

THANKGIVINGS DAY. 23.11.13

Lody B. van de Kamp:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart’. The Talmud explains this verse in Deuteronomium ‘with your entire heart.

‘Keshem Shemewareech al haTova, kach mewareech al ha-ra’, Just as one says a blessing for the good, one says a blessing for the bad.

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These words from the Talmudic sages seem so simple. When we are granted the good things in life, we thank the Almighty. Good health, prosperity, a stable life. Everything to be grateful for and worthwhile to thank Him.

But then mishaps might occur. Losing a job, health problems, and the children.

We do know, everything comes from above. But to be grateful for problems? To thank Him? Is that realistic.

Yes, there are situations where this is very realistic.

It is May 2011. During the past few months, at several spots in the city of Amsterdam Jewish youngsters have been harassed. Sometimes they are verbally abused, occasionally yarmulkes are taken away. Another time children are actually

threatened. The majority of these incidents are caused by Islamic youngsters with a Moroccan or Turkish background.

In fact in Holland, there lives a large Muslim community from those countries whose parents and grandparents came to Holland during the seventies and the eighties of the last century¹. The Dutch Jewish broadcasting company decides to show once and for all the public what it means to be a Jew in Holland. To show the once 'so called' Dutch tolerant society what it means to live as a Jew in our country.

Several days later two pupils of the orthodox Jewish school and myself are walking through Amsterdam neighborhoods adorned with secret camera's. At the street corner right

¹ The total Muslim population in a city of Amsterdam is 14 %. This means a total population of 790.000 approx. 110.000

opposite of a large market a young boy raises his right hand

“Jews, Heil Hitler”!

The film images do their job. The city council is disgusted.

The political parties demand an explanation of the Minister

of Justice. The Public prosecutor starts his investigations .

Time goes by. The political parties are once again occupied

with other matters. The city council is busy with the drugs

problems of the city and the investigation through the offices

of the Public Prosecutor drags on and on.

Then, on a Sunday morning, Said Bensalem, a Muslim youth

worker hangs on the phone. ‘Please, rabbi, would you want

to sit down with this boy who greeted you in such a repulsive

manor. Your action with the secret camera’s damages the

relationship between our communities”. We sat down, we spoke, and we tried to understand each other.

And a week later? The youngster walks with me through the secret annex of the Anne Frank House. He listens intensely to the story of the Jewish community during world war two. He holds his breath while I tell the story of my parents and my grandparents. Then we stand still, in front of the screen. The old lady, Miep Gies, one of the very brave aids of the family Frank during the time in hiding, tells her story how she, as a young girl, sustained the family in hiding with food, clothing and everything else. My Muslim was watching the film. He didn't move on. He watched it again. “Rabbi, when I was standing in the street, stretching out my hand, I thought I was

cool. Now, when I stand in front of this lady, now I realize what is cool". This very same person, this Muslim, this member of the Moroccan community in Holland serves as a role model to other children, at school at the community centers.

That nasty incident was indeed a blessing in disguise. Nothing to be grateful for. Not, until I received that phone call from Said. "Rabbi, don't you think we should sit and talk"? Then I realized how something which initially bad can be linked to the good. Indeed, something to be very thankful for. Bad, until I was standing there with that young Muslim who told me what is indeed cool.....

Said and me carried on with our friendship. Yes, I would like to share with you much more of our story. But it is a shared story from Said and me. Until here I presented my share.

From here, shortly my dear brother Said will present it further.

Let me conclude.

`Keshem Shemewareech al haTova, kach mewareech al ha-ra',

“ Just as one says a blessing for the good, one says a blessing for the bad”.

May we all, here present, and everybody who celebrate this Thanksgiving Day elsewhere, our Dutch nation, and the American People be blessed in such way that we can feel

Thankful for the good things, for our food, for our health, for our lives, for our prosperity.

But also may we be blessed to be able to recognize in every deed the Almighty in Heaven performs for us that his hand is always for the good. Just as that simple phone call from Said made everything good. AMEN

Said Benselam:

I was very upset. In our community we work so hard to establish a good relationship with the other communities. We tell our boys and our girls again and again to behave

correctly. We tell them to go to school, to obtain their diploma's, to participate in the society.

And then one day, this rabbi turns up and shows our city the bad behavior of one of our boys. One single boy behaves bad towards our Jewish neighbors and puts to shame the entire Muslim community.

But then everything changed. The rabbi answered my call and we sat together. Lody and me organized our first meeting between three generations Muslims and Jews in our city.

Muslims and Jews sat together, talked to each other and listened to each other. They ate Kosher and the eat Halal.

Muslim youngsters, boys and girls, worked together, five weeks long, together with Jewish Youth to restore a, ancient

Jewish cemetery, here in Amsterdam. My being upset made way for thankfulness.

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Recent weeks Lody and me travelled together to the city of Arnhem. Four young Turkish boys said terrible things about

the Jews. We talked to them, we took them together to the Anne Frank house here in Amsterdam. The friendship between Lody and me has shown to be an example for those boys. It made them rethink and act entirely different towards their Jewish Neighbors .

This is something to be very thankful for.

A few month ago Lody and me spend a few days in your beautiful capitol Washington. This visit was by invitation of the Public Prosecutor of Holland. In the Capitol building we were able to share our story with the American People. A story of being Thankful for what we are able to accomplish between our two communities here in Holland. Being

thankful that we have the opportunity to share our goal in life with the American nation.

During that visit the two of us went to one very special place.

The Holocaust Museum. Just imagine, my dear friends, a Jew and a Muslim, a Rabbi and me the Moroccan, two close

friends, who are standing in front of that cattle car. A train

wagon in where Jews were taken to the death camps. Lody

and me were standing there in silence. Thinking of our home

town. Thinking of our opportunities. Thinking of what we

were able to achieve. Completely the opposite of the purpose

of this cattle car. A Muslim and a Jew, working together in

this great city of Amsterdam. Yes, I do know what

Thanksgiving day means.

