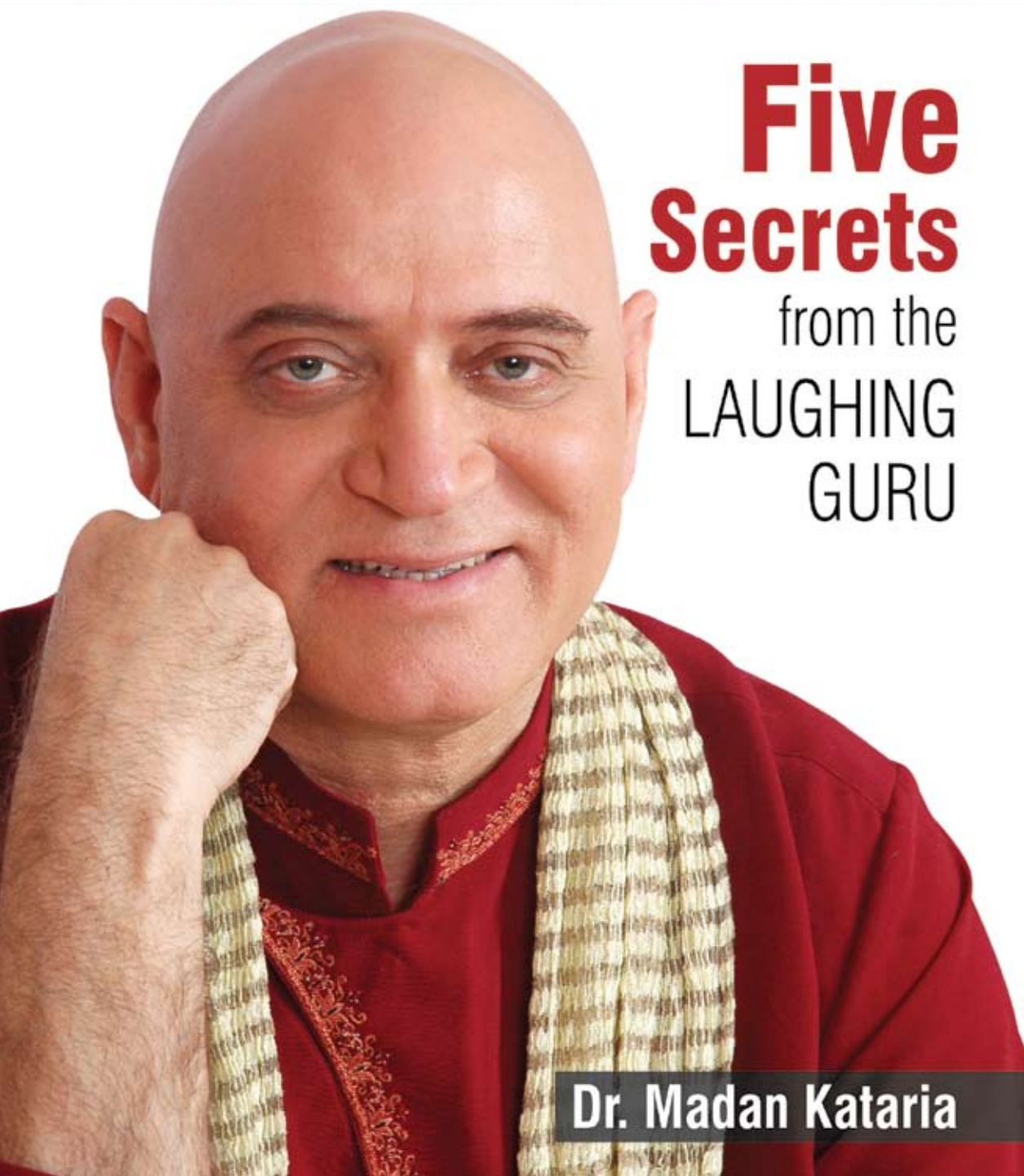


THE INNER SPIRIT OF **LAUGHTER**

Five Secrets

from the
LAUGHING
GURU



Dr. Madan Kataria

When You Laugh
You Change
When You Change
The Whole World Changes

“I am a great teacher because I have great students”

This book is dedicated to all my students from whom

I have learnt more than I have taught

The Inner Spirit Of Laughter

Five Secrets From
The Laughing Guru

DR. MADAN KATARIA

Founder

Laughter Yoga Clubs Movement

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PREFACE

This book is a complete testament of 16 years of my journey with Laughter Yoga that began in India in 1995 with only five people. There is no doubt that Laughter Yoga is helping scores of people around the world with physical, mental, emotional and social benefits, but the one thing that truly sets it apart from all other exercises is the fact that it helps to bring about everlasting changes in people's attitude and perception of life. It engenders qualities and traits that enable one to live sensibly and virtuously. These interesting stories will help you understand how unconditional laughter helps one to get in touch with their true self and spiritual nature. Inspirational and anecdotal, they have been taken not just from my life, but also from Laughter Club members worldwide, who have experienced the power of laughter in times of crisis or when dealing with difficult people.

This anthology of personal experiences inspired me to laugh and keep my spirits high despite the challenges of life. Most stories are based on actual happenings from my worldwide travels and are a result of motivation and new insights I developed while interacting with people of different cultures in different countries. They are a testimony of my changed attitude towards people and life, and how Laughter Yoga helped me to transcend my judgmental mind and find my true nature; my meaning and purpose of life. It not only changed my life; but has inspired tens of thousands of people to cope with impediments and enlighten them about the inner spirit of laughter, which is one's ability to laugh not only at the best times in life, but also to keep the spirits high when life offers a dare.

In the opening section, I have shared five secrets of laughing for no reason which is the core concept and philosophy behind all Laughter Yoga methods. Using this philosophy, many myths and misconceptions about laughter will be laid to rest. For example: how can you laugh when you don't feel like laughing? How can you laugh if you are not happy? Do we need a sense of humor to laugh? Why children laugh so much and adults so little? How can I learn to laugh?

Over the years, yogic laughter has helped me discover five principles of inner spirit of laughter. These are based on my belief system of sensible and righteous living and will hopefully motivate and inspire you to cultivate a more positive mental attitude, and will enable you to glide through the challenges of life with a smile on your face.

Whether we know it or not, every aspect of our life is influenced by certain universal principles. You may call them spiritual laws or universal laws. You may have noticed there are times when you don't have to struggle hard and things come easy in life. Then there are times when certain good or bad things happen and one just does not know the reason and gets quite perplexed. This is very akin to the natural and effortless working of the Universe. Therefore, if we understand and imbibe these principles on the whole, we can live a life of complete flow without asking too many How's and Why's. It will help the logical mind to accept what's not working and why we face problems in life which are incomprehensible and make us upset and angry. What cannot be explained logically can be understood by these spiritual principles. If we align ourselves to these principles, one can experience moments of happiness, peace, harmony and unlimited potentiality.

Then there is the age old wisdom from India of 5 rooms of Work - Life Balance. According to this philosophy our life is like a house with five rooms: Self, Family, Work, Social and Spiritual. If we want our house to be clean or our life to be balanced we need to clean all the rooms and take care of all these areas of life. Most people are focused on their work, leaving other areas of life unattended which creates an imbalance. You will also learn what the relationship between silence and laughter is, and how one can find out about the five rooms by observing silence. There are practical suggestions about how to observe silence which will help you to go beyond the conscious and judging mind and enable you to get in touch with your true inner self. The idea is to experience pure silence without active thinking. This introspective experience helps one to realize the power of silence and how it works towards bringing peace and tranquillity in our life. In times of difficulty, it is not easy to remain calm, but by imbibing the inner spirit of Laughter Yoga

and its characteristics, one can learn to handle any situation effectively without losing composure.

Laughter Yoga goes beyond just laughter. It not only fosters a feeling of physical well being, but also enhances the spirit and touches the emotional core of people. It develops an emotional balance which helps one to understand one's own emotions as well as those of others. People are often surprised at the powerful changes that Laughter Yoga makes to their lives. The ever present ego and the 'I' mellow down to a loving, caring and giving state of mind. It alters the selfish character to an altruistic nature. It cultivates a positive mental attitude and an understanding based on unconditional love, forgiveness, generosity and compassion. It allows virtues of patience and tolerance to emerge in the forefront.

Laughter helps people to develop a state of emotional fluidity where worries and intense goals that have driven their lives become less important. The inner spirit of laughter ensures that people around us are also happy or else they will not allow us to be happy. It is important that as we seek our happiness, we must be mindful of bringing happiness to others too. Laughter has taught me the true meaning of spirituality, that is – "if you can raise your spirits by yourself and raise someone else's spirits, you are spiritual."

Based on this book we have launched a program – '**Five Secrets From The Laughing Guru**' which is designed to teach, coach and train people how to bring more laughter and joy in their life, no matter what happens in the outer world. It will teach them how to shift their perspective through laughter so that they can navigate their life in a better way. People will understand the value and benefits of laughter on physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and will get trained to use the tools of Laughter Yoga in order to get its enormous benefits. Finally, they will learn how to laugh when faced with challenges of life; how to keep the spirits alive when there is nothing to laugh about and how to carry the spirit of laughter in real life.

Dr. Madan Kataria

March 13, 2012

FOREWORD

Andrew Weil, MD

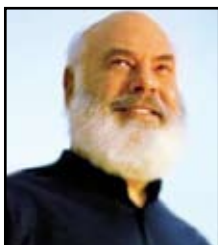
For centuries people have known that laughter is the best medicine, and now science has proved it. Unfortunately, many people have no idea how to laugh or what will enable them to do it on a regular basis. There was no reliable method of bringing more laughter into people's lives till Dr. Madan Kataria discovered Laughter Yoga, a unique breakthrough delivery system which allows people to practice laughter without depending upon outside conditions and stimulation. It is a remarkable exercise routine which combines yogic breathing with laughter and is an ideal tool for complete body-mind wellness.

I have discussed and recommended Laughter Yoga practice in my latest book *Spontaneous Happiness*. The method is straightforward. After brief physical exercises and breathing exercises under the direction of a trained leader, people simulate laughter with vigorous "ha-ha's" and "ho-ho's." In the group setting, this "fake" laughter quickly becomes real and contagious and may continue for half an hour or more. Laughter brings more oxygen to the tissue, boosts immunity, relieves pain, lowers stress, and even helps protect against heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, migraine, and cancer. It is a powerful technique – safe, easy, and a lot of fun.

I can't think of any other mind-body technique that has caught on in this way. As the Laughter Club movement has gained worldwide popularity, the experiences of thousands of people have stimulated research on the physiology and neurochemistry of laughter. And I believe the movement is contributing significantly to public health.

Dr. Kataria's stories are highly inspiring. I am sure they will help readers keep their spirits high even when there is nothing to laugh about. But mere knowledge about laughter is not enough; you must do it! It is the regular practice of unconditional laughter that brings about the desired physiological and biochemical changes to create a lasting positive mental attitude.

The principles of the inner spirit of laughter that Dr. Kataria explains will help you experience greater happiness and positivity. Training yourself to laugh regularly can also increase genuineness, compassion and sensitivity. It can make you more effective in dealing with others and with everyday situations. Over time, Laughter Yoga engenders qualities and traits that will enable you to live a more sensible and virtuous life. The fascinating narratives in this book will help you understand how the process works, and will also enable you to get in touch with your true self and realize your spiritual nature.



Andrew Weil, MD
Tucson, Arizona, USA

My Laughter Story

Born in a small village on the Indo - Pakistan border, I was the youngest of eight children. Hailing from a farming background, my parents were simple village folk engrossed in the daily grind of a rural life. They had never been to a school, and to follow suit my siblings too were not interested in studying. I was the odd one and showed a lot of academic spark which fuelled my mother's dream that I should become a doctor. As a medical facility was a rarity in the village and one had to travel almost 15 miles to seek any kind of medical help, she hoped I would study medicine and return to the village to help the people.

In pursuance of her wish, I went to a boarding school and worked hard to get my medical degree. After graduation, I went to Mumbai to do my post- graduate studies in medicine. Completely lured by the glitz and glitterati of Mumbai, swanky cars and luxurious apartments, I too wanted to become rich and famous. I tried everything in my capacity to reach for the skies, but soon realized it was not that simple. My quest did not succeed and I slumped into a bout of depression. Life was tough and it was not easy to make money without any business experience. I was stressed and miserable. At that time, my mother visited Mumbai and was shocked to see my state. She asked, "Madan, what is wrong? You don't look happy and you don't laugh and smile like you did in the village."

She was right. Somewhere in the midst of my upward scramble, I had actually lost my laughter. The transition from an innocent village boy to a city doctor had seriously altered my persona. I knew I was in trouble. Having realized the enormity of the situation, I embarked on a new search – and this time it was not money. It was to find my laughter - the key to happiness and joy.

Not content with being a practicing physician in a suburb in Mumbai, India, I launched a health magazine 'My Doctor' to spread more awareness about good health among people. But March 1995 was a turning point in my life. While writing an article 'Laughter – The Best Medicine' for my journal, I stumbled on a rich repertoire of scientific work done on laughter as a therapy. On exploring further, I was amazed at the volume of documented studies that described at great length the many proven benefits of laughter on the human mind and body. As I read through the scientific literature on the benefits of laughter, I was profoundly inspired by the book 'Anatomy of an Illness' written by Norman Cousins in which he described how he laughed his way back to health from Ankylosing Spondylitis, an incurable disease of the spine. The work of Dr. Lee Berk of Loma Linda University in California which showed that mirthful laughter reduces stress levels and has a positive effect on the immune system was also very rousing.

This set me thinking. Life in Mumbai was stressful and people hardly laughed. They were forever rushed and hassled to meet their needs and fulfill their dreams. Even I had turned dour and lost my laughter to the daily rigors of my profession and the added burden of a publication. There was no time to laugh.

