**Accusing Achashverosh**

By Rav Yitzchak Blau

And Esther said: "The adversary and the enemy is this wicked Haman" (*Esther* 7:6). R. Elazar said: This teaches us that she was pointing toward Achashverosh and an angel came and moved her hand towards Haman. (*Megilla* 16a)

Two questions emerge from R. Elazar*'*s statement. On what textual grounds does he argue that Esther first pointed to Achashverosh? Furthermore, why would Esther do such a thing when her clear target is the wicked Haman?

R. Baruch Esptein offers two answers to the first question in his *Torah Temima*. The original Hebrew reads “*ish tzar ve-oyev Haman ha-ra ha-zeh*.” According to Rav Epstein, the pronoun “*ha*-*zeh*” renders the mention of Haman*'*s name superfluous, as Esther clearly points to the culprit. He also argues that the proper noun “Haman” should not appear in the middle of a series of negative adjectives describing Haman. Apparently, Esther began talking about someone else and switched to Haman in the middle.

Assuming we have textual grounds for this homily, what idea lies implicit within? R. Epstein argues that Esther was furious with Achashverosh for the capriciousness and hatred he exhibited when consenting to Haman’s decrees. She truly wanted to verbalize her disgust with her beast of a husband. However, the angel reminded her that even though Achashverosh deserved censure, it was currently far more important to deal with Haman and find a way to overcome the decree against the Jews.

The Vilna Ga'on, in his commentary on *Megillat Esther*, takes Esther*'*s accusation in a different direction. He points out that the images running through our minds often impact on the words that escape from our mouths. At times, we want to call Shimon but we call Reuven because we were thinking about Reuven. Apparently, people before Freud understood the phenomenon of the "Freudian slip." Esther was beseeching God to deal with Achashverosh. That thought lurking in the back of her mind led her finger initially to point at the king until the angel straightened the matter out.

The *Torah Temima* understands that Esther consciously wanted to accuse the king, while the Gaon thinks that her subconscious pushed her in that direction. Both agree that she harbored justified resentment toward the Persian monarch. This highlights Esther’s heroism and helps us appreciate another gemara about the holiday of Purim.

Esther bravely enters a contest that leads her to marry a man capable of terrible things. Even when the Jews emerge victorious, she must go on living with him. The story ends on a high note for the Jewish people but the heroism of Esther does not come to an end.

The gemara (*Megilla* 14a) questions the absence of *Hallel* on Purim and provides three explanations. First, perhaps we do not say *Hallel* on a miracle that occurred in the Diaspora. Second, the recital of the Megilla is a substitute for *Hallel*. Third, the joy of the story remains incomplete since the Jews still find themselves “servants of Achashverosh.” The Pesach story reflects total salvation, but the Purim story represents only a reprieve – albeit a reprieve of great significance, but one that does not yet permit a sense of redemption. Esther*'*s desire to point a finger at the Persian monarch gives us a sense of the ongoing problem at the story*'*s end.

As a final point, let us note that the absence of *Hallel* does not mean an absence of celebration. We do make Purim a holiday, and quite a joyous one at that. R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin (*Divrei Soferim* 32) sees Pesach and Purim as two important paradigms. As mentioned, Pesach represents leaving the darkness. Purim, on the other hand, serves a model for finding the ability to cope with remaining in the darkness. Even if only one of them merits *Hallel*, both are worthy of celebration. It behooves us to remember this, as instances of complete salvation are few and far between. We must be grateful for and celebrate our ability to make it through difficult times, even when our problems do not depart entirely.