

Purim: Where is the miracle?

Purim arrives and, as every year, we gather to share the joy of this “Jewish carnival”, with its costumes and its traditional food and its particular traditions. The name of this holiday means “luck” and it refers to the raffle that the evil Haman makes to determine the date in which the Jewish people were to be exterminated, moved by his hate towards Mordechai, who refused to kneel before him, as it is said in our tradition.

King Achashverosh, after marrying Esther, niece of Mordechai, and making her Queen, was manipulated by Haman to sign and seal the extermination proclamation, which afterwards could not be modified. But Mordechai, who was very clever and who had already gained the trust of the King after having discovered a plot against him, and who also had a big influence due to the presence of his niece at the royal palace, managed, together with Esther, to avoid the catastrophe and to warn all the Jews, with enough time, to prepare for war and to defend themselves. To make a long story short, the Jews fought, defended themselves and survived once again.

Nowadays, we celebrate and give each other gifts of food (Mishloach Mannot), we give gifts to those who are in need (Matanot la Ebiyonim) and we teach the future generations about the importance of celebrating Purim.

The story of Purim, summarized very briefly in the previous paragraph, together with the miracle of the salvation of our people, invites us to reflect about the nature of miracles in our everyday life. If we pay attention, the miracle of salvation that we celebrate with so much joy in this days, is based in a series of human acts: the shrewdness of Mordechai to plan the salvation of his people, his devotion to G-d by refusing to kneel before Haman, the bravery of Vashti, first wife of Achashverosh, by refusing to put up with her husband’s abuses, the courage and wisdom of Queen Esther, who agreed to defend her people even with her own life at risk. Moreover: unlike the other books of Tanach (Hebrew bible), G-d isn’t mentioned, not even once, in Megillat Esther, the book containing the story of Purim. Thus, we could wonder: if it is only about apparently “human” acts, and besides G-d is not part of the story, how is it possible to speak of a “miracle”? Of what kind of “miracle” are we talking about?

I believe that the story of Purim is the best example of miracles happening constantly in our lives, and being performed by men and women of good will that, as Esther and Mordechai, are willing to sacrifice themselves for their fellow man. Probably, if we hoped for G-d to appear supernaturally in our lives, breaking the laws of nature to show us His power, perhaps we would never be able to find Him. But if we develop our sensitivity in such a way that we can discover His presence in the kind and committed acts of the people around us, we could probably enjoy the blessing of feeling His day to day presence and to comprehend our mission as partners of G-d in the task of making the world a better place. And that was exactly the merit of Esther and Mordechai: they knew how to transcend and perform miracles through which we remember them until today. Or as the prophet Yishayahu says: “Atem Eddai” – “You are my witnesses”.

iPurim Sameach for everybody!