

Yom Kippur and *Purim*.

They have a lot in common.

Said not very many people, ever.

Purim, a boisterous day of raucous celebration where we unabashedly indulge in life's joys, delight in a fantastical tale where God takes a backseat and the Jewish heroes of our story bring about redemption.

Yom Kippur, a day of solemnity, of facing death, of abstinence from life's greatest pleasures, of engaging in deep repentance, praying that God will determine, despite our profound imperfections, that we will see another year.

Not only are they radically different from each other in their observances, but both *Purim* and *Yom Kippur* are void of typical Jewish holiday practices.

In the *Talmud*, Rabbi Yehoshua explains that a *yom tov*, a Jewish holiday, is a day that is:

dedicated half to God, because a verse in Deuteronomy says, "It shall be an assembly *for Adonai your God*"¹

and dedicated half to us, the Jewish people, because a verse in Numbers says, "It shall be an assembly *for you*"²

Thus, Rabbi Yehoshua determined that for each holiday: half of the day ought to be spent studying and praying and the other half eating and drinking.³

¹ Deuteronomy 16:18

² Numbers 19:35

³ Pesachim 68b

The 18th century Lithuanian Talmudist, thinker, and *halakhist*, the Vilna Gaon asserted: “Here is a rule for every *Yom Tov* [every holiday]: it is half for God and half for you.

[This is the essence of what makes *a yom tov*, a *yom tov*.]

There are two holidays that seem to be exceptions to this rule:

Yom Kippur is entirely for God

and *Purim* is entirely for you.

But, since we know that there are *no* exceptions to this rule, there must be an explanation!

[And this, by the way, is the type of dilemma the rabbis love—so the Vilna Gaon employed a favorite textual tool: wordplay.]

There must be an explanation!

And that is:

Yom Kippurim [as *Yom Kippur* is called in the *Torah*] should be read as *Yom K*-[meaning “like”]-*Purim*.

Yom Kippur is a day that is *like Purim*.

Therefore, together make up one complete holiday.

And if *Purim* and *Yom Kippur* are one holiday, then half is for God and half is for you.”⁴

As silly as it may seem, this rationale allowed the Vilna Gaon to conclude that *Yom Kippur* and *Purim*, are two sides of the same coin. About as far apart as they can be on the calendar, these two observances, together, make up one holiday.

Yom Kippur—an observance of abstinence to make way for *teshuvah*, *t’filah*, and *tzedakah*, as a way to repair the wrong we have done

Purim—an observance of indulging in the world’s pleasures in celebration that we have survived

A day where we solemnly face our mortality

And a day when we unabashedly celebrate survival

Two sides of the same coin.

⁴ Pachad Yitzchak, Purim 8

Our tradition *also* teaches that, in the World to Come
we will not need *Sukkot* to hold us in our fragility
we will not need *Rosh HaShana* to mark the world's creation,
we will not even need Passover to celebrate our freedom.
The only two holidays that we will continue to observe in the World to Come
are *Purim*
and *Yom Kippur*.⁵

It's weird, right?

Why have either?

Even if I could somehow wrap my head around the observance of a holiday
absent of God in the World to Come because we should *only* know joy,
why hold onto *Yom Kippur*, a solemn day of repentance, when we will have
nothing left to repent for?

Also having fun with wordplay, *Tikkunei Zohar*, a Jewish mystical text, answers
this question by teaching us that *Purim* actually merits its name because in the
World to Come,
“people will rejoice on *Yom Kippur*, *ki-Purim*, like they do on *Purim*.
Yom Kippur's required afflictions will transform to delight.”⁶

In the world to come we will have two holidays of delight
Purim—a day of rejoicing dedicated to *us*
and
Yom Kippur—a day of rejoicing dedicated to God

But we are so very far from the World to Come.

It seems unattainable.

In our current fractured world.

⁵ Midrash Mishlei 9:1

⁶ Tikkunei Zohar 57b:4

Personally, I prefer Yom Kippur over Purim.

Unpopular opinion.

I know.

I could do without all of the chaos and frivolity and costumes and even the *hamentaschen*.

I'd choose to be grounded in a day of predictability and reflection, even if the reflections are harsh,
the routine of it brings me comfort
as the world around me spins out of control,

As opposed to Purim
where the world around me spins out of control
and I feel like I'm spinning out of control with it.

But this year, I want a taste of that *Yom Kippur* of the World to Come. The *Yom Kippur* that is *kei-Purim*, where our afflictions are turned into delight.

Tonight, I just want to grasp onto a little bit of that *simcha*, that joy, that is essential to *Purim*.

During this extraordinarily difficult year I want to complement *Yom Kippur's* abstinence with celebration of our very being and existence.

