

# The Leper/Healer

Rabbanit Leah Sarna | Tazria Metzora 5783

## Vayikra 13:45-46

As for the person with a leprous affection, his clothes shall be rent, his head shall be left bare, and he shall cover over his upper lip; and he shall call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" He shall be unclean as long as the disease is on him. Being unclean, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

## ויקרא יג:מה-מו

והצרוע אשר בו הנגע בגדיו יקרין  
פרמיו וראשו יתיה פרוע ועל-שפם  
יעטה וטמא | טמא יקרא:  
כל-ימי אשר הנגע בו יטמא טמא הוא  
בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו:

## Bechor Shor Vayikra 13:45

And the leper. This is about any kind of lepers, that he should behave like a mourner since he has been put into exile by the heavens, for he is separated from his wife and children, and he calls out "unclean! Unclean!" that they should distance from him. And the Rabbis taught that he needs to make known his suffering to the masses, so that they will pray for mercy on his behalf.

## בכור שור ויקרא יג:מה

והצרוע. אכולהו קאי, ינהג מנהג  
אבלות, שהוא כמנודה לשמים,  
שפרשו מעל [יו אשתו ו]בניו, וטמא  
טמא יקרא, שירחיקו ממנו. ואמרו  
רבותינו שצריך להודיע צערו  
לרבים, ורבים יבקשו עליו רחמים:

## Chulin 78a

**As it is taught** in a *baraita*: It is derived from the verse: **"And he will cry: Impure, impure"** (Leviticus 13:45), that a leper must publicize the fact that he is ritually impure. **He must announce his pain to the masses, and the masses will pray for mercy on his behalf. And likewise, one to whom any unfortunate matter happens must announce it to the masses, and then the masses will pray for mercy on his behalf.**

## חולין עח.

כדתנא (ויקרא יג, מה) וטמא טמא  
יקרא צריך להודיע לרבים ורבים  
מבקשים עליו רחמים וכן מי  
שאירע בו דבר צריך להודיע  
לרבים ורבים מבקשים עליו רחמים

## Numbers 12:1-15

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite woman!" They said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" The LORD heard it. Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth. Suddenly the LORD called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting." So the three of them went out. The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two of them came forward; and He said, "Hear these My words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he

## במדבר י"ב:א'-ט"ו

ותדבר מרים ואהרן במשה על-אדות  
האשה הכשית אשר לקח כיי-אשה כשית  
לקח: ויאמרו תרק אהי-במשה דבר ה'  
הלא גם-בנו דבר וישמע ה': והאיש  
משה ענו מאד מכל האדם אשר על-פני  
האדמה: {ס} ויאמר ה' פתאם  
אל-משה ואל-אהרן ואל-מרים צאו  
שלישיתם אל-אהל מועד ויצאו  
שלישיתם: ויגרד ה' בעמוד ענן ויעמד פתח  
האהל ויקרא אהרן ומרים ויצאו שניהם:  
ויאמר שמעו-נא דברי אהיה נביאכם  
ה' במראה אליו אתוודע בפהלום  
אדבר-בו: לא-כן עבדי משה בכל-ביתי  
נאמן הוא: פה אל-פה אדבר-בו ומראה  
ולא בחילת ותמנת ה' יביט ומדוע לא

beholds the likeness of the LORD. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!” Still incensed with them, the LORD departed. As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales.

**Rashi on Numbers 12:10:1**

AND THE CLOUD DEPARTED, and only afterwards, BEHOLD, MIRIAM BECAME LEPROUS, WHITE AS SNOW. A parable! This may be compared to a king who said to his son’s tutor, “Chastise my son, but do not do so until I go away from you, because I feel pity for him”

And Aaron said to Moses, “O my lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly. Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother’s womb with half his flesh eaten away.” So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, “O God, pray heal her!” But the LORD said to Moses, “If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted.” So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted.

