

פרשת
בהעלתך
Parashat Behaalotcha

Bamidbar / Numbers 8:1-12:15, Zechariah 2:14-4:7
Luke 17:11-18:14

Unrepentant Disobedience to God's Word

In this week's reading the people were very discontented saying the following, ויהי העם כמתאננים רע באזני יהוה וישמע יהוה ויחר אפו 11:1 *The people took to complaining bitterly before the LORD. The LORD heard and was incensed: a fire of the LORD broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp.* ויצעק העם אל־משה ויתפלל משה אל־יהוה ותשקע האש 11:2 *The people cried out to Moses. Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down.* ויקרא שם־המקום ההוא תבערה כי־בערה במ אש יהוה 11:3 *That place was named Taberah, because a fire of the LORD had broken out against them.* והאספסוף אשר בקרבו התאוו תאוה וישבו ויבכו 11:4 *The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat!* זכרנו את־הדגה אשר־נאכל במצרים חנם את 11:5 *We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.* ועתה נפשנו יבשה אין כל 11:6 *Now our gullets (נפשנו) are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!"* והמן כזרע־גד הוא

ועינו כעין הבדלה *11:7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and in color it was like bdellium.* שטו העם ולקטו וטחנו ברחים או דכו במדכה. ובשלו בפרור ועשו אתו עגות והיה טעמו כטעם לשד השמן *11:8 The people would go about and gather it, grind it between millstones or pound it in a mortar, boil it in a pot, and make it into cakes. It tasted like rich cream.* וברדת הטל על-המחנה לילה ירד המן עליו *11:9 When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall upon it.* וישמע משה את- העם בכה למשפחתיו איש לפתח אהלו ויחר-אף יהוה מאד ובעיני משה רע *11:10 Moses heard the people weeping, every clan apart, each person at the entrance of his tent. The LORD was very angry, and Moses was distressed.* It is interesting how the Scriptures say that “*the fire broke out against them ravaging at the outskirts of the camp.*” Note how the people mingled with the nations while they were wandering in the wilderness (see Parashat Pinchas). This draws in the context of “*near and far*” in relation to the people in their nearness to the Lord who is at the center of the camp (*at the Mishchan [Tabernacle]*). Could a conclusion be drawn, those who are near have greater faith than those who are far? This could be analogized to those who sit at the feet of their rabbi (*going to the front of the synagogue*) as opposed to those who pop in and sit in the back? It could be those who were in the outskirts of the camp did not have a proper view of the Lord God Almighty and fell into sin in their hearts leading to the intense and bitter complaining before God? Could it also be those who were at the outskirts of the camp were the ones who would sneak off to mingle with the nations? The people say, *וְעַתָּה נִפְשֵׁנוּ יִבְשָׁה אֵין כֹּל בְּלִתִּי אֶל-הַמָּן עֵינֵינוּ: 11:6* *Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!* Note how “*gullets*” is the word *נִפְשֵׁנוּ* meaning “*our souls.*” the people are saying this food isn’t enough, the Lord God Almighty isn’t enough, even our souls are shriveled, dried up, and as dead people. The people were not just complaining about the food. Their complaint had a much deeper spiritual component. *Rashi* has a similar interpretation in his commentary on *Bamidbar / Numbers 11:1 Part 2* states the following, “*מְתַאֲנָנִים — The term מְתַאֲנָנִים denotes [people who seek] “a pretext” — they seek a pretext how to separate themselves from following the Omnipresent. Similarly is stated in the narrative of Samson, (Judges 14:4) “for he sought a pretext (תואנה)*”