I want a bit of unabashed celebration to motivate us toward the *Yom Kippur's* opportunities of *teshuvah*, *t'filah*, and *tzedakah*.

If *Yom Kippur* and *Purim* are two sides of the same coin, then tonight let's flip the coin over, for just a little while, and lean into joy.

Lean into making this moment, not all for God, but also for *us*.

Let's get a taste of the World to Come's *Yom Kippur*.

On this most solemn day of the year,
as we reach the pinnacle of our self-reflection sometimes bordering on
self-flagellation,
let's disrupt things for a bit.
Tonight, on *Kol Nidrei*, I want us to allow ourselves to be proud of all we have
done before we transition into all of the work we have yet to do,

Immersed in a year of death and destruction,
a year of trying to figure out how to navigate our Jewishness and Jewish
identity inside and outside of our Jewish spaces,
a year of fear and trauma and heartache—
I don't want us to lose sight of the joy that we experienced this past year
I want us to acknowledge that we *deserve* joy.
I want us to notice that joy can find its way through the cracks of our
brokenness and, when it does, we deserve to revel in it.

Our *Machzor* has additions that, in the past, I couldn't quite understand or embrace. They try to console us when our tradition tells us we are least deserving. Modeled after our *Vidui*, our confessional prayers, instead of:
*Al chet shechatanu l'fanecha....*for the sins we have committed before You...
they read
*Al hatikun shetikanu l'fanecha...*for the act of healing we have done...⁷

I skip over those readings,
If they even make it into our service outlines, it is only for *Ne'ilah*, our closing service,
just for one day, we have been asked to focus on the things we need to change, the ways we need to improve.
Can't we let that be?
There are so many other days to congratulate and to celebrate ourselves.

But in a year when we have collectively been carrying the weight of such severe trauma,
in a year when we have been in perpetual mourning,
in a year when we have been trying to rebuild ourselves as a Jewish community –less than a week after the first anniversary of October 7–
Yom Kippur feels more like salt on an open wound than an opportunity for repair and return.

⁷ *Mishkan HaNefesh: Yom Kippur*, p. 93 and 313

It's not that we don't have *teshuvah* to do.

On the contrary, there is so much *teshuvah* to do.

But for a little while, let's claim collective joy alongside collective repentance.

Because, yes, *al chet shechatunu lifaneicha*, there are many transgressions we have committed before

but also, tonight

Al hatikun shetikanu l'fanecha, there are also many ways we have repaired ourselves, our community, and our world over the past year

Even on *Yom Kippur*, when we are meant to walk that liminal space between life and death, we chant from the *Torah*, "*u'vacharta bachayim*," "Choose life, that you and your children may live."⁸

How do we choose life? We can start by acknowledging the joy we have brought to this world, and this community, amidst death and destruction.

We choose life by flipping over the coin and uplifting the words of the Book of Esther.

"*La'y'hudim hay'tah orah v'simcha v'sason vikar*," "The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor."⁹

And so, for tonight, let us choose life by enjoying light and gladness, happiness and honor.

Let's make sure *Yom Kippur* is a bit more *k'Purim*, like Purim, so that we can heal from this terrible, horrible, no good, very bad year?

⁸ Deuteronomy 13:19

⁹ Esther 8:16

In a sermon delivered on the second *Yom Kippur* following the start of the pandemic, Rabbi Alana Alpert preached:

“We are not okay. The Jewish people, the global community, our species...

Purim knows this truth — and so Purim gives us the key to our collective healing. There are four mitzvahs associated with Purim...

Matanot la'evyonim [giving gifts to the poor]: We must read as justice, a relentless commitment to the process of systemic change.

Mishloach manot [sending packages to friends], stands for *Gemilut Chesed*, the practices of mutual aid and community care.

With the imperative to hear *Megilah* we are reminded of the critical importance of studying history and the wisdom of our ancestors.

And with *Seudah*, the obligation of a festive meal, the tradition insists that we make a practice of experiencing pleasure.

Justice, mutual aid, education, and pleasure — this is the roadmap.”¹⁰

Tonight, on this *Yom K'Purim*, let's acknowledge the ways we have performed these *mitzvot*

And brought light and gladness, happiness and honor to shine through the darkness of a very broken year and a very broken world

Let's focus on how we have chosen life

Wednesday night begins *Sukkot*, also known as *Z'man Simchateinu*, our season of rejoicing. But we shouldn't wait until Wednesday to acknowledge our joy.

