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Living torch



Ministério Seara Ágape
Estudo Bíblico Evangélico

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Thanks to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who teach us the right ways, revealing His truths and giving us the perseverance to believe in His promises, even when many try to move us away from them.

This book is dedicated to those who know how it's necessary to have strength to endure all oppositions to the true love, and the value of the perseverance and the faith to achieve a goal.

“You will be a living torch in my hands and my word in your mouth will heal and liberate many. When you prophesy, the spiritual world will hear my voice, not yours, and it will come out of your lips as fire to burn the cedars of Lebanon and destroy the strongholds of the enemy. I am who I am.”

Introduction

Who has ever heard the call to follow Jesus? What did you feel by having the first encounter with Him and begin to have Him as your Lord? Surely, you felt the flame of the ‘first love’ and the wish to do everything to please Him, did you not? You began to seek Him, you started having personal revelations and promises for your life; where you went everyone knew that you had something different, which was the presence of the Spirit of God with you. Then time passed and you began to realize that the Christian walk was not as easy as many said; the trials came, and suddenly, a crossroads appeared in front of you. The initial call deepened and you were faced with a choice: to continue to follow Jesus, even without knowing exactly where to go, or stop there, since the way had no turning back. If you went ahead, you will understand this allegory; if you stopped, you will also understand why everything has cooled from night to day in your life.

Do you remember what happened to Moses when he was faced with the burning bush in the desert? First, he came closer, having his curiosity sharpened to see what it was about; then he heard the Lord calling him and saying, “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” The bible says that Moses hid his face in fear of looking to the Lord and then He began to give him the revelation of why He was calling him. That’s when He gave Moses the name by which He would be known among His people: *YHWH; the LORD; I AM WHO I AM; I AM*. Therefore, we can imagine that the flame represented the divine presence, the holiness and the revelation. Furthermore, it brought a promise; it revived the faith of Moses and gave him the perseverance to carry out his mission.

Let’s return to us again. The Lord called us, we felt His presence with us, His holiness, we received a revelation and we even began to believe in the promise given to us, but then the faith died, the perseverance ended, and the fire was quenched. Am I right? Why? This is a book for those who once heard the calling of God, dared to dream, but suddenly were faced with so big difficulties that they had not strength to continue and resist. That’s because they gave heed to the opinions of those who know nothing of God and live only for the pleasures of the flesh, besides, they dare to call themselves ‘spiritual persons’ without being so, and decide to give a guess where they have no divine license, ending up for undermining the project of the weakest in the faith, steal their dreams and even lead them astray. They place the barriers of unbelief and impossibility, until making them to give up everything by feeling themselves different and wrong.

However, this allegory goes further, warning the people of God for His justice that is about to come and to keep their lamps burning to the “*meeting with the bridegroom*.” It is also an exhortation for those who are called by His name to take on a spiritual position.

Let’s use as characters some trees well known in the bible for their nutritional value and for the meaning that they have for the people of the Old Covenant. They typify the characteristics of human personality and can be used in the right way or not, depending on the free will of those who have them; hence, the importance of the Holy Spirit directing our lives. He does not change our personality [*in psychology: an organization comprised of all the characteristics of intellectual knowledge, affection, desire and physical of a person; in other words, his individuality often fitted into one of the following types: sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic*], but He transforms our character [*set of good or bad qualities of an individual within any of the above groups*].

Although today's science no longer wants to use these names, given in Antiquity by Hippocrates (460–370 BC), human temperament continues to fit these characteristics. The protagonist of the story is a small 'bush' called "*Living Torch*", which once had an encounter with the Lord and dreamed with His fire burning in the hearts of those who would like to follow the path of love and holiness too. She found much opposition on the part of those who surrounded her, and her fire went out, saddening and discouraging her. That's when the Lord heard her voice from heaven and did justice in relation to her cause, rekindling the flame that once had been lit. Through her, many might know faith, perseverance and the joy to see fulfilled the promise of God in those who leave aside the flesh to live in the Spirit. Unfortunately, He has another destiny in store for those who decide to follow the paths of wickedness.

May God bless you, and revive in you His holy flames.

Tânia Cristina

Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995).
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to facilitate the readers' understanding).
- The word for *bush* in Hebrew is *Sneh* (the same root as the name '*Sinai*'), which literally means '*bush*', '*shrub*' or '*thorn bush*'. The plant found in Sinai, where God spoke to Moses is the *Seneh*, also known as *Shittim* (*Jl 3: 18*) and refers to *Acacia nilotica* (or *Vachellia nilotica*), a thorny plant of the *Fabaceae* family, genus *Acacia*. When parasitized by the plant *Loranthus acaciae*, whose reddish fruit and flowers gives from afar the impression of flames on the bush, it is called '*burning*'. All the furniture of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon (including the Ark of the Covenant) was built with acacia wood (*Acacia nilotica*), as indicated by divine revelation to Moses. The phenomenon witnessed by Moses was, for sure, something supernatural and not an effect of parasitism of *Acacia nilotica* by *Loranthus acaciae*. In our book, we will use another plant called *Euonymus alatus*, which is popularly called '*burning bush*' because of the red color of its leaves in the autumn, but it does not belong to the same botanical class or family or species of acacia, although it is also a thorny bush. Therefore, we'll see the mockery of the other characters on the uselessness of its wood and on one of its ancestors having been the instrument of God to speak to Moses. In English, we use the word 'bush' in the bible as a translation for the Hebrew '*Sneh*', designating only '*shrub*' or '*thorny plant*'; and '*burning bush*', in reference to the event witnessed by Moses. Later, the term '*burning bush*' was given to *Euonymus alatus*.
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Knowing the Garden 1