I believed laughter could improve health and cope with stressors of modern living. I looked for ways to generate more laughter and help people in medical or personal crisis. I started joking and laughing with my patients and soon found that they recovered much faster as laughter kept them happy and positive.

The Origin

On 13th March, 1995, I got up at 4am and was pacing up and down in my living room when a sudden idea flashed through my mind: If laughter is so good, why not set up a Laughter Club. I was ecstatic and could hardly wait to implement the concept. Within three hours, I hurried to the public park where I used to go for my daily morning walk and tried to convince the regular morning walkers about the importance of laughter and to start a Laughter Club.

The expressions were predictable. They were aghast and actually thought I was crazy. They laughed at the idea and scoffed at the whole concept. But, I was unshakeable and did not give up. I did manage to motivate 4 out of 400 people! And thus was born the first Laughter Club with just 5 people.

We met for half an hour every morning to laugh together much to the amusement of befuddled onlookers. In the beginning, the session began by someone telling a joke or narrating a humorous anecdote. Soon, people started enjoying the whole exercise and reported feeling much better after a laughter session of 20-30 minutes.

Bearing the initial ridicule and criticism, I firmly continued to explain the health benefits of laughter till gradually people became a little more receptive and showed a keen interest. The attendance started growing and there were about 55 people by the end of the week. For ten days the routine continued with much vigor, after which we hit a snag. The stock of good jokes and stories ran out and we were left with negative, hurtful and naughty jokes which prompted some participants to complain that it would be better to close the club than to continue with such jokes.

Determined to keep the Laughter Club alive, I asked the club members to give me a day to resolve the crisis. That night, I kept trying to look for some way to laugh without jokes. Providentially, I laid my hands on a book 'Emotions and Health', from Prevention Health Care Series



The first five people who created history on 13th March 1995. Madan Mohan Pushkarna, Mohan Singh, Rajendra Tandon (Standing L-R) Madhuri and Madan Kataria (Sitting)

(USA). While reading a chapter on humor and laughter, I was surprised to discover that the body cannot differentiate between real and fake laughter. It clearly revealed that if one cannot laugh, one should pretend to laugh. I also learnt that not only laughter, but a bodily expression of any motion, generates a similar emotion in the mind. This was a breakthrough - I thought why not use laughter as an exercise.

The next morning, I explained this to the group and asked them to try and act out laughter with me for one minute. Though skeptical, they agreed to try. The results were amazing. For some, acted out laughter quickly turned into real laughter --- this was contagious and very soon others followed. Soon the group was laughing like never before. The hearty laughter that followed persisted for almost ten minutes.

Finally, there was laughter, real laughter – with no jokes.

The fact that one could laugh without an external trigger was a unique feature. But there were some people who were naturally inhibited and shy and found it difficult to generate laughter. As every person has a different psychological make-up, it was harder for some to laugh. My new challenge was how to get these people laughing without any reason.

I came up with an idea of warm-up exercises such as clapping and chanting ho ho ha ha ha. This loosened the inhibitions and helped people to laugh easily. Soon different kinds of laughter exercises were developed, which included elements of role-play, childlike playfulness and other techniques from my days as an amateur dramatic actor.

As the concept evolved, I saw many similarities between laughter and *Pranayama* in Yoga. Both were based on the principle of optimal breathing - fundamental to good health. Together with my wife, Madhuri, we incorporated the elements from this ancient form of Yogic breathing with laughter and the result was Laughter Yoga or *Hasya Yoga* (as known in Sanskrit) - a complete workout for health and wellness. A physically-oriented technique, it allows for multiple health benefits, primarily increasing the supply of oxygen, boosting the immune system and energizing and recharging the metabolism.

Today, with thousands of Laughter Yoga Clubs burgeoning worldwide, scores of people are taking advantage of the enormous benefits of laughter and are experiencing relief from a variety of stress-related illnesses. It has grown on its own strength and the actual benefits are undeniable.

Unstoppable Laughter!

As the news of Laughter Clubs spread in the country, back in my hometown, a local newspaper carried a picture of a club on the first page, which sent my eldest brother into a state of panic. He called me and asked, "Madan, what are you doing? Please stop it immediately. This is causing us a lot of embarrassment. We sent you to become a doctor; instead you've become a laughing stock."

I tried to explain that the club was not some sort of funny entertainment or cheap comedy – it was a health club and was dedicated to provide good health and maintain the well being of the people. But alas! All explanation was in vain. He was adamant that I stop my laughter movement.

In order to convince my family, I invited him and my mother to Mumbai and took them to the Jogger's Park Laughter Club in Mumbai west. They were surprised to see more than 100 people laughing together. Most of them were educated professionals like doctors, engineers, accountants and businessmen. In fact, they were amazed to see lots of ladies in the session.

The overwhelming response from the members and the feeling of harmony that was displayed had a profound impact on my family and they changed their attitude towards the laughter movement. Comprehending the tremendous health benefits and the happiness and joy that the clubs have instilled in the people worldwide, my family now takes pride in my work and is a part of my 'laughter family'.

Laughter Yoga – A Unique Delivery System

Until now there was no reliable and effective system to deliver laughter. Humor was the only tool available which is not very consistent and seldom leads to continuous hearty laughter. Laughter Yoga is a breakthrough laughter delivery system which enables a person to laugh continuously for 15 to 20 minutes. It combines unconditional laughter with yogic breathing (*Pranayama*) and anyone can laugh for no reason, without relying on humor, jokes or comedy. In a session, laughter is simulated as a body exercise in a group. The group maintains eye contact and childlike playfulness and laughter soon turns real and contagious. This whole concept is based on a scientific fact that the body cannot differentiate between fake and real laughter, if it is done willingly. One gets the same physiological and psychological benefits, purely from the motion. It approaches laughter as a bodily exercise, making it simple for everyone to follow. It can actually be prescribed and

practiced by one and all irrespective of cultural background, language and state of mind because it is a common language we all speak. In fact, it is now being practiced in companies, old age homes, schools, colleges, fitness centers, community centers, prisons, hospitals, homes for the physically and mentally challenged and cancer self-help group to promote complete wellness. It can also be a value addition to other health building activities like yoga, meditation, aerobics, Tai-Chi, etc.

3 Reasons to Practice Laughter Yoga

1. To get the scientifically proven benefits of laughter one needs to laugh longer - at least 15-20 minutes with resting breaks in-between. Only then can the body get physiological and biological health benefits. But, in everyday life we barely laugh for a few seconds here and there. Laughter Yoga helps in extended laughter because laughter is done in the form of an exercise and you can choose to laugh as long as you want to.

2. Laughter Yoga enables you to laugh loudly. This is particularly essential to get health benefits. In fact, you need to do full belly laughing, but very often in social situations this kind of all-out laughing is not appropriate. That's why Laughter Clubs are important as they provide a safe place to laugh out loud.

3. People always need some reason to laugh. However, there are not many reasons that make us laugh in real life. Laughter Yoga enables you to laugh even when there is no reason to laugh. Sometimes, life just isn't that funny. That's why Laughter Yoga teaches you to laugh no matter what. We are not leaving laughter to a chance but are making a commitment to laugh because it is a great wellness tool.

Five Benefits Of Laughter

1. Elevates Mood: Laughter Yoga can change your mood within minutes by releasing endorphins from the brain cells. This makes you feel good, and once in a good mood you can do almost anything and do it well. It also makes you cheerful throughout the day.

2. Health Benefits: Laughter Yoga reduces stress and strengthens the immune system. If your immune system is strong you will not fall sick easily and even if you have chronic health conditions, it will help to heal faster.

3. Business Benefits: Our brain needs 25 % more oxygen for optimal functioning. Laughter exercises can increase net supply of oxygen to our body and brain which helps to improve efficiency and performance. You will feel energetic and will be able to work more than you normally do without getting tired.

4. Social Connector: Quality of life depends upon quality of our friends and our relationships. Laughter is a great connector of people and brings lots of good friends with caring and sharing relationships.

5. Laughing through Challenges: Anyone can laugh when times are good, but Laughter Yoga teaches people to laugh unconditionally so that they can laugh even when times are hard. It provides strength in adversity, a coping mechanism to help people keep a positive mental attitude regardless of circumstances.

SECTION 1

Five Secrets For Laughing For No Reason

1. You Don't Need A Sense Of Humor To Laugh

2. You Can Laugh Even If You Are Not In A Good Mood

3. You Can Laugh Even If You Are Not Happy

4. Childlike Playfulness Is The Essence Of Laughter

5. You Can Train Your Body And Mind To Laugh

Five Secrets For Laughing For No Reason

Laughing for no reason is the core philosophy of Laughter Yoga methods. When I travel around the world, the most commonly asked questions are: Do we need a sense of humor to laugh? How can we laugh when we don't feel like laughing or are not in a good mood? How can we laugh when we have so many problems in life? Why children can laugh 300 to 400 times in a day while adults laugh only 15 times? Can we learn to laugh? Though I am a medical doctor, I must say I was not aware of these very relevant questions before starting the Laughter Club movement. But as the concept of Laughter Yoga evolved, so did the answers. I started to experience the magic of laughing without a reason, which gradually enabled me to discover 5 secrets of laughing for no reason which I want to share with you.

SECRET 1: We Don't Need A Sense Of Humor To Laugh

What is the relationship between a sense of humor and laughter? Is it possible to laugh for no reason? Most people believe that one must have a sense of humor to laugh, but Laughter Yoga has proven otherwise. No one is born with a sense of humor which is the brain's capacity to perceive, relate and experience a situation and judge if the situation is funny or not. We acquire this judgmental skill as our mental abilities develop during mid and late childhood. Sense of humor is a mental and intellectual phenomena.

Laughter arising out of humor is conditional. It depends upon the person's intellectual ability, state of mind and level of happiness and life satisfaction. But laughter can be achieved unconditionally. Children laugh without any mental or cognitive ability to aid them in comprehending humor. Most of their laughter is an outcome of playfulness and inherent joyfulness. To develop the ability to laugh joyfully once again, adults must remove layers of inhibition, programming and mental roadblocks created by self, family, and society. Beneath these barriers lies an infinite ability to laugh for no reason.

Teaching an inhibited person to develop a sense of humor is like flushing a drain blocked with rocks and rubble. Once the rubble is removed, water will start flowing. Similarly, mental inhibition and shyness is like rubble that blocks our sense of humor. Laughter Yoga facilitates this cleaning process. As years of programming are cleared, natural joyful laughter inside of us is released and begins to flow.

Laughter Yoga techniques are effective even for people who have lost their laughter or have absolutely no sense of humor. People often say, "I am depressed", "I cannot laugh", or "I don't feel like laughing". We tell them, "It doesn't matter. Just bring us your willing body and we will make you laugh."

Once released, natural laughter is hard to stop. Even in a country like India where we don't have a great tradition of humor and comedy, hundreds of thousands of people laugh daily in public parks. People, who never smiled, now laugh at small things. They have also started telling jokes and acting funny - something never did before. Playfulness has helped to develop their sense of humor and has brought more laughter to their lives.

In fact, laughter and humor share a cause-and-effect relationship. They are in unison and cannot be separated. One leads to another. Sometimes humor is the cause which is more mental and cognitive, while the effect is laughter - more of a physical phenomenon. In Laughter

Clubs, laughter is the cause and the effect is humor. I realized that most people do not identify with a sense of humor. They find it easier to laugh physically in a group. This has led to the growing popularity of Laughter Clubs. So, even if you don't have a sense of humor, don't worry. Just join a Laughter Club and you will soon develop one.

Difference Between Laughter Clubs And Humor Based Activities

What is the difference between laughter and humor? Let me make a statement: Though we do laugh without using humor, we help people develop their sense of humor through laughter. Let us understand what humor is. It is more subtle and is the awareness and ability of a person to see something funny or express something in a funny way while laughter is one of the many expressions of humor.

Humor is the cause and the effect is laughter which brings physiological and biochemical changes in the body. But in Laughter Clubs we do not use any type of mental and cognitive humor as a cause. We use the physical act of laughter which helps people to do away with their inhibition and shyness, become more open and start seeing the funny side of life. In other words, laughter helps our club members to develop a sense of humor.

In Laughter Clubs, we laugh in the form of an exercise in a group at absolutely nothing. This does not mean that there is no reason to laugh. The very idea of laughing in a group at nothing is so absurd that it makes us laugh. Secondly, we use the infectious and contagious nature of laughter as a reason for simulated laughter.

We do not use humor as a cause to simulate laughter because humor is a mental and intelligent phenomenon. In fact, a lot of people feel they cannot laugh much as they don't have a sense of humor. This is where a Laughter Club really helps. It brings more laughter to the lives of people without bothering much about their sense of humor. Laughter helps to open up their perception and create a sense of humor. In Laughter Clubs, laughter is the cause and humor is the effect. It is like putting the cart before the horse, and it works.

SECRET 2: You Can Laugh Even If You Are Not In A Good Mood

“How do you laugh when you’re in no mood to laugh or don’t have any reason to laugh?” The answer is – Theory of motion creates emotion.

There is an inherent link between the body and mind. Whatever happens to the mind happens to the body. If you observe sad and depressed people, their bodies are also depressed. They walk slowly, talk slowly and their body movements are sluggish and listless.

The opposite is also true; whatever happens to the body happens to the mind. I remember my father said, ‘If you’re sad, don’t sit idle. Keep doing some physical work or go for a walk and jog, you will feel better’. And he was right; I always feel better when I keep my body active.

This is known as theory of motion creates emotion and it establishes a two-way link between body and mind. If one changes the quality of thoughts, one can feel a change in body behavior. Conversely, if one can bring a change in body behavior one can experience the change in mental state. Laughter Yoga has the ability to synchronize both body and the mind, maintaining a mutual harmony.

Two Way Link Between Body And Mind

Psychologist William James in 1884 found that the state of mind, whether positive or negative, is mirrored in a matching bodily expression-- or ‘body behavior’. In his research he found that each emotion in the mind has a corresponding behavior in the body. He discovered that bodily enacting any emotional behavior triggers corresponding changes in the state of mind. The connection works both ways: from mind to body and body to mind.

