

8 When he came down from the mountain, large crowds came to him. ²Behold, a man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said: Master, if you are willing, you can make me clean. ³Yeshua extended his hand and touched him, and said: I am willing. Be clean, and in that very hour his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴Then Yeshua said to him: See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the oblation that Moshe commanded for their testimony.

commentary

8:1 When he came down from the mountain - This transitional verse is important: the other synoptic Gospels also record some of these events, but in a different order (see for instance the teaching of the narrow gates in Luke 13:22-27). Notice that the end of the last chapter and some of the following events described by this author, in Mark do not happen on a mountain, but in a synagogue of Kefar-Nahum on Shabbat (*Mark 1:21-27+*). The difference in the narrative order – which implies they did not have a clear reference of the order of events – followed by the similarity of content evidences that the synoptic Gospels, although drawing from the same oral traditions, wrote separately, thus attesting to actual aspects of Yeshua's life. In the case of this author, Yeshua's story is presented as a series of orderly introduced events, it is a journey, and the setting is meaningful, midrashically speaking. "When he came down from the mountain"; from where his Torah speech had taken place, paralleling a Sinai event. Just as the Torah was given on a mountain, Yeshua's message was given on a mountain. The meaning is, therefore, that once Yeshua gained popularity with his Torah of Hassidut, the people of Galilee began to follow him in mass, as a sage of Israel. As mentioned in Matthew 2:22, the Galil is according to the midrashim the place from where Messiah is to be manifested. "Messiah... shall reveal himself in the land of Galilee; for in this part of the Holy Land the desolation first began, and therefore he will manifest himself there first" (*Zohar 2:7b*). Having concluded a section with his sayings, now the author opens a new section with some of the works that made him known; because if one pays attention first to the works and not to the words, one might be led astray, but if one pays attention to the words first, and they are holy, then the works may serve as a seal of the teacher's righteousness.

8:2 Behold, a man with leprosy - The translation here is misleading, because in our modern society leprosy refers to Hansen's disease; a very specific infection that causes ulcerous eruptions, facial deformity, poor eyes sight and lack of ability to feel anything, which leads eventually to loss of extremities. The translation of "lepra" came to us via the Greek LXX, but it is inaccurate. The Hebrew word is Tzaraat **צִרְעָת**, which refers to so many different diseases in the skin, and is rather a "Biblical leprosy" than "modern" or "scientific leprosy". The condition is described as a patch of skin that appears white and sunken. If there is white hair or healed flesh in the patch or it has spread after a seven-day period, the person is ritually unclean (*Lev. 13:2-4*). The description is more similar to Vitiligo than to Hansen's disease; Vitiligo spreads white patches in the skin, which can be disfiguring for those of dark skin. Notice how it says that Moshe put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, it was covered in Tzaraat, white "as snow" (*Ex 4:6*). There are, however, also variants that cause bleeding ulcers in the skin (*Negaim 7:7*) and some are caused by a burn (cf. *Lev. 13:18; Negaim 9:2*). Every "leper" mentioned in the Tanakh was afflicted because of some transgression; in fact, they were separated from the camp because of their ritual status; not because they might be necessarily contagious (cf. *Lev 13:46*). The Mishna says that if a bridegroom, on his wedding day, observes symptoms of Tzaraat on his skin, he can postpone being checked (*Negaim 3:3*), because he is not a threat. The ostracism is a heavenly mark of social disapproval upon the sinner. What is the spiritual reason of becoming a Biblical "leper"? There are seven sins (cf. *Arakhin 16a*): the shedding of blood, vain death, incest, arrogance, robbery, envy, and the main one which is 'lashon hara' **לִשׁוֹן הָרַע** which means: defamation, slander, gossip; literally: evil speech. A leper, in Hebrew 'metzora' **מְצוֹרָע**, is "he who brings up a bad name" *motzia-shem-ra* **מוֹצִיא שֵׁם רַע** (*Arakhin 15b*). Notice how Miriam was struck with leprosy after defaming Moshe before Aaron (*Num 12:1, 10*), and Moshe tells Israel to remember this incident in the laws of leprosy (*Deut. 24:8-9*). Leprosy, then, is an all-inclusive disease, which is also evidenced by the six permutations of the Hebrew root **צִרַע** which produces six negative images: **צִרַע** (leprosy), **צִעַר** (grief), **רָעַץ** (smashing), **רָצַע** (whipping), **עָצַר** (restraining) and **עָרַץ** (dread).^a

8:3 touched him - By the Torah, a leper is commanded to warn everyone to stay away from him (cf. *Lev. 13:45-46*). "With his slander he caused separation between two people, he too will be separated from society" (*Arakhin 16b*). The leper required a great amount of courage and faith to approach Yeshua, and so Yeshua, by touching him implied that his social ostracism had ended. As it is explained elsewhere: "he [Yeshua] was moved with compassion" (*Mark 1:41*).

^a cf. Rav Ginsburgh's *shiurim* on parashat Metzarah.

⁵When Yeshua had entered Kefar-Nahum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.⁶Master, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly. ⁷Yeshua said to him, I will come and heal him.

commentary

8:3 see that you don't tell anyone - This is, in order to achieve two things: firstly, to correct the original cause of the leprosy; which was Lashon haRa, evil speech; he should be humble and avoid using more words than required. Secondly, to serve as a testimony. Don't tell anything, just show yourself to the priests, let them acknowledge that your leprosy is gone, and only then, when they inquire about what happened, you can tell them. Until the priest declares you clean, you are still secluded from society, so do things right.

8:4 show yourself to the priest - according to the Jewish law, as it has been established in Leviticus (14:10-21).