Who were those who were coming? The cedar of Lebanon, as leader of the group was interested in knowing; in fact, he needed to have a private conversation with the teacher of landscaping who had planned that ‘experimental ornamental garden.’ He was seeing a lot of things wrong, but could not say anything. Now, everything was just finished! He thought, *“This is what happens by putting inexperienced students to make a decent garden! The poor plants become mere guinea pigs.”* Furthermore, what most irritated him was to see that small and dry burning bush just in the middle of the garden when he, with all his strength and magnificence had been planted in the ‘outskirts’. This was too much for him! *“Ah! They are the trainees of the botany course who came to take a look at the work of their colleagues.”* The professor said,

“Attention, folks! You are now entering an experimental garden designed by the students of landscaping. You may notice that many trees here are not native, but we are doing an experiment to see how they behave outside their natural habitat. Please do not touch the seedlings or damage the plants. Let’s start with the scientific information about each one. Take note, please.”



He continued, “The first we’ll talk about is the vine. As you know, there are several meanings to *vine*, in the bible. The vine is a symbol of prosperity and peace, a symbol of divine favor; it is also a symbol of the chosen people who were taken out of Egypt and planted in a land promised by God. It also means the union of Christ and His Church, as He refers in John 15: 5, saying that He is the true vine and we are the branches. It is associated both with the joy and to wrath. The vine (*Vitis vinifera*) has always been part of the diet of Israel, for supplying the need of the body with iron and manganese, as well as muscle relaxants, antioxidants and the melatonin, which helps in sleep. It is a woody climbing plant, cultivated worldwide for its delicious fruit, the grapes, and has oval leaves, lobed and quite worked by nature, tiny flowers grouped in clusters, and berries rich in sugars, the reason because they ferment easily, producing the wine. Behold, here is a sprout.



“The term ‘new wine’ or ‘sweet wine’ (*Hebrew, tîrôsh*) represents the first juice that flows before and soon after the winepress being trodden. After the grapes having been trodden, the juice flowed to a vat or bowl. This juice they called ‘new wine’ – and the Jews drank it in this stage of fermentation (before it ends). The fermentation process begins six hours after the maceration, while the juice is still in the vats. Slowly, the fermentation goes on for a period of several months. The unfermented wine (the ‘new wine’) could not be available several months after of the grape harvest (which occurs in the month of Tammuz, corresponding to June-July). Other words used in the bible for fermented wine are: *yayin* (*translated as ‘wine’*) and *shekhâr* (*‘strong drink’*).



“That tree there in the right corner of the garden is an apple tree, symbol of wisdom. It’s a tree that provides a good shade, the fruit is sweet, and the scent, much appreciated in the East (*Song of songs 2: 3; Song of songs 7: 8*) where the apple (*Hebrew, tappūah*), scientific name *Purus malus* or *Malus silvestris*, was well known and cultivated in Ancient times, most probably by the Arabs than in Palestine due to climatic conditions. Therefore, the bride, described in *Solomon’s Song of Songs*, wants to stay under the apple tree, receiving the wisdom of the lover and resting on His shadow, being protected by His cloak of love. Eating His wisdom (fruit of the apple tree) is good and does good to her; it is a true feast. So, she asks Him to take her to the banquet hall, because when we are in communion with the Lord at His table, He divides with us His power and His whole being, everything He has.



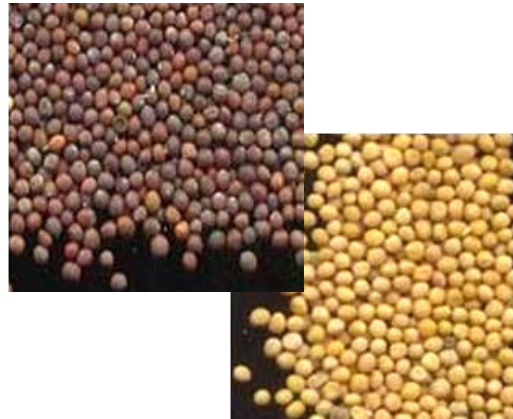
“Beside it is the palm tree, in Hebrew *tāmār* (date palm: *Phoenix dactylifera*) which symbolizes victory and exultation (*Psalm 92: 12; John 12: 13*), upright posture, grace and elegance. It is a tall and slender tree, without branches, with a tuft of leaves of 6.56 to 9.84 feet long, frequent in Palestine. This is what the Lord expects of His Church: behaving elegantly with strength, victory and joy for His salvation and the power He delegated to it. The tree is generally used for ornamental purposes, as it was in the temple of Solomon. The so-called ‘*Royal Palm*’ belongs to the same species and receives the name *Oreodoxa oleracea* and was planted by Don John VI (1767-1826) at the Botanical Garden of Rio de Janeiro.



