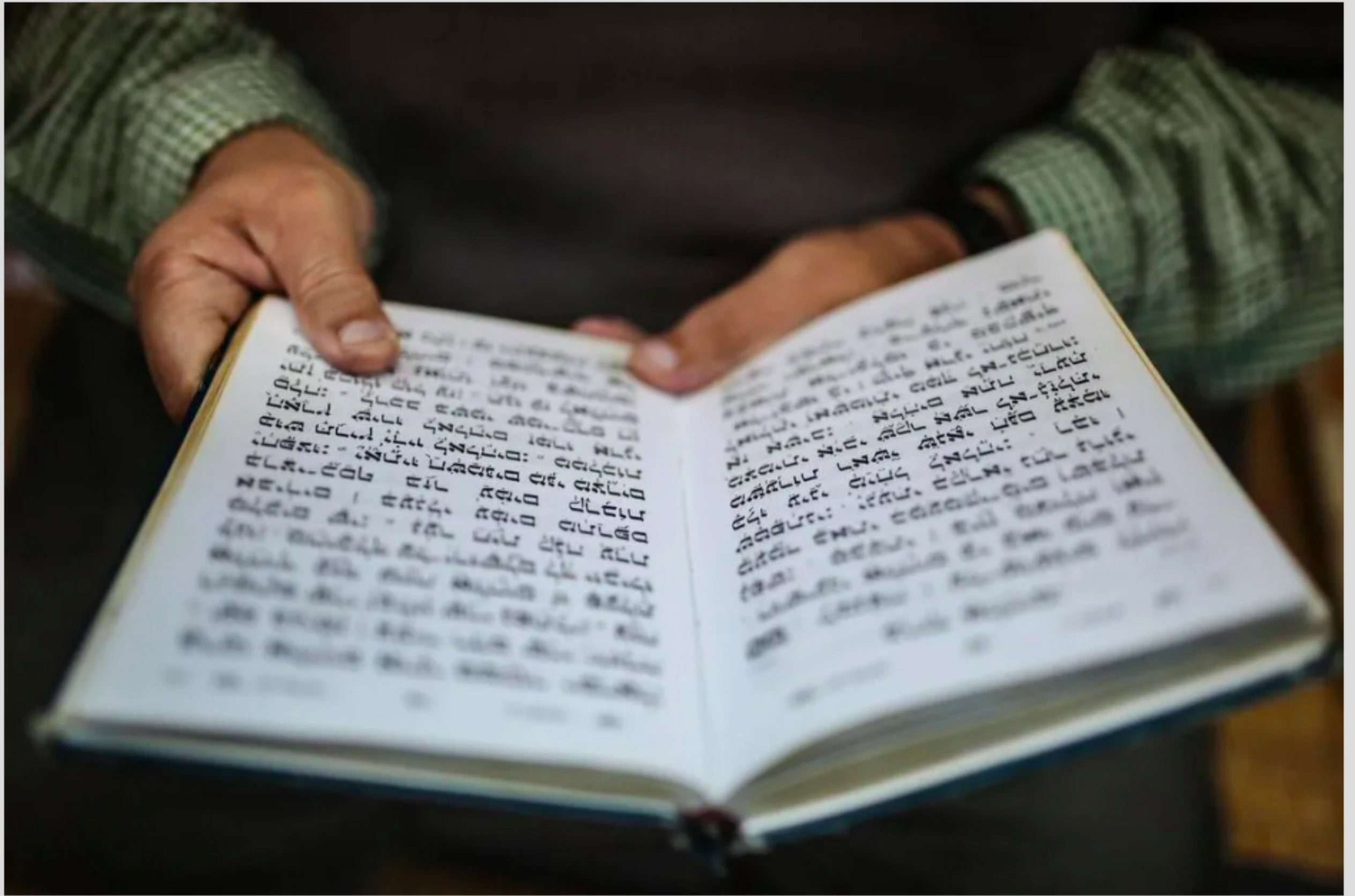


Faith Matters: A prayer for healing in the Torah

Moses's prayer on behalf of his sister Miriam an inspiration for people now, writes Moshe Meirovich

By Moshe Meirovich | Contributing columnist

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The book of Numbers proclaims in five words, one of the shortest prayers in the Hebrew Bible: “Eil Na R’fah Nah Lah-O’ God pray heal her/please send her healing.”

This prayer is recited by Moses on behalf of his sister Miriam. Why so? Both Miriam and her brother Aaron publicly speak out against Moses’ status as a prophet declaring that God too communicates with them.

Consequently, due to Miriam’s display of hubris she is inflicted with ‘Tzaraat’ — a skin disease. Immediately, Aaron turns to Moses and pleads with him to pray for a complete healing for their sister, Miriam.

Reacting to Moses’s prayer, rabbinic literature confronts the brevity of his prayerful supplication. The Talmudic sages underscore the *raison d’etre* for Moses consciously choosing to speak just five words of healing out of concern that the Israelites might complain: “For his sister he pleads with God at length; but were we in her place he would offer only a few words.”

Yet, a close read of the Biblical text reveals that Moses addresses Miriam in the third person, not even mentioning her by name. By contrast, when we beseech the Almighty in the synagogue for a complete healing, we specifically acknowledge by name the individual who is ill.

Therefore, one might argue that indeed Moses’ prayer for Miriam reflects a potential lack of sincerity.

Yet, this negative perspective fails to capture an important principle underscoring Moses’ plea.

As Rabbi Shai Held, a contemporary rabbinic scholar writes: “Perhaps, Moses’s greatness ... lies in the fact that as hard as he finds it, he does indeed choose to pray on behalf of his sister ... It’s one thing to pray for people we cherish, or with whom we have never faced conflict. It’s quite another (thing) to pray sincerely with passion for those who have hurt or disappointed us ... Perhaps ... (what) we are meant to learn is that as difficult as it can be, only one who finds it in him or herself to pray for others, even when they have caused heartache, is worthy of having (one’s) prayers answered.”

Something to think about the next time we are asked to pray on behalf of someone with whom we may not necessarily have a close relationship with in our lives.

May we be blessed with the wisdom to act righteously.

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