When you leave services tonight or at some point tomorrow, please take a small card from the table outside and with a permanent marker here or at home write down a moment of joy you experienced this past year or a way you have celebrated life and return that card tonight or at some point before the end of *Yom Kippur*. Read them as they are out on display throughout *Yom Kippur* and then hanging in our *sukkah* during the time of our rejoicing. They are a reminder that we are persisting and are deserving of joy, even in our most challenging times. They will be present so we can celebrate ourselves and one another.

¹⁰ <https://www.nu-detroit.com/yom-kippur-rabbi-alpert/>

And, embodying another aspect of *Purim*, that is turning everything on its head (after such a topsy-turvy year),
Instead of skipping over *hakarat hatov*, recognizing the good, as I so often do on *Yom Kippur*,
I want to offer us an adapted version of a prayer from our *machzor* “For Every Act of Goodness.”¹¹
personalizing it with ways that *we have done good* at Temple Shalom this year.

In the spirit of *Purim*, you consider cheering for these acts of goodness. (Just please don’t “Boo” them!)

“Let us affirm the good we have done;
let us acknowledge our acts of healing and repair...

For the good we have done
by caring for the earth and sustaining its creatures;
by working to make our landscaping more sustainable with native plants and through native seeds during tashlich
by composting
by and joining together in vegetarian Shabbat dinners (that, to the surprise of many of you, are more than “just tofu”),

For the good we have done
by housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the stranger;
by participating in six apartment setups for refugees in partnership with Homes Not Borders
and by helping resettle and sponsor a family of seven fleeing persecution in Afghanistan

For the good we have done
by offering children our love and support;
by training our 11th and 12th graders to serve as peer leaders for our 8th and 9th graders through our recently launched Chai Life program
by bringing on our new Early Learning Center director Maggie Heidema who facilitates a nurturing environment for our youngest learners

¹¹ Mishkan HaNefesh, Yom Kippur, p. 313

For the good we have done
by keeping promises and honoring commitments;
by continuing our religious school education through 10th grade—and doing it with gusto, compassion, creativity, and ritual—even by immersing in the mikvah to honor that life-cycle moment

For the good we have done
through acts of friendship and hospitality;
by launching Kulanu—All of Us, chavurot designed to build community among our gender expansive members as well as loved ones of gender expansive people and through securing a \$10,000 Belonging Grant from Federation to strengthen this work

For the good we have done
through thoughtful and encouraging words;
through Cantor Tovlev enhancing our liturgy through non-binary Hebrew prayers

For the good we have done
by caring for our health and that of our loved ones;
by lessening the burdens of members of our community by preparing meals for those going through a difficult time

For the good we have done
[through acts of prayer and ritual;]
through eight adults in our congregation being called to the Torah as Simchat Mitzvah under the care and guidance of Rabbi Potts
through training new shiva minyan leaders
through joining our youth and adult choirs
through our monthly Shabbat Vayinafash services which bring together our congregation in meditative reflection as we fill our Sanctuary with prayerful song
through welcoming members of our community into the Jewish people through conversion and baby namings

For the good we have done

[by coming home to celebrate]

by Emet being called to the Torah for his gender affirming bar mitzvah on this bimah 14 years after he celebrated his bat mitzvah from this very lectern

by Tali and Jaime, two adults who went through religious school here together, allowing us to bless them before their wedding in front of the same ark where they shared their Confirmation vows

by the many of you whose children have blessed us with the opportunity to name their children in the spiritual home where they were raised

For the good we have done

through acts of civic engagement and *tikun olam*;

through two successful blood drives

and through writing 10,360 postcards (and counting!) to BIPOC voters in Virginia, Florida, North Carolina, and Arizona with Reclaim Our Vote.

For the good we have done

by strengthening our Jewish community;

by installing Cantor Tovlev as Temple Shalom's cantor

by being one of the 25 participating households in Generation-to-Generation, pledging to leave an estate gift to Temple Shalom to ensure its future

by belonging to this community, all 500 plus households of us, up from 343 in 2019

by launching Opening the Gates, our three-year campaign to raise the funds to transform our building to match our values of inclusivity, connectedness, accessibility, and love

by, being among the Opening the Gates leadership donors who, following just a few one-on-one meetings during the first phase of the campaign, have enabled us to quickly approach \$2 million in gifts and pledges

All these have brought light and healing into the world.

(If you have done any one of these things or plan to become involved in one of them in the year to come, please rise or give a wave at this time...Look around.

All of you have brought us light and gladness, happiness and honor.

You may be seated.)

May these acts inspire us to renew our efforts in the year to come.”

May we flip the coin over for a bit
So that we may rejoice amidst our reflection
So that we may know goodness amidst our grief
Tikkun amidst *teshvuah*
Life amidst death

This year, may our *Yom Kippur* be *k’Purim*, a little more like *Purim*.