“Let’s move now to the wheat field. There is something interesting with wheat. It is a very important cereal for feeding humanity. It produces a more delicious bread and better than that produced by any other cereal. It is a very important part of the diet of the children of Israel. Because of its importance as food, it appears in the Scriptures as a symbol of goodness and provision of God. It was used as a grain offering in worship at the temple. The flour mixed with olive oil gave origin to the bread. Another interesting point is that one grain gives rise to many new ears of wheat, demonstrating spiritual fructification. The same way the original grain is consumed, Jesus sets the example (*Jn. 12: 24*: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”) that the spiritual fructification has its origin in the *death of the self*. The wheat (belonging to the botanical genus *triticum*) in the NT is symbolic of God’s children, in contrast to the children of the evil one (*Matt. 13: 38* – ‘weeds’ or ‘darnel’). The darnel, mentioned by Jesus in the New Testament and whose scientific name is *Lolium temulentum*, in its early stage of development looks like the wheat; it is beaten by children and women to be separated from the stem and is given to chickens as food.



“Beside the wheat plantation, we can see the plantation of mustard. It can grow to a height of seventeen feet, but usually does not exceed four feet. It’s important to stress that there are two types of seeds: the black mustard (*Sinapis nigra*) and white one (*Sinapis alba*), which are very small, and the examples that Jesus gave in His parables probably refer to *S. alba*. We can say that it is a symbol of faith.



“Here, right behind them, is the myrtle, a small shrub (*Myrtus communis*) of Mediterranean origin, cultivated to make hedges and is characterized by tiny leaves, compact and fragrant. The flowers are white and fragrant and were used as perfumes. Its name in Hebrew is *h^adas*, and *Hadassah* (Hebrew name of *Esther*) is derived from it. The shrub reaches thirty-three feet tall.

“Now come. Let’s go back to the center of the garden and then we’ll study the trees on the other side.”

“Professor, what is the name of this one in the middle of the garden?”



“This is the famous *Euonymus alatus*, also known as *burning bush*. It is a shrub whose branches and trunk are thorny, of deciduous character, that is, the leaves fall in the winter. That’s why it is thus, seeming dry and lifeless. There are many varieties of *Euonymus*. In this species the leaves are oval and pointed, initially dark green in the summer, reaching the reddish color as the fire in the autumn season and remain exuberant for several weeks.



“The more mature, the more it spreads, that is, its branches extend further, reaching a height of 9.8 to 16.5 feet. The insignificant yellowish-white flowers from April to June are followed by reddish-orange and attractive seeds. To give shape to the bush, it is necessary the pruning of the young branches. The burning bush needs well-drained soil (it must have outflow for the water, so that the plant does not become soggy). The origin of species is eastern Asia (China, Japan, and Korea). It is usually used as an ornamental plant, but is also found in forests, meadows and poorer soils along the seacoast of the USA. It represents the divine presence, the holiness and the revelation.



“This one you all know; it is the olive tree (*Olea europaea*). The word in Hebrew is *zayit* and, in Greek, *elaia*. It’s symbol of beauty, strength, blessing, prosperity, friendship, fructification and peace. Kings and priests were anointed with olive oil; therefore, olive tree also represents divine sovereignty and strength. It can grow up to twenty-three feet high, has twisted trunk and numerous branches. Its development is slow, reaching even centuries old.



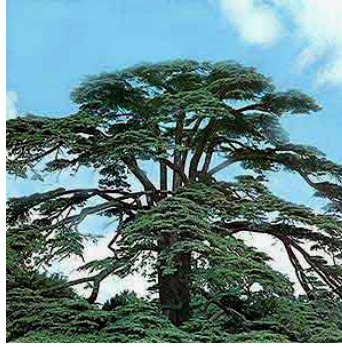
“The olives ripen in early autumn, but are harvested in late November (almost close to winter in Israel). In Ancient times, a shallow cistern was carved in stone and then the olives were crushed with a great millstone, like this one you see here. The fruit of the olive tree in its raw state is small and worthless; to become productive, the olive tree needs to be grafted (a branch of wild bush into a good olive tree), so the apostle Paul says we are branches of wild olive grafted in cultivated olive tree (*Romans 11: 11-24*).



“We came to the pines (*Hebrew, ’oren*) that in many biblical versions have their word translated as *cypress* or *cedar*. Our version is also translated as *cypress*, a species that in Hebrew is called *b’êrôsh*, *b’êrôthim*. The cypress and pine, botanically speaking, belong to the genus *Pinus* (*P. brutia* and *P. halepensis*). They are conifers perennially green, native to the hills of Palestine and Lebanon. The cypress (*Isa. 41: 19; Isa. 55: 13*) is a symbol of fertility. It is also an excellent wood for construction. Solomon, for example, built the temple not only with cedar, but with olivewood and cypress wood (*1 Kin. 6: 31-36*). Therefore, it also symbolizes grandiosity, royalty and reverence to God.



