

Our parashah, Purim, and Yom *HaKippurim* are deeply intertwined. The focal point of our parashah is the story of the infamous golden calf, to which the Israelites turn when they fear that Moses had abandoned them. Like the revelers at Achashverosh's weeklong wine party in Megillat Esther, they eat, drink, and carouse. The Hebrew word for carouse is a word we know well: צַחֵק (*tzachek*). In addition to chuckling and benign laughter, it denotes taunting or mocking, and can also refer to sexual activity. Sarah laughs at the notion that she could bear a child, and Abraham names that child Yitzchak, another derivative of צַחֵק. The word appears again when Sarah accuses Ishmail of taunting Yitzchak, when Potifar's wife accuses Joseph of trying to rape her, and when Avimelech sees Yitzchak caressing Rebekka. Although this word does not appear in Megillat Esther, there is plenty of carousing at Achashverosh's table. Midrash Esther Rabbah 7 recounts that Haman had advised Achashverosh to "provide [the Jews] with prostitutes, make a banquet for them, and decree that they must all attend, and eat, drink, and do as they please." And 18,500 Persian Jews ignore Mordechai's warnings and go to the banquet house to carouse like their ancestors did in front of their calf. The Torah itself, along with the angels, the sun, and the moon join forces to try to dissuade HaShem from eradicating them, and Elijah seeks Moses' help. "Moses said to him, 'Is there an honest person in this generation?' He answered, 'There is, and his name is Mordechai.' Moses answered, 'Go and let him know, so that he will stand in prayer there, and I will do so from here, and we will ask for mercy for them before the Holy One of Blessing.' He immediately went to let Mordechai know." In both stories Jews unite in disobeying HaShem. In our parashah Moses pleads with HaShem, in the Megillah Esther pleads with Achashverosh, and in both stories a decree of annihilation is reversed. Both stories contain terrible violence. In our parashah it was the Levites killing the Israelites who had debased themselves with idolatry, and in Megillat Esther Achashverosh allows the Jews to go on a horrific killing rampage. For us today, these and other stories of Jews killing other human beings are deeply disturbing and embarrassing. But our *mitzvot* and our tragic history notwithstanding, we Jews are just a fallibly human as everyone else. We too, harbor the feelings of fear and defenselessness that are the natural result of oppression and violence, and these feelings can, and often do, lead to outbreaks of revenge violence. And in the aftermath we often look back in remorse. Yes, Yom HaKippurim. When we are in a Purim mood, we might jokingly translate that as a day like Purim, and there is some truth in that. According to Midrash Mishlei 9:1, "That is the good name she [Esther] acquired in this world and in the world to come; since all of the holidays are to be nullified in the future, but the days of Purim will not be nullified, as it is stated in Esther 9:28, 'And these days of Purim shall not be rescinded from the Jews.' Rabbi Elazar said, 'Also Yom Kippur will forever not be nullified, as it is stated, 'And it will be to you for an everlasting statute to atone for the Children of Israel from all of their sins once a year.'" In our parashah Moses returns to Mount Sinai with the second set of tablets, as HaShem had commanded. HaShem renews the covenant with the Israelites, and reviews its stipulations. Seder Olam Rabbah 6 teaches that Moses went back up on the 18th of Tammuz to plead for mercy for 40 days. He came down on 28. Av, carved the second set of tablets, and went back up the following day. "He came down on the 10th of Tishre, which was Yom Kippur, and announced to them that they had found favor before God." Both holidays begin in trepidation and culminate in the joy of delivery and renewal. On Purim we wear masks and costumes, superimposing a new identity on our everyday selves. When Moses returns from the mountain unaware that his face had become radiant from having spoken with HaShem, the people recoil in fear. He puts a veil, i.e., a mask over his face and lifts it only when he is teaching them what HaShem had spoken to him on the mountain. Of course HaShem remains invisible, but that brief encounter shielded by HaShem's "hand" in a small fissure infuses Moses with divine light and forever divides him. He is the Israelites' untiring and very human leader, and he is the only person intimate enough with HaShem to converse *panim el panim* – metaphorically face to face. In essence, Purim and Yom Kippur are two sides of the same coin. Purim is entirely physical. We eat, drink, and celebrate with abandon. We wear masks and costumes in a place where we ordinarily would not, we interrupt the Megillah reading with noisemakers and raucous catcalls whenever Haman is mentioned, and we let our imaginations run wild creating our Purim Shpiels. Yom Kippur is entirely spiritual. We fast, the prevailing mood is solemn, we wear white, and we focus inward, repenting and searching for reunion with HaShem. There is a time and a place for both sides of this coin, and we need them both. They flow into each other and nourish us in the process. It is not our way to be hedonists or ascetics. As comedian Alan King defines our holidays: They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat." Indeed, we are commanded to use what HaShem provides, but in gratitude and moderation, and always remembering to share with others. Exchanging *mishloach manot* (sending portions) is one of our Purim *mitzvot*, originally intended to ensure that everyone had enough food to enjoy a carefree Purim celebration. So enjoy Purim to the fullest. Eat, drink, and have lots of fun recharging your emotional, physical, and spiritual batteries – because Pesach comes next month!