

There are lots of reasons why I am passionate about Judaism – the ethical and spiritual wisdom, the fascinating and multifaceted history of our people and, of course, the food! But the thing I love most about Judaism is that it's fun! No really, it is, I promise! There are of course times, such as slogging through a particularly interminable description of sacrifices in Leviticus, or near the end of Yom Kippur, when this might not be our first thought about Judaism, but Judaism is indeed fun and Purim comes along every year to prove it!

Like other festivals it follows the pattern “They tried to kill, we survived, let's eat!” and commands us to celebrate copiously. We sing, we dance, we dress up, we eat (and drink!) and we enjoy ourselves with friends and family. It's a glorious reminder not to take ourselves so seriously all the time, and to experience our Judaism as a joy rather than a burden.

And Purim reminds us that Judaism can be funny. Parts of the Purim story are classic farce, with mistaken identities, awkward and surprising reversals and a bumbling and ridiculous king. Traditional celebrations of Purim involve funny Purim Spiels, parodies of prayers and Torah stories and it's the only day in the year when orthodox men are allowed to dress as women (and vice versa)! Jews have always been funny. Even the rabbis in the Talmud make jokes, like when they tell us that we need to see the Shofar being blown on Pesach lest we hear a donkey braying and confuse the sounds! And in the modern era, the list of funny Jews is endless, from Lenny Bruce, Mel Brooks and Woody Allen to Gilda Radner, Jerry Seinfeld and Jon Stewart. And yet we seem to think that Judaism has to be somber, serious and guilt ridden all the time.

In fact there is a lot of fun in Judaism. All our festivals involve food and song, Shabbat is a day of joy as well as of rest, and some commentators even argue that Yom Kippur is the most joyous day of the year because we get to be absolved of our sins (although even I will admit that one might be pushing it a little!)

So come join us for Purim, the most fun holiday in the Jewish calendar, and be inspired to bring that sense of joy and fun to the rest of the Jewish year and to everything you do in life.

Rabbi Emanuel