



Chagim uMoadim

— from Masorti Olami & MERCAZ Olami

בס"ד

Purim: A Festival of identity

One of the most colorful and cheerful celebrations of the Jewish year is coming, full of traditions and laws, as it is Purim.

This celebration is based in one of the books of the Tanach (Bible), The Book of Esther.

In the Meguilah, appear as main characters the Queen Esther, Mordechai, the King Achashverosh, and the evil Haman.

Based in a visceral hatred and a couple of situations with Mordechai, Haman will seek to destroy the Jews of the kingdom, achieving for this a decree of destruction from the ruler.

In verse 3:8, we find an affirmation from Haman, which begins to show the poison that this character distillates *"Then Haman said to Achashverosh: There is a particular people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people; moreover, they don't observe the king's laws. It doesn't befit the king to tolerate them."*

Clearly this is an act of defamation from Haman, based on the hatred he had for Mordechai, and an attempt to destroy all his people.

A false accusation, that takes some of the truth, to be able to continue with his evil plan.

A false accusation that will be repeated throughout history, by the anti-Semite/judeophobe of the day.

But in this writing, I will not analyze the part of the false accusation, but the truth that Haman uses to slide the remaining of the sentence: ***"Their laws are different from those of every other people."***

This part is true. If there is something that distinguishes and characterizes the Jewish People, are its laws.

A lot of laws. Laws that permeate all of the possible situations of our lives. Since we are born until we die. Since we rise in the morning until the moment prior to close our eyes every night.

Those laws make us different. The rites of our birth, the brit milah (circumcision) for example. When we become adults, with the Bar and Bat Mitzvah. The particularity of the chuppah when getting married. Everything that surrounds the passage to the eternal life.

Not to mention Kashrut laws, that rule everything that we can and cannot eat or drink.

I was saying at the beginning that Haman had lied when he told that we did not comply what the surrounding society commanded. And two simple examples came to my mind, that happened to me recently: Being in Brazil (in Curitiba), I ate feijoada, a typical preparation from Brazil, which is completely Kosher. It seemed to me a beautiful detail from the Kehillah, to prepare us this dish. The other case was one of my friends, during our recent year of study in Israel, trying to find any butcher who knows how to slice meat in the appropriate way to prepare milanesa (in Israel, it is easier to find chicken schnitzel, but not the meat ones). Tell me if that isn't getting adapted to the environment in which we live. Our grandfathers at Poland or Syria did not eat that food, that is clear.

We prepare them, we adapt them, we enjoy them.
We do so with everything in our lives.

The wonder of Judaism in general, and of the Masorti/Conservative ideology and practice, is to be able to seek what unites our millenary tradition with our everyday life.

We look to give meaning to a modern and agitated world, that seems to try take away our particularities, and infuse us with globalized way of life that erases everything previous and only takes what's new.

We do not want for us a life immersed in the darkness of the past, we don't want to find ourselves blinded by false dazzling lights of the future.

We want to live in our world which we live, with our rules, our traditions.

Sometimes it seems to be heard that we, Jews, only have two classic problems: antisemitism and assimilation. Both situations are a reality, indeed, and they have a similar antidote: education. Educating inside and outside.

We have different rules, that make us live and feel differently. They are ours, they are yours. "Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe, Morasha Kehillat Ya'akov" "The Torah Moshe commanded us is an heritage for the community of Ya'akov." (Devarim – Deuteronomy 33:4). This is your tradition, this is your identity, your way to see and transit the world. Being Jewish is your heritage, if you behave its owner and make it part of your life, it will be truly yours.

Purim comes once a year, we disguise ourselves of what we are not, to take out our identity the rest of the year and be what we are and what we want to be.

Make yourself the owner of your Judaism, reach your Kehillah and decide which way you want to walk.

Chag Purim Sameach!

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