[against the Philistines]” (*Sifrei Bamidbar 85*).” This pretext is designed to find a reason to be discontented and this was evil in the sight of God. *Daat Zkenim on Bamidbar / Numbers 11:1 Part 1* states, “וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים, הָעָם כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים, “the people were like murmurers;” the people were already mourning the potential casualties they would incur when going into battle against the Canaanites in order to conquer their land. They were lacking in faith and dreading warfare.” This interpretation states the people were seeking reasons to be discontented and this was connected to their lack of faith and their expectation of war on entering the Promised Land. The idea is instead of marching joyfully towards their destination, the Holy Land, being delivered from bondage, being set free from slavery, they marched grudgingly. This is why in the verse, וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים רַע בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה וַיִּחַר אַפּוֹ וַתִּבְעַר-בָּם, וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים רַע בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה וַיִּחַר אַפּוֹ וַתִּבְעַר-בָּם, 11:1 *The people took to complaining bitterly before the LORD. The LORD heard and was incensed: a fire of the LORD broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp,* the reason the word כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים is spelled with the prefix כ (a preposition describing something in relative terms, i.e. “as if”) is because at this point in the journey they did not yet dare verbalize their feelings of discontent. They did not want Moses to hear their complaint. This is why the Torah describes God as “*hearing*” unspoken complaints by the people. As we go through life living out our faith, are we doing the same thing the people here were doing? Ibn Ezra explained, “*It is the same language as ‘evil,’ like it is used in the phrase ‘your evil thoughts’ (Jeremiah 4:14)...that is, they spoke evil words.*” Discontentment can lead to evil thoughts, and these thoughts are known by the Lord God in heaven. This week’s Torah portion speaks to us of not just remaining faithful before God, but of the importance of not joining ourselves to the ways of the nations, and to being joyful before the Lord for such a great salvation He has provided!

In this week’s reading from Parashat Behaalotcha, we are told, א וַתִּדְבֹר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִשְׁחָה עַל-אֲדֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכְּנִישִׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח כִּי-אִשָּׁה כְּנִישִׁית לָקַח: ב וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֲרַק אֶת-בְּמִשְׁחָה דָּבָר יְהוָה הֲלֹא גַם-בָּנוּ דָּבָר וַיִּשְׂחַ 12:1 *Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 12:2 and they said, ‘Has the Lord indeed spoken only*

through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?’ And the Lord heard it. 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.) (NASB) Now, have you ever wondered what does the Lord speaking only through Moshe have to do with his marrying a Cushite woman? Did Moshe claim the Lord spoke to him regarding this woman? The text is not clear about that, but we are told because of Miriam’s criticism, she was afflicted with Tzaraat (Leprosy). Note how she criticized Moshe whom the Lord calls “*My servant.*” Also, Aaron was not afflicted with Tzaraat, and the reason may be he was the Cohen Hagadol (High Priest), however the Lord clearly rebuked them both. Since Miriam was mentioned first in the text, we can assume that she initiated these critical words against her brother. Based on this context, the more severe punishment went to Miriam, the one who actually initiated the evil words. This parallels our previous conclusions from Parashat Bamidbar on the Mishnah (*Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:18*) teaching of the one who brings merit to many by demonstrating the way of righteousness through faith and action in God’s Word. This speaks of leading and teaching many in the ways of righteousness as opposed to leading many to sin. The one who leads many to sin receives the greater punishment.

As we had mentioned previously in Parashat Tazria, traditional rabbinic opinion does not regard Tzaraat (translated as leprosy in modern bibles) as a normal disease. Instead, the rabbis see it as a divine punishment. The reason being what we read here in *Bamidbar / Numbers 12:10*, Miriam the sister of Moshe, was punished with Tzaraat for speaking derisively against her brother. Studying the Scriptures, *2 Chronicles 26:20* speaks of King Uzziah being punished with Tzaraat for defying the Torah and offering incense in the Temple. According to *2 Kings 5:27* we are told about Elisha’s servant Gehazi being smitten with Tzaraat for being greedy and taking money from Naaman. The rabbis believe Tzaraat was an affliction for specific sins based upon these Scriptures. Rambam taught in his *Mishney Torah Defilement of Leprosy 16:10* that Tzaraat was primarily a punishment for the sin of evil speech. The Hebrew term for evil speech is Lashon Hara. It literally means the “*evil tongue.*” The rabbinic association between evil speech and Tzaraat is derived from the story of Miriam’s affliction. In the case of Tzaraat, one becomes ritually unfit, and so it is also in