**Zevachim 101b:19-102a:1**

The Gemara raises an objection to Rav’s statement: When Miriam became a leper (see Numbers 12:10), who diagnosed and quarantined her? If you say that Moses quarantined her, that is difficult, as Moses was a non-priest, and a non-priest may not inspect the shades of leprous marks to diagnose them. And if you say that Aaron quarantined her, that is difficult, as Aaron was a relative, Miriam’s brother, and a relative may not inspect the shades of leprous marks. Rather, the Holy One, Blessed be He, bestowed a great honor on Miriam at that time, and said: I Myself am a priest, and I will quarantine her for seven days to see if the shades of leprous marks persist, and I will declare her a leper if she is impure, and I will exempt her if she is not impure.

**II Kings 7:3-11**

There were four men, lepers, outside the gate. They said to one another, “Why should we sit here waiting for death? If we decide to go into the town, what with the famine in the town, we shall die there; and if we just sit here, still we die. Come, let us desert to the Aramean camp. If they let us live, we shall live; and if they put us to death, we shall but die.”

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָם לְדַבֵּר בְּעֵבְרֵי בְמִשְׁחָה: וַיִּחַרְרֶאֱפָה ה' בָּם וַיִּלְחֹד: וַהֲעֵנֹן סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וַהֲגִה מִרְיָם מִצְרַעַת כַּשָּׁלֵג וַיִּפֹּן אֶהְרֹן אֶל־מִרְיָם וַהֲגִה מִצְרַעַת:

**רש"י על במדבר י"ב:י"א:**

והענון סר. ואח"כ והנה מרים מצרעת כשלג, משל למלך שאמר לפדגוג, רדה את בני, אבל לא תרדנו עד שאלך מאצלה, שרחמי עליו (שם):

וַיֵּאמֶר אֶהְרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בִּי אֲדֹנָי אֵל־נָא תִשֶׁת עֲלֵינוּ חֲטָאת אֲשֶׁר נִוְאָלְנוּ וְאֲשֶׁר חָטָאנוּ: אֵל־נָא תְהִי כַּמֶּת אֲשֶׁר בְּצִאֲתוֹ מִרְחֹם אִמּוֹ וַיֵּאכַל חֲצִי בְשָׂרוֹ: וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' לֵאמֹר אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ: וַיֵּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַבְיָה יָרֵק יָרֵק בְּפִנְיָהּ הֲלֹא תְכַלֵּם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּסְגָּר שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְאַחֲרֵי תִסְגָּר וְתִסְגָּר מִרְגָּם מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְהָעַם לֹא יֵצֵא עַד־הָאֶסֶף מִרְגָּם:

**זבחים ק"א ב- ק"ב א**

מיתבי מרים מי הסגירה א"ת משה הסגירה משה זר הוא ואין זר רואה את הנגעים וא"ת אהרן הסגירה אהרן קרוב הוא ואין קרוב רואה את הנגעים אלא כבוד גדול חלק לה הקב"ה למרים אותה שעה אני כהן ואני מסגירה אני חולטה ואני פוטר

**מלכים ב ז:ג-יא**

וַאֲרַבְעָה אַנְשִׁים הָיוּ מִצְרַעִים פָּתַח הַשַּׁעַר וַיֵּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ מָה אַנְחֵנוּ יִשְׁבִּים פֶּה עַד־מָתָנוּ: אִם־אֲמַרְנוּ נָבוֹא הָעִיר וְהָרַעַב בְּעִיר וּמָתָנוּ שָׁם וְאִם־יִשְׁבְּנוּ פֶה וּמָתָנוּ וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וּנְפֹלֶה אֶל־מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם אִם־יִתְּנוּ נַחֲלָה

They set out at twilight for the Aramean camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, there was no one there.

For the Lord had caused the Aramean camp to hear a sound of chariots, a sound of horses—the din of a huge army. They said to one another, “The king of Israel must have hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Mizraim to attack us!” And they fled headlong in the twilight, abandoning their tents and horses and asses—the [entire] camp just as it was—as they fled for their lives.

