

Laughter Lasts Longer

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The Rabbis teach that in messianic times, "when all the other festivals will be abolished, Purim will remain." (Midrash Mishle 9:2) Why?

Why is this strange, party-strewn, hero and villain tale so powerful that it must never disappear? Perhaps the secret is that Purim is the only holiday set aside for laughter. Skits, sketches, revelry, joking — these are all part of Purim. Purim occurs in Adar, the month when, the Rabbis tells us, we are invariably joyful. Of all the things that mark human life — pain, seeking, questioning, spirituality, hope — could it be that laughter alone abides?

In the Talmud, (Ta'anit 22a) we read that a certain Rav Beroka once met Elijah the prophet in the marketplace. Visitations from Elijah are periodically recorded in rabbinic literature. Elijah brings wisdom and counsel to this world. Rav Beroka asks who of those in the marketplace will inherit the world to come. Elijah points to two men.

Rav Beroka wants to figure out what accomplishment separates these two from their fellows. "What is your occupation?" Rav Beroka asks.

They answer: "We are jesters. We make the sad laugh, and when we see two people arguing, we try to make peace between them." Happy Purim, forever.

Off the Pulpit is a weekly message from Rabbi David Wolpe.