8:5 Kefar-Nahum - Which was at the northern shore of the sea of Galilee. Kefar-Nahum had been the home for both Jews and pagans since the time of the exile. Isaiah uses the expression "Galilee of the nations/gentiles" (*Isa. 8:23 [9:1]*), and the Targum Yonathan says it refers to the land of Naftali and Zebulun (*cf. Matt. 4:13*).

8:5 a centurion came to him - Another account says he did not talk to Yeshua directly, but he had sent Jewish elders to talk on his behalf (*Luke 7:3*). The presence of the centurion implies there was a garrison of soldiers stationed there to preserve order. He most probably was an officer in the army of Herod. Despite the Roman oppression, not all of them were hostile. There has always been pious people among the nations – Hassidei umot haOlam – who protected and respected Israel, some of whom also submitted themselves to obey the laws of Noah; which include rejection of idolatry (*cf. Avodah Zara 64b*). He may be what the Torah calls "Ger hashaar", Ger of the gates (*Exodus 20:10*) about whom God says "shall be treated as a native born and must be loved equally" (*Lev. 19:34*). If this centurion was indeed a Roman, a priori logic suggests that he would worship idols (he would be an akum עכו"ם - i.e., idolater), but this one's behavior demonstrates that he loved the Jewish people and knew the God of Israel. The narrative in Luke even includes the fact that he had "built a Synagogue" (*Luke 7:5*). Another famous righteous Roman was the Emperor Antonius Pius – the most peaceful emperor in Roman history – of whom the sages say he became a 'ger'^b (*cf. Yerushalmi Megillah 72b, 74a*).

8:5 asking for help - The soldier was not even asking for himself, but for his servant. It is written that Hagar raised her voice and wept for her child and that God heard the lad's voice, rather than hers. "This comes to teach us that the sick person's prayer is more effective than the prayer of others on his behalf, and is the first to be accepted" (*Rashi on Gen. 21:17; cf. Bereshit Rabbah 53:14*). It is therefore written: "I cried out to you, Hashem, my God, and you healed me" (*Psalm 30:3*). Still, praying on behalf of others fulfills the principle of "loving your fellow as yourself", and psalms such as Psalm 20 – "May Hashem answer you on the day of your distress" – are traditionally recited for a loved person.

8:7 I will come and heal him - It is written (*Exodus 21:19*) "And he shall provide a cure". The school of Yishmael deduces from this verse that it is permitted for a doctor to try to heal anyone, and it will always be the will of God (*cf. Bava Kama 85a*). From this we learn that anyone who has the God-given capacity to heal someone, should try to do so, but this should not prevent us from being aware that sickness often comes as a retribution for a transgression, as the result of a breakdown in happiness caused by lack of faith (*cf. Liqueite Moharan II:24*) and it also is a Heavenly tool to test our faith in the Creator. Look how Yov's faith remained unshaken until Satan afflicted his body (*cf. Yov 2*). Sickness is not to be blamed on natural causes or human error; it is always from Hashem, to bring us closer to Him. Usually, our inability to fix these problems by ourselves is the agent by which we approach God in humbleness and humiliation; our health depends ultimately on Divine Providence. Rabbi Nahman says, "The main misconception of those who do not have faith in Hashem is that they visibly see a world governed by the stars [i.e., by the visible nature]... in medical matters, they put their faith in the intermediary [i.e., a healer, a doctor] rather than in Hashem, who [if he wanted to], could actually heal them without doctors and medicine" (*Liqueite Moharan 1:62*). It is therefore written, "I shall heal your afflictions" (*Jer. 30:17*). I, and not the physician; he is merely an agent who should pray to be an agent of healing and not of death.

^b **Ger** - I do not want to translate the word "ger" גר because it carries so many different connotations. It is commonly translated as 'convert' due to the fact that the LXX renders almost every instance of it as "proselyte", but such translation cannot apply in all cases; in verses such as Ex. 12:48, 20:10, Lev. 19:34 or Deut. 14:21 it is evident that a 'convert to Judaism' is not meant (*cf. Ramban*). Also, when the Talmudic sages talk about a 'ger toshav' גר תושב (*cf. Lev 25:47*) it is clear that a 'Jewish convert' is not in mind either. In contrast to an akum (idolater) or the generic term 'goy' (from the nations), a 'ger' implies that the person was not born a Jew and yet has abandoned idolatry. Abraham was the first to say "I am a ger and a toshav" (*Gen 23:4*); which is often translated as "stranger and resident"; someone who stays in a place he is not native of, reason why 'conversion' in Hebrew is 'giyur' גיור.

⁸The centurion replied: Master, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, Go, and he goes; and that one, Come, and he comes; I say to my servant, Do this, and he does it. ¹⁰When Yeshua heard this, he was amazed and said to those accompanying him: Amen I say to you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Itzhaq and Yaaqov in the kingdom of heaven.

commentary

8:8 But just say the word - The centurion's analogy of himself being a man under authority evidences his unmovable faith in God and in Yeshua as God's agent. It is taught in hassidut that the prayer of a tzaddiq (a righteous person) can alter the course of events, even negating the apparent inevitability of nature. "This is visible evidence that God exists and listens to the prayer of the tzaddiq, thus reshaping the entire natural order". And this will be even more evident in the future, as our sages said (*Pesakhim 68b*): 'The tzaddiqim will bring the dead back to life' and other wonders (*Liqutei Moharan I:62:6*). We can indeed get closer to Hashem through communication with a tzaddiq - who is God's emissary - in fulfillment of the command (*Deut. 11:22*): "Love Hashem your God, walk in obedience to him and cleave to him". Our sages explain that "cleave to him" means that we should cleave to the wise men (*Sifri on Deut. 11:22*); i.e., to the tzaddiq, as it is written: "They believed in God and in Moshe his servant" (*Ex 14:31*); this is because a truly righteous person, the Moshe of each generation, is one with God and represents his attributes on earth, as "cleave to him" is also interpreted as "cleave to his attributes" (*Sotah 14a*). The tzaddiq has such a connection with God that his faith and mere words can go directly to the Source and transcend nature. A tzaddiq has the power, therefore, to revert a sickness caused by a Heavenly decree. This is based on the principle spoken by the sages, "God decrees and a tzaddiq has the power to nullify his decree" (*Moed Qatan 16b*), and similarly "A tzaddiq decrees and God fulfills" (*Zohar II:15a*). As explained in the prophets (cf. *2Kings 4*), it was Heavenly decreed that certain woman should not have children^c, but Elisha the prophet blessed her and she did, in fact, give birth, thus overturning a Heavenly ruling.