Consider these:

Sexual thoughts lead to arousal of sex organs in the body, and stimulation of the body’s erogenous zones also induces sexual arousal in the mind.

Acting sad and depressed (for example sitting in a moping, depressed posture and replying to questions in a sad and dismal voice) soon leads to real emotional sadness.

Actors who portray strong emotions often tell of real-life emotional repercussions. Many film and theater actors have reported that while performing tragic roles they experience a real sadness.

Dr. Dale Anderson, MD (Minnesota USA) tells of an American actress who played tragic roles for so long that she fell into depression with classical physical symptoms. After extensive physical testing, her doctors declared her physically healthy, but psychologists suggested she stop playing tragic roles and turn to comedy. As she followed their advice her symptoms and depression completely disappeared.

The same phenomenon can be observed in athletes participating in competitive sports. Physically they act in a brave and courageous manner, shouting and making body gestures to put their mind into a positive winning state. This reduces their fear and anxiety. Soldiers use similar tactics when preparing to attack, often shouting at the top of their voices to 'psych themselves up'. This bodily expression of courage creates matching emotions in the mind.

Laughter Yoga –The Childlike Model

Do you know why children laugh 300 to 400 times in a day while grown-ups laugh only 10 to 15 times?

It's because adults use their cognitive ability to first comprehend humor and then laugh. This is called the mind-to-body model or the **Humor model**. It relies on the ability to understand what's funny and amusing. For example, the extent to which a person laughs at a given joke depends on the quality of the joke, the narration and also the state of mind of the listener.

But, the model has its limitations - it does not guarantee how much a person will laugh. It's conditional: dependent on a sense of humor, the state of mind and the quality of the external stimulus. Being a mental

experience, it has the disadvantage of diminishing with any physical or mental aberration that reduces cognitive and intellectual functionality.

The other model is the **Childlike model** or body-to-mind model. If you observe children, you will find that they laugh the most while playing. Their laughter comes straight from the body and does not make use of any intellectual capacity of the brain. This clearly shows that the source of their laughter is within the body. We, too, can use it whenever necessary by moving the body at our own will. The significant feature of this model is that the person must actively participate in laughter and humorous activities. Being passive will not reap the same benefits.

Laughter Yoga and laughing without any reason helps to cultivate this childlike playfulness. Once you learn to play, laughter is a natural outcome. When you learn to induce laughter in the body, the mind just falls in step. The physical model of laughter is easy to practice for most people—they are relieved not to feel the pressure to identify with the mental part of humor.

SECRET 3: You Can Laugh Even If You Are Not Happy

Laughter Yoga makes a clear distinction between happiness and joyfulness. Happiness is a conditional response. It is dependent on the fulfillment of certain desires of the mind and is related to happenings in the past and the future and hardly ever deals with the present. Do you remember how long you stayed happy after getting that diploma, car, job, or new house that you had worked so long for? Sadly, the fact is that even if the conditions are fulfilled, happiness is often fleeting as it is quickly displaced by new conditions—the idea of forever-moving goalposts. In contrast, joyfulness is unconditional commitment to be happy for the moment and to have fun despite life's problems. Joyfulness is easily triggered by joyful activities like laughing, dancing, singing and playing. It is purely a physical phenomenon while happiness is a concept of the mind.

When you're joyful, you experience physiological and biochemical changes. The generation of good feelings and a sense of well-being

change your outlook towards life. Laughter Yoga is all about learning to be joyful and you can navigate happiness in a much better way.

Fake It Until You Make It

There is an old saying, “If you are not happy, act like a happy person and you will become one.” There is great wisdom and science behind “acting out happiness”. Medical research shows that even if you pretend to laugh or act happy, your body produces happy chemicals. According to the principles of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), there is hardly any difference, between thinking about doing something, and actually doing it.

Hence, whatever may be the source of laughter; it leads to the same physiological changes occurring in the body. Many actors, all over the world, have experienced the effect of faking emotions. They often felt sick after enacting a sad and depressing role, which clearly indicates that if acting sad can make one sick; acting happy can make one healthy.

SECRET 4: Childlike Playfulness Is The Essence Of Laughter

Laughter is not about laughing. It is actually about cultivating childlike playfulness. Once you learn to play, you don't have to laugh. Laughter will be the natural outcome of your playful inner child. If you want to get rid of your dependence on jokes and still want to laugh, simply become childlike. In the initial stages of the growth of Laughter Clubs, when we found jokes could not make us laugh much, we forced ourselves to laugh in a group, but many people found it mechanical and got bored with the activity. Though laughing in a group provides a stimulus, a childlike behavior by adults helps them to get over their inhibitions and actually loosen up. Therefore, we incorporate a lot of childlike actions in the Laughter Club like producing funny sounds by swiveling the tongue inside the mouth, tapping air-filled cheeks, laughing like a child and talking Gibberish. We keep reminding our members about the importance of being like a child.

Robert Holden in his book "Laughter - The Best Medicine" says: "Every child is born with abundant creative potential for laughter, fun, play, happiness and love. Any restraint on any of these has an adverse effect on the child's growth and development. Anyone who grows with the inner child will find health, harmony and happiness. Therefore, instead of growing out of the child, we should grow with the child."

As adults, very few can retain the excitement of a child. Poems have been written about the desire to get back to one's childhood days, but this alone is not enough. Some additional action is necessary. Just as one cannot learn swimming without getting into the water, one can be childlike only by behaving like a child. In a given period of time, every day we as Laughter Club members try to revisit our childhood and try to carry that carefree spirit over to daily life. Childlike activities can be done either with one's own children/grandchildren or in a group of adults at Laughter Clubs.

SECRET 5: You Can Train Your Body And Mind To Laugh

Did you know that we can actually learn to laugh?

Our body and mind can be trained to laugh at will. It's like learning to ride a bicycle which uses muscle memory; once you learn it, you never forget. The theory of NLP clearly indicates that by repeating any bodily behavior over a period of time, the mind begins to generate a predictable response. The body learns to produce a knee-jerk reaction without involving the rational brain or the process of thinking. This is called 'conditioning'.

Russian scientist Pavlov's experiment with dogs is a classic example of conditioning. Every time he gave them food, it was accompanied by ringing a bell. After several days of repeating the same process, he stopped giving food and only rang the bell. He found that simply ringing the bell, even in the absence of food, produced saliva in the mouth and gastric juice in the stomach. The body of the dogs had developed an association between the ringing of the bell - a physical sensory experience and the food.

Similarly, the human brain can also be conditioned. With repetitive exercises, the body starts reacting out of reflex before the conscious brain can rationalize and think. Throughout our lives, we are conditioned in both positive and negative ways.

Over time, members of Laughter Clubs become conditioned to be joyful through the bodily experience of doing Laughter Yoga. Clapping in rhythm, chanting “ho ho ha ha” in unison, and positive affirmations like “very good, very good, yay!” are a few examples of expressions of joy practiced repeatedly in Laughter Clubs. With Laughter Yoga, the brain develops new neuronal connections that produce happy chemistry in the body. These reactions can be triggered simply by laughter exercises, and doing certain actions of the body which lead the mind to experience the emotion of joy - no matter what.

SECTION 2

Five Principles Of Inner Spirit Of Laughter

1. Be Who You Are And Don't Pretend

2. Purpose Of Life Is To Contribute. It Is Not About Achievements

3. Do Your Best And Leave The Rest

4. Appreciation And Forgiveness - Two Magic Words

5. When You Change, The Whole World Changes

Five Principles Of Inner Spirit Of Laughter

Countless studies have validated the efficacy of laughter and its therapeutic power in dealing with physical, mental and emotional health. With such enormous physiological and psychological benefits, it is the most powerful remedial tool with the ability to dramatically change your outlook of life by helping you to get in touch with reality and control emotions and feelings under adverse situations.

It has the power to enhance the inner strength and provide succor when life offers a challenge and one faces difficult times. In fact, I can very easily say that Laughter Yoga has made me what I am today. My levels of patience, understanding, compassion and generosity have all been elevated to a level which helped me transcend the trivialities of life like negativity, conflict, inconsistencies etc. Laughter helped me cope with the tough times and by continuing to laugh over a period of time, it brought about a significant change in my whole thinking, attitude and behavior. I started perceiving life and my reactions in a different manner than before. I realized I could face almost anything without getting either upset or troubled. Nothing perturbed me and I looked for positive solutions to problems rather than brood over them.

Interestingly, I did not do much to bring about these changes. They came automatically as an outcome of my physical act of laughing. My

interaction with thousands of people around the world opened up a plethora of beautiful insights – these stories are the outcome of all those experiences and my new way of thinking. This is what I call the inner spirit of laughter- an unseen force which has the ability to bring on a constructive change and help people live virtuously and with dignity.

Here are five basic principles of Inner Spirit of Laughter:

1. Be who you are and don't pretend
2. Purpose Of Life Is To Contribute. It Is Not About Achievements
3. Do Your best and leave the rest
4. Appreciation And Forgiveness - Two Magic Words
5. When You Change, the Whole World Changes

Principle 1- If you want to laugh more, find your authentic self. Be who you are and don't pretend as truth is always the ultimate force.

Laughter Yoga is a great tool for bringing about physical as well as psychological changes. However, in order to retain the smile that laughter puts on your face, you need to look deep within your own soul. What is keeping you from laughing freely? What is holding you back from truly being happy?

When I asked myself these questions, the answers that came back to me were that I was not being authentic or truthful; a part of me always tried to pretend. On introspection, I realized my inner thoughts and feelings were in conflict and often not in sync with what I presented outwardly. It was as if I were two completely different people.

This revelation tremendously altered my life for the better. I discovered that if you are completely honest and truthful with yourself, inside and out, not only will it set you free from all pretenses, but it will also

bathe your soul with an inner sense of joy, peace and contentment and, ultimately, allow you to laugh more freely.

The following stories validate this principle:

There Is One Answer To Every Question

Ever since I started the Laughter Clubs, the idea of laughing together was widely accepted. As its popularity grew worldwide, the media was rampant with stories about the clubs and its unique concept. Leading newspapers, magazines and television which covered Laughter Yoga helped to spread awareness and gradually the interest grew extensively.

In 1998, one such story appeared in the Los Angeles Times that caught the attention of Steve Wilson, a psychologist and great believer in laughter and humor. Steve called me immediately and planned a trip to India. A few days later, we met in Mumbai and together, we had some great laughter sessions on Juhu beach. He loved laughing with the Indian people and thought it would be wonderful if I could visit the U.S. to promote the cause of laughter. Quick on the task, he planned a series of workshops and seminars in 14 cities that we were to cover in one and a half months.

This was a dream come true. I was very excited, since it was my first opportunity to travel abroad at the age of 40. However, at the same time, the thought of addressing an international audience and handling almost 20 seminars sent a shiver down my spine. I was totally beset with fear and apprehension regarding the presentations. I speculated about everything - the reactions, the response and the feedback of the people. Being a medical doctor, it was important to know the scientific

details regarding the physiology, biochemistry and psychology of laughter. To add to my woes, my Indian English accent scared me no end. I feared being ridiculed and was worried the people would not understand me.

Madhuri and my friends reassured me and suggested I read some more books on laughter, which were readily available in the U.S. Information Center and the British Library. As the day of travel drew near, the enthusiasm of the great American trip was being dampened by panic. I literally was a bundle of nerves, but diligently continued doing my “homework” on laughter. As I browsed the net, I realized that laughter was much written about. There were several books and an incredible amount of research work on different aspects of laughter and its enormous benefits. I had just 12 days to internalize all of this before our first stop, New York City, so I tried to assimilate as much as I could. Really tense, I poured over books day and night and prayed that all would go well.

An early riser, each morning I would ponder over all kinds of possible questions and answers that I might have to face. Suddenly, one day enlightenment struck me. I ran to the bedroom, woke up Madhuri and told her that I had finally found a solution to my worst fear. People could ask me anything and I would have just ONE answer, “I DON’T KNOW!” Startled and surprised, she began laughing!

I had an internal dialogue with myself—“Why should I be afraid of saying, “I don’t know” to any question which I don’t know the answer to? Why can’t I be real and truthful? Nobody is going to hang me for being honest.”

May 24th, 1999 arrived. Madhuri and I boarded the Air India flight to New York en route to Columbus, Ohio, where Steve and his wife, Pam, lived. Having understood the relevance of truthfulness and honesty, believe me, the seminars were a runaway success. People loved my new concept, plus, I was able to answer almost everything they wanted to know and they even understood me!

It occurred to me that fear was just a figment of my imagination. It had paralyzed my thinking process, because my initial goal had been to impress the Americans and rise to, what in my mind, was their supposed expectations of me. For the first time, I realized and fully understood the power of truth. Truth is the ultimate power - fire can't burn it, air can't blow it out.

Reflecting on my life, I felt that most of the time since I left my little village, I had been over-projecting myself in order to impress everyone. I always tried to be someone I was not, which was adding to my stress.

What a breakthrough - My mask-wearing days were over! Today, I am a much better person and try not to be who I am not. Laughter has benefited me two-fold on this journey – not only has it opened by heart and soul to who I am, but it even allowed more laughter to flow as a result.

My Hairy Tale

As a child in school in my village, my teacher advised my mother to send me to a good English school in the nearby town because I was very good in academics. Greatly motivated by what she said, my mother envisioned that I should study medicine since there was no doctor in the village and people had to travel more than 20 miles for medical care. I followed her vision and put my heart and soul into my studies. Soon I became very popular in my new school because I was always first in my class work, good in almost all extra-curricular activities and rather “cute to look at” (that’s what they all said).

Scoring top grade in the 10th standard exam, I went to the capital city of Chandigarh in North India to prepare for the medical entrance exam. The next two years were very defining for me while I studied day and night. Finally, my hard work and my mother’s prayers paid off. I

was accepted for admission to the medical college in Amritsar in 1974 – the first turning point of my life.

