



FLOURISHING....!

HOW ARE YOU? ASKS AN OLD FRIEND. “GREAT!”, YOU RESPOND. “Fantastic, wonderful. Flourishing!” You smile, your old friend smiles, and moves on. However, you think to yourself, things are more complicated than that, in all sorts of ways. In fact...

Are you right to be so cheerful? According to Jewish teaching, yes. Of course there are times to confide one’s problems to a friend, times to get help, and certainly there is a need to be aware of what is happening in one’s life and to take firm action to deal with dangerous and otherwise negative situations. Yet at the same time, we can truthfully say, whatever the situation, that we are flourishing.

“Really?” you might ask. “Whatever the situation? What about if...? Come, on, be rational...”

The double Sedra¹ gives us a hint of this idea, as explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe².

The name of the first Sedra is *Tazria*, which means “conceive, give seed”. It expresses fertility and childbirth. The opening passage is in fact about a woman giving birth to a child, and about the offering she brings to the Temple, expressing thanksgiving to G-d.

Commemorating the Birthday of
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The rest of the double Sedra, however, concerns a person who is afflicted with a condition generally translated as 'leprosy'. The main symptom is that a patch of their skin goes white, and on account of this they may have to dwell outside the city. At first sight this is something negative in the extreme. Nonetheless, the name of the first Sedra which is mostly devoted to this topic is *Tazria*, denoting fertility, flourishing health, goodness.

There is a tradition that the name of each Sedra in the Torah is itself part of the teaching which the Torah imparts to us. Although we may not realise this at the time, the negative condition of 'leprosy' will lead to something good. It is part of the process of giving birth, of spiritual progress.

Thus Maimonides³ tells us that this kind of 'leprosy', which only existed in Temple times, was a wondrous sign from G-d, warning the person that he was doing something wrong, namely speaking bad about others.

The sign came in stages: first an affliction of one's house (described in the second Sedra), then of one's clothes and finally of one's own body. The afflicted person dwelt outside the city in order to think over his attitude to other people, and to repent. Then the condition healed and he returned to normal life. The fact that G-d showed him directly that he was doing wrong, was actually a mark of his closeness to G-d and the presence of the Divine among the Jewish people. It forced the person to face himself and take stock of his situation, and to improve and to put things right. The negative was the start of something positive, a mark of growth and progress.

From a spiritual point of view, *every* problematic situation for each individual, and also for the Jewish people as a whole, is a step to something good, although this may sometimes be very hard to understand. Our lives in Exile can often seem extraordinary difficult. However, the promise of the Sedra is that inwardly we are engaged in a process of rebirth, leading to the Redemption. So when our old friend asks how we are, or indeed, 'how is the Jewish people?' the ultimate answer is: flourishing!

1. The double Sedra is Leviticus chs.12-13, 14-15. 2. The following is based freely on *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.22, p.70 ff. 3. *Mishneh Torah*, end of 'Laws of Leprosy'.

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SEDRA TAZRIA – METZORAH

THINK GOOD AND IT WILL BE GOOD...

It was a breezy Sunday afternoon when Tammy Bergman returned home from her shopping trip. Just as she arrived on the front steps of her house, she realized that her wallet was missing. Panicked, she made her way up and down her street where she had walked from the bus stop, her eyes scanning any spot where the wallet may have fallen. After a long while, she gave up and slowly made her way home. Tammy felt like crying. This was the worst thing that could have happened!

“Oh, Tammy, I’m so, so sorry, dear,” Mrs Bergman said sympathetically, after Tammy spilled out the sorrowful story. “I wish there was something I could do. Did you have a lot of money in it?”

“Well actually... I don’t think I had so much. I spent quite a lot of it today...” “Well, at least that. But still, you must be so upset. Perhaps, someone will find it and return it!”

“Yes, I actually have a paper with my name and contact information in my wallet. I doubt someone will find it though. I looked everywhere...”

“Well, you never know. Think positively. Sometimes, things happen to us which seem really bad but in the end turn out to be really good. Reminds me of this week’s Sedra, Tazria-Metzorah. First it speaks of cases where people could develop Tzara’at – leprosy, in which their skin goes white. Then later it seems to say that G-d states He will put a kind of Tzara’at on their houses, green or red patches. Why does G-d say He will do that, as if it were a good thing?”

“The Sages explain. When the Jews found the green or red patches on the walls of their houses, they sometimes had to demolish that part of the house, or even the whole building. Of course, it felt terrible and they were very upset. But they often found treasure that had been hidden away in the walls of the houses. So you see, they complained about their walls being ruined, when actually it turned out well for them.”

“Well, that’s very nice, Mom, but that was thousands of years ago. I just want my wallet back ...” Tammy said. “Of course you do, ” said Mrs Bergman, “but if you have a positive attitude, you never know what the results might be. There is a Jewish saying: ‘Think good, and it will be good...’”

Later that evening, there was a knock on the door. Tammy went to open it and there stood a girl, looking about her age... holding her wallet!!!

“Hello, my name is Naomi,” the girl introduced herself, “I just moved here today into that house over there-” she pointed to her house “- and I found this wallet right in front of the bushes of our front yard... I saw your address on the slip of paper inside and I think it’s yours...?”

“Wow! Thank you so much! Oh my goodness, this is amazing! Thank you! I can’t believe I didn’t see it there! I looked and looked!”

Naomi laughed. “Well, obviously I was meant to find it and bring it to you so that I could meet you, my new neighbour!”

Tammy couldn’t believe it. A girl her age – right across the street! Her mother sure was right. What a wonderful thing. This could be the beginning of a brand new friendship!

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