the case of evil speech one becomes unfit or defiled. Yeshua taught in *Matthew 15:17-20* saying, “15:17 ‘Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? 15:18 ‘But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 15:19 ‘For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 15:20 ‘These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.” (NASB) The concept here is very similar to what the Rabbis teach in relation to evil speech. Now it is important to understand that most of us have been taught that “unclean” (tamei) means “sinful.” This is not what the Torah teaches. The Torah teaches us that becoming tamei makes one unfit for service before the Lord where the contraction of uncleanness may not be the result of a sinful action. In the case of Lashon Hara, one contracts Tzaraat due to moral contamination that comes from the heart. In the Torah, the general descriptions of becoming unclean occurs through the normal course of life. In the case of Miriam, she become afflicted with Tzaraat due to an unnatural way through speaking in an unclean way against her brother Moshe. In this case we see the evil effects of gossip coming to the surface (death) and Miriam was white with Tzaraat. When someone says something about another, it may seem innocent to someone else but it often leads to strife and division. Note how this is implied based on *Bamidbar / Numbers 12:3* *Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.* (NASB) The Torah records that Moshe was very humble, because many times our words can either build up or tear down. Moshe was humble and he would not have said a word about their accusations. The Lord however pointed out the significance of their statements. Let’s discuss this further in this week’s Torah portion.

This week we are looking at *Bamidbar / Numbers 12:1-16*.

Bamidbar / Numbers 12:1-16

12:1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 12:2 and they said, ‘Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?’ And the Lord heard

it. 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.) 12:4 Suddenly the Lord said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, 'You three come out to the tent of meeting.' So the three of them came out. 12:5 Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, 12:6 He said, 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. 12:7 'Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; 12:8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses?' 12:9 So the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed. 12:10 But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous. 12:11 Then Aaron said to Moses, 'Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12:12 'Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!' 12:13 Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'O God, heal her, I pray!' 12:14 But the Lord said to Moses, 'If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again.' 12:15 So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again. 12:16 Afterward, however, the people moved out from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran. (NASB)

א וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִטְעָה עַל-אֲדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכַּשִּׁית אֲשֶׁר
 לָקַח כִּי-אִשָּׁה כַּשִּׁית לָקַח: ב וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֲרֵק אֶף-בְּמִטְעָה דָּבַר