When those lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into one of the tents and ate and drank; then they carried off silver and gold and clothing from there and buried it. They came back and went into another tent, and they carried off what was there and buried it.

Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, and we are keeping silent! If we wait until the light of morning, we shall incur guilt. Come, let us go and inform the king’s palace.”

They went and called out to the gatekeepers of the city and told them, “We have been to the Aramean camp. There is not a soul there, nor any human sound; but the horses are tethered and the asses are tethered and the tents are undisturbed.”

The gatekeepers called out, and the news was passed on into the king’s palace.

**Sanhedrin 98a:15-17**

**Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi found Elijah the prophet, who was standing at the entrance of the burial cave of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **said to him: ...When will the Messiah come?** Elijah **said to him: Go ask him.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked: **And where is he sitting?** Elijah said to him: **At the entrance of the city of Rome.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked him: **And what is his identifying sign** by means of which I can recognize him? Elijah answered: **He sits among the poor who suffer from illnesses. And all of them untie their bandages and tie them all at once,** but the Messiah **unties one bandage and ties one** at a time. **He says: Perhaps I will be needed** to serve to bring about the redemption. Therefore, I will never tie more than one bandage, so **that I will not be delayed.**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **went to the Messiah. He said to the Messiah: Greetings to you, my rabbi and my teacher.** The Messiah **said to him: Greetings to you, bar Leva'i.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **said to him: When will the Master come?** The Messiah **said to**

ואם־ימיתנו ומתנו:  
וַיֵּצְאוּ בְּצֹפֶרֶת לְבָא אֶל־מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם וַיָּבֹאוּ  
עַד־קְצֵה מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם וְהָיָה אִין־שָׁם אִישׁ:  
וַאֲדָרְבֵי הַשְּׂמִיעַ | אֶת־מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם קוֹל רֶכֶב  
קוֹל סוּס קוֹל תְּוִל גְּדוֹל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ  
אֶל־אֶחָיו הֲנֵה שְׂכַר־עֲלֵינוּ מְלֶךְ וְשָׂרְאֵל  
אֶת־מַלְכֵי הַחֲתָיִם וְאֶת־מַלְכֵי מִצְרַיִם לְבָא  
עֲלֵינוּ:  
וַיִּקְוֹמוּ וַיִּנְּסוּ בְּצֹפֶרֶת וַיַּעֲזְבוּ אֶת־אֹהֲלֵיהֶם  
וְאֶת־סוּסֵיהֶם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם הַמַּחֲנֵה  
כַּאֲשֶׁר־הָיָא וַיִּנְּסוּ אֶל־נַפְשָׁם:  
וַיָּבֹאוּ הַמְצַרְעִים הָאֵלֶּה עַד־קְצֵה הַמַּחֲנֵה  
וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־אֹהֶל אֶחָד וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּישְׂאוּ  
מִשָּׁם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּבָגָדִים וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ  
וַיָּשָׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־אֹהֶל אֶחָד וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם  
וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ:  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לֹא־כֵן | אֲנַחְנוּ  
עוֹשִׂים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יוֹם־בְּשֻׁרָה הוּא וְאֲנַחְנוּ  
מִחֻשִׁים וְחֻשְׁנֵינוּ עַד־אֹר הַבִּקְרָר וּמִצָּאֵנוּ  
עוֹנוֹן וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וּנְבָאָה וּנְגִידָה בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ:  
וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־שַׁעַר הָעִיר וַיִּגִּידוּ לָהֶם  
לֵאמֹר בְּאֵנוּ אֶל־מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם וְהָיָה אִין־שָׁם  
אִישׁ וְקוֹל אֲדָם כִּי אִם־הַסּוּס אֶסוּר  
וְהַחֲמֹר אֶסוּר וְאֹהֲלֵים כַּאֲשֶׁר־הָמָּה:  
וַיִּקְרְאוּ הַשְּׂעִרִים וַיִּגִּידוּ בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּנִימָה:

