



Ambassadors of a
WORLDWIDE BROTHERHOOD

MEDITATION 3 (August 8, 2011)

We already got acquainted with each other. We know a little more about our guest families. We visited Delft, and celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday.

Now we are going to make an additional step. We are together as Ambassadors of a Worldwide Brotherhood. We are on our way to Madrid. That is good. But sometimes life tastes bitter, and we are tired. Where can we quench our spiritual thirst? We are living here as it were in an oasis. And collect what we need for the journey further on.

- **Lectio: Exodus 15: 22-27**

22 Then Moses led Israel forward from the Red Sea, and they marched out to the desert of Shur. After travelling for three days through the desert without finding water,

23 they arrived at Marah, where they could not drink the water, because it was too bitter. Hence this place was called Marah.

24 As the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

25 he appealed to the LORD, who pointed out to him a certain piece of wood. When he threw this into the water, the water became fresh. It was here that the LORD, in making rules and regulations for them, put them to the test.

26 "If you really listen to the voice of the LORD, your God," he told them, "and do what is right in his eyes: if you heed his commandments and keep all his precepts, I will not afflict you with any of the diseases with which I afflicted the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

- **Meditatio**

The text we read this time, reports on part of the desert journey undertaken by the people of Israel. They have recently left Egypt. The crossing of the Red Sea has just taken place. They are entering the desert. This desert becomes in the Book of Exodus the place where the people are tested. The central question is the one of trust. Do the Israelites dare to place their trust in God under all circumstances? By doing so the desert becomes the setting where a human being may become pure. And this indeed especially regarding the following question: what, as a human being, can you truly trust? And in whom do you place your trust? This is indeed the most probing question for each and every human. It is also the religious question par excellence: what or who gives you something to hold on to? Further on in the Bible, the desert becomes a model place. The example par excellence for Christians is Jesus' stay in the desert. He too is being tested there. In the desert the people of Israel are tested in a number of ways regarding their trust in God. The first test is the one of the water. The people are thirsty. How do you get water in the desert? Without water life is impossible. The second temptation is about bread. How does one get bread out there in the desert? There is no life without food. How do you sustain your life? God gives them the manna. After this temptation there is yet another temptation regarding water. It is evident that this journey from its very beginning deals with the basic needs of every human being: water and food. In our story the people arrive at an oasis. But the water turns out to be bitter. The people are at their wits end. Further on in the desert story other temptations follow. The reactions of the people become more and more violent. This ultimately grows out into a desperate demand. Somewhere else they blame Moses for leading them into the desert to die there.

The piece of wood that God points out to Moses, may look like a physical science problem. However, due to the verb 'to point out', a different meaning comes to the fore. In what follows now, it

becomes clear that the wood is an image of God's directions. The direction the Lord provides in laws and rules, form the piece of wood which can take the bitterness out of life. Thus there is a relationship between water and wood, and the Law which the Lord provides. The title God has here resembles the one of a medical doctor. God cures the water, and in that way also the people. And the medicine which He provides is the Torah (the Law).

Bitterness also makes a link with the preceding story: the exodus from Egypt. The laws which were enforced on the people in Egypt were bitter and harsh. They made the people become slaves. The laws and rules which God provides give direction; they are sweet and point the way to the country where life is agreeable.

And that becomes a true reality. The rules and laws given by God lead the people toward Elim. This is a place with twelve springs and seventy date palms. The number twelve refers to the twelve tribes which make up the people of Israel. The number seventy refers to the number of people with whom Jacob had left for Egypt. Thus there is now a spot where the people may enjoy the goodness of life. At this place there is ample water and food for all. However, this is just an intermediate station. The name Elim refers to oak trees. And thus the name itself points to the spot where Abraham lived near Hebron, where he was buried after his death. Also this reference points out where a faithful person must search for his aim. At Elim a faithful person should seek out his goal. At Elim a faithful person may have confidence that God will feed him. He may be confident that he is called as Abraham was. In and through God, he may trust that he will find the spring that offers living water. There is yet another dimension. The Church Fathers saw Elim as image for a gate. Elim was a gate the faithful had to go through in order to find the road to the good life. Thanks to Elim, we may together go on our way, on our way as Ambassadors, and on our way to the World Youth Days.

- **Contemplatio**

After each number there will be a short period of silence; finally there will be a silence of 10 minutes, ending with instrumental music.

1. An important and vital question is: who or what does give you as a human being grip on life?
2. When things go against us in life, we do complain. Which complaint is easily on the tip of your tongue?
3. Elim is an oasis. How do you picture your (spiritual) oasis? To which oases do you prefer to go?
4. Elim is a gate leading to a life with God. At which moments in the course of your life did you pass a gate which was decisive for the way you are currently going? What do these gates look like?

- **Collatio (sharing)**

1. What did this meditation do to you?
2. What are you able to share with the others regarding having a foothold in life?
3. What do you complain about? And which complaints are you able to share with others?
4. To which oasis do you go to find new sources for your life?

- **Oratio (praying)**

Which prayer do you think of in connection with (the discussion on) water, law and rules, resourcing, living in an oasis?

- **Creatio (creative processing)**



One of today's questions was: who or what gives you a hold on life? This afternoon we are going to make an imprint of our own hand, and then we are going to write or draw something in that space, or perhaps paste something in it. What we are looking for is a symbol that gives you a grip on life; something you always 'like to have handy'; a symbol fitting your oasis...

Materials: vaseline, plaster bandage, water, fine sandpaper, paint, anything else you can find; during a walk outside the plaster can dry.