“This is the fig tree: Fig (*Hebrew, t’ênâ; Greek, sykon*), fig tree (*Greek, Sykê; Hebrew, pagh, Song 2: 13*), also used the Greek word *olynthoi* for green figs or early figs – *Rev. 6: 13*. The botanical name is *Ficus carica*. The tree can grow up to thirty-nine feet and can flourish even in stony soil. Generally, the fruit appear before leaves. The fig is associated with God’s promises about prosperity and prophetic warnings (*Jer. 5: 17; Hos. 2: 12; Hab. 3: 17*). Planted along with the vine (*Lk. 13: 6*), it symbolizes perpetual well-being and prosperity. Its productivity was a sign of national peace and divine favor. The bible describes three types of figs: a) late figs or autumn figs (*Jer. 8: 13; Jer. 29: 17*), from August until the winter; b) Those who had not time to mature stayed in the branches and are small (winter – *Mk. 11: 13; Matt. 21: 19*), c) first-ripe figs (summer, from June onward – *Isa. 28: 4; Jer. 24: 2; Hos. 9: 10; Mic. 7: 1; Nah. 3: 12*). Thus, healthy fig trees produce figs ten months a year.



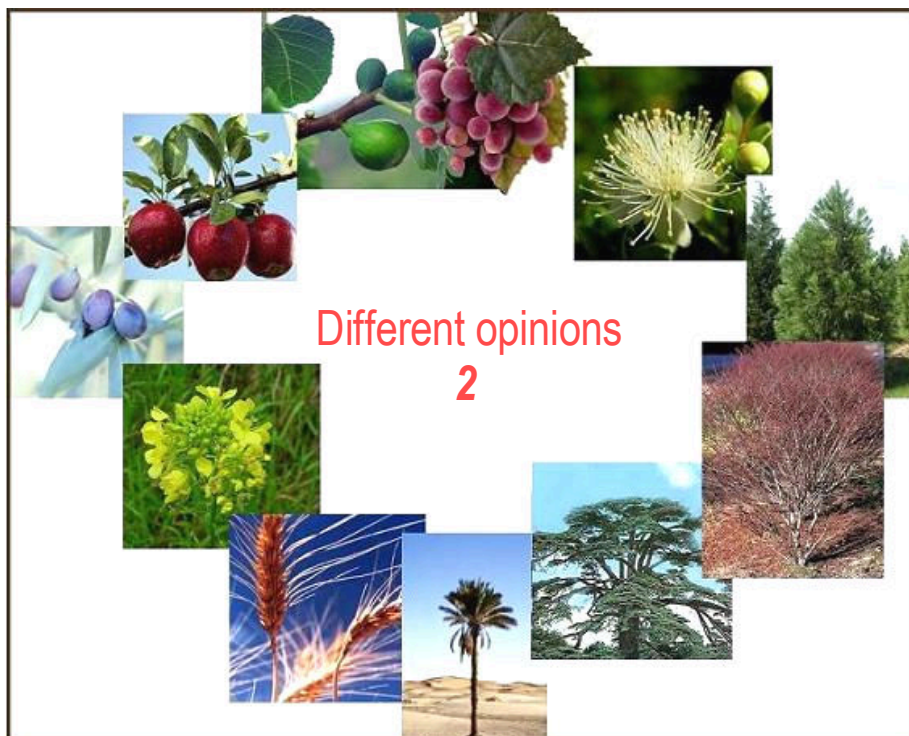
“We finish our explanation with the cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*). It is a majestic conifer of durable wood; so David built his house with cedar, and Solomon, the temple, as well as the second temple of Ezra was also reconstructed with this wood. The cedar can reach one hundred and thirty-one feet high and the ancient writers used it as a symbol of the stature of a man (*Ezek. 31: 3; Am 2: 9*), also of strength, majesty and power (*Song 3: 9*), pride, hardness, inflexibility (*Ps. 29: 5*). In *Song 4: 8; Song 4: 11; Song 4: 15*, the lover mentions Lebanon. Lebanon is famous because of its dense forest. The abundant rainfall from November to March and the mountains of limestone give rise to many wellsprings and streams. To the south of the mountains there are cultivation of gardens, olive groves, vineyards and orchards of fruit (mulberries, figs, apples, apricots, walnuts) and small fields of wheat. The forest vegetation is of myrtle, conifers and huge cedars; therefore, Lebanon is a symbol of fertility and of taking benefit and enjoyment of life and of a plantation, of taking advantage of the fruit. The fragrance of the bride dresses presents itself to the lover as the smell of the forests and of the orchard’s fruit. Symbolically, our spiritual garments must show the scent of the cedars and the spices of Lebanon; they must show the joy, the scent of Jesus and God’s prosperity wherever we go.”

“How beautiful, teacher! I hope that the species adapt and grow. Perhaps, if they bear healthy and good fruit, we can make a market of natural fruit, without using agrochemical products, don’t you think?”

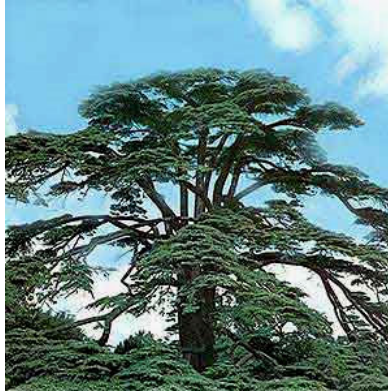
“Excellent idea, but first let’s see what happens. We are trying to make them feel as comfortable as possible, without human interference, as if only nature took care of them. The sun will do its part as well as the clouds, the insects and birds. See you soon, folks!”