יְהוָה הֲלֹא גַם-בְּנוֹ דְבַר וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה: ג וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו
 [עָנָו] מֵאֵד מְכַל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: ס ד וַיֹּאמֶר
 יְהוָה פְּתָאֵם אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל-מִרְיָם צֹאוּ שְׁלֹשְׁתֵּיכֶם
 אֶל-אַהֲלֵ מוֹעֵד וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁלֹשָׁתָם: ה וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן וַיַּעֲ-
 מֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּקְרָא אֶהֱרֹן וּמִרְיָם וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: ו וַיֹּאמֶר
 שְׁמַעוּ-נָא דְבַרִי אִם-יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֵכֶם יְהוָה בַּמְרֹאָה אֵלָיו אֶתְוַדַּע
 בְּחִלּוֹם אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ: ז לֹא-כֵן עֲבַדִּי מֹשֶׁה בְּכָל-בֵּיתִי נְאֻמָּן הוּא:
 ח פֹּה אֶל-פֹּה אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ וּמְרֹאָה וְלֹא בְחִידָת וּתְמִנַת יְהוָה
 יָבִיט וּמְדוּעַ לֹא יֵרְאֶתֶם לְדַבֵּר בְּעַבְדִּי בְּמֹשֶׁה: ט וַיַּחַר-אַף
 יְהוָה בָּם וַיִּלְדֹּ: י וְהֶעֱנָן סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְהִנֵּה מִרְיָם מְצַרְעַת
 כְּשִׁלְג וַיִּפֹּן אֶהֱרֹן אֶל-מִרְיָם וְהִנֵּה מְצַרְעֶת: יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֶהֱרֹן
 אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בִּי אֲדֹנָי אֶל-נָא תִשֶׁת עָלֵינוּ חַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר נוֹאֲלָנוּ
 וְאֲשֶׁר חָטְאָנוּ: יב אֶל-נָא תְהִי כִפְתֵת אֲשֶׁר בְּצִאתוֹ מִרְחֹם אִמּוֹ
 וַיֵּאֱכַל חֲצִי בְּשָׂרוֹ: יג וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה לֵאמֹר אֵל נָא
 רַפָּא נָא לָהּ: פ [מִפְטִיר] יד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַבְיָה
 יָרֵק יָרֵק בְּפָנֶיהָ הֲלֹא תִכְלֹם שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תִּסָּגֵר שְׁבַעַת יָמִים
 מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְאַחַר תִּאָּסֵף: טו וַתִּסָּגֵר מִרְיָם מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה
 שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְהָעָם לֹא נִסַּע עַד-הָאָסֵף מִרְיָם: טז וְאַחַר נִסְעוּ
 הָעָם מִחֲצֵרוֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַר פָּאָרָן:

In this week's reading from Parashat Behaalotcha, we are told the fol-
 lowing, א וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמֹשֶׁה עַל-אֲדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכַּנְשִׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח
 כִּי-אִשָּׁה כַּנְשִׁית לָקַח: ב וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָרֵק אֹף-בְּמֹשֶׁה דְבַר יְהוָה הֲלֹא גַם-בְּנוֹ דְבַר
 יְהוָה: *12:1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses be-
 cause of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married
 a Cushite woman); 12:2 and they said, 'Has the Lord indeed spoken
 only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?' And the
 Lord heard it. 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than
 any man who was on the face of the earth.) (NASB)* We are told be-
 cause of Miriam's criticism, she was afflicted with Tzaraat. The Torah
 teaches us that becoming tamei makes one unfit for service before the
 Lord where the contraction of uncleanness may not be the result of a
 sinful action. In the case of Lashon Hara however, based upon what
 Yeshua and the rabbis are teaching us, one contracts Tzaraat due to

moral contamination that comes from the heart. This form of uncleanness was not normally something that was visibly seen unless one was stricken with Tzaraat. Miriam became afflicted with Tzaraat due to an unnatural way through speaking from the uncleanness of her heart against her brother. Here we see the evil effects of gossip coming to the surface and Miriam was white covered in death. It was also implied from *Bamidbar / Numbers 12:3* *Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth. (NASB)* that Moshe was very humble, and that Miriam and Aaron's words were more hurtful and harmful than they realized. The Lord God of Israel points out the significance of their statements and their sin. The point is the Lord God in heaven knows our thoughts and how desperately wicked we are on the inside. This is why Teshuvah is so important and once we recognize our uncleanness to go to the Lord and bringing with us our faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

Rashi has the following to say concerning *Bamidbar / Numbers 12:1*.

Rashi on Bamidbar / Numbers 12:1 Part 1

ותדבר. אין דבור בכל מקום אלא לשון קשה, וכן הוא או
מר "דבר האיש אדני הארץ אתנו קשות" (בראשית מ"ב),
ואין אמירה בכל מקום אלא לשון תחנונים, וכן הוא אומר
"ויאמר אל נא אחי תרעו" (בראשית י"ט), "ויאמר שמעו נא
AND דברי" (פסוק ו), כל נא לשון בקשה (ספרי): ותדבר
[MIRIAM AND AARON] SPAKE — The term דבר in every passage where it is used implies harsh language, for so it states, (Genesis 42:30) "The man, the lord of the land spake (דבר) roughly to us". The term אמר, however, is always an expression denoting supplication, for so it states, (Genesis 19:7) "And he said (ויאמר) 'I beg of you (נא), my brethren, do not so wickedly" ; (verse 6 of this chapter) "And He said (ויאמר), Hear, I pray you (נא), My words' — for the word נא always expresses supplication (Sifrei Bamidbar 99).