8:10 I have not found anyone in Israel with such a great faith - The breslovers tell of an incident that was witnessed by many people: During a Shabbat meal one of Rebbe Nahman's disciples came with his arm in a sling; he had suffered a serious ailment in his arm for a very long time and was in such a great pain that he was unable to move it at all. In addition, this cripple was very poor and could not afford medicines. The Rebbe remarked on two occasions that the man was a real man of faith and those present agreed. Suddenly the Rebbe commanded the cripple, "Lower your hand". As soon as the Rebbe gave his order, "he decreed, spoke and was fulfilled" (*Yov 22:28*). The man's sling was removed and he instantly lowered his arm and was totally healed for the rest of his life (cf. *Rabbi Nahman Discourses, 187*). In both accounts it is remarked that the person's faith allowed for the healing miracle to take place. Having faith in the Creator is not only a "Jewish" thing; the goal of all creation is "to know God" (*Zohar 2:42a*), the word for "knowing" ידע implying a close connection as in "Adam knew Hava his wife" (*Gen. 4:1*). It is therefore written, "They shall all know me" (*Jer. 31:34*). Faith is the tool by which we come to 'know' Him, recognizing that "There is nothing but Him" (*Deut. 4:35*).

8:11 many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham - "Recline"... to eat, to take their place at the feast; to have a share in the World to Come. Abraham Avinu is the paradigm of faith. He knew for certain that according to the laws of nature he was unable to bear offspring, and yet, when God informed him that he would have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, he absolutely believed it. He "believed Hashem and he accounted it to him as righteousness" (*Gen 15:6*; cf. *Targum Yonathan*). "A tzaddiq lives in his faith" (*Habakuk 2:4*). "True belief means giving oneself over to Hashem, trusting in him totally and never doubting him no matter what. This is the concept of emuna אמונה, faith; to cling to him completely... When a person believes in the Almighty with all his heart, he becomes attached to him and does not turn away from him. Moreover, such attachment brings a person to perfection" (*Hayim Pinkhas Scheimberg, Derekh emuna uBitakhon II, pp.134-138*). It is said to Abraham: "In you all the families of the ground will be blessed" (*Gen 12:3*). "Venivrekhu" ונברכו is a rare nifal conjugation of the verb "to bless", more commonly used for the verb of the same root "habrikh" which has to do with grafting plants. Rabbi Eleazar expounds that "in you all the families will be blessed" should be read as: "All the families will be grafted in you". He also says through a midrash that this fulfils a Messianic purpose: "The Blessed Holy One said to Abraham: I have two goodly shoots [berikhot] to engraft on you: Ruth the Moabitess and Naamah the Amonitess" (*Yevamot 63a*). Here Abraham is depicted as a tree, and the nations that repent are considered shoots that are grafted in this tree.

^c cf. *Ralbag on 2Kings 4*.

¹²But the children of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ¹³Then Yeshua said to the centurion, Go; as you have believed, it shall be done to you. And his young was healed at that moment.

commentary

The grafting of the nations into the faith of Abraham has been alluded to in the Shema, "Hear Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is one", as Rashi expounds: "Hashem who is 'our God' now, [of us, Israel] but not of the other nations; He will be one Hashem [of everyone] in the future, as it says (Zeph. 3:9), 'Then I will bestow pure speech upon the peoples so that they may all call upon the Name of the Lord' and it says (Zech. 14:9), 'In that day Hashem will be one and one will be his Name" (*Rashi on Deut. 6:4*). It is also written, "Hashem will have mercy on Yaaqov, and will again choose Israel and place them in their land, and the Ger shall accompany them, and they will be added onto the house of Yaaqov" (*Is. 14:1*).

8:12 the children of the kingdom will be thrown outside - This is in reference to the natural Israelites, who believe deserve salvation for the mere fact of being sons of Abraham. While it is written that (*Isaiah 60:21*) "All your people are tzaddiqim", this refers to God's people as a whole and not to all individuals, and neither at all times. We cannot cheat God; he who sins receives the retribution of his acts; even the Jews. It is thus written, "The ger that is among you will arise above you higher and higher; while you will descend lower and lower... he will be at the head and you will be at the tail... because you did not obey Hashem" (*Deut. 28:43-45*). The people of Israel said the following adage: "An ox runs and falls, and its owner goes and casts a horse in its place" (*Sanhedrin 98b*). According to Rav Papa this was in line with the future vision of Israel being overruled by the nations. Although the horse is an inferior work animal relative to the ox, when there is no ox available, a horse must suffice. But when the ox recovers, it is difficult to remove the horse. So too, after the Jewish people sin, it is as though the Blessed Holy One transfers their prominence to the gentiles. "Both of them are my handiwork" says Hashem (*ibid.*) and so he does not make any distinction when one sins and the other repents. It says (*Gen. 25:23*), "And the one people shall be stronger than the other people", teaching that when one nation rises, the other necessarily falls (*Megillah 6a*).

8:12 weeping and gnashing of teeth - gnashing of teeth denotes anger in impotence as well as envy, as can be seen in Psalms (*37:12*) or in Yov (*16:9*), "He hates me, [My adversary] has gnashed His teeth at me". Based on Psalm 35:15 [16], the midrash says the minister of Gehinom gnashed his teeth over those who flattered Korakh (*Sanhedrin 52a*). Being cast to the "outer darkness" refers to the fact that native born Jews who have sinned will be in a much less prominent seat in the Messianic era than the righteous gentiles who have repented and shown faith in God, as it will be developed in chapter 22 (*22:12-14*). "Darkness" implies they may have to be purged in Gehenna, as it says "the light has passed away from before us, and darkness will be our dwelling forever... for we have not praised the Name of the Lord of Kings" (*Enoch 63:6-7*). "He will cast down the faces of the strong and shame will fill them, and darkness will be their dwelling, and worms will be their resting place. And they will have no hope of rising from their resting-places, for they do not exalt the name of the Lord of Spirits" (*ibid. 46:6*). Yov (*10:21-22*) says, "before I go and do not return, to a land of darkness and the shadow of death... where the light is as darkness", and the Gemara says "Gehenna is similar to the night" (*Yevamor 109b*) - because of its darkness. Therefore, although on the one hand it is taught that "The fire of Gehenna does not touch the sinners of Israel because they confess their sins and accept their punishment at the entrance" (*Eruvin 19a*), on the other hand the sages offer a list of Jewish sinners who certainly end up in Gehenna, for instance, he who turns away from the Torah: "one who departs from the Torah... arrives in the place of the spirits, which is nothing other than Gehenna, as it is stated (*Prov 9:18*): 'But he does not know that deceased-spirits רפאים are there; that her guests are in the depths of Sheol'" (*Bava Bathra 79a; comp. Yoma 72b*).

relevant quotes

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion... And many nations shall join Hashem..." (*Zech 2:14-15*) R' Chanina bar Papa said: this verse is only speaking of that hour when the Blessed Holy One judges the nations of the world אומות העולם in the time to come. In that hour the Blessed Holy One will bring all of the geirim הגרים who converted שנתגיירו in this world and judge the nations before them. He will say to them: why did you abandon me and worship idols that have no substance? They will say before Him: Master of the World! If we had come to your door you would not have accepted us. He will reply to them: Let the geirim הגרים who converted שנתגיירו from amongst you testify upon you. Immediately the Blessed Holy One will bring them and they will judge them, saying before them: why did you abandon Him and worship idols that have no substance? Wasn't Yitro a priest of idolatry (avodah zara) but he came to the door of the Blessed Holy One, and he received him? And were we not idol worshippers but we came to the door of the Blessed Holy One and he received us? Immediately all of the wicked will be ashamed due to the repentance of the geirim" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 35*).

¹⁴And Yeshua came into Shimon's house, and behold, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. ¹⁵He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on them.

¹⁶When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he cast out their spirits with a word and healed all those who were heavily afflicted.

commentary

8:14 came into Shimon's house - If not for this incident we would not know that at least some of Yeshua's disciples were married. This proves that the Gospels do not tell us every single detail of their lives, but only those things that are relevant for the message that each author wants to convey. For example, Mark and Luke add some details that are not mentioned here, such as the fact that the incident took place at the end of Shabbat, after leaving a synagogue (cf. *Mark 1:29, Luke 4:38-40*). Once they entered Shimon's home, they showed him how his mother-in-law was, and "they besought him for her". In Yeshua's days some people believed the end of days was about to happen and therefore thought it was better not to get married – see the priestly class of the Essenes, for instance (cf. *Ploni the Elder, Historia Naturalis 17 [29]*). However, Judaism praises marriage as the first mitzvah commanded in the Torah, and every Torah observant Jew as a general rule wants to obey all the commands (*Gen. 2:24; 1:28; Yevamot 62b*).

8:14 lying in bed with a fever - Fever on itself is not negative. On the contrary, Rava said about fever: "Were it not for the fact that it is an agent of the Angel of Death, it would be beneficial for a person as a prickly foliage is for palm trees, if it is experienced once every thirty days" (*Nedarim 41a-b*). A healthy fever is a natural protection against infections; fever enhances the immune system. It is told in the Talmud that Rabbi Assi died when he was suffering from fever and they relieved him from the heat with cold compresses (*Niddah 36b*). In the case of Shimon's mother-in-law, the fever was "excessively high" (*Luke 4:38*); meaning it went beyond 39° C (103° F), at which point the same high temperature that attempts to get rid of your infection can also affect negatively the brain and eventually kill you.

8:15 the fever left her - It means, not in a natural manner, but suddenly, as an evident Divine intervention through the tzaddiq's touch. A holy person has the power to bring life into the material world even by mere touch, as it is taught in Scripture, that a man came back to life after touching the bones of Elisha the Prophet (*2Kings 13:21*).

8:15 and began to wait on them - Now to this point the author has brought three specific cases in which Yeshua performed a miracle, these being examples of three types of people: the ostracized by sin, the gentile who is not "worthy" of a tzaddiq entering his home, and the ostracized by sickness. All of them were drawn closer to Hashem and brought back to "service" through the righteous man who was the agent of their deliverance. In Kabbalah, the three are representations of Gevurah, Hesed and Tiferet. The leper learnt Gevurah (strength), which is the aspect of "fear of sin", as the sages teach (*Avot 3:9*): "Anyone whose fear of sin comes before his wisdom, his wisdom will endure". The gentile learnt Hesed (loving-kindness) represented in Abraham, who converted others as it says, "The souls they had made in Haran" (*Gen. 12:5*), and Shimon's mother-in-law learnt Tiferet (beauty/harmony), which is the aspect of those who use their wisdom appropriately; Tiferet represents compassion as well as empathy; so as soon as she was healed, she began to take care of their needs. Yeshua himself is the tzaddiq (which represents the sefirah of Yesod, as it is written "Tzaddiq Yesod Olam", the righteous is the Yesod of the world (*Prov 10:25*). Incidentally, the next set of miracles has to do with Yeshua fighting the demonic realm, in order to purge the qlippah, the darkness of Malkhut, which is filled with demons as a consequence of human sin on earth (cf. *Zohar 190a*).

8:16 many who were demon-possessed - The Ramhal explains: "There is one specific entity that is an intermediate between the physical and spiritual. This class consists of entities that... are not bound by the constraints and laws of ordinary detectable matter. For this reason they might be improperly considered spiritual. Their essence, however, is very different from angels and forces, despite some similarities... These entities are known as shedim (demons), and they, too, have specific inborn attributes and make-ups, and are also so highly variable that each would seem to be in a class of its own, but are likewise all of one sort" (*Derekh Hashem 1:5:1*). Demons are all around us all the time. They are more numerous than we (cf. *Rashi on Psalm 91:7*), If the eye had the power to see them, we would get thunderstruck and undone... "They surround us like the ridge around a field... Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand" (*Berakhot 6a*). "Whoever wends to the left [i.e., whoever sins] is seized by evil spirits on the left side" (*Zohar 1:47b*). They are incomplete beings so they "roam the world, craving to clothe themselves in a body, but they cannot. We must defend ourselves against them, so a song against evil spirits has been prescribed for whenever their dread prevails in the world [namely, the Psalm 91]" (*Zohar 1:48a*). Some of the tzaddiqim casted demons away, it is called Girush shedim (casting out demons). Shimon bar Yohai drove out the demon Ben Temalion from the daughter of a Roman emperor by saying twice: "Ben Temalion, leave her" (*Meilah 17b*).

¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: He lifted up our diseases and bore our afflictions.

¹⁸When Yeshua saw the large crowds surrounding him, he gave orders to cross to the other side.

commentary

8:17 to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah – Based on the original Hebrew verse, **חלינו הוא נשא ומכאבינו סבלם**, the phrase “he lifted up our diseases” (*Isa. 53:4*) can be homiletically interpreted in various different ways. It can mean lifting in the sense of carrying, as Rashi interprets here “he bore our illness”, applying it to Israel’s suffering for the sake of atonement: “The illness that should rightfully have come upon us, he [my servant Yaaqov] bore” (*Rashi*). The author of this Gospel will later interpret the verse in a similar fashion, but right now he is interpreting the verb “nasha” **נשא**, lifted up, more in the sense of taking and removing from them, similar to the verse “Yaaqov lifted his sons and wives [from the floor and set them] on camels” (*Gen. 31:17*). In this sense, lifting a disease is interpreted as healing, removing the illness from them and placing it somewhere else. Similarly, “bore our afflictions” can mean that he took them and dealt with them on his own. The Targum Isaiah (*53:4*) applies this verse partially to the Messiah and reads: “Then he [the Messiah] will beseech concerning our sins, and for his sake our iniquities will be forgiven; yet we were esteemed wounded, smitten before Hashem” - In this interpretation Messiah brings redemption and Israel is the one that suffers. The “forgiveness of sins” is directly related to the casting-out of demons above mentioned, as both concepts refer to the battle against the forces of darkness. While the verse here is being applied as a peshet on the person of Yeshua, the passage itself is prophetic in nature. The idea that these healings and deliverances are messianic signs of the kingdom on earth will be developed later in chapter 11 (*11:4-5*). The commentary on that section will explain in detail how these healings were a first century messianic expectation within Judaism^d, highly based on Psalm 146 and Isaiah 61, despite the fact that technically speaking, the Messiah does not need to perform any miracles in order to be received as such.

8:18 he gave orders to cross to the other side – The literal meaning is self-evident: he decided to separate himself from an oppressive crowd, partly in order to avoid a very materialistic understanding of his mission and also to help those who were on the other side. Still, there is so much allegoric and homiletic value in these words, which have been the source of so many sermons for nearly two millennia, a common one being that we cannot help everyone, sometimes we need to distance ourselves from toxic people; we cannot please everyone, we need personal time to gather some clarity, leave your comfort zone and go a step further... etc. There are less commonly known interpretations, though. Large crowds were surrounding him. In the Aramaic the vocabulary fits well with the Targum on Psalm 118:10, “large crowds have surrounded me”, which represents the final battle against impurity “I shall gather all the peoples to Jerusalem to wage war” (*Zech. 14:2*; see *Rashi on Psalm 118*). The Psalm says, “They encircled me like bees; they were extinguished like a thorn fire” (*Psalm 118:11*). Yeshua’s battle against the forces of impurity fits well with the previous verses in which he was delivering people from sickness and demon-possession. Then he orders to “cross to the other side”. The Other Side, in Aramaic “Sitra Akhra”, is the kabbalistic name for the realm of impurity. This has to do with the fact that the Hebrew for “sin”, **עבירה** aveirah, literally means to pass over, to cross the borders of what our real spiritual nature is. Hence “repentance” **תשובה** means to return. Moses says about the Torah, “It’s not beyond the sea for you to say, Who will cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us”. The Targum Neofiti interprets here, “It is not beyond the great sea that one should say, Would that we had one like Yonah the prophet who would descend into the depths of the great sea and bring up the Torah for us” (*Targ. Neof. On Deut. 30:13*). Crossing to the other side is interpreted as descending into the depths, and both expressions mean the same thing. Yonah fell into the depths of Sheol, the lowest possible level of the soul, and there he ‘resurrected’ and brought light to the city of Nineveh, a city about to be destroyed because of its corruption. In this sense, “cross to the other side” is a call to defeat darkness, the forces of impurity, it is a call to leave the current reality behind and bring light to oneself and to the world. In times of injustice, spiritual oppression, and so much darkness, when apparently the evil forces encircle us, we are to stand firm and defend the messianic consciousness within. That is the call to “cross to the other side”. The light of the Torah is within and no matter what circumstance we face, rescuing the imprisoned sparks of light and illuminating the world is possible. This is the secret in the verse, “If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there” (*Psalm 139:8*). Righteous people descending to other people’s level in order to help them ascend is called “Yeridah le’tzorekh aliyah” (descent for the purpose of ascent). The tzaddiq can do this since his heart has been already purged and thus can avoid becoming entrapped by the evil forces of the Other Side (cf. *Avodat Israel, parashat Qedoshim; Meor Einaim, parashat Shemot*).

^d On the early diversity of messianic expectations cf. *Jacob Neuser, “Judaisms and their Messiahs at the turn of the Christian era”*.

¹⁹Then a certain scribe came to him and said, Rabbi, I will follow you wherever you go.

²⁰Yeshua replied, The foxes have dens and the birds of the sky have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.

²¹Another of his disciples said to him, Master, allow me first to go and bury my father.

²²But Yeshua told him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.

commentary

8:20 the son of man has no place to lay his head – One is certainly tempted to jump directly into the allegorical interpretation of these words, as this is one of Yeshua's original sayings surviving in its purest form in the mystical Gospel of Thomas (#86), which incidentally tends to avoid terms such as "the son of man". However, in the case of this book in which a specific context is being offered by the author, the most satisfactory interpretation is the one following its narrative: Yeshua is indirectly describing his current situation as an itinerant teacher, and the consequent risks of such a life are that he would often find himself without a roof to sleep under. Would you really follow him wherever he goes knowing that his situation would be at times worse than that of wild animals? This answer, however, is still too superficial for three different authors to remember it and record it in their collection of spiritual logia. In this version, a scribe approaches him, and this defines the interpretation of the phrase. In Jewish lore, the proverbial fox represents cunning and treacherous religious people; "be a tail unto lions, not a head unto foxes" (cf. *Avot 1:15*). Birds are those with supernatural knowledge (cf. *Zohar III:148b*). While the "son of man" is a generic term for humans, in this case Yeshua is applying it to himself, from the verse "what is... the son of man that you should be mindful of him? You have made him a little lower than celestial beings" (*Psalms 8:5; cf. targum Tehilim*). Religious people, whether righteous (the birds) or wicked (the foxes), usually have a community, a safe place to call "home", but Yeshua is warning that his teachings would not find their proper dwelling place in this current era. Compare this with: "In the house of my father there are many dwelling places" (*John 14:2*). His teachings, then, belong to the Father's reign, the messianic era, not to this time period. If you belonged to an influential house of accredited orthodox scribes, you may want to think it twice before engaging in the Torah of the messianic era, as you will be likely to find certain level of opposition in your local synagogue. Paradoxically, the son of man has been given dominion over both the beasts of the field (*Psalms 8:8*) and the birds of the sky (*ibid. 8:9*). Granted, the Psalm says "beasts of the field" instead of "foxes", but it is worth noting that most manuscripts in Thomas reference only the birds, not the foxes. The later might have been intentionally added by the author to form the above-mentioned allegory. Going deeper into interpretation, animals have their "resting" place, they are content with their lot. It is not so with the son of man, who was made a little lower than divine beings. He has a divine soul that does not settle down in this world until it attains perfection. It will be in the World to Come that the son of man will "sit" and find rest, but in our current world, we are like Abraham: "ger ve'toshav"; stranger and sojourner (*Gen. 23:4*).

8:22 let the dead bury their dead – "Another of his disciples" is, like the previous scribe, someone who already is, or at least should be, occupying himself with the things of the kingdom (see *Luke's version, Luke 9:59-60*). Luke begins the passage with Yeshua's calling: "follow me", whereas in Matthew the sentence comes after the disciple's request. In both cases, the context is about different types of people reacting to Yeshua's call to "cross to the other side" with him. Burying a loved one who has recently passed away does not have, obviously, any negative connotation whatsoever, but when trying to take Yeshua's response at face value, some logical questions come to mind: If this person's father had recently died, why was he with Yeshua and not with his father? Why going to bury him exactly after Yeshua made the call to follow him and not before? In other words, if his father had just died, shouldn't he be sad at home mourning him? It seems to me his father had not died yet, and the disciple was actually saying, I will follow you after my father dies and I bury him, which could be in one month or in ten years; he was excusing himself. Whatever he meant, Yeshua's answer is evidently allegorical and is addressing us all. "The dead" means the sinners. "A sinner is counted as dead" (cf. *Tzeror Hammor 6:2*) and "the wicked ones, even while they are alive are called dead" (cf. *Berakhot 18:2*). Same idea is repeated throughout the NT texts as well (cf. *1Timothy 5:6, for instance*). The meaning, then, is as follows: Do not waste your time with those defiling things that the sinners waste their time with, do not waste your time in trivial matters when you know you have a mission, occupy yourselves with those things that pertain to the living. Do not wait until your "father" is buried. Let the dead bury their dead works. Let them deal with their own issues, but not you, you are being called to work for Hashem, and "if not now, when?" (*Avot 1:14*). The work of the kingdom cannot be postponed indefinitely, for no one knows the day of their death. It is therefore written, "Moses blessed the Israelites before his death" (*Deut. 33:1*), and Rashi comments here "because if not now, when?"