The cedar thought, “*They’d better leave soon; moreover, what most absurd idea was this of leaving me for the end of everything! Precisely I, the most important of all, the cedar of whose wood have been already made palaces and thrones of kings!*”

They went away, but one of them dropped a cigarette butt almost extinguished as he passed through the burning bush. No one noticed, only she. What would happen?



The cedar spoke, “Well, folks! Now that these intruders are gone, what about we talk a bit on what we heard? After all, I the cedar of Lebanon, as head of this group, I was thinking about certain things concerning this ‘congregation’ that humans decided to organize.”



“Hey, hey! Who appointed you chief over us? We pine trees and cypress are of the same family, do you remember? We are as majestic as you; after all, our ancestors also participated in the life of the great kings of History.”



The cedar objected, “Now! Why this power struggle? Everyone heard what the professor said: the cedars reach a height of one hundred and thirty-one feet and symbolize the stature of a man. Since it is so, the greatest one commands and that’s it!”

It was the time for the olive tree to speak, “Umm! What haughtiness! Don’t you remember that it was my fruit that anointed the kings? I also have a share of royalty and blessing of God among this community. Suffering has a price. Do you think it’s easy to see my ‘children’ crushed by a millstone, and then, these mere human to be kings? Look at this fruit that is being born here. Isn’t it beautiful? It was born anointed. Look at its face: plump, fragrant and tender—”



“What’s up, olive tree?! Did you not hear the explanation correctly? I the fig tree, I am the tree that has the most productivity and fertility. I bear children for ten months a year. Look at these of summer that are being born; don’t you want to take a bite? They are so cute! So peaceful, so prosperous, so full of divine favor! Moreover, they already were born with prophetic gift. Don’t speak ill of them, please.”



The apple tree protested, “Wait a minute, all of you. Without my wisdom, you do not go far in your reign. You say you are prosperous, blessed and full of favor and anointing of God, full of works to show others, but don’t you remember that the richest of kings was also the wisest? I’m sure that since he was little he was fed my fruit. So you may consult me about any subject. I know everything.”



The cedar commented, “Beware, apple tree! You know so much that one of your ancestors beguiled an unsuspecting woman; then the unexpected happened and these poor humans live today looking for, I don’t know what.”

She answered, “Now! Shut up. I don’t like that people speak ill of my family.”



The ear of wheat said, “May I speak a little bit? You are bragging so much about fertility, prosperity, blessing and divine favor, but is lacking a bit of humility and surrender to the Creator, isn’t it? My children were buried alive, for an entire plantation to be born again and feed many. If someone here has something to boast about productivity, fertility and humility, this one it’s me; after all, only one son of mine creates a great offspring. What do you think?”



“That’s what I call ‘to bury the talent’ that one received, hah, hah, hah! I, the vine, I do not stay crying the dead children; as soon as they start to appear I rejoice because my offspring is truly chosen, full with the power and the divine blessing and will bring joy and gladness to many. You all boast of being part of royalty! Hah! I took part in the Last Supper. I sat face to face with the *King of kings*. How about now?”



“Yuck! Disgusting! Have you never heard that faith without works is dead? Without a humble mustard like me your faith dies. What would be of the kings and prophets if I was not part of their table? I fed them with my faith, and they did wonders, don’t you remember? Hey! There is someone here who did not speak until now. What’s wrong with you, burning bush? Don’t you have anything nice to say? If I were you, I would not save compliments to your ancestry, since one of your ancestors served as an instrument in the hands of the Creator to speak to Moses. Ah! If it happened to me! ...”



She was oblivious to all boastful comments about the great qualities and gifts that her companions said they had received. On the contrary, she was the smallest of the species there, and, moreover, it was not the autumn season. They only saw in it a bunch of dry twigs that made her feel alone, small and despised. What she wanted most at that moment was to feel the presence of God and His flame kindled powerfully in her as it was in some ancestor of the family. The little burning bush prayed that one day the Creator could give her a great gift to be multiplied, in order to bless many of her companions and even humans. Thus, the way she was, without brightness, without any attractive, not even birds or insects would approach her. And why precisely she, the most insignificant, had been planted right in the center of the garden? Have they ever imagined if the Lord visited her and filled her with His revelation and His presence? What she sought was the true holiness, not this false holiness and ‘modesty’ that her friends around used to brag so much. She longed for the simplicity and intimacy with the Creator of the Universe, not the ostentation or outward appearance. Suddenly, she

got scared. What smell was this that came from the base of her trunk? And what was this coming up through it? It was fire. Ah! That cigarette butt warmed by the sun had kindled a fire to one of her branches. What about now? She did not want to die burnt. She was still so young! This was not this fire that she sought. She tried to calm down, while the rest of the people shouted, "Fire, fire! Help! Fire!" But nobody listened to them. Humans did not understand the language of nature. Suddenly she began to realize that this was an unusual fire, it didn't burn or brought her any kind of harm. On the contrary, it warmed her, gladdened and brought her an incredible sense of life and unity with everything and everyone.

"Burning bush! Are you listening to us? Why don't you answer?"

"She seems to be in shock. That's weird! The cigarette is no longer kindled, there was no fire and only a small flame is still burning at the top of the bush. She does not seem to feel pain; on the contrary, her face is glad and it seems that she is hearing a voice that we can not hear. She is very attentive. Let's wait..."