Rashi bases his interpretation upon the Hebrew text saying the word

דבר is a reference to harsh language and the locations where the word אמר is used it is a reference to supplication (prayer). The basic conclusion is that Miriam's heart was involved in deception as opposed to supplication, when she said what she did concerning her brother's marriage. This indicates Miriam's heart was found to be in a critical spirit as opposed to being humble before the Lord in prayer.

Midrash Tanchuma goes further to describe Tzaraat as being an affliction due to Lashon Hara.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Metzora 10:2

How is it shown < that leprosy comes > for idolatry? In that, when they made the calf, they were afflicted with leprosy. Thus it is stated (in Exod. 32:25): NOW MOSES SAW THAT THE PEOPLE WERE RIOTOUS (parua'); and it is written concerning the leper (in Lev. 13:45): HIS HEAD SHALL BE UNKEMPT (parua'). And how is it shown < that leprosy comes > for blessing (i.e., cursing) the name? From Goliath, of whom it is stated that he said in (I Sam. 17:8): CHOOSE A MAN ('ish) FOR YOURSELVES. Now man ('ish) can only be the Holy One, since it is stated (in Exod. 15:3): THE LORD IS A MAN ('ish) OF WAR. It is also written (in I Sam. 17:46) THIS DAY < THE LORD > WILL DELIVER (rt.: SGR) YOU. Now deliverance can only imply leprosy, since it is stated (in Lev. 13:5) THE PRIEST SHALL ISOLATE (rt.: SGR) HIM. And < how is it shown > for unchastity? Where it is written (in Is. 3:16–17): < BECAUSE THE DAUGHTERS OF ZION ARE HAUGHTY, AND WALK WITH EXTENDED NECK AND ROVING EYES...; THEREFORE THE LORD WILL SMITE WITH SORES (SPH) THE SCALPS < OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ZION >.34 It is also written (in Lev. 14:56): FOR A SWELLING AND FOR A SORE (rt.: SPH) AND FOR A BRIGHT SPOT. < How is it shown > for theft and for swearing falsely? Where it is stated (in Zech. 5:4): I HAVE SENT IT (i.e., the curse of the flying scroll in

vs. 1) FORTH, SAYS THE LORD {GOD} [OF HOSTS]; AND IT SHALL COME UNTO THE HOUSE OF THE THIEF AND UNTO THE HOUSE OF THE ONE WHO SWEARS FALSELY IN MY NAME; AND IT SHALL LODGE WITHIN HIS HOUSE; AND IT SHALL CONSUME IT, [EVEN] WITH ITS TIMBERS AND STONES. What is a thing which consumes timbers and stones? See, it says this is leprosy, since it is written (concerning a house infested with leprosy in Lev. 14:45): AND IT (i.e., the plague)³⁵ SHALL BREAK DOWN THE HOUSE WITH ITS TIMBERS AND STONES. And < how is it shown > for slander? From Miriam [of whom it is written (in Numb. 12:10): AND THERE WAS MIRIAM WITH LEPROSY LIKE THE SNOW; SO WHEN AARON TURNED UNTO MIRIAM, THERE SHE WAS, STRICKEN WITH LEPROSY.] It also says (in Lev. 14:1): THIS SHALL BE THE LAW OF THE LEPER (hametsora'), < i.e. > the one who puts forth evil (hamotsi ra'). And < how is it shown > for those who bear false witness? Where Israel testified over the Holy One and said (in Exod. 32:4): THESE ARE YOUR GODS, O ISRAEL. They were afflicted with leprosy, since it is written (below in vs. 25): NOW MOSES SAW THAT THE PEOPLE WERE RIOTOUS (parua'). And < how is it shown > for the judge who perverts justice? Where it is stated (of unjust judges in Is. 5:24): AND IT SHALL BE THAT AS A TONGUE OF FIRE CONSUMES STRAW, AND AS CHAFF SINKS DOWN IN A FLAME, THEIR {BLOSSOM} [ROOT] SHALL BE LIKE THE ROT, AND THEIR {ROOT} [BLOSSOM] SHALL RISE UP LIKE THE DUST; FOR THEY HAVE REJECTED THE LAW OF THE LORD OF HOSTS AND SPURNED THE WORD OF THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL. THEIR BLOSSOM (PRH) can only refer to leprosy, since it is stated (in Lev. 13:12): IF THE LEPROSY SHOULD BLOSSOM OUT WIDELY (rt.: PRH). And < how is it shown > for one who enters a domain which is not his?

