

# “Joy to the World”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Yeats writes in *The Fiddler of Dooney*:

*When we come to the end of time  
To Peter sitting in state  
He will smile on the three old  
spirits  
But call me first through the gate.*

The fiddler makes people happy, and so will be first to his reward. The Talmud tells the story of Elijah pointing out to Rabbi Berokah two men destined for the world to come. When he asks them their profession, they answer, “We are jesters. When we see one who is downcast we cheer him up; when we see people quarreling we seek to make peace between them.” (Ta’anit 22a)

Religion and reward are weighty topics. They often call forth ponderous tomes, chin rubbing and serious, soulful gazes. But the rabbis, like the poet, knew that sometimes in lightness and joy there is a greater service to humanity than in philosophy.

In *Tourists* Yehuda Amichai tells of sitting with two baskets under a Roman arch in Jerusalem. A tour guide points out the arch to his group by noting it is just above the head of the man with shopping baskets. And the poet thinks that redemption would arrive if only the tour guide would say, “You see that arch from the Roman period? It’s not important: but next to it, left and down a bit, there sits a man who’s bought fruit and vegetables for his family.”