

## **Rabbi Zamore's Message for March, 2014**

When I was a young girl, I loved the non-alcoholic party drink made with ginger ale and a splash of grenadine, garnished with a maraschino cherry. Most of us know the drink as a “Shirley Temple,” but my father would urge me to say, “I would like an ‘Ambassador Shirley Temple Black.’” As a seven-year-old, I did not quite understand my father’s point, but now I certainly do. My father wanted me to see Shirley Temple and all other female role models as women with accomplishments deeper than their beauty.

Before we point a finger at American society and object to its limited view of Shirley Temple, we need to consider our Jewish tradition’s treatment of Queen Esther. Just as we must fully consider Shirley Temple’s complete legacy, we must recognize Queen Esther for her powerful role in our Purim story.

While it is tempting to remember Shirley Temple only as the cherubic child with blue eyes and blonde, curly hair who lit up the Hollywood screens, we would only be seeing part of her life story. Being adorable and precocious were not her only talents; her life’s work did not end with her last film in 1950 when she reached the ripe age of 22. Her second act included getting married, having kids, and, oh yes, being an ambassador for the United States.

Over her political career Shirley Temple Black served as a Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador to Ghana and later Czechoslovakia (just as the Iron Curtain was falling down). She also was appointed first female Chief of Protocol of the United States. Among her adult achievements was speaking openly about her fight with breast cancer at a time when few talked publicly about cancer, especially breast cancer. Ambassador Shirley Temple Black won universal praise for her astute statesmanship and careful diplomacy.

Just as it is important to remember Shirley Temple for more than her childhood screen persona, it is vital to remember Esther for more than winning a beauty contest and mindlessly following Mordechai’s directions. When we teach the story of Purim, we often stereotype Vashti as the disobedient wife and Esther as the compliant beauty who deserves to be queen.

While one could read the Book of Esther and come to these conclusions, there is a better way to view these brave women. A closer reading of the text and its commentaries shows us that Vashti resisted dancing naked in public, even though she surely understood the price of her insubordination. Forced into a harem and, later, royal marriage, Esther finds the strength first to hide and then, finally, to reveal her

Jewish identity. While she may have initially resisted her role in saving her people, ultimately no one can deny her remarkable bravery. In addition, Esther's resistance may have reflected the traumatic circumstance in which she found herself.

It is tempting to stereotype both modern and historical figures into monolithic caricatures, but complex reality provides the best role models for us and our children. Both Shirley Temple and Queen Esther were certainly beautiful women, but both knew how and when to use their intellect and voices. As we enter into our Purim celebrations, let us carefully choose the way we remember our heroes.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore