



Latkes, Sevivon and Resistance



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That year, when I was twelve, I took over frying the latkes for our Chanukah celebration while my mother was in the hospital, a responsibility that marked the beginning of my deeper connection to Jewish traditions. Even as I increasingly distanced myself from active religious participation, the latkes remain a symbol of my enduring bond to my heritage and the challenges we face together as a family.

Every year for Chanuccà I cook latkes with, or instead of, my mother. This tradition started when I was twelve and my mum was suddenly hospitalized. In the past years I used to watch her, sometimes I was helping her to peel the potatoes (I had learned it from a Rabbi friend of mine, who taught me the previous Purim, before giving me some wine, since also kids can drink alcohol to celebrate Purim – at least this is what he said, even if my mother did not seem to agree when I told her).

So, I helped my mother frying latkes, which is not truly a tradition where we live unlike sufganiot, but for her latkes are important since she grew attached to her Ashkenazi family origin – therefore also in Pesach we are obliged to eat a charoset which is not full of fruits but is made of apples and walnuts only, unlike the one that all the lucky people we know get. Whatever!

But exactly when I was twelve my mother, who had already been sick in the past two days, heroically prepared the latkes' dough for around twenty people (you should consider that we were seven just in the family, before my sixth brother was born, which is a quite a big number, but not being satisfied she invited also a bunch of people. There were also grandma and grandpa just arrived from the north of the country). Later and less heroically, since she was running a very high temperature and was even being delirious, an ambulance arrived and took her away for approximately three weeks or around that. And you should consider us at home, at that time I was the elder brother while the youngest was one year and a half only...us, with a dough for about eighty latkes to be fried, and no certainty for the next hours and days. What should I have done? I took the frying pan and oil, a spoon and a plate with paper towel, and I started to fry.

Initially I wanted just to lend a hand and fried just some latkes, and I was happy to do a favor to my mum...but she was not there, and I slowly fried them all. Needless to say, we did not have a great party and we inaugurated a little sadly Chanuccà, us and our grandparents who tried to make us happy just being with us (which did not happen often). But mum was not there.

She did not appear indeed for quite a long time, but it seems that she secretly got one or two smuggled latkes in the hospital, even she should have not... and since that year I distinguished myself and got burdens and honor to participate actively in the latkes issue in the years to come. I also received tongs shaped as sevivon, which all my brothers envy and which are mine only.

This is the period in which I feel belonging to Jewishness more than ever. My mother has always cared a lot, she has always asked school permissions for Jewish holidays or to leave earlier and go to Talmud Torà children's lessons. We go to Synagogue every Chag and at least one Shabbat every month...but I increasingly started to negotiate, and I try to participate less and less (moadim are two days long? I go to Shul the first day only). When I moved to a new school, I asked her not to tell that we are Jews, even if I told it to a new schoolfriend after a while. One of my brothers was beaten after October Seventh and he is now studying in Israel.

As for me, two years ago I took a wonderful trip to Israel with my mother, just the two of us, and I often think of it. I took part in Jewish contests and I sometimes got recognitions...but what happened on October Seventh scares me, I see everything black and right now I prefer to act as these Jews in the Maccabean times, who seemed just to play with the sevivon, hiddenly, and wait for better times to come. Maybe a new Chanuccà miracle.