

An open letter from Miriam the Prophet to G-d, after He struck her with leprosy in Numbers
12:10

by Sophie Katz

Dear G-d,

If you're expecting an apology, you're not going to get one. I meant every word I said. I believe that my brother Moses was wrong for marrying that Ethiopian woman. I believe that you give Moses unfair privileges over me and our brother Aaron. I believe that Aaron and I are just as important as Moses, no matter what reasons You might think you have for treating us differently.

And I also believe that it is just plain wrong of you to punish me, but not Aaron, even though he said the exact same things that I did. What's your reason for that, G-d? Is it because I'm not a priest? Is it because I'm not a man? You should know better than anyone else that I don't have any control over that!

You must be wondering how I can dare speak to You in this way, after You have already reproached me in front of all the Children of Israel, after You have made my skin pale and leprous and banned me from the camp for seven days as punishment for slandering my brother and speaking out against you. How crazy it must seem for me, Miriam the Prophet, sister of Moses, to still defy You, my father who has spat in my face. How crazy it must seem for me to express my displeasure with You and my anger at your unjust actions, to still behave in this unruly, "unladylike" way after You already struck me down.

G-d, have You forgotten that I am a prophet? I have seen the future and what it holds for the women of the world. I see a society where while we are no longer slaves to a pharaoh, we are slaves to fear. We will be afraid to speak up for ourselves and to act on what we believe is right. We will be afraid to be seen as angry. We will be told that because the world is "better than it was before," we should be satisfied and stop trying to upset the system. We will be called bossy, obnoxious, and selfish, and we will be afraid to do anything that might give someone reason to call us those things. We will doubt that we can succeed in defeating those who oppress us. We will doubt our ability to right the wrongs done to us and to make the world a better place for us. We will be afraid to speak up.

I must behave in this way, G-d, because my actions will be recorded in Your holy book, and thousands of years from now, a girl will read that I spoke up. She will read that as a child I approached Pharaoh's daughter to make sure that Moses would be raised by our mother, without fear of the repercussions. She will read that as I grew, I encouraged my people to stand against the one who oppressed us. She will read that I took my timbrel with me when I left Egypt, because I knew that we would have cause to celebrate. She will read that I never once doubted that we would succeed in defeating our oppressors.

And most importantly, she will read that even once we had left Egypt, even once things were "better than they were before," I did not stop striving for a better world. I did not say, "We have won enough, now let's be quiet." She will read that I spoke up for what I believed to be right,

that I sang and danced and upset the system, and that I never apologized for my actions or my beliefs. I never took back my words. I never feared the wrath of He who held power over me. I damn well let the world know that I was angry, and I was never cowed into silence.

Oh, G-d, she will read that I took Your unjust punishment like a woman!

And maybe – just maybe – she will be inspired to speak up, to raise her voice in a world that tells her to be silent, to say harsh words to the people who tell her that she should be soft, and to never stop striving for better.

And when she is struck down by the all-powerful He who thinks that He knows what's right for the women of the world, she will not give up. She will continue to speak up. She will let the world know that her punishment is unjust and that she is angry.

And she will not apologize.