

WHITEWASHED WALLS

By Hannah Nesher

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The kids and I took on the daunting task of giving the walls in our home a fresh coat of white paint in preparation for Passover. Even though we got paint all over ourselves (and other places that paint doesn't belong), I must admit that it looks great! So clean..so fresh...so pure. No more looking at the ugly, dirty hand prints and black smudges on the walls that stubbornly refused to be removed with even the strongest of cleansers.

No one looking at my nice clean walls now could even guess at the filth that hides secretly underneath the thin veneer of whitewash. It got me thinking about myself – and people in general – how we can hide the darkness in our hearts and souls beneath the masks we wear in public. If we dress nicely and put on a big smile and apply enough makeup (women only ☺), probably not too many people could see the sin and brokenness we are trying desperately to cover up.

Lately, our Torah studies leading up to Passover have been dealing with being cleansed from defilement and what it means to be truly holy. Yeshua addressed this issue when dealing with the Scribes and Pharisees of his day, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”** (Matthew 23:28)

This scripture came to my mind so strongly yesterday as I needed to do some shopping in a religious area of Israel. The stores and streets were full of Orthodox Jewish men, all wearing the typical black hats, long sidecurls (peyote) and long black overcoats. The outside looks so holy and righteous (I don't know if I would go so far as to say 'beautiful' ☺), but what is inside?

Only God knows what lies hidden in each of our hearts. Yeshua said to **beware the leaven (chametz) of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**¹ Hypocrites put on a show of righteousness while all the while hiding sinful thoughts and behaviors. Yeshua warned us that one day



¹ Luke 12:1

everything will be fully exposed ; everything hidden will be revealed. The Word calls sin ‘chametz’ (leaven), warning us to get rid of it since a little leaven will leaven the whole lump. ²

That is why the custom of ‘B’dikat Chametz’ (Checking for Leaven) is so beautiful. Each year, on the evening before Passover, the head of the household will lead his children around the house with the lights turned out, holding only a candle and a feather. Together, they shine the tiny flame of the lit candle into every corner; every nook and cranny of the home, seeking out the bits of leavened bread that usually the mother has pre-hidden for them to find. (Moms – take my advice and COUNT how many pieces you hide to make sure that you’ve actually found them all. ☺)

When they find a crumb, the children exclaim, “We found one! We found one!” And the father (or head) sweeps the chametz (leaven) away with his feather into a dustpan. After collecting all the chametz, the pieces are then taken outside to be disposed of before Passover begins. The chametz is not just thrown away in the garbage but burned in fire! All over Israel you can see small fires in people’s yards and fields – chametz burning into oblivion. Halleluyah!

The symbolism is clear. It is the light of God which is the lamp of the Lord which searches the heart – seeking for sins hiding secretly in the darkness. It is the light of God which reveals those things hidden in the darkness. The feather represents the wings of the dove – the Holy Spirit – which sweeps it all away. For it is not by might, nor by power that we may be cleansed of our sins, but only through

His Spirit. And finally, this ‘chametz’ – these sins – once they have been confessed and repented of, are not just removed but burned – for our God is a consuming fire!

Lately, I’ve been pondering this whole issue of chametz – what exactly is God trying to cleanse out of me this year? As I seek God I become more convinced than ever that He is not trying to show us what ‘wicked sinners’ we are, but only bringing these things to the surface that are already within us – so that we may be delivered, healed and set free.

If lately we have been dismayed to see some of the garbage that is coming out of our heart and mouth, (the rage, the bitterness, that ‘mean-streak’....) this is not cause to feel condemned but rather to rejoice in the sense of knowing that God is with us and is faithfully working in our lives to mold us into His image. In other words, as we approach Passover, God is just ‘cleaning house’. ☺



² See Passover articles, Cleansing the Chametz and Beware the Leaven www.voiceforisrael.net

DO NOT FEAR

Issues that God seems to be putting His Holy finger on in my life at this time, are the bondages of fear, worry and anxiety. God says 365 times in His word, “Do not fear” That is one for every day of the year! Therefore each day, we can wake up and hear God say, “Good morning my child. *Do not fear, for I am with you. Be strong and of good courage today. For I have not given you a spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind.*”

The stereotypical Jewish mother tends to worry and be anxious about many things, and I think I have inherited this tendency – the ‘Oye vey’ syndrome. But God doesn’t want us to be perpetually worried and anxious about everything like non-believers who don’t know the faithfulness of God. He wants us to trust in Him and live by faith. We will either live by faith or, simply by default, be controlled by fear. God has never intended for His children to surrender control of their lives to fear.

I just read a quote about this issue, written by Dr. E. Stanley Jones³, that sums it up so beautifully, I would love to share it with you.

I see that I am inwardly fashioned for faith and not for fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is oil...In anxiety and worry my being is gasping for breath – these are not my native air.

But in faith and confidence I breathe freely – these are my native air...we are inwardly constructed, in nerve and tissue, and brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality.”

I love that – worry is sand in the machinery of life – faith is oil....

BE YE TRANSFORMED

The question remains – how do we change? If we have been living with worry, anxiety and fear, how may we be changed into a faith-filled, strong and courageous child of God? I believe the key lies in the Scripture, **‘Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...’**⁴

It is not some minor adjustment that we are after – but an entire transformation of our personality. We have been born again spiritually but we need a mental and emotional born again experience as well. We need a complete transformation in how we think - about ourselves, about God, and about life.

The simple truth is that in order to change our lives, we need to change our thinking. The Word of God tells us to think about the good things – whatever is beautiful, whatever is good, true, pure, lovely, praise-worthy and of good report. (Phil. 4:8)

³ Robert H. Schuller, Success is Never Ending, Failure is Never Final

⁴ Romans 12:2

But some of us are continually thinking of what is wrong – what is wrong with me, with them, with the world. We focus on what went wrong in our day instead of what went right. Some see roses and are joyful and thankful; others are pricked by the thorns and are therefore angry and sad.

When we focus on the negatives of life, we perpetuate a negative cycle. Some of us have a deeply rooted, pessimistic outlook on life; we are caught in a web of anxiety and fears, suspicion and doubts, criticism and judgments. It is this weed that God wants to yank out by its roots from our life, rather than just chopping off the rotten fruit over and over again.

I have found that I can make a change in my life, even a drastic change – and yet the same issues just re-appear in another form. I can move to a different location – but there I am! I can escape an abusive relationship (which is good); only to find that I am now in relationships with other people who do not treat me with respect or kindness.

Why do these cycles keep repeating? It is because we need to deal with the root issues – the lack of healthy boundaries, the feelings and thoughts of unworthiness that cause us to tolerate unacceptable behavior. But the good news is that change is possible. We can be transformed by renewing our minds in the Truth of God's Word. By feeding our mind and soul with the nourishment of encouragement and faith we can resist the temptation to give in to fear; and can become a mentally and emotionally 'born again' person – full of faith and confidence in our God who is faithful and good and true.

This Passover, may we allow our Deliverer, Redeemer and Savior, God's servant, Yeshua, to set us free from slavery in Egypt – the land of fear, anxiety and worry – and lead us into our 'Promised Land' of faith, peace, love, and hope!

May we cooperate with the Holy Spirit by renewing our minds with the Word of God and by using discipline to keep our mind (and mouth!) focused on whatever is good, true, pure, lovely and of good report; and may we be transformed – from glory to glory. In Yeshua's name. Amen.

*Happy Passover to all our chaverim (friends) in the nations!
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supporting our family and ministry here in Israel.*

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