוֹ אֶת־שַׁעַר אֵיגְרִי:

I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as

the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.

וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזַרְעֶךָ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ לְקַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי:

All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command.”

The second name of the boy who will receive this drawing is Leib, Yiddish for Lion. The lion over his head, a sign of strength in many stories and verses in Tenakh, holds a lulav and an ethrog in its paw, the plant bundle and fragrant fruit used during the Festival of Sukkot. They became, together with the lion, a symbol of the royal House of Yehudah and a reference to messianic times, when the House of David and the Temple will be restored in their former glory. Then Jews from all over the world will travel to Yerushalayim to celebrate the biblical pilgrims festivals.

There is no verse listed that begins with a ל *lamed* and ends with a ב *beth*, like Leib, therefore this name is visualized rather than textualized.

Avraham Leib is of priestly lineage, he is a kohen, and therefore a kohen stands near the altar in front of the Temple, to the right of the lion. The domed and flat roofs of Yerushalayim are in the background.

The angel and the fish hovering to the left of the lion's tail refer to a verse from the bedtime Shema, Bereshit 48:16:

הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגָּאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל-רָע יְבָרֶךְ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים וַיְקְרָא בְהֵם שְׁמֵי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתָי אַבְרָהָם וַיְצַחֵק וַיְדַבֵּר לְרַב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

The Messenger (angel) who has redeemed me from all harm bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, And may they be teeming multitudes like fish upon the earth.”

The green tree symbolizes the tzaddik, the righteous human being, which the boy Avraham Leib should emulate (Tehillim 1:3):

וְהִי כַעֲץ שֶׁצִּמְחָה עַל-פְּלִיגְיֵ-מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ | יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא-יִבּוֹל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יִצְעָשָׂה יִצְלִיחַ:

He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever it produces thrives.

The colors in the drawing reflect the earth and the fore, the sky and the water, they are bright, uplifting, and symbolizing a full and blessed life.