

# PURIM CELEBRATES JEWISH REFUSAL TO BOW DOWN TO TYRANTS

By Rabbi Barry Silver

About 14 billion years ago, the universe was mostly hydrogen. which gathered and condensed into galaxies (from the Greek word for milk because they appear white). Within the galaxies, particles swirled and coalesced further under intense gravitational pressure to become stars. The immense gravity of stars fused hydrogen atoms into helium, giving off a tiny fraction of energy, some of which reaches earth in the form of light, heat, and other types of energy. Towards the end of the star's life, the hydrogen is exhausted, and gravitational forces exceed the expansive forces of the star's diminished energy and fuse the hydrogen and helium into still heavier elements. Depending on their mass, some stars explode at the end of their lives in a supernova (nova is Latin for "new" as these super bright objects appeared new in the ancient sky). The heavier elements from the exploding star scatter into space and may be brought into gravitational homage around a second or third generation star as they help comprise orbiting planets.

This arcane discussion may not interest you, until you realize that this process explains how every atom in your body, such as carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and all others came to exist and how they became "us". These amazing celestial crucibles called stars, led Carl Sagan to declare that we are all "star stuff". Since we were created from a supernova, each of us is literally a "superstar".

The word "star" is derived from the goddess Ishtar, the "star" of the Persian pantheon, which gives rise to the name of the Purim heroine, Esther. In Persian mythology, the consort of Ishtar was Marduk, (who became Mordechai in the Purim story) and whose name morphed into the planetary names Mars and Mercury (Martes and Miercoles in Spanish), and Nimrod in Hebrew.

Mordechai by coincidence consists of "*Morde*", i.e. death in Latin and "*chai*" (life in Hebrew). Through his courage, in the Purim story, Mordechai delivers the Jews from death under Haman, to life. Esther, the "superstar" of Purim, risked her life to save the Jewish people in this mythological story that reflects Jewish life under Persian rule circa the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, and other places of Jewish exile. Although the story never happened, it is true, as this legend describes a recurrent theme in Jewish history. Tyrants like Haman have always demanded that every knee must bend to them, and while most people do, the Jew refuses. Historically, we've only bowed to God and today, some of us do not incline the knee or the mind to any heavenly dictator, as our sense of reason

liberates us from enslavement to a supernatural being. Rather, we give reverence to spectacular, numinous, creative natural processes that generated and sustain all life, including our own.

Sadly, today, many Jews believe the fable, but reject the message of Purim, as they bow down to a pathetic, modern-day Haman who sought absolute power by sending domestic terrorists and a lynch mob carrying Confederate flags and shouting vile anti-Semitic slogans to overthrow democracy, destroy America, kill police officers, hang Pence and make Trump a dictator.

While Esther means a “*star*” in Persian, in Hebrew it means “*hidden*”. Esther hid her Judaism from the king to be accepted as a Persian queen. However, when needed to save her people, Esther ceased being a “missing Persian” and risked her life to declare her Judaism, express solidarity with her people, and stand up to Haman.

Today, many Jews are standing up to our modern-day Haman, by resisting Trump’s quest for absolute power and the replacement of democracy with demagoguery. Trump’s slogan “America First”, was used by pro-Nazi fascist forces in America in the 1930s, who serve as role models for Trump and his legions of lunatics who seek to impose a theocratic tyranny in America. Jews like Raskin, Blinken, Mayorkas and others, proudly stand for truth.

The Purim story is found in the Book of Esther, which is the only book of the Bible which does not mention God. Perhaps, this reflects an awareness that there is no supernatural dictator or savior in the sky, and that the survival of the Jews and of all living things on our precious planet, is in our hands. Thus, Esther and Mordechai are archetypes of the “type” of person we should be as we help the “arc” of history bend towards justice.

Let us give thanks this Purim that throughout history courageous, intelligent, and righteous Jews and others, have been willing to defy dictatorship, and devote their lives to Jewish ideals of justice, equality, and freedom. Let us emulate Esther and Mordechai by hiding our Judaism no more, and recognizing our true nature as superstars, standing up to tyrants and protecting the splendor of our precious planet, this heaven on earth, whose elements were forged in the cosmos eons ago, and gave rise to all life, including our own.

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