²³Then he got up into the boat and his disciples went up with him. ²⁴And behold! There arose a great tempest in the sea, so that the boat was covered by the waves. But Yeshua was asleep. ²⁵The disciples approached and woke him up, saying, Master, deliver us! We perish! ²⁶He replied, Why are you afraid, you of little faith? Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷But the men were marveled saying, Who is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?

—commentary—

8:23 There arose a great tempest in the sea – If we apply a literal understanding to this passage, then the text is referring to the intrinsic divine power of the righteous people to control and transcend nature because of both their faith and their closeness with the Creator. Many saints in the TaNaKh allegedly demonstrated control over nature, such as Yehoshua, who caused the sun to stop at his command (*Joshua 10:12*). In the 1st century BCE there is Honi haMe'agel - the circle-drawer - a saint who, in a time of drought, caused to rain by vowing not to eat anything until the Creator responded to his demands (cf. *Taanit 19a*). “The words formulated by the tzaddiq in prayer enhance and improve the structure known as the “the lower regions” of the universe; in Hebrew ‘takhtonim’ תַּחְתּוֹנִים. These prayers... are the real ‘toldot’ - or enduring achievements - by the righteous on earth” (*Qedushat Levi on Bereshit, vayetzei*).

8:26 Why are you afraid, you of little faith? – “Rabbi Ami said that if the rain is withheld, people should go to the Tzaddiq to request it... The Baal Shem Tov [on the other hand] explained that in truth, all people have complete control over nature, for whenever someone truly believes in God’s power, this manifests – it is only as they seek their predilections and remove God from their radar that they become in need, they then go to the one who is connected (i.e., the Tzaddiq)” (*Baal Shem Tov, saying 95*).

8:26 he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea – The passage reflects Psalm 65:6-8, “By awesome deeds with charity you will answer us, God of our salvation, the trust of all the distant ends of the earth and the sea... who humbles the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the multitude of kingdoms”. The more than evident allegoric interpretations let themselves glimpse here, for the waves of the sea represent our unsteady emotions, problems, even the hubbub of the world (cf. *Targum Tehilim 65*), which always shake and swamp our boat; i.e., our life (see *Shimon bar Yohai’s parable of the drilled boat on Vayiqra Rabbah 4:6*). For those with little faith, these events conceal the hand of the Creator, even to the point of assuming defeat. Our messianic consciousness, our higher self which is always in alignment with God remains dormant within, it is “sleeping”, so to say. We must, therefore, “wake it up” and improve our faith in Hashem. No matter what happens in the world, then, for we will realize we are always safe, we will perceive things with clarity and experience a great calm. Someone who attains devequt - attachment to God - and perfects his faith, cannot live with fear. Fear and Emunah do not coexist. This is the secret in the verse, “The Canaanites dwell by the sea and alongside the Yarden”, which is followed by “And Calev silenced the people” (*Num. 13:29-30*). “The people” refers to the impure forces of this world, which are like a tempestuous weather, as it says, “the nations rage [like a raging tempest]” (*Psalms 2:1*). And Calev is the power of faith, which is calm, as it says that Hashem was found in “a calm, gentle whisper” (*1Kings 19:12*).

8:27 even the winds and the sea obey him – This is said in reference to the awakened messianic consciousness. The Qumran scrolls describe the messianic-like mission of a future righteous priest and then say, “The great sea shall be quiet because of him” (*4Q541*). In kabbalah, the winds [rukhot רוחות] and the [great] sea are the evil spirits and the upper world of the Other Side; the realm of impurity (cf. *Zohar II:56a*). The tzaddiq has power over the forces of darkness, as mentioned above, and can, therefore, sail through their kingdom and defeat them without getting trapped inside.

²⁸When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no man could pass that way. ²⁹And they shouted saying, What do you want with us, Yeshua, son of God? Have you come here before time to torment us?

textual variants

8:28 in the region of the Gadarenes – When it comes to this region, there are discrepancies between the source manuscripts and even within the Gospels, having been found a total of five different variants for its name. A great number of sources call it “the region of the Gadarenes” (*B, C, M, Diatessaron, Origen, Syriac manuscripts... etc*), which is closely followed by “region of the Gerasenes” (892^c Δ^{lat} Latt syr^{hmg}). The other name most commonly found in the manuscripts is “region of the Gergesenes” (κ² and some Byzantine sources). Of these three, it may appear we can safely discard “Gergesenes”, since there was no city named Gergesa, although some theologians identify it with the modern El-Koursi, and the manuscripts in Luke and Mark use the other two names, but not Gergesa (cf. *Mark 5; Luke 8*). The source for the name appears to be Origen, who might have used it as an allusion to the Girgashim of Scripture, although they were Canaanites living Westward, not in the East, which is the implicit location in the narrative (cf. *Gen. 15:21, Josh. 24:11*). All these names can be considered part of the same unity, they can even be considered synonymous from a certain point of view, as they all belonged to the Decapolis, a group of ten Hellenistic cities which spoke a Semitic language but were highly dependent on Rome. Undoubtedly, Gerasa (Yerash) and Gadara were both at the other side of the Yarden, the Jordan river. The Decapolis is the region of both Gadarenes and Gerasenes. The common factor of all these names, then, is that they were cities of a massive pagan/secular population.

commentary

8:28 When he arrived at the other side – “The Other Side”, which we have explained in its kabbalistic and allegorical meaning to be the world of impurity. It is precisely here where he meets an “army” of unclean spirits.

8:28 in the region of the Gadarenes – A region of massive Roman influence, where people had forgotten their Semitic/Jewish roots, and had opted for a pagan life.

8:28 coming from the tombs – Not only from among the tombs, but they actually came forth, out of them; as a symbol of absolute defilement, drawing a parallel with the words of Yeshua: “Let the dead bury their dead”. The spiritual defilement is such that nobody can “pass that way”. Some people have descended so spiritually low that they have placed both their soul and body in complete misery, in a status of being dead while alive. That’s the reference to the “two men”: the body and the soul.

8:29 What do you want with us – It has been taught that if someone annoys the demons or worries about them, they bother him, but while someone does not annoy them/does not worry about them, they don’t bother him (cf. *Pesakhim 110b*). The Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, also known as the Vilna Gaon, met a possessed person, and the evil spirit talked to him, but he answered: “I have never wanted to have any dealing with your kind and also now I will not speak with any of you at all” (*Hayim Volozhin, hadrat Qodesh intro*). Why did Yeshua, then, come to disturb these spirits with his mere presence? Not because he wanted to have any dealings with the evil forces, but to bring redemption to the soul that was being entrapped and contaminated. This was part of his personal mission, as he would later explain. It is the mission of the “son of God” to bring light even in the darkest corners of the soul. “The Messiah will have to attract all people, he will have to reach the lowest and most base individuals among us, not just the exalted ones” (*David Sheinkin, Path of the Kabbalah*). As for us, we must consider that every descent is merely for the sake of the ascent.

8:29 before time to torment us – They say “before time” because Messiah ultimately destroys the powers of the Other Side. The Zohar (*I:107b*) attributes to Messiah the verse “Before him those that dwell in the wilderness will bow down” (*Psalms 72:9*). About the future it is also said, “The spirit of the Messiah shall rise against and destroy the sinful Edom and burn in fire the land of Seir. Hence it is written (*Num 24:18*), Edom will be possessed, and Seir will become the possession of his enemies, and Israel will triumph. And in that time the Blessed Holy One will raise the dead of his people, and death shall be forgotten of them” (*Zohar II:212b*). It is also written, “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will return tribute” (*Psalms 72:10*). It does not say, “they will bring,” but “they will return”. This is a reference to the evil powers returning to the Messiah that which they took from Yaaqov, as it has been taught, “The gifts which Yaaqov avinu made to Esav, the heathens will return them to the Messiah” (*Bereshit Rabba 78:12*). However, we can hasten the Messianic era, as the sages taught, “If they are worthy, I will hasten it” (*Sanh. 98a*). We can defeat the powers of darkness now, before its time. “Today, if you hear his voice” (*Psalms 95:7*). We must learn that the man destined to be Messiah is merely the head (i.e., the leader), the “star out of Yaaqov” (*Num. 24:17*), but all of us are his body. “There is a spark of the soul of Messiah with each and every one of us” (*Baal Shem Tov, Meor Ainyim*), we all share a global consciousness which is always connected with God. This is known as the Yekhida soul, the soul of Messiah. It remains dormant in most of us,

³⁰Some distance from them a herd of many pigs was feeding. ³¹The demons begged Yeshua, If you cast us out, send us into the herd of pigs! ³²He said to them, Go! And immediately they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed directly over the cliff, fell into the sea and perished in the waters. ³³Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported everything that had occurred, and concerning the demoniacs. ³⁴Then the whole town went out to meet Yeshua; and when they saw him, they besought him to leave their borders.

commentary

but we all have ability to awaken it, to reveal the soul of Messiah within and defeat the powers of darkness, as it says, "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth" (*Zech. 3:9*).

8:30 a herd of many pigs – We have previously mentioned two important pieces of information: Firstly, that this region was under absolute control of Rome, and secondly, that the defeat of the impure forces by the spirit of Messiah is referred to as destroying "the sinful Edom and... the land of Seir" (*Num. 24:18*). In 1st century Judaism, Edom became an allegory for Rome, and Rome was represented by the pig, "the pig is Edom" (*Vayiqra Rabbah, Shemini 13:5*) as it is written, "The boar from the forest ravages [the holy Land]" (*Psalms 80:14*). "Why is he [Edom/Rome] compared to a pig? Because, just as a pig when he lies down displays his cloven hooves as if to say, I'm ritually clean, so this wicked kingdom steals and commits violence, yet it appears as if they establish courts of law" (*Bereshit Rabbah 5:1*). Romans were always curious as to why Jews do not eat pork, to the point of saying "the Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred" (*Tacitus, Historiae 5:4:1-2*). If the evidence was not enough, in Luke (8:30-31) these many demons call themselves "Legion", which is the name for a military unit of the Roman army. The pigs here represent the messianic battle against Edom.

8:31 they came out and went into the pigs – The forces of darkness, unable to stay in someone who has revealed the messianic consciousness in him, return to the world, to the source of man's defilement, and then perish in the waters of the Torah. The Messiah's main weapon is the power of holy speech, the power of prayer; it is thus written, "He will slay the wicked with the spirit of his lips" (*Isaiah 11:4*). The more one engages in prayer, the closer one can draw to God (*Liqutei Moharan II:84*). When prayer is elevated to its rightful position in our lives, the messianic kingdom will be revealed (*Liqutei Halakhot, Rosh Khodesh 5:2*). The we will fulfil the verse (*Zech. 3:9*), "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth".

relevant quotes

"Once in Vilna in the courtyard adjacent to the study of the [Vilna] Gaon, a dybbuq (i.e., an evil spirit) entered and possessed a certain man. A great commotion entailed with crowds of onlookers rushing in to behold the strange phenomenon. Our master opened the window of his study to see what all the noise was about. Immediately, upon beholding the face of our master the possessed person began to scream: Rebbe! You are the one for whom they proclaim above, Beware of Eliyahu and his Torah! If you were to decree upon me even with only the words of your mouth to leave this man, I would have no choice but to go. Our master answered him: I have never wanted to have any dealing with your [kind] and also now I will not speak with any of you at all" (*Hayim Volozhin, hadrat Qodesh intro*).