**סנהדרין צ"ח א:ט"ו-י"ז**

ר' יהושע בן לוי אשכח  
לאליהו דהוי קיימי אפיתחא  
דמערתא דרבי שמעון בן  
יוחאי... אמר ליה אימת אתי  
משיח אמר ליה זיל שייליה  
לדידיה והיכא יתיב אפיתחא  
דקרתא ומאי סימניה יתיב  
ביני עניי סובלי חלאים וכולן  
שרו ואסירי בחד זימנא איהו  
שרי חד ואסיר חד אמר דילמא  
מבעינא דלא איעכב

אזל לגביה אמר ליה שלום  
עליך רבי ומורי אמר ליה  
שלום עליך בר ליואי א"ל  
לאימת אתי מר א"ל היום

**him: Today.**

Sometime later, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **came to Elijah**. Elijah **said to him: What did the Messiah say to you? He said to Elijah** that the Messiah said: **Greetings [*shalom*] to you, bar Leva'i**. Elijah **said to him:** He thereby **guaranteed** that **you and your father** will enter **the World-to-Come**, as he greeted you with *shalom*. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **said to Elijah:** The Messiah **lied to me, as he said to me: I am coming today, and he did not come**. Elijah **said to him** that **this** is what **he said to you:** He said that he will come **“today, if you will listen to his voice”** (Psalms 95:7).

אתא לגבי אליהו א"ל מאי  
אמר לך א"ל שלום עליך בר  
ליואי א"ל אבטחך לך ולאבוך  
לעלמא דאתי א"ל שקורי קא  
שקר בי דאמר לי היום אתינא  
ולא אתא א"ל הכי אמר לך  
(תהלים צה, ז) היום אם בקולו  
תשמעו

**The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society - Henri J. M. Nouwen  
(excerpts from chapter 3)**

The Messiah, the story tells us, is sitting among the poor, binding his wounds only one at a time, always prepared for the moment when he might be needed. So it is too, with ministers. Since it is their task to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, they must bind their own wounds carefully, in anticipation of the moment when they will be needed.

They are each called to be the wounded healer, the ones who must not only look after their own wounds, but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others. They are both wounded ministers and healing ministers...

How can wounds become a source of healing? This is a question that requires careful consideration. For when we want to put our wounded selves in the service of others, we must consider the relationship between our professional and personal lives.

On the one hand, ministers cannot keep their own experience of life hidden from those they want to help. Nor should they want to keep it hidden. While doctors can still be good doctors even when their private lives are severely disrupted, ministers cannot offer service without a constant and vital acknowledgement of their own experience.

On the other hand, it would be very easy to misuse the concept of the wounded healer by defending a form of spiritual exhibitionism. Ministers who talk in the pulpit about their own personal problems are of no help to their congregation, for suffering people are not helped by those who tell them that they have the same problems. Remarks such as, "Don't worry because I suffer from the same depression, confusion, and anxiety as you do," help no one. This spiritual exhibitionism adds little faith to little faith and creates narrow-mindedness instead of new perspectives. Open wounds stink and do not heal.

Making one's own wounds a source of healing, therefore, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains, but for a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition that we all share.

...

To announce, however, that the Liberator is sitting among the poor and that the wounds are signs of hope and that today is the day of liberation, is a step very few can take. But this is exactly the announcement of the wounded healer: "The master is coming -- not tomorrow, but today, not next year, but this year, not after all our misery is passed, but in the middle of it, not in another place but right here, where we are standing."

...

If indeed we listen to the voice and believe that ministry is a sign of hope because it makes visible the first rays of the light of the coming Messiah, we can make ourselves and others understand that we already carry in us the source of our own search. Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated a new creation.