Oh! What a joy! He heard her request. The flame said, "I'm calling you today for a great mission: to burn the same flame of love around you, in other lives. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. I pour upon you the greatest of gifts: the gift of love, without which none of the others will be able to flow properly. However, be strong and brave to overcome the trials. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. When you want to talk to me, look at the flame, and it will instruct you in what to do. Just say, 'I AM, I need you', and I'll come to you in my fire. Don't let it be quenched. You will be a living torch in my hands and my word in your mouth will heal and liberate many. When you prophesy, the spiritual world will hear my voice, not yours, and it will come out of your lips as fire to burn the cedars of Lebanon and destroy the strongholds of the enemy. It is I who destroys all pride and haughtiness. I am who I am. If you multiply the gift, the flame will spread and the prophetic word that I promised you will be fulfilled. Be strong and strive. I know it seems difficult what I gave you, but the impossible with men are possible with God. From now on, you'll be called 'Living Torch', for that's what I have appointed for you."

"Burning bush, you are listening to us? What is happening to you?"

"She had always been weird and isolated; indeed, with so many thorns, who dares to come near her?"

"Nonsense! Did you not notice that the thorns defend her? This is just to disguise her shyness and low self-worth. She can not bear fruit, her leaves remain only for a few weeks in the year and she has no attractive flowers, poor thing! What else is left to her?"

"There must be some way to get her out of this torpor. Bush, bush!"

The small burning bush finished listening to the voice of the Lord and looked at those who were screaming desperate. The small flame in her head looked like a tiny lit match head, but made her feel different. Her peace irritated them and they wondered what had happened.

The fig tree was angry, "Have you ever wondered, girl, that you could destroy everything here with all this fire? Are you crazy? Quench it immediately, before it becomes a great fire. Otherwise, it will bring you a big headache. What is up? Did you lose your tongue or you don't have more education with the elderly? Do not reject the prophetic exhortation."

The burning bush replied, “Why are you so desperate? Have you never seen a flame of fire?”

The mustard said, “Hey! Is not true that she speaks, after all?”

“Listen to me little girl! I the cedar of Lebanon, the lord of this garden, I’m asking you, what happened?”

The burning bush explained, “The Creator visited me and gave me a mission: to teach the creatures to love, and thus they’ll have the same burning torch lit inside them. This fire also comes to purify them from the works of the flesh and make them holier, as He is.”

The apple tree laughed at her, “Hah, hah, hah. This is all we needed! A small burning bush in our midst! Honey! We are not Moses; we do not need any bush. We have no mission but the one that have been given to us: to be born, to grow up, to fructify, multiply and die. What are you talking about?”

The cedar also laughed, “Hee, hee, hee! It is the most absurd thing I’ve ever heard in my life. Well! In this garden so planned and so weird, this is the only one thing we could expect.”

But the myrtle tried to calm them all, “Leave her alone. Later she returns to normal; it’s just teenager’s dream. Let’s go to sleep and leave the conversation for tomorrow. Have you noticed that it already darkened and the moon goes high in the sky? Good evening, my darling. I understand you, tomorrow everything will be okay.”

“Myrtle!”

“What?”

“Listen to ‘the voice of wisdom’ of the apple tree here. We know you very well. You have a fragrant smell, but a ‘bitter flavor’ that only you could have! ... Save the poison for later.”

The myrtle didn’t like the comment, “Look who’s talking! From whom did you inherit the poison? Besides, I’m only used in preparation of perfumes. Are you not confusing me with myrrh, which also has a bitter taste?”

The cedar shouted, “Stop arguing, I’m ordering. Good evening to everyone.”

“Yes, ‘Your Majesty!’”

The rain is coming
3



Morning came and with it, the birds, bees and the usual visitors of the garden, for they needed to work. Animals and plants lived in a state of mutual cooperation. However, on that sunny morning there was something different in all of them. They were so accustomed with the known trees and flowers that they barely paid attention to the thorny bush. Today, however, by seeing the flame of fire on her, they didn't even care what she looked like, because a feeling of love, affection, compassion and wisdom emanated from her, and then they began to approach. The insects and birds alighted on her branches, wondering, curious, what was that thing over her. Then they realized that she was not alone anymore, but the Lord was there and they wanted to hear Him. He began to speak through the small burning bush,

"Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal... I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so

that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“... Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

“...The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest...

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

“Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

“... If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

“...Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest...

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

“For many are called, but few are chosen.

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

“... Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The birds and insects that were there learned a lot from this, because in truth, though small in the eyes of all, they were who would spread these words of life, which emanated from the small burning bush. She had nothing, but at the same time had everything: a flame kindled on her and that was now bigger and stronger. Those words were food for them, however, the trees and shrubs of the garden began to feel jealous of her because, somehow, she had taken their ‘glory’; the birds no longer made nests in their branches, the hummingbirds no longer came to seek their nectar or suck the juice of their fruit. The bees had something more interesting to do, for the words were sweet as honey to them and many companions in their hives could be fed on them to receive healing. The days went by and the visitors of the garden were different every day, because they heard about the power of *I AM*, who dwelt in the burning bush. Then the malicious comments began to come,

“I think she is making it up all of this just to draw attention, since she does not have anything good to give to anyone.”

“I agree; moreover, she’s too young and already feels qualified to talk about certain things. She had no time yet to be truly prepared. It is not *God’s time* for her. You can see the following: except at the time of Moses, no burning bush was famous. History didn’t speak anymore about anyone who built anything with wood of burning bush; not even a chair for the poor was built with it, let alone a throne of king as our timber already did.”

“And have you ever heard someone say that kings were fed or perfumed with products of burning bush?”

“This is good! Really good! Great!”

“I am fragrant indeed and even inspired the name of a queen. What do you think? Hadassah! Isn’t it beautiful?”

“A wishy-washy small bush, which has no skill to occupy a position of authority, is now aiming for a leadership position!”

“That’s right. Moreover, being the first seedling to be planted in the garden. She not even had leaves or reached stature to be pruned. She lacks a leadership posture”

“Hey, gal! What business is this of thinking that you have the strength to lead, let alone to generate descendants? And what so insignificant dream is this, of making such

a flame to burn in other species? It's already written that love will grow cold in the end times. You dream too high, put your feet on the ground and live the reality of life. Love does not put food in the mouth of anyone. These beautiful words you say, actually, don't put any dream into practice; at most they give a momentary hope. And who will support you just because of your pretty talk? You don't have any fruit to show, at most one red leaves that last few weeks in winter and nothing beyond this."

"Did you call on your friend *I AM* today? Apparently not, because the flame that appeared in the first preaching decreased again. If you need a little oil to rekindle it, I can help you, hee, hee, hee."

"Certainly, we have a solid ancestry, born in cradle of kings and priests, knowledgeable of the word of the Maker. This has already been transmitted to us in other generations; we have much more experience, obviously. In fact, your new way of preaching is somewhat weird. You are trying to create a new religion, is that it? There are so many."

"Have you thought? A woman, a small burning bush, making disciples—"

"Hey, wait a minute! What are you men saying? This is discrimination. Maybe the gal doesn't have age or capacity to the thing, but it's not for being a woman that she can not preach, because if she were one of us, we would support her, for sure."

While they created a war between the sexes among the various plant species, the burning bush began to grieve and noticed that the fear and insecurity invaded her heart. Could it be that they were right? She was confused. She looked up and saw that the flame was almost over; it also seemed sad with so much hardness of heart, irreverence, hypocrisy, wickedness and perversion disguised as piety. Distorted knowledge with an air of truth; so much pride, arrogance, power struggle, strife, irony, envy and so on; everything to disguise the lack of faith and perseverance and endorse the self-indulgence and cowardice of those who can not rejoice with others who are really idealistic and warriors. They spoke of humility, but where was this humility, when they denied within themselves the deep need to be guided by God? They could hardly realize that were their own egos that prevailed, and for possessing everything and having never passed, indeed, by so many trials, needs and rejections, is that they could not identify themselves with the pain and sensitivities of the weakest. By having so many material benefits, by being so supported by their qualities and usually planted in groups, that's why they always felt strong and 'part of a community'. On the other hand, nobody had ever heard of a planting of burning bushes. Those thoughts began to cause harm to her, and looking to the sky, she noticed that all that strife brought dark clouds of darkness forecasting rain. Soon the rain came, becoming stronger, soaking the ground and, worst of all, quenching the tiny flame. It was a lot of water, and the drainage ditch that had been made around her could not drain enough; she was almost drowning. Her branches were wet and wilted. When all this would finish? The birds, her new friends, had fled, as well as the insects. They would only come back with the arrival of the sun.

A moment of sadness
4



For the small burning bush it was very sad to see her flame quenched. If she called for *I AM*, would He return? It seems that all she had lived was a dream that would never be born, and more than that, would never have a chance to grow and strengthen in fact. What would happen to her now? If she died of sadness, she would be plucked out of the garden and could no longer be a reference for those who needed to know love.

The rain stopped after twenty-four hours. Everything was silent and still gray by the clouds that had not dissipated. Gradually, a gentle wind began to blow, turning stronger until the clouds were gone and the sun shone again. The birds and insects returned to their previous relationships. Everything seemed to come back to normal for everyone, but not for *Living Torch*, who was still feeling sad and empty. Had He departed from her?

Some new birds that she had never seen before began to fly through the garden, and to her surprise, they decided to alight on her, neglecting the more exuberant and fruitful trees. It seems that their exuberance did not attract them, but the simplicity of a small and insignificant bush. The birds were colorful and showed joy, faith and hope. They began to sing and it seemed as if they were singing only for her, in order to get her out of that sadness and loneliness. A parrot that flew suddenly interrupted the singing with two words, "*persevere, persevere*" ... She never saw him again. Then, the birds resumed singing,

"Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights."

They seemed happy to sing it; however, to her everything seemed contrary. Apparently, the fields of wheat and mustard had not suffered serious damage and the trees still had fruit on their branches. Only for her there was desolation. There was still water not drained around her trunk. Fortunately, the song began to come into her heart like a balm which revived the faith in the promise of *I AM*. They stayed there with her until she fell asleep.

Surely He heard her and sent those angels to comfort her and help her to persevere. She had not noticed, but the end of the summer was coming and those trials of months by which she had been through were not in vain; she was more mature and more experienced.