During my medical studies I participated in a lot of cultural activities and took part in many plays, debates and other literary programs, but really excelled in theatrics. Having won several prizes for my acting prowess, I thought I had a great chance of becoming a movie star, so started imitating actors that soon changed my entire persona. I styled my hair differently, wore flashy clothes and behaved like I thought a model would behave.



After completing my medical studies, I realized I had two options in life, fulfill my mother's dream and go back to the village and serve the people or follow my own dream and go to Mumbai to join the top hospital and become a famous doctor in the country; however, in the back of my mind, there was also a faint hope that I might become a model or film star which was, for sure, the easiest and fastest way to become rich and famous.

After mulling over it at length, I decided to join Jaslok Hospital in Mumbai which was one of the top hospitals in the country where I began working as a full-time resident physician. Although I easily settled into the groove of the hospital routine, the "acting bug" was still biting. Although working in the hospital was a full-time job, I did skip out to watch film shoots. I even gave my photographs to several advertising agencies in the hope of landing a modeling career, but I felt guilty ignoring my hospital duties and soon realized that a medical career and modeling could not coexist. After much tough thinking and soul-searching I finally decided to eliminate the idea of the glamour

world and genuinely focus on medicine.....and that was the end of a great “star in the making” - ha ha ha!

However, whether it was the glamour world or medicine, my burning ambition was to become rich and famous. Making money from a medical career was not easy, because it would take years of experience and hard work to reach the level of a really well known and famous doctor. This mental struggle, combined with a lot of stress, resulted in massive hair loss. It seemed like every time I brushed my hair, another clump would fall out. When a nurse in the hospital pointed out that I was going bald, I got really worried. My anxiety grew as I tried many treatments, creams, lotions, and even intradermal injections, all to no avail.

As my bald patch grew larger, my nervousness also grew. More and more people started noticing and I started having nightmares. I thought, “Oh, my God, no girl will ever marry me and I will have to remain single and alone for the rest of my bald life!” This self-consciousness and fear compounded my worries and led to further hair loss. Thankfully, all was not lost – in 1986 I met Madhuri who thought I looked great! We fell in love and were married, thus laying one of my biggest fears to rest.

Although marriage did wonders for me, my hairline kept receding, as my worries increased. In 1993, I started editing a health magazine, which saw a rapid rise in my stress levels with even greater hair loss. Finally, I resigned myself to the fact that nothing could be done and I just chalked up my hairy woes to my unfortunate genetic history of baldness!

I stopped obsessing in front of the mirror, put my hairbrush down and started re-focusing on my career and ambition. My health magazine was becoming popular and my medical practice was also taking off. I started a new concept in Mumbai - that of mobile healthcare, going on home visits to care for the elderly who could not visit doctors frequently. On one hand, I made good money but the stress was great and I kept losing more hair!

Then came another defining moment in my life - I started the Laughter Clubs in 1995. This ingenious idea spread like wildfire around the world and catapulted me to the pinnacle of fame, but no riches, since these clubs were totally free for the participants. I was now fully engrossed in spreading the mission of laughter and had stopped worrying about my looks. One day Madhuri commented that with my major hair loss, I appeared much older. I just laughed and said that my real beauty was in my work, not in my looks; however, deep inside, I knew I was not telling her the truth. In my subconscious mind, I still believed I needed hair to look and feel good. It was then I came across an advertisement from a new hair clinic which offering a variety of hair treatments, including hair weaving and bonding techniques. This sounded great and I decided to give it a try.

There was a battle going on in my mind. One part of me thought, "Get real, why would you do that? Why can't you be who you are?" But, the other part of me said, "What the heck? Why not give it a try?" My risk-taking approach kicked in. I decided to try artificial hair and Madhuri was delighted!

Wow! I was looking great with my new hairpiece, which I thought looked quite natural. In fact, people who did not know me had no idea. My friends and relatives were pleasantly surprised with my new look and said I looked much younger, which made me feel on top of the world. Sadly, the new found happiness had its fair share of trouble. First, there was the hassle of putting the toupee on and off, which took a lot of time; secondly, I got so used to my artificial hair that I felt extremely uncomfortable without it. I became totally stressed out over the possibility of somebody dropping in and seeing me hairless.

Then the challenges – if I traveled by car, on windy days I had to be careful not to put the windows down because it would upset my "hair". I could not ride on a motorbike or swim with my hairpiece on. All this made me self-conscious plus I was worried stiff about presenting my balding head to others, letting them know my true reality.

It was a big dilemma - to wear my artificial hair or not. Many times I felt like throwing the thing away because it caused a lot of stress and very little gain. Then, one day as I was meditating, an inner voice told me to stop with the charade and get real. I listened and decided right then and there, I had had enough of pretense and pretending – the hairpiece had to go!

From then on, during workshops and seminars, I started talking openly about my artificial hair and often I would take it off, fling it across the room, making everybody laugh. When I removed that “mask”, I felt lighter and so much happier than ever before.

So, I decided to completely shave my head but Madhuri fiercely opposed the idea. When she went on holiday to Goa for a week in July 2007, I took the opportunity to go to the barber’s shop to clean up the sham - off with my hair! At long last, I was able to get rid of a pretense I had held on to for years. With the “mask” discarded, I basked in the light of truth and honesty – my “holiday” and newfound freedom had begun!

What I learned from my hairy tale was that the artificial hair I had may have looked better than a few straggles of hair on an almost bald head, but believe me, my slick mop of hair did nothing to make me feel good. I had fallen into a world of make believe which was creating an internal conflict. How could I laugh and be completely natural when I was struggling to find my true identity? Pretending to be something that I was not, hanging on to the facade, took a lot of energy. It kept me from being the real me and it also kept me from laughing freely and fully.

Everybody welcomed my decision; in fact, many of my students in the West told me I looked great without hair. They were not bothered about how I looked, because they perceived me as an enlightened person who goes beyond the outward appearance of the physical body.

So here I am, “The Bald and Beautiful”, ha ha ha!

Principle 2- The purpose of life is to make a worthwhile contribution to the world. It is not about achievements

From Super Achiever To Super Contributor

On January 4, 2007, I was honored with a “Super Achievers” award by an educational institute in Pune, India, which awards and honors those who have made an outstanding contribution and innovation in different fields of science, art, culture and education.

It was a gratifying moment as I held the trophy in my hand. I felt humbled and moved by the response of the people. After the warm greeting, I was expected to say a few words about my achievements. Standing at the lectern, gazing at the trophy, I felt a kind of spontaneous rush within me and much to the amazement of the audience, I said quietly, “I don’t think I am a super achiever”. I knew they were not expecting that, but the words came straight from my heart.

When I was young, I always dreamed of being a super-achiever and becoming rich and famous. I wanted to prove to the world I was a high flier, a real go-getter, but it was not easy. The struggle to be that kind of person was very long, hard and left me unhappy, stressed and depressed. As I approached my 40s, I began to feel as though time was running out without having accomplished all those things I had once dreamed of. Thinking only of myself and of no one else, I drove myself even harder as increasing restlessness and dissatisfaction engulfed me.

Without warning, suddenly my life took a full about turn and the ingenious idea of Laughter Clubs came to me. Many advised me to patent the idea that could possibly make me a millionaire. I must confess,

in the beginning, I was very tempted to go ahead and fulfill my lifelong ambition. However, within six months after I started the first Laughter Club, hundreds of letters and e-mails from all over the world began pouring in, saying how it had changed their lives. Seeing the growing popularity of the clubs, once again, my innate desire to become rich and famous peaked and I thought of charging a small membership fee, which would generate a substantial income. In fact, I had almost made up mind to start charging when this incident changed my entire perspective and sent me a new direction. The age-old adage, "Man proposes, God disposes" made me do something that I never ever thought I could do.

One day in December 1995, 85-year-old, Babu Rao, came to my clinic with his son. As soon as he entered, he fell at my feet. This is a custom in India to show respect and gratitude. Momentarily, I was uncomfortable seeing an elderly man touch my feet, but I accepted it and took it in my stride.

After a while, he began crying and continued to cry for almost five minutes. Barely able to talk, as he wept, he kept repeating, "Doctor, you have saved my life." I picked him up, gave him a hug and tried to pacify him, but as I started talking, he offered me a box of homemade sweets, and then told me he had been suffering from several diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, insomnia and depression.

Disgusted with his life, he contemplated suicide, but fortunately, joined a Laughter Club, which changed his whole perspective. After a month of laughter, he felt much better, even his blood sugar and blood pressure had stabilized. He experienced a new will to live and felt completely rejuvenated. I was moved to tears as he recounted his story. Happily surprised at his firm belief in my concept; for the very first time, I realized the value of true contribution. Anything that can change a person's entire life is to be cherished and shared with the world, not something that can never be equated with monetary gain.

After my experience with Babu, I decided to tour India with Laughter Yoga. As I traveled, I met many who had benefited from laughter -



nature's most powerful healing force and the best medicine for physical and emotional and mental well being. Seeing the results and growing popularity, I realized this had nothing to do with me, but that it was a divine gift. I was merely the vessel placed on this earth to spread the good word. Any ideas of patenting or charging a fee for laughter were forever dropped. Laughter was a gift that I intended to give to the world and from that day forward, I felt happy and relieved.

Laughter was not about me, but an idea that helped so many experience complete wellness, happiness and joy. As Laughter Yoga spread, my dream to become world-famous was realized. Respect and well wishes began pouring in and soon I realized that everything that I ever wanted in life came to me once I placed others before myself.

These were my words to a packed house at the Super Achievers Award ceremony on January 4, 2007:

"Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for honoring me with this super achiever award, but I don't think I am a super achiever. I

would rather call myself a super contributor. The times when I was striving, struggling and pushing too hard to accomplish something in life, were the times when I found life to be very difficult. It was not easy and I was quite frustrated. Nothing was ever enough, because all was directed toward myself. But when I started thinking about others and planned to do things that would help people, life became simple. I could easily achieve everything I ever dreamed of by making a worthwhile contribution to the world, thus making a difference to the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. There is an old saying, 'Whatever you give out to the universe will come back to you.' This is the true circle of life."

Inspired by my speech, the chairman of the Institute changed the name of the award from "Super Achiever" to "Super Contributor".

Work Smart Not Hard

Success comes with a price and requires a lot of really hard work. But working hard means different things to different people. When Einstein won the Nobel Prize for his Theory of Relativity, a young girl of 12 asked him to explain his theory in simple words. Einstein replied – "My dear girl, if I ask you to sit on my lap, you will not sit for more than 10 minutes, but if I ask you to sit on your boyfriend's lap, you can sit for hours." This is the Theory of Relativity.

When we talk about working hard, it is relative from person to person, situation to situation. Many people equate hard work with a lot of effort, striving against all odds, going through a lot of pain and discomfort that invariably leads to weariness and fatigue. Basically, when you do something that does not resonate with your heart, it becomes hard work, and in spite of all the effort, if everything hoped for is not achieved, the frustration becomes enormous. It often creates

a negative frame of mind which can make the entire struggle seem unending and worthless.

On the other hand, when you are in love with what you are doing, it will not seem like hard work. Passion and energy is the fuel that will keep you going. You will not feel like stopping, but will ceaselessly work without fatigue. In fact, time will fly by effortlessly.

What is the difference between the two situations? Why are these two scenarios so different? One is about working hard, the other about working smart. I have personally gone through both situations and know the difference.

When I was young and ambitious, all I could dream of was to become rich and famous. I worked hard each and every day to realize my goals. At that point in my life, I had great expectations which if not realized, left me frustrated and stressed. Physically and mentally, I was exhausted. Emotional highs and lows left me tense during the day and sleepless at night. This mad cycle of tension and pressure, aspiration and achievement went on until I discovered the unique power of laughter.

The beginning of Laughter Yoga was a major turning point that changed my entire outlook and perspective towards life in general. Laughter's ability to relieve stress, plus generate inner joy and contentment, left me immensely fulfilled and satisfied. My focus shifted from personal gain to working unconditionally for others. I dropped expectations and instead, learned to do my best and leave the consequences to the Higher Universal Power. I decided not to use Laughter Yoga for personal gain, but to give it away to the world as a gift that would bring happiness, joy and peace. In all honesty, I can tell you that despite working much harder, I felt energetic and totally relieved of all worries and stress. Despite working 14-15 hours every day, I would get up feeling more refreshed than ever before.

What was the difference? I stopped thinking about myself. The perpetual "I" which essentially posed an obstacle to my happiness melted into a "We" with Laughter Yoga. The power of unconditional love and bonding taught me to work with selfless dedication and commitment, as I realized the importance of working diligently not for

any effect, but for the love of it - my goal being to add more laughter and joy to the lives of others.

Providing the catalyst for change in the lives of tens of thousands of people around the world was more than I needed for compensation for my efforts that left me with a feeling of tremendous gratification. This was working smart, not hard. When work is done for others, without thinking of any personal consequence, work becomes a joy and no longer a burden.

Real Success Is About Your Work - Not You

In September 2008 I went to visit my wife's brother Gope in Toronto. On my arrival, he wanted to introduce me to several of his friends so he organized a dinner party. As we talked and got around, most of his friends discovered that I was the founder of Laughter Yoga. Highly amused, they were eager to get more details about the concept. During our conversations that evening, one guest mentioned that Laughter Clubs has been featured in several Hindi movies and was wondering if the film producers had consulted me before featuring the Laughter Yoga sessions. He was quite upset when I said that I had not been consulted. "At least they should have mentioned your name", he insisted.

Feeling grateful for her genuine concern, I responded, "It is fine with me if they do not mention my name. The whole concept is to create more awareness, and if the film with its immense popularity has become a medium for spreading the message of laughter in India, as well as to Indians abroad, I am really happy. It's not about my name. I tried to explain that the laughter movement is a divine movement – it is not just "Dr. Kataria's Movement" and that a much higher force was working

behind the concept. "It is some kind of spiritual power without which I would not have been able to spread the idea worldwide," I said.

I cited another incident when in 2005, I had gone to Melbourne, to present a corporate seminar for the Australian Institute of Management, and conduct several Laughter Yoga seminars. My host Merv Neal had become a Laughter Yoga activist following his recovery from a life-threatening illness that had shut down his bone marrow and immune system. He strongly believed that laughter was the catalyst that had turned his condition around.

On our way from the airport to his home, I asked what his profession was and he said he assisted people in writing business plans. When he asked if I had one, I very sheepishly admitted that I had none and nor was I interested in such a thing. I told him Laughter Yoga had become a global phenomenon without any marketing and publicity on my part and that laughter is not my business, it is my social mission.

Although surprised with my statement, Merv continued to push for a business plan, convinced I needed one and lots of money in order to spread the laughter movement much faster. I had never thought about laughter needing a business plan before listening to him, but somehow he swayed me. I asked him if he would help me write one, so for the next two days, together, we developed a great strategy for advancing the Laughter Yoga movement.

Merv introduced me to about 250-300 people at the seminar, then asked, "How many of you have heard about Laughter Clubs?" More than 200 raised their hands. Next question, "How many of you have heard of Dr. Madan Kataria? Maybe 25 responded affirmatively to that question! Merv's spontaneous response was, "Ladies and gentlemen, here is man who is known more for his work than for himself!"

Surprisingly, I had no bad feelings about not being known, but instead, a wave of enlightenment flooded my heart. Suddenly, I knew that after I die, the Laughter Yoga movement would continue to live, because the movement had grown not because of my personal charisma, but

because of the positive benefits derived by those who had experienced the healing power of laughter.

I had always felt that the Laughter Yoga movement had spread like wildfire to so many countries in a very short period of time without advertising and marketing because an undeniable Higher Force was guiding and promoting it. I knew it was not about me, but about the work, the people and the benefits it provided, but that day drove the point home. Yes, laughter has its own wisdom, its own intelligence – I was merely the vessel.

Principle 3- Whatever Happens Happens For A Reason- Do Your Best And Leave The Rest

Several times we are completely oblivious of why certain things happen in our life. We can get no logical answer and most events are unexplainable. All we can do is to tell ourselves that whatever happens happens for a reason and the Universe knows it all. This perhaps is our only comforting recourse and reassurance for everything that happens to us. Based on this belief is another principle of inner spirit of laughter and that is: one should be at peace with what one has and what there is. All one needs to do is to carry on doing their part, and not worry about the end result, because whatever has to happen will happen and it happens for our good.

There is a strange but strong rationale behind it as if there is a divine reason behind the whole thing. There is always a silver lining somewhere because not only does something valuable come out of it, but it's just what you need. Incredible as it sounds, it is true. Even in the worst of times there are hidden opportunities, life-enriching lessons and better alternatives which lead us to believe that it was the best thing that could have happened.

We see it happening almost daily - for instance when our plans for an evening out fall through, we feel miserable till we later realize that

everything we wanted was right at home. And sometimes we see this happening in a much bigger way. For instance, a woman missed her flight due to some airline error which made her extremely angry and upset, and she kept shouting and blaming the airline officials for the goof up. But, much to her shock, a few hours later, she came to know that the same flight met with a calamity. She shuddered to think what could have happened and quietly accepted the fact that whatever happened had happened because of what was destined.

The following stories wholly substantiate this belief:

The King And His Minister

One day a king went hunting in the forest with his minister. After a hard day's work, his hunting was in vain, making him extremely frustrated and angry. Wielding his sword, he accidentally cut off his finger. As the minister bandaged the king's finger, he said to him, "Do not worry, your Majesty, whatever happens, happens for the good."

Already aggravated, the king retaliated, "What nonsense are you talking? Can you not see my finger nearly chopped off, I am bleeding profusely and yet you have the audacity to say there is something good in this?"

Angry and annoyed, the king ordered his soldiers to throw the minister into a well. As he continued the hunt, he occasionally checked on the minister. Seeing his plight, he mockingly repeated, "Whatever happens happens for the good – well then stay there."

Leaving him, the king and his soldiers wandered deep into the forest and soon realized they were lost. Try as they might, they could find no way out. To top it all, they unfortunately ran into a band of uncivilized, savage natives in the forest, who were getting ready to appease their local deity with the ritual sacrifice of humans.

Not recognizing their king, they captured him and readied him for sacrifice. However, as they were chanting their prayers, one of the priests noticed the missing finger. According to their tradition, a human sacrifice was unacceptable, unless the one being sacrificed was physically complete with no disability of any kind. This was a fortunate twist of fate, and the king was immediately released. Shaken by the turn of events, but exceedingly thankful and happy, he suddenly remembered what his minister had said. He realized how correct his words had been, "Whatever happens happens for the good." At that very moment, he knew that had his finger not been cut off, his head surely would have been. Indeed, fate and fortune had been good!

Rushing to his minister, he asked his soldiers to remove him from the well. Although praising his minister's words, he was still reluctant to give him full credence as he asked him, "I acknowledge that it was good my finger was cut off, and that saved my life, but tell me, what was so good about me throwing you into the well?" The minister replied, "Sire, had you not thrown me into the well, I would have been with you and had those natives seen me, it would have been my head!"

The wisdom and insight of this story is profoundly true. Remembering to look for good in extreme moments of distress rarely happens. Only later, after the event, as the good begins to emerge, is the power of this philosophy realized.

Surrender and devotion to the Universal Force is something fervently practiced in India. This belief allows for contentment in what the Universe brings, without questioning how or why. A peaceful mind, unlike one conflicted with unrest and turmoil, is capable of more creative and peaceful solutions. The ability to be at peace and content with what is generates positive vibrations from which troubling questions are mysteriously answered.

Personally, I have used this philosophy many times in life and have found it really does work. Whenever I have practiced this, never have I failed to find something good in all that happened. Without my

intervention, everything eventually sorts itself out for the good.

Logically, this idea is difficult to explain, but it does keep me in a positive state of mind. By nature, I am a little pushy and impatient. However, now if things do not happen the way I think they should, it no longer upsets me. My basic stance on this philosophy is, "Do your work and shut up!" The results are not in my hands. They will come when the time is right.

The Law of Karma states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. There will be a result for every action performed, but there is no timeframe for that result. No one except the Universe knows when that time will be. The important point is to keep a positive mindset and repeatedly tell yourself that some good will surely happen when the time is right. Stay detached from the outcome of your actions; just do what you do for the love of it. I think maybe this is the reason I no longer get frustrated – I do what I do because I am in love with what I am doing!

Miss A Flight ...Get A Brand New Bag!

This story also confirms that we have no control over what happens to us but have one hundred percent control over what we do when something happens which we don't like.

"My wife, Madhuri and I frequently travel round the world hopping from place to place. It was 2005 and we were about to leave Zurich after a hectic 7 day teachers training. Just before we left we spent some time with Vijay Singh our laughter leader who had settled in Zurich since the last 40 years.

We were having a good laugh at the coffee shop while waiting for our flight to Munich. After an hour we proceeded for security check

and immigration. Normally, it's just a customary check at the counter as Madhuri and I are regular travelers. But as luck would have it there was some snag. I was told that we had overstayed in Switzerland. We were there for 12 days while our visa only allowed us 8. I had overlooked the number of days as we usually used get permission for over 15 days. The officer made us stand on the side while he consulted his senior. Madhuri was worried that we might miss our flight. Fortunately, the officer was convinced that it was a genuine mistake and warned us to be careful in the future and we proceeded to board the flight.

As if this was not enough, another problem awaited us at Munich airport. We had to catch a connecting flight to Amsterdam and there was very little time left. First, the immigration officers delayed us by asking too many questions and to top it all – we missed the transit gate, instead made an exit from the airport! To take the flight, we had to go through the entire immigration process once again.

There was just five minutes left for the flight to take off. We ran like Olympic athletes and by the time we reached the boarding counter we were out of breath. It was really not our day. The aircraft had already closed and was on the taxi way. Our luggage was removed from the plane as we had not reached in time for identification. We could do nothing. We started laughing much to the surprise of the lady at the counter. She told us that she never saw anyone laughing while missing a flight. She was surprised when we told her that we are the founders of Laughter Yoga Clubs and was quite amused.

After some time, Lufthansa Airlines booked us on KLM and was even kind enough to give us two lunch coupons as a bonus for missing the flight. We had some great Italian food at Munich airport which was a treat! Sitting on the airport Madhuri and I discussing about the Indian belief system that what ever happens, happens for the good which is also the philosophy we teach in our workshops. We wondered what was behind all the troubles we went going through and what was good in it.



Finally, we boarded the plane and landed safely in Amsterdam. On landing we found that one of our big bags was totally damaged en route. Madhuri was about to get upset but we looked at each other and started laughing again. After taking out our frustration through laughter, we went to lodge a complaint at the airline counter and laid a claim for a new bag. KLM officials were sorry for the damage and immediately compensated our loss.

Madhuri was very happy when the officer presented a brand new Samsonite soft bag as a replacement for our worn out hard bag. We looked at each other again and smiled knowingly. This was it. God made us miss the flight – just to get a brand new bag!!!

Looking back at the entire sequence of events, despite negative situations happening one after the other, we kept our spirits alive and this is what we believe is the gift of laughter which helps us during challenging times. In India we believe that there is always a balance of opposite energies in every part of our life and that there are ups

and downs in daily existence. In fact, I'm forever prepared for some shock here and there. I've realized that this is how life intended to be. Conflicting situations are a part of its intrinsic design. But remember, there's always a blessing in disguise. We may be unaware of it and may feel betrayed but time proves the goodness hidden in it. Perhaps this is nature's way of give and take.

Do Your Work And Shut Up

On January 29th, 2010, I got up at 5 am and thought of laughing alone. A few guests were sleeping in the house, while some people were praying in a temple behind my office. I realized if I laughed loudly, everyone was sure to get disturbed, but I really wanted to laugh in the morning. So, I thought the best way to laugh would be without any sound. I tried, and it really worked well. I put my camera on my laptop and went on to laugh without any sound. All I wanted to do was to share my laughter with everybody without troubling others. Keeping this in mind, I recorded my newly discovered 'silent laughter'; quickly edited it on my Mac laptop and voila it was all set!

I was so excited about sharing this technique of laughing without sound that I promptly wanted to upload it on You tube. But, alas! Nothing happened. I made five attempts, but all in vain. I wondered what was wrong. Not the one to give up easily; I tried again, but failed. I later learnt that if the server is breezy it might take a long time for the video to show up on You tube. I decided to be patient and wait for few hours before checking again.

The remarkable thing was that even after several failed attempts to upload my video, I did not get frustrated. Do you know why? It's because

of my belief system that whatever happens; happens for a reason. There is always a time and place for everything; the Universe knows better. My past experience had taught me that whenever I pushed too hard for something; it just did not happen. I had also learnt that it was always for something good to come about that things happened at a particular time. Therefore, I was completely at peace and nothing deterred me from my belief.

Anyway, to further my story of unflinching persistence... After breakfast, I tried once again without any success. Then I got busy with other work and asked my assistant to look into it, but I also did not give up trying throughout the day. After much effort, my patience paid off and it was in the evening that I finally managed to upload the video. It worked - ha ha ha. Deep within me, I felt there was no technical problem; it was just a question of time. There was a continuous flow of energy from my brain in the form of positive thought waves which told me that everything will eventually work out. One has to keep trying.

I don't know how to explain this attitude logically, but it did keep my mind in a positive frame. I neither got frustrated or angry. By nature, I'm very pushy at getting things done but if they don't happen, it doesn't upset me. I just do my best and never give up trying. This is because of my belief in the philosophy - Do your work and shut up. The results are not in your hands. They will come when the time is right.

The Law of Karma says that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. If you perform any action, the results will come, but there is no timeframe. No one knows. If you keep your mind in a positive frame and just keep telling yourself that - it will happen at the right time. I'm completely unattached to the outcome of my actions; I just do it for the love of doing it. Patience and persistence come more from not being attached to the outcome. So, remember Never Give Up – Just Keep Trying.

There is the reason for everything- Universe knows the best

Principle 4- Appreciation And Forgiveness - Two Mantras For Inner Spirit

In order to live sensibly, we need to develop and enhance traits which show genuineness and the ability to accept others for what they are. The inner spirit of laughter not only teaches one to appreciate other people for their actions and achievements, but also helps one to forgive others and not carry any baggage of hostility and hatred for long. It is important we analyze and understand a person's behavior in context with several factors that may have led to unpleasant acts and doings, thereby enabling us to absolve people. But, let us not forget the most important aspect of human nature. Even as we show our greatness to appreciate, forgive and forget, we must remember that to be even greater we must learn to apologize for our own conduct which at times may be the cause of others getting hurt and upset. There is no harm in asking for forgiveness and saying sorry as it helps to mitigate all anger and resentment and allows us to move ahead with a positive and a more constructive mental attitude towards people and life.

Soon after Laughter Clubs started gaining momentum, there was a wife of a Laughter Club member who complained that although her husband laughed heartily every morning at the club, his behavior at home had not changed. He continued to shout at family members as always. She suggested that Laughter Clubs should ensure that laughter travels "inside" the members as well. I asked her to clarify what she meant by "laughter traveling inside". Unprepared for my question, she was hesitant, but with some effort, clarified her idea saying what she really meant was that in order to be a Laughter Club member in the true sense of word, members should also develop an inner spirit of laughter. I thanked her and assured her that it would be seriously considered.

To be perfectly honest, I only said this out of politeness; however, her proposition did not leave me. While I was used to being bombarded with critical comments, this was the first time someone had made a

constructive suggestion. With further reflection, her suggestion struck me as very profound. After all, I asked myself, was it not true that the benefits of laughter would be worthless if a person were not willing to shed their negativity?

After some serious discussion with those involved in the laughter movement, it was decided that the goal of Laughter Yoga would be revised from "Laugh and Be Healthy" to "Health and Happiness through Laughter and Inner Spirit of Laughter," The spirit of laughter is not only about making yourself happy, but also about increasing the joy and happiness of those whose lives you touch.

This was an important step in the Laughter Yoga movement – to focus on the efforts and actions necessary to make not only members happy, but being the impetus to motivate and equip the members with what was needed to make others happy as well.

I was determined to create something that would result in more than just the casual daily guffaw, but instead, something that would bring about a change in attitude by consciously adopting resolutions that would convert negative thinking patterns into more positive ones. What were those negative emotions and habits that blocked the road to love, laughter and happiness? My new task had begun.

Paying Compliments

The unfortunate habit shared by many in India, during their morning walks, was critical discussions regarding government corruption, pollution, traffic jams, bad economy, etc, followed by problems with children and other family members. It was impossible for me to stop these conversations, but I wondered what would be the best way to replace all this negativity with more positive thoughts. It was decided that we should start complimenting one another in order to raise spirits and self-esteem. Therefore, the "First Commandment" of Laughter Clubs in our search for a happier way of living became that of paying compliments. Some thought this felt insincere and was not a

good idea, while others felt it was very good. Many found it difficult to pay compliments for no reason, but I repeatedly reminded them that one of the objectives of the Laughter Club was health and happiness through laughter. The happiness was to be directed not only toward one's self, but also toward the happiness of others, which in so doing, boomeranged back to self. What better way to elevate someone else's happiness than by offering a genuine, sincere and deserving compliment?!

Some members experienced very good results as they began verbally appreciating their spouses, children and servants; however, in India, it is rare for men to appreciate their wives with words. Affection is felt in the heart, but rarely expressed in words – the words, “I love you” are seldom heard. A word of caution - as important as it is to praise and appreciate, it is equally important that the praise be appropriate and well-timed.

One day a Laughter Club member went home after a laughter session, determined to verbally appreciate his wife just as she was getting out of bed. Looking at her disheveled state, he blurted, “You’re looking so beautiful!” The wife was taken aback and could not understand what her husband was up to since he had never complimented her in more than 25 years of married life! And why, when she was looking her worst, would he say such a thing? Timing means everything to credibility!

It surprised me to find that paying compliments was extremely difficult for some. Rather than acknowledging the good, the human tendency is to focus only on the negative aspects of others. This, in turn, results in the exchange of much negative energy and unpleasantness, leading to bitterness, intemperance, tension and bad relationships. Sharing their experiences as they practiced paying compliments was a way to one's insight on how to praise with grace. What could be complimented and how? How could compliments be paid without looking undeserved, irrelevant and gimmicky?

Is Paying Compliments Necessary?

Everyone, regardless of age, background or station in life, needs love and recognition in order to live happily and to function optimally. Failure to have our best efforts positively acknowledged and instead met only with silence, results in careless, negligent, apathetic and hostile behavior.

The self-image, that mental picture you carry in your mind of yourself, determines whether or not you will live a happy, satisfied life. That image must be one you like and can live with. When you are proud of your self-image, you will exude confidence and function at your very best; however, if you are ashamed or unhappy with your self-image, you will be hostile and difficult to get along with.

Something miraculous happens when self-esteem is elevated. By offering sincere praise, spirits and self-esteem are elevated. Suddenly, that person becomes more likeable, more cooperative, and kinder. Sincere praise will polish the self-image until it sparkles, but in order for that praise to be effective, it must be given sincerely.

It is unfair and unkind to withhold a compliment – pass it on as quickly as possible. Your words could give an unhappy person a moment of joy; help him cope with a deep despair, while making you a happier person, as well.

How To Pay Compliments

Compliments can be given directly in a casual conversation, a letter or even an email, but there is also another way – a third party compliment. If you fear a direct compliment might appear insincere or be discounted as politeness, praise that person behind their back and ask that person to pass your kind words on to the deserving person. This form of appreciation might be even more believable.

When To Pay Compliments

The golden rule of appreciation is, do it now! Do it while your sense of

gratitude is fresh and strong. If you feel a flash of thankfulness, act on it before the impulse goes away.

Here is my experience:

There is a cobbler who sits at the corner of the lane where I live in Mumbai. I always found him fully involved and happily repairing shoes. One fine day, I stopped for a while to express my feelings of gratitude I felt for the work he was doing. I said to him, "My dear sir, you are doing a great service to humanity. Do you know that the job you are doing for a few pennies is considered a dirty job by many people?" He smiled and was thrilled to receive such a compliment. Since then, he smiles at me whenever I pass his shop. I could clearly see his spirits were raised by my appreciation of his contribution to society.

Practice Appreciation In Daily Life

Now that we know the power of appreciation and paying compliments, how do we put this knowledge into practice? We have already been using this concept among Laughter Yoga club members, but how do you use this powerful tool to bring more laughter in your life as well as the lives of others.

Here is one exercise we suggest. Sit in silence, and reflect, how often you had been criticizing other people, and how much appreciation you have been giving to others. This will make you aware about your thinking pattern, whether you are paying more compliments or criticizing. Once you are aware of your thought pattern, the second part is to make a resolution. Make a resolve each day to develop a conscious habit of finding good qualities in other people.

Learning The Value Of Apology & Forgiveness

Something has puzzled me through the years, how can a relationship that has taken a lifetime to build, be destroyed in one clean sweep? How can it be that two people who could not live without each other, suddenly become foes? What is it that creates a difference and causes a change of heart? The answer is simple - Ego. Well-meaning people

continually go through life hurting one another - a friend insults, a parent abuses, a lover cheats - all giving rise to a stream of painful memories. Without forgiveness, the rancor and bitterness keep the old wounds painful, while haunting and harming both parties, physically and psychologically. As taught extensively in Judaism, Christianity and many other religions, forgiveness breaks the grip of pain on our minds, opening the doors to possibly repairing resentments and grievances. In the long run, apologizing, followed with forgiveness, is the best for all concerned.

However, that is easier said than done. Something deep within stops us from asking for forgiveness, even if we want to. Many find it difficult to forgive others who have caused a grievous hurt and feel humiliated to apologize. If the hurt is acknowledged by both parties, who will ask for forgiveness first?

Factors That Hinder Apology / Forgiveness

Realistically reviewing these misconceptions will assist in overcoming these difficult hurdles.

(a) The first misconception is that the act of apologizing denotes weakness and will invite humiliation. The fact is, apologizing requires moral strength and courage which, when given sincerely, elevates that person's worth in the eyes of the recipient, prompting forgiveness.

(b) If doubtful that your apology will be accepted, know that the general feeling is that once the fault is admitted, instinctively that apology will touch a feeling of generosity in the recipient. Initially, if the apology is rejected, proceed with persistence; knowing that acceptance of the apology might be dependent on the recipient's sensitivity and the depth of hurt. It might not happen with the first try, but in order to live peacefully, with total sincerity, continue to ask forgiveness.

(c) Our basis for not forgiving people is that we always feel that it is a deliberate act of wrongdoing on their part. But the fact is that many

times we do not realize that the act may be unintentional. Therefore, always give a thought and analyze whether the hurtful action is deliberate or unintentional. In fact, rarely is either party 100 percent at fault or innocent; the important point is to look deep within yourself to see what your contribution was to the situation, thus making forgiveness much easier.

(d) No one is all good or all bad; shades of grey exist in everyone. Yet, in everyday life when you have offended or have been offended, this fact is easily overlooked. If we realize that others can make mistake and so can we, it will make it easier to let go of other people's mistakes. It is easy when you are the wrong-doer to rationalize your behavior by thinking, "I am not all bad; there's lots of good in me too", but how much more difficult is that to remember when someone has wronged or hurt you? Remembering there is good in everyone will ease the forgiveness process.

An Effective Apology

What dictates an effective apology? All apologies must be genuine, sincere, and satisfy the recipient; otherwise, the entire process will be a waste of time and energy. For an apology to be effective, consider the following:

(a) Look the recipient directly in the eye, regardless of any discomfort it might create – never pretend to be doing something else or your blurted-out apology will appear half-hearted.

(b) Accept responsibility for your actions. NEVER make excuses for your behavior – you did it, own it, then apologize, forget it and move on!

(c) Like it or not, simply saying, "I am sorry" will be insufficient to calm the troubled waters. The recipient needs to hear the specifics of your apology, because in all truth, he will appreciate seeing you squirm! Be expressive and specific with your apology.

Effectively Accepting Forgiveness

Accepting the apology, effectively forgiving, must be genuine or all efforts will be fruitless. How can you effectively accept an apology?

(a) Be gracious.

(b) Be sincere. Show a change of heart toward the wrong-doer.

(c) Do not act as if accepting the apology was done as a favor or that the acceptance is accompanied with warnings, threats or conditions, something that would destroy any and all hope for peace and harmony.

(d) Acknowledge acceptance of an apology with sincere words, such as, "I know it must have been difficult for you to apologize, but I do appreciate the fact that you did." A written note of appreciation, invitation for tea, holding their hand or giving a hug will also enhance all future interactions. It is important that you visibly and effectively acknowledge their sincere apology.

Never Reopen Old Files – Forgive and Forget

The two words "forgive" and "forget" go together, and rightly so, because in order to forgive, you must forget; however, forgetting takes time and effort. If there is genuine forgiving, the wound will heal and forgetting will eventually come. Forgetting does not mean obliterating the whole event from memory. What need to be forgotten are hurt, resentment and bitterness. Whenever in conflict we have a bad habit of opening old files, especially couples who have a penchant for reviving issues which have been forgiven and forgotten. This invariably leads to unpleasantness. Remember, the best of efforts will be nullified if old files are opened at the slightest provocation. I have watched people who make one another's lives miserable, as they repeatedly refer to an event that happened twenty years ago.

Advantages Of Apology and Forgiveness

Experts feel that forgiving and forgetting is the first line of defense, the

untapped and least understood source of healing power and here are some of its advantages.

(a) Realizing your mistake, but failing to have the courage to apologize, will not benefit you in any way and will result in endless self-punishment. An apology and forgiveness frees you from self-loathing.

(b) Both the parties live under stress in a strained relationship. An apology and forgiveness affords new happiness for both.

(c) A new beginning could arise from past pain. An apology and forgiveness alleviates the pain that has engulfed our minds, allowing the door to open to all kinds of new possibilities.

(d) Forgiveness transforms hostility into helpfulness. An apology with forgiveness lifts the spirits of both the forgiver and the forgiven.

(e) The most important ingredient in forgiveness is love. Forgiveness often is necessary for our loved ones who have hurt us. An apology with forgiveness renews friendships, marriages and careers.

(f) Hate and revenge disturb the harmony of all relationships. Whether passive or active, hate is a malignancy that grows, feeds from within as it releases harmful chemicals that give rise to a multitude of illnesses. Mahatma Gandhi once said that if all live by an "eye for an eye", all of mankind would be blind. An apology with forgiveness diffuses hate and revenge.

Double Benefit

Situations in life can often provoke a state of anger. If your temper flares for whatever reason, cool down, then summon courage to go to that person and simply say, "I am sorry, I lost my temper with you. I was upset, because I did not like the way you behaved with me." By plainly saying, "Sorry", you are neutralizing the hurt feelings inflicted by your outburst and the opportunity can be used in a constructive

way to remind the person why you got angry in the first place.

Verbalizing these feelings of regret and remorse over angry words spoken in haste is often difficult for most, even if the wish to say them is strong. By repeatedly making verbal apologies, consciously committing to do so when necessary, the words will eventually come more easily. This practice has benefited me immensely, resulting in a renewal of more than a dozen relationships whose bonds have become even stronger than before.

What Constitutes Forgiveness

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is the ability to control anger, by completely understanding the situation, then choosing an appropriate, rather than thoughtless, response. It is devoid of anger or revenge. Forgiveness is kindness, tenderness, and love carefully and thoughtfully expressed.

Hypocrisy is to forgive outwardly, while cultivating revenge, enmity and a desire to punish inwardly. It is not forgiveness. If one forgives under a threat, as in, "My enemy or opponent may harass me if I don't forgive you", that is not real forgiveness. If greed and temptation are the motivating force, that is not real forgiveness. If your ego is dictating forgiveness, as you think, "I am powerful, I am the master and only I can forgive and save him, and then he will serve me", that is not forgiveness. In short, words originating from ego, fear, hypocrisy, greed, or lust are not real forgiveness. Only words and thoughts indicating selfless, sincere manifestations of love, kindness and affection constitute true forgiveness.

The following is an inspiring story from Tarzan Ren-yuan Lyu, a psychologist I met in Taiwan who is also the translator for my workshops and seminars. Additionally, he translated an article for me entitled, "Forgiveness" and was so inspired afterward, that he apologized to his uncle whom he had not spoken to for many years.

Set Yourself Free With Forgiveness

Dear Dr. Kataria,

In 2007, I went back to my hometown to visit my father's grave, who had died 16 years ago. As my mother prayed to bless our whole family with health and happiness, a sudden thought hit me. I too wanted to pray to my father. I realized I had missed him for years. Tears welled up in my eyes and I broke down as I said, "Dad, I haven't talked to you for a long time and have been missing you so much."

I apologized for my action years ago, when I had torn the congratulatory notes that were put on my door by neighbors to congratulate him for my achievement. I regretted my indifference towards him. "I know you must have felt very sad, pained, and even tired of earthly life because of my behavior. I know I acted rashly and left home that day to go to a friend far away. You called me that night to show your love, but unfortunately I did not understand it then. I am so sorry dad... would you please forgive me?" I cried.

As I prayed, I felt better and continued to talk. I said I had got married and had two beautiful children who I loved just as much as he loved me. I even told him that my younger brothers and sisters were happy and well settled.

When I finished praying, I saw my mother and brother crying. To ease their emotions, I decided to lighten the situation by offering my father a drink (water)! "Dad, why not drink a cup of wine; Cheers!" Everybody laughed, as we all knew dad loved drinking wine.

Even as I recovered from years of sorrow and repentance, I couldn't help remembering my uncle with whom I had a big squabble 12 years ago and since then had never met or spoken to him.

After my father died, my uncle helped my mother to maintain the

family business. Although he did the work, he used to take a lot of money which made me very angry. I thought his kindness was not genuine and was tinged with an ulterior motive. That led to a squabble and I broke all links with him.



This had been troubling me for years, till I read the teachings of the Dalai Lama and also Dr. Kataria's philosophy on the importance of forgiveness and apology. I learnt to see the positive side of everything. These teachings made me look within myself and gave me the strength to let go my ego. I went to my uncle's home and apologized for years of apathy. I thanked him for all he had done for my family and acknowledged his concern.

A simple man, he was so touched and moved by my gesture that he could not say a word. In a sudden surge of emotions all the unpleasant and hard feelings were just washed away. We talked and talked and I felt calm and relaxed. Years of hatred, hostility and old grudges just vanished. All that was left was a sense of lightness and happiness. I felt free. It was like a release of all pent up emotions.

We usually bring on these negative emotions ourselves and suffer the most. Laughter Yoga is a powerful technique which diminishes hurt and releases all negative emotions and helps develop a positive mental attitude. What I learnt from Laughter Yoga is: When you laugh first, you win; when you apologize first, you win; when you forgive first, you win.

Tarzan

Practice Spiritual Technique For Forgiveness

Sometimes it is very hard to forgive and forget when someone has deeply hurt you. Here is one spiritual technique we practice in our Laughter Yoga Retreats:

Sit in silence and take your time to reflect on the person who you want to forgive. Write a letter in detail expressing your feelings and in the concluding paragraph say that even though it is very hard for you to forgive, you are ready to let go because you want to feel free, breathe free and get on with your life. After you have finished the letter, light a bonfire and burn it. You will instantly feel a sense of freedom from the hurt that you have been holding on for years.

Principle 5 - When you change, the whole world changes

Tell me - have you had any success changing anyone's basic behavior? No matter what the level of your determination is and how hard you try, one's basic nature is difficult to change.

Studies have shown that more than 80 per cent of our time is spent in reacting to the behavior and circumstances of other people, and the thinking process loses all rational logic as it is completely caught up in emotional mire one after another. Desperately searching for ways to change existing circumstances and people, little time is spent on actually taking life in a positive direction.

Nevertheless, there is one thing that will surely bring about a change in almost anyone's life and that is demonstrating unconditional love, despite unacceptable behavior. Generally, those who have a difficult behavior or indulge in negativity have at some point in life missed out on receiving the love and support needed to provide emotional security and a positive attitude. Absolute love and care is needed in order to alleviate a negative state of mind - unconditional love can produce that kind of transformation. Never underestimate the power of love.

Offering unconditional love does not mean accepting injustice or unacceptable behavior. There might be times when showing displeasure or anger is necessary; even so, maintain love in your heart and never let the person feel let down. Express anger only as a means of averting a wrongful or harmful act.

Remember, there is a major difference in expressing anger and getting angry. When anger is expressed, the other person is given the “original document”, while you keep nothing. On the other hand, getting angry indicates that the original copy was given, but you kept a carbon copy for yourself; thus, keeping you constantly involved in connected emotional reactions. Unconditional love keeps nothing – you give it out, and then forget it.

Unconditional love will eventually result in harmony. It is all about the acceptance of others without judgment or expectations, while not attempting to change them in any way, except with a positive example. The law of unconditional love dictates that expressing it automatically places you above fear. As you transcend fear, you will automatically open up to the expression of unconditional love. It is better to win a person with love and understanding, rather than revile them with rules and regulations.

Read the following story which teaches that it is better to win a person with love and understanding rather than trying to reform as correction invariably leads to rebellion.

Do Not Correct - Connect With People

This is a story that teaches that it is far better to win a person with love and understanding, rather than to revile with rules and regulations that can only end in rebellion.

One day I went to the local Laughter Club at Lokhandwala, Mumbai, and was confronted by an elderly club member who was extremely troubled and annoyed about the club functioning. He was angry with the leader and felt he had no skills or ability to make people laugh. He accused him of being dominating and controlling in the way he

conducted the laughter sessions. The flare-up was directed at having the leader removed from leadership.

Though persistent in his faultfinding and aggression against the leader, the elderly member accepted the fact that people still came to the club despite an unfavorable ambiance. I tried to reason with him and told him that anger was no solution that it would only lead to frustration and negative emotions which would affect his mental and physical well being. I cautioned him that anger should be neutralized before it becomes like a wave that can consume his entire being.

Seeing the gentleman's intense dissatisfaction, I realized that it was important to enlighten him about the power of love, the only tool that can transform the mind. I told him that beauty lies not in correction, but in connection and bonding.

Confront egocentric and self-centered people with love and empathy. If the situation requires some sort of harsh action, try taking a counter action. Actions that follow true wisdom rather than anger are actually more effective in the long run. In the above scenario, removing the leader may have led to even more unpleasantness. Approaching his negativity with positive thoughts and continually offering love and support would hopefully bring a positive transformation in his behavior. Whether the change happens or not, happiness will definitely bring peace and calm, while angry confrontation would lead to division within the group.

Stand by Truth and Love – They Are Invincible

An interesting anecdote from the works of Sufi Bayazid:

Sufi Bayazid said that as a young man he was a revolutionary, and prayed to God to give him the energy to change the world. As he approached middle age, he realized that half his life was gone without changing a single soul. He then decided to change his prayer and started saying, "O God, give me the grace to change all those who come in contact with me and I shall be happy." The arrogance displayed in youth had mellowed to acceptance of others. As he turned old, his thinking underwent a

further change and so did his prayer which became, "Give me the grace to change myself."

Bayazid realized that had he prayed for this right from the beginning, he would not have wasted his life.

I had to face this sort of dilemma at an All India Laughter Convention held in India. Only a day before the convention, I was invited as the chief guest by one of the Laughter Clubs. Approximately 120 members welcomed me with warmth and affection.

The club seemed extremely well organized with many people regularly attending the laughter sessions. The leader began the session with some laughter and stretching exercises, lasting for about 30 minutes. After the exercises, he brought us up to date with a report about various activities of the club which all sounded good to me.

Although I appreciated the efforts of the leader and not intending to be critical, I told him that the laughter exercises were a little mechanical and the stretching exercises were too fast for the senior age group. I was only trying to reinforce my teachings; however, it was not well taken by the leader.

After listening to my remarks, a look of extreme displeasure came over the leader's face as he gave me a disparaging sideways glance and thanked me half-heartedly in his closing remarks. His tension and anger with my remarks, which he obviously had seen as a personal affront, were visibly apparent as he avoided speaking to me for the remainder of the conference. Feeling dismayed and bewildered with his behavior, I began wondering if I had done the proper thing by offering what I felt was constructive criticism.

That same evening we met at a party, but he was still very curt and angry with me. When he began making critical remarks about my work, I was infuriated and ready to retaliate. Fortunately, better sense prevailed, as I took a deep breath and held back my anger.

Saddened and hurt by the turn of events, I went back to my hotel and looked through my final preparation for the conference. Much to my surprise and disgust, I found that this particular leader was to be awarded with a gold medal for his contribution to the laughter movement at the end of the conference. For a moment I was consumed with revenge and wanted to cancel his award, but an inner voice would not allow me to commit such an act of unkindness. Suddenly, I realized there would be no difference between him and me if I reacted in this manner. I decided to continue my positive approach, at least outwardly, until the time it genuinely came from within.

The next day at the conference, despite the revelry, laughter and fun, the leader did not look happy. I decided to break the ice. I went up to him and apologized for my remarks. I said I had no intention of hurting him and appreciated all that he had done for the laughter movement, that my words were merely constructive criticism. Immediately, his expression softened and he began smiling. Congratulating him as I presented his award, I noticed tears in his eyes. Not only did I know he regretted his rude behavior, but I also knew my comments had been forgiven and my apology accepted.

Compassion and understanding are two great tools that can transform the mind. Remaining positive will in time foster positive change; however, that change will never happen until you change your own behavior.

Eliminating The Negative

Through the years, I have tried to manage my work and time effectively in order to keep my things organized. Much of my work involves viewing online Laughter Yoga photos and videos that has resulted in an enormous collection of images that need to be routinely sorted.

A journalist friend once gave me a CD of 350 photographs that needed to be sorted through with my favorites selected. I began plodding through the photos, eliminating those that were of no use to me. It felt good to eliminate, to throw away things that would not serve my purpose; however, I found that after sorting for 30 minutes, only 50 photographs had been deleted and I felt as though I had been sorting forever. The task was becoming so time-consuming, it was stressing me out.

Suddenly, I had an idea – why not reverse the process? I would quickly run through the photos, pick out the good ones, and copy them into a folder. I whizzed through the remaining 300 photos in 15 minutes and then realized how inefficient I would have been had I continued to slowly delete the photos. Hours of my life would have been lost, hours that could have been spent on more productive endeavors.

This experience inspired me to reflect on other parts of life. So much time is spent on trying to eliminate rubbish – a misleading course which may feel productive and good, when in fact, one gets so involved in the process that there is very little time left to recognize the many positive elements of life. The freedom, which could be enjoyed by focusing on the best things in life and its successes, is denied. Martin Seligman, in his book, “Authentic Happiness,” emphasizes that focusing on the problem and how to fix it should not be our priority. Rather, time should be spent enhancing the positive parts of ourselves.

In the early days of Laughter Clubs, I found myself criticizing laughter exercises and events. As a result, many laughter leaders got angry. When common sense kicked in, and I realized that the method was ineffective, just like deleting my photographs, I reversed the process. Instead of focusing on what was wrong with various laughter

exercises and teaching styles, I started to look for what was good about the sessions I was observing and began appreciating those things profusely. It worked wonders and made everyone, myself included, happy.

This is the process I have now developed in life. For example, if I recognize that I am feeling jealous of someone, I find the reverse emotion - appreciation. When appreciation is cultivated, jealousy simply disappears! Focusing on the negative is time-consuming and produces ineffectual positive feedback; whereas, spending time cultivating the positive actually saves time and keeps spirits high.

An age-old wisdom from India reads, "You can never remove darkness from this world; the only way to remove the darkness is to light a lamp."

SECTION 3

Inspiring Stories From Laughter Clubs & My Personal Experiences

So What? The Mantra For Happiness

Have you ever cast aside your troubles and said, 'so what?' Have you ever shunned your self-pity and said, 'so what?' Perhaps, never. I want to share a very inspiring lesson I learnt from a street dog which helped me go through difficulties of life.

It was in the year 1996, I found myself going through a rather low ebb of life. Faced with countless tensions, I was worried stiff, till one day a chance meeting with Yamma Gucci put my life back on the tracks and changed my entire perspective. I learnt that the art of living was not in wallowing but in facing the challenges.

Who was Yamma Gucchi? A stray dog!

Conceivably hard to believe that a dog taught me the toughest lesson of life. But, it was true. Yamma was one of the waifs and strays in my neighborhood. Looked after by an old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Anand, she had earned quite reputation in the area. Most of it though was credited to her absurd name.

The old couple had named almost all the stray dogs and used to feed them twice a day, in spite of stiff resistance from the neighbors. Endowed with compassion and kindness, this couple took good care of these dogs. By making frequent trips to the veterinary doctor for regular



checkups, they ensured the well being of these dogs. But, the most noticeable, was the fact, that though they were strictly vegetarians, they cooked a delectable non- vegetarian fare for these dogs.

Every morning, on my way to the Laughter Club, I would see Yamma hopping and prancing on just three legs. She was a beautiful brown dog, distinct from the rest and I was saddened by her condition. Later, I learnt that she had been run over by a car, thus fracturing her hind leg which left her injured.

Despite a broken leg, I noticed Yamma was very agile, enthusiastic and ran all over the place, like the other dogs. I went close and looked into her eyes. There was no sign of despair or depression. They sparkled and shone with life. It was then that it struck me that she was trying to convey a message and saying, 'so what if I have a broken leg'. I continue to live and celebrate life. Life does not cease to exist for me. It is you human beings who constantly crib and exaggerate the happenings in your life.

Bravo Yamma Gucchi! I thought if a dog can continue to live and enjoy life even when incapacitated, what's wrong with me? Why do I worry about the problems I have?

I realized Yamma Gucchi showed me the way, by giving me the mantra: 'so what'

I applied this mantra to most of the problems I faced and found they all vanished in no time. The instant I realized I could survive and manage, the fear was gone. People are in the habit of worrying about problems and stop short of asking themselves "so what?" They keep worrying and making their lives miserable. I believe if you apply this Yamma Gucchi formula (So What?) you will manage the differences and move ahead in life. It will provide you with more confidence and courage to face problems.

(Yamma Gucci died in March, 2008. She was run over by a car ...I lost a guru who taught me the mantra 'so what')

Laughing In Challenging Times

My brother David and my sister-in-law died in a plane crash in the USA and at the same time my mother was hospitalized as she was suffering from cancer. But, after hearing about the tragic accident, she suffered a major setback and went down with pneumonia and septicemia (a kind of blood poisoning). Under such trying times, my father went for the funeral while I stayed home to look after my ailing mother. It all happened so suddenly that it was very hard for me to grasp whether it was true or some nightmare. My body was in a state of shock; I had to remind myself to eat. I couldn't sleep; I had nightmares, felt restless and uneasy. My breathing was disturbed and I felt sad, depressed and helpless. I remember David's visit to my Laughter Club to celebrate my 40th birthday. He laughed with us and appreciated Laughter Yoga as he made many laughter friends.

Even as I stayed with my mother in the hospital, I had asked a friend to lead the laughter sessions. I wrote to my club members telling them about the tragic turn of events but insisted that laughter must continue. Strangely, the laughter session was held at the same time as David's funeral. Everyone fondly remembered him and did Crying Laughter. I was deeply touched by their genuine love and concern for my family.

After some days, I returned to lead the Laughter Yoga meeting. It was the first time I actually practiced laughter exercises since the

unfortunate event. Initially, I was afraid I may not be able to laugh. When I heard laughter from other people it did not infect me the way it usually did. But, I told myself I will do my best and fake it until I make it!

I remember I did laugh on a few occasions over the past weeks, but it was either a reaction to some joke or something funny. I tried to use humor to deal with the difficult situation in my life. But, Dr. Kataria you are so right when you said during one of our trainings that if you can't laugh; bring your body to the Laughter Club. It will know how to do it. And that's what I did. I took my body and an open heart to the Laughter Club. I shared my sorrow with my friends in the club and thanked them for their love and support.



That laughter session was the most powerful experience I ever had in my life. I found my ability to tap my inner resources at a time I felt so weak and powerless. My Laughter Club members were really caring and supportive. It was their love and laughter that helped me to deal with such a hard time. They brought my laughter back.

Nili, Israel

Laughter Helped Me Grieve The Loss Of My Mother

A few days after my mother's hip replacement surgery, she reported some unusual symptoms to my dad, who took her to the emergency room. There, they discovered she had a life-threatening aortic aneurysm and the decision was made to transport her by medflight to a nearby hospital for emergency heart surgery.

As we anxiously awaited the outcome of her operation, I called the organizer of an event for which I was to do a Laughter Yoga program the following day. I had made a commitment to open the conference for the postmasters of Iowa with rollicking laughter. Yet in this moment of crisis, laughter was the last thing on my mind. The organizer couldn't find a replacement speaker but offered to let me off the hook so I could stay at the hospital with my family.

Amazingly, my mom came through the surgery. Since the rest of the family could stay with her and she wouldn't be fully conscious that day, my sister urged me to go ahead and speak at the conference.

What an incredible day it was! Being able to go and bring joy and laughter to a mob of postmasters was just the lift I needed in that difficult time. They were so grateful that my husband and I had come

and many didn't even know that my mom was in the ICU hanging onto life by a thread.

After the conference, I returned to the hospital and spent quality time with my mom. She was fully aware and appreciative of our presence with her. Two days later—after we'd left for the night—she fell unconscious and was not able to be revived. It was Mother's Day weekend that my mother died.

In that moment, my life was irrevocably changed. The profound sadness of the loss was overwhelming. Grieving is so difficult because so many emotions flood you simultaneously. How could I face losing mom? I really didn't know.

The day after her funeral, however, I was at the Laughter Club. People thought it odd that I could laugh in the face of such despair, but I said, "How can I not laugh?" Laughter is so healing, so life-giving, that I felt I needed to practice Laughter Yoga all the more in the depths of my grief.

As the months went on, I added more laughter to my daily routine. I began spending a half hour each morning doing the yoga breathing and laughing exercises. On top of that I practiced yoga nidra (Yogic sleep – a relaxation technique) regularly for deeper healing. How I could have gotten through the worst of it without these practices, I have no idea. They gave me mini vacations from my grief—they revitalized me again and again so that I had the strength to do the arduous work of grieving. In addition, the Laughter Yoga community supported me. I was so moved by the outpouring of kindness that I received from Laughter Yoga people around the globe. Students, fellow Laughter Yoga teachers, laughers I had met at conferences and events sent cards, letters, and flowers. I could feel the tangible power of their love as they continued to breathe and pray for me.

Perhaps most touching was that the postmasters I'd laughed with during my mom's hospitalization sent me sympathy cards. I received

over 40 cards from this group and since they're postmasters, many included stamps as well. I had only met them once, but the laughter knit our hearts together and they became part of my family. They wrote such kind things, it made my weeping heart sing. Here's one example:



"Thank you for leading us in Laughter Yoga at the postmaster's convention. Your positive attitude was infectious. I wanted to be crabby and you wouldn't let me. I wanted to mope and be sad about a bunch of things and you weren't having any of that either. If you could be so cheerful when complications, illness, and the threat of death loomed over you, then all of us need to draw from your strength. I'm so sorry to hear of your mother's death. I know nothing of your family circumstances but if you are the way you are because of your mother—you are sharing her gift to you with all of us. She shines in your laugh!"

It's been a year and a half now since my mom died. I'm still not "done" grieving, but I am gaining more peace all the time. Above all, I credit Laughter Yoga with giving me the ability to walk through this dark valley to the light and happiness on the other side.

Laura Gentry, USA

Laughter Kept My Spirits Alive

I was invited to speak about the benefits of laughter at the department of Health & Allied Health at the local university. It was a breakfast meet around 7.30 am and there were around 200 students and staff members. The theatre was on the ground floor, down two flights of stairs joined by a landing. I arrived bright and early, ready for my presentation and started climbing down, but unfortunately the heel of my shoe caught the first step and I tripped. Losing my grip on the hand rail I slid down the stairs on my right, stopping only on reaching the landing half way down.

A student helped me up and we laughed as I quickly brushed my attire and commented on the distance of the fall. Even before I regained my bearing, another student rushed to my aid only to trip on the last step. She fell forward onto me and sent me tumbling backwards down the second flight. Oops! It couldn't have been worse.

I don't remember the second fall. All I remember is the feel of cold concrete under my arms and the side of my face as I lay on my back at the bottom of the stairs. I could hear a gentle voice in the distance saying. "Stay back, let me check her first." I opened my eyes to see a 'kind face' looking down at me. He asked me to try and move my arms

and legs. I tried to comprehend his words and wanted to do as he said, but it's funny how my mind worked. Without the slightest glitch, my first instinct was to check if the buttons on my blouse were intact! Forget the injury. And thank heavens I had worn trousers. I was so relieved I didn't realize I was hurt.



Suddenly, after the initial glance, I was overcome with the shock of the fall and had to make a snap decision between laughing and crying. I chose laughter. I smiled and got up. I tried to gather the contents of my brief case strewn all over the steps that I had just, so inelegantly, descended! The 'kind face' told me to keep still as I needed a proper checkup, but I clambered on my feet saying, "I have a presentation in 5 minutes; I have to go." I raced to the ladies room to make sure I was presentable before heading to the theatre.

My presentation went well. We talked and laughed and everyone joined in the clapping and laughing. Thirty minutes quickly went by and I returned to my table to listen to the next speaker.

As I sat, a familiar face crouched down by my seat and said, "That was truly the most remarkable presentation I have ever seen." I thanked him for his generosity and we joked about his remark. He sincerely repeated his comment and went on to explain that he was the 'face' at the bottom of the stairs - a lecturer at the university and a coroner. He recounted my tale of horror. He had witnessed my fall and was astounded that not only had I survived without breaking any bones, but had enough grit and energy to conduct a lively and coherent 30 minute workshop. He said he watched in dismay as I fell backwards from the landing, hurtling down the steps, and landing on my back with the base of my neck clearly touching the edge. How I tumbled, twisted and crashed heavily down the stairs before landing flat on my back on the cement at the bottom of the stairs, sending my skull crashing to the cement

floor. I couldn't believe my luck after listening to his detailed account of my mishap. He asked if I was badly bruised. I laughed and said, "I hadn't really checked because what I couldn't see couldn't hurt," but I promised I would visit the doctor 'just in case'

After spending a few more hours at the workshop, I decided to head home. I didn't feel the pain until I was alone in the car and then it began to hurt. I laughed loudly to myself for the entire 20 minute journey.

I don't usually bruise. In fact, as a child I had always complained how unfair it was that I never got hurt enough to show off a 'trophy'. This time it was different! My body and the sides of my leg had dark 'stripes' where I had slammed into the stairway edge. I laughed and called my husband to 'check out my 'prized possessions.'

Horried, he took immediately took me to the doctor. The x-rays showed no physical injuries apart from severe bruising and some muscle damage. I stiffened and began to limp. Left with no choice, I accepted his prescription, but never took the pain killer.

Laughter was the only pain killer I needed. It might not work for everyone all the time but for me it was a lifesaver. I don't know how long or what kind of journey my recovery would have taken had I given in to pain.

I enjoyed showing off my bruises until they began to heal and turned an unsightly shade between green and yellow. The story was shortened to 'a fall down the stairs'. I have no memory of the fall, but the memory of 'Laughter' as a pain killer will always be with me. It helps to re-enforce the power of laughter with a whole generation of future health and allied-health professionals.

I was again invited to speak with the new students the following year but this time I ensured I wore better shoes! I wanted to reiterate my story through words not action...

Bron Roberts, Australia

I Learnt To Live With Joy & Contentment

My yogic life started in the late 1990's, but it was not until the year 2006 that Laughter Yoga found me. Yes, I like to say Laughter Yoga found me, because it arrived into my life unexpectedly! I was doing a Yoga Therapy teacher training in USA, when one day, one of my classmates asked for permission to lead a Laughter Yoga session during an afternoon break, just for fun. I can vividly recall how, by the end of the session, lying on the floor, I couldn't stop kicking my arms and feet, screaming and laughing. I remember saying it felt like as if the sky had opened its doors for me.

I was totally hooked and couldn't wait any longer. Fortunately, I got the opportunity to train with Dr. Kataria in Los Angeles. Back in Mexico, I immediately started practicing Laughter Yoga. My own transformation was set, and I began discovering unknown capabilities in myself. I felt I was the chosen one to spread this unique concept and bring more laughter into the lives of people.

In September 2007, the All American Laughter Yoga Conference was set to be held in Miami, Florida. I couldn't miss the opportunity to meet my teacher once again, so I flew to USA, this time with my 14 year old daughter, Liat. We arrived in the afternoon of Thursday, September 27, and I drove directly to the venue where Dr. Kataria was holding the

Teacher Training, prior to the Laughter Yoga Conference. We spent a few hours with the group, and practiced Laughter Yoga on the beach.

Later in the evening, everybody was getting ready for supper. Liat and I decided to drive to the place where we were supposed to stay, but since we felt hungry, we decided to stop for dinner at a Chinese restaurant, in Aventura, Florida. We sat at the table and watched the beautiful pictures I had taken during the beach session. After 10 or 15 minutes, a man walked by our table and “accidentally” hit one of the chairs and very politely excused himself. In a while, I saw him run out of the restaurant with my travel hand bag which had all our personal belongings like passports, money, credit cards, identity cards, keys, camera, etc. I realized I lost everything.

If this was not enough, we were unceremoniously swept out of the restaurant because we had no money to pay our bill and the authorities were unwilling to assist us in any way. Out of the restaurant, while Liat was frightened and crying, the local police officer made sure to remind me how stupid I was for not securing my belongings with my hands. To add to our troubles I found no “functioning” telephones from where I could call home or get my credit cards cancelled. All I managed was another appointment with the local police for the next day, in order to continue the legal process.

Rather dejected, we headed to the apartment we had booked to stay, but it took a couple of hours before the landlord allowed us in as without my ID card, I could not convince him of my credentials. Anyway, we finally did get in and somehow I managed to cancel my credit cards. But, alas, it was too late. The thief had already “milked” thousands of dollars, right in Aventura’s Shopping Mall, next to the Chinese restaurant! My fate was sealed.

The next day, feeling angry and helpless, we began our legal journey through the police station and the Mexican consulate. I realized this was going to take days, so after a long and arduous day, I called Dr. Kataria and told him I would not be able to attend the conference.

Understanding my dilemma, he advised me not to feel miserable and keep my spirits high. At that moment, I thought it was weird. How the hell could I keep my spirit high under such adverse situation?



In spite of everything, I tried to meditate before going to bed even though I was completely drained and tired. Suddenly, a sparkle inside me began to grow. It was like a divine light and I have been carrying this light inside me throughout my entire life. It is my Arjuna; my Warrior of Life that has never abandoned me. This was what Dr. Kataria was talking about - an inner divinity and a higher consciousness that had the ability to uplift one's spirits. Everything was instantly clear: Nothing can rip my spirit; no one can steal my laughter!

My daughter and I finally attended the Laughter Yoga Conference. I remember Dr. Kataria's eyes, nodding, while I was doing my best to let myself go during the session. He was probably thinking, "Yes, you have made it". After lunch, he invited me to me to share my experience with other participants. We just kept flowing, laughing and raising our level of vibration and elevating our mantra to life: ho, ho,ha,ha,ha. ! Very good, very good yay! Muy bien, muy bien, yayyyyyy!

Two days later, we finished all legal arrangements and flew back home.

Now I know for sure: "We teach what we, ourselves, have to learn".

Laughter Yoga has helped me to learn, and I keep learning, how to laugh, how to open my heart, how to live with joy and content, how to touch my own and other people's sadness, how to let go, how grateful I can be, how to find and open different doors, how to elevate my spirit at all times, how to be a better person, how to look into the distance, into the sea of infinite possibilities...

Nathan Mansbach Mexico

I Met God Outside The Temple

In November 2006, I was staying at the guesthouse of Vivekananda Yoga University in Bangalore. Every evening, as I went for my customary after dinner stroll, I was often told by the locals to visit the cave temple, Gavipuram known as one of the most beautiful example of rock cut architecture.

Finally, one afternoon, I decided to see the rock marvel along with a friend from the Laughter Club. We walked along the street and as we entered the temple complex, the first thing that struck us was a winding line of beggars sitting outside the temple gate hoping for a bighearted soul to pass them by.

Now, if ever there is a place for prime earnings, it is an Indian temple!! People's generosity knows no bounds as they shower their blessings on the deprived and the poor in sheer expectation of receiving their share of blessings from the Almighty. What's with parting of a few pennies, if it makes a great bargain!!

As I smiled in silence at the on goings, I suddenly found myself being chased by two women and a young man, begging for alms. Perhaps they mistook me to be a foreigner—even better for business!! I stopped. My friend and I exchanged some knowing glances and



then we slowly began to play and laugh with the group. They were completely befuddled. Hoping for a few pennies, they instead found themselves gradually warming up and laughing with us. Unable to fathom the situation, they burst out laughing at our antics