From Uzziah, when he entered the domain of the priesthood. It is so stated (of him in II Chron. 26:16, 19): < ...; HE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD HIS GOD AND ENTERED INTO THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD TO OFFER INCENSE UPON THE ALTAR OF INCENSE.... > THEN LEPROSY APPEARED ON HIS FOREHEAD. And < how is it shown > for one who instigates quarrels among brothers? Where it is stated (in Gen. 12:17): THEN THE LORD AFFLICTED PHARAOH < ... >, because he had taken Sarah from Abraham.

Midrash Tanchuma opens with the question of how does Tzaraat (leprosy) come from idolatry? The rabbis refer back to Parashat Ki Tisa and the golden calf, the people were afflicted following their sin with the golden calf. The midrash continues by connecting leprosy to idolatry by the example of Goliath where the deliverance promised by God can only refer to being delivered from Tzaraat. Note the connection to the hidden sin in our hearts and Tzaraat. Only the Lord God of Israel and His Messiah Yeshua are able to deliver us, and the rabbis say this deliverance was promised by God. The midrash also states leprosy is connected to unchastity (sexual immorality), and for swearing falsely. The narrative then moved to the home that was stricken with leprosy, and this is connected to slander. Notice how slander is connected to the uncleanness of the house, and Miriam who spoke against Moshe and was stricken white like snow. This connects leprosy to one who bears false witness. The midrash parallels this to the tongue of fire that consumes straw and chaff like in a flame. The heart and our emotions are what set the tongue on fire. Those who set their tongues on fire in this way are synonymous to those who have rejected the Torah of the Lord of Hosts and spurned the Word of the Holy One of Israel. The midrash states, *“IF THE LEPROSY SHOULD BLOSSOM OUT WIDELY (rt.: PRH). it is by reason that one enters a domain which is not his?”* Note how the rabbis speak of entering into a domain which one does not belong to, where the example given is of Uzziah and offering incense upon the altar of incense and his forehead broke out with leprosy. This speaks to the purpose for our creation, to serve the Lord and to walk in His ways. When we choose to walk in God’s Ways according to His

Word, we are walking in the domain in which we were created. The Midrash draws out this idea of not “*being in the domain we were created for,*” referring to when one walks in sin before the God of Israel. We were not created for sin (*Ephesians 2:10*), we were created for righteous and holy works (*Romans 7:12*).

The commentary Shney Lichot HaBrit speaks of sin and of being afflicted with the essence of impurity and there being no way to avoid it.

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The person suffering from צרעת, however, is afflicted with the essence of the impurity, and there is no way for him to avoid it. Hence he has to leave all three camps as long as he is afflicted. Such impurity in any Jew is of the kind that infects even the נפש, i.e. part of the camp of the Israelites. This is in accordance with Proverbs 21,23 that “he who guards his mouth and tongue, keeps his soul from troubles.” The Zohar suggests that the reading of mizorat is equivalent to mizora-at, i.e. from that skin eczema. Our sages are agreed that evil gossip is a principal cause of this affliction. Classic examples are Miriam (Numbers 12,10), and Moses (Exodus 4,6), both of whom were punished for having made inappropriate comments about Moses or Israel respectively.

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Similarly Job 23,4. When Job cursed the day he was born (Job 3,3/4) he in fact cursed the angel in charge of who will be born when and under what mazzal. This angel is called לילה. Later on Job reflected how G’d had punished Miriam for speaking out against Moses (Numbers 12,10); he further observed how G’d had punished Moses not allowing him to enter the Holy Land because he had struck the rock instead of merely speaking to it (Numbers 20,12). He also noted that G’d had blinded Isaac (for having loved the wicked Esau), see Gene-

sis 27,1. He realized moreover that G'd had punished Abraham for having asked: "how do I know that I will inherit?" (Genesis 15,8) G'd had responded by telling Abraham that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land for four hundred years before being liberated (Genesis 15,13). G'd had also קרב קיסין, struck at Jacob with a piece of wood, causing the latter to limp as a result of the nocturnal encounter with the שרו של עשו, the guardian angel of Esau, to use the words of the Midrash.

The commentary Shney Luchot HaBrit states that when a person suffers from Tzaraat, he is afflicted with the essence of impurity and there is no way to avoid it. This is interesting because no matter what we try to do to approach the Lord God of Israel it doesn't work, the impurity that is found within forces us to leave all three camps as the midrash states, to leave from the presence of God due to this internal uncleanness that drives us from His presence. This is why there is a need to be purified from the inside out. Note there are not purity rituals specified in the Torah for purifying one from the inside out. This is why the rabbis emphasize studying Torah and getting God's word into our hearts to effect a change for His glory. The Lord however afflicted Miriam to draw her to repentance and to turn her heart from the impurity that proceeded from it. The Lord is always seeking us just as our Master Yeshua the Messiah says *"I love you, come to me..."* The commentary states that even Moshe was not allowed to enter the Holy Land because he had struck the rock instead of merely speaking to it. There is power in the tongue, to believe, to make confession and own up to our sin, and to bring blessings upon others. The tongue also has the power to destroy, hurt, and kill. In *Ramban's commentary on Bamidbar / Numbers 15:23*, he writes that the mitzvot of an idolator is meaningless. This may be interpreted as either the Lord God of Israel rejecting the mitzvot of the idolators due to the severity of the offense of idolatry. Or, an idolator is truly unable to accept the binding nature of the commandments due to his theological error. This follows through to the conclusion that there is a need for us to be purified from the inside out which is something only the Lord can do. As a result, the idolators fulfillment

of the commandments is inherently lacking a crucial element, faith and the motivation based out of love for the Lord which is a response to having a relationship with Him. The act of idolatry consists of a rejection of all that is sacred. Therefore, any mitzvah an idolator performs is a secular act at most and lacking the essential component of faith. It may also be in this way the Rabbis conclude Tzaraat is connected to Idolatry, Lashon Hara, and unrepentant disobedience to God's Word.

In this week's Torah portion, Miriam's criticism led to her being afflicted with Tzaraat. The Torah teaches us that becoming tamei makes one unfit for service before the Lord where the contraction of uncleanness may not be the result of a sinful action. In the case of Tzaraat however, based upon what Yeshua and the rabbis are teaching us, one contracts Tzaraat due to moral pollution that comes from the heart. This speaks to us as something that is desperately wrong on the inside. We all need to be changed from the inside, and this is something only God can do. This is why the rabbis believed that Tzaraat is an affliction from the Lord that only the Lord can heal one from Tzaraat because it is what comes from the inside out. Miriam being afflicted with Tzaraat reveals the evil effects of gossip and sin coming to the surface. This is why we are taught in the Apostolic Writings the importance of believing in Yeshua as God's Messiah and to seek the in-filling of God's Spirit in our lives. We are called to study God's Word and to walk in His ways, and by His Spirit, He will heal us from the inside out.