A few more days followed and she felt that the sun hit her with more intensity on that day. Why? Was it a sign of *I AM* to her? Then she remembered Him and had the courage to pluck up from the deepest of her being a groan which expressed her pain; but the groan became an cry, a mixture of supplication and praise that made her feel hot and with more certainty that she was being heard,

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in

the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who are they that fear the Lord? He will teach them the way that they should choose. They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them. My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. Redeem me, O God, out of all my troubles."

The Lord hears the cry
5



Even she was startled by the poem that came out of her lips, for she knew that had been helped and could not do it alone. She felt peace inside, despite the gossip and the works of the flesh around her. She was alone with herself, the birds were gone, however, she looked different; she was not sure of what it was, but knew that her prayer had been heard and would not return empty.

It took a few hours and the sky began to announce rain again. It was the end of summer and the rains, now, were frequent; there was nothing abnormal about it. So, why this rain seemed to come stronger than the others? At the distance she saw lightning, and the dark clouds brought by the wind came to the garden. It did not take long for the water to fall. The rain came and in a few minutes, it became a great storm with thunder and lightning. This was worse than the first. It seemed that she heard voices from heaven saying,

“Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, ‘Glory!’ The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!”

Suddenly, she got scared, when the lightning began to fall in the garden on the trees, shrubs and plantations, as if knew exactly what to smite. All were killed and carbonized by the lightning. It was the Lord, answering her cry, doing justice and destroying her enemies: pride, envy, hatred, irreverence, blasphemy, idolatry, accusations, lie, gossip and everything else that He saw and abhorred both in the flesh and the spirit. The storm was strong and frightening and a lightning also hit her, causing her to ignite. She thought she was also being punished for her sin, but was being sanctified. So, the flames did not consume nor carbonized her; they just burned her impurities so that she returned to feel the ‘fire of the first love’, the presence of *I AM* permanently within her with His power that broke the barriers of prejudice and physical limitations, bringing the promise to reality: to make her flame burn in the hearts of others and generate holiness and the true revelation of God in all creatures around her. It was no longer a small flame that burned in her; she was now a *Living Torch* in the hands of the Lord so that He could use her as a valuable instrument. Would the fire remain lit?

Living Torch
6



The storm stopped suddenly as if a powerful order was given. The thick drops of water turned into a fine drizzle that went ceasing until disappear completely. The wind returned and, timidly, the sun showed its face, resuming gradually all its splendor in the sky, now clear and cloudless.

Living Torch could then see clearly the wreckage around her. The garden had been consumed, as well as the unpleasant and discouraging voices. They gave rise to the chirping of birds, and the ashes scattered on the earth could be softened by the flight of the colorful butterflies. But in the garden there were no trees, no fruit or flowers anymore. What, then, attracted these new visitors to that place? She looked at herself and saw something that moved her and gladdened her, for the joy she felt would never be taken away from her. What she saw was the fire in her whole being, which continued to burn in spite of all things around her no longer have color. She was a burning bush, the *Living Torch* that *I AM* had promised that she would be. She had been preserved for one purpose: to be the landmark of love in that place, showing everyone that there was still a God who watched over by the sanctity and by the promises given to the pure in heart. Then she prayed,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Humans came running to the garden and were amazed by what they saw. It was not an ordinary fire that burned the burning bush, but a fire that no fireman would be able to extinguish, or would like to do it. There, God's presence was powerfully felt and His love emanated from the small bush that survived in the experimental garden. They did not understand the language of nature, as *Living Torch* talked to the plants and animals, but they understood the language of the Spirit of God, reminding them of His eternal covenant, His holiness and His love that He wanted to see in all His children.

The garden was restored, but only a green grass and tiny flowers were planted to make it colorful. In fact, the focus was given to the phenomenon they had witnessed. Although the fire had been quenched in the human eyes, and the burning bush followed her way as her species had been determined to be, with reddish leaves that appeared in the autumn and fell in the winter, *Living Torch* would always feel and see the fire of *I AM* within her. She felt alive and, even without speaking, she conveyed to anyone who entered there, something indescribable but spiritually sensitive, reminding men and nature that God was real and still wanted to be present in the hearts.

Below her, it was left the blessing given by God to the tribe of Joseph by Moses' mouth, "... *Blessed by the Lord be his land, with the choice gifts of heaven above, and of the deep that lies beneath... with the choice gifts of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of the one who dwells on Sinai [NIV: in the burning bush]*" (Deut. 33: 13; 16a).

Epilogue

For us, the word of the Lord remains, *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near”* (Rev. 1: 3).

You are God existing in us
Through the Spirit we hear your voice
That kindles the flame of life
Holiness, peace and joy

Revive, Lord, your love
Your sovereign will shall be
Established in heaven
On earth it will be firmed

Your voice is strong and powerful,
At the same time calm and quiet
Loving, yes
Loving, yes

May the earth and the sea celebrate
To the God of power, El Shaddai,
Who came to dwell in the bush
All we can do is to glorify you

Hosanna, Hosanna
To Him who comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna, Hosanna
To Him be the honor and praise forever
Hosanna, Hosanna
To Him who comes in the name of the Lord
Hosanna, Hosanna
To Him be the honor and praise forever

(This is the literal translation of the song – its meaning in English)