Having been bored witless by the world's most boring rabbi, Jack came out of temple before the preacher had finished his sermon.

Outside he met a friend who asked, "Has he finished, then?"

He replied, "Oh yes, he's finished, but he won't stop!" . . .

Jewish humor is humor.

Last week we celebrated Purim, the Jewish holiday dedicated to laughter, the best kind of laughter, laughing in the face of danger. That is what Purim is, they threaten to kill us and we laugh at them.

Today is April 1st April Fools Day another day, though secular, that feels very Jewish – because it too is a day dedicated to the joy of life, to laughter.

It's good to laugh

Good for the body

Good for the soul

Good for the world

Good for the body – Has its roots in the Bible

The Saga of Isaac. His name in Hebrew, Yitzchak, means the "the one who brings laughter." When his mother, Sara, was told by the angels that at 90, she was going to conceive and give birth, she let out a laugh that was heard from shore to shore. She always yearned for a child, but she was not sure about this. Suffice to say, her laughter has been interpreted many different ways,

Laughter is one of the best medicines around for all of life's ailments.

Perhaps without laughter, she would not have been able to conceive at such an age. Laughter is good for the body.

Human beings love to laugh, and the average adult laughs 17 times a day. **Laughter scientists and physicians have found** increases oxygenation of your body at both the cellular and organ level. By laughing, you take in vast amounts of oxygen in huge gulps, and you repeat this process in a sort of temporary hyperventilation session. This is the natural result of laughter, and if you watch someone laugh, you will notice these biophysical effects. AS the saying goes - **"Laughter is the Best Medicine?"**

The great comedian, Henny Youngman who died in 1998, tells a story of his visit to the doctor the year before his death.

His doctor told him that he was a very ill man.

Youngman reports that the doctor said, “You are very sick, Mr. Youngman. You have only six months to live. Now, here is my bill.”

Youngman then shares that he told the doctor that he could not pay him.

And he ends the story by saying, “So the doctor gave me another six months to live.”

Laughter is also good for the soul.

On Yom Kippur Shapiro walked up to the rabbi during the break between services.

"Rabbi, you must help me...I know that we're supposed to fast this day, but I am so thirsty – I must be allowed to have something to drink!"

The Rabbi quietly, but firmly responded, "I am sorry, but it must be *pekuach nefesh* (life-threatening) before the fast may be broken."

"But, you don't understand," whined Shapiro, "if I don't get something soon, I am going to faint from thirst." Shapiro had continued on for some time when the rabbi finally relented and instructed the Cantor to give him a glass of water.

Shapiro quickly downed the liquid, whereupon he gasped, "That's the last time I have salt herring for breakfast on Yom Kippur."

Laughing is good for the soul. If, on Yom Kippur, I gave a sermon on the importance of fasting, you might remember this story more than if I had lectured about the cleansing affect that fasting can bring to the spirit. It might be more effective to tell this humorous story than to sermonize at length about when our ancestors desired us to purge our bodies as well as our souls on the Day of Atonement.

The Talmud tells a story that two men passed by the prophet Elijah. Elijah commented as they walked by, “These two have a share in the world to come.”

Rabbi Beroka then approached and asked them, “What is your occupation?”

They replied, “We are jesters, when we see men depressed we cheer them up; furthermore when we see two people quarrelling we strive hard to make peace between them.”

We need not be professional jesters to have a place in the world to come. But we ought to laugh more, for when we do, we tend to learn more. Laughing more is something we can control, which is a funny statement by itself. It is like forcing people to have fun. But in the core of our being, we can choose to untie the knots of our constriction and loosen up so as to enjoy the moments life presents to us.

Ever wonder why there are so many Jewish comedians – perhaps, just perhaps it is due the difficult past of our people and our souls need soothing and ease and laughter. Think of Purim – and

what we do in the face of danger, and what we do after we've come through the other side.

Laughter is good for the soul.

In addition to laughter's benefit to the body and to the soul, humor and joy and laughter are good for the world in general.

Victor Borge, the comic classical pianist, once said, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."

The other day I heard this story of a little school girl. The weather that particular day was questionable to say the least, and as the afternoon progressed, the winds whipped up, along with rain and thunder and lightning.

Of course, the little girl's mother was concerned that her daughter would be frightened as she walked home from school, and the mom

herself feared that the electrical storm might endanger her child. Filled with maternal worry, the mother got in her car and drove along the route to her child's school.

And there she was - walking home. But the daughter's reaction was not at all what the mother expected. At each flash of the lightning, the child stopped, she looked up and smiled. As another and another flash followed quickly, the girl repeated her turning to the heavens and smiling.

When the mother's car drew up beside the child she lowered the window and called to her,

"Honey, what in the world are you doing? Why do you keep stopping?"

And the little girl answered her mother:

"Mommy, I am trying to look pretty because God keeps taking my picture."

Imagine if each person smiled in the midst of a storm? Imagine how different our world would be.

Laughter is when the unexpected occurs. A toddler puts on her father's big shoes -- and we laugh. The Prime Minister forgets his lines in a speech -- and we laugh. When two contrary elements are juxtaposed, the sudden surprise catches us off guard. And the more unexpected, the funnier it is.

As one sociologist put it, laughter helps us PUT LIFE INTO PERSPECTIVE it helps DIFFUSE THE TENSION

Why do high school girls giggle when the boys walk by? Or why, in an amusement park's "haunted house," do people laugh when the ghost pops out?

So use laughter consciously to break tension in yourself and others. In today's world, everyone is worried about terrorism, global warming, the economy, I could go on but I want to uplift you not depress you. These worries have made us so uptight that many people walk around like time bombs, ready to explode.

Laugh to release steam and uplift yourself. You don't realize how much tension you walk around with every day until you've had a good laugh to release that tension.

LAUGHTER AND GOD

On a deeper level, laughter teaches us how God interacts with the world.

The official "Jewish day of laughter" is Purim. We get dressed up in funny costumes and act silly -- which is surprising since the Purim story is all about an impending annihilation of the Jewish people!

But then the story turns upside down. The Jews went from being the target of annihilation, to being the heroes and victors. Haman is hung and the Jewish people are rescued. It was a miraculous 180-degree shift in fortune. One who thought he was in danger and suddenly discovers he's safe laughs aloud in relief. One who thought he lived alone in a hostile world and suddenly discovers that God is really there laughs aloud in joy.

And that's the perspective of the Jewish people.

The Talmud says that in the times of the Messiah, *"THEN our mouths will be filled with laughter."* Why then and not now? Because today, the world is beset by jealousy, greed, violence, intolerance and fraud.

We are suspicious of our neighbors and cynical of our leaders. We are manipulative and seek advantage at the expense of others. Rather than cooperate, we compete.

But in the Messianic era, all that will turn around. As the prophet says: *"The lamb will lie down with the lion ... and young children will play at the cobra's nest"* (Isaiah 11:6). At that time, when all truth is revealed, *"THEN our mouths will be filled with laughter."*

Laughter is good for the world

A passenger on a train in Israel watched in astonishment as the old man across the aisle kept repeating the same pattern. First he would mumble a few words to himself, then he would smile, and finally he would raise his hand and stop talking for a few moments.

After observing this unusual behavior for close to an hour, the passenger finally brought himself to address the stranger. “Excuse me, sir, but I could not help noticing what you were doing. Is anything wrong?”

“Not at all,” replied the old man. “You see, whenever I take a trip, I get bored. And so I always tell myself jokes, which is why you saw me smiling.”

“But why did you keep raising your hand?”

“Oh, that. It’s to interrupt myself because I’ve heard that joke before.”

Whether we have heard it before or not, laughter is good for the body, good for the soul and good for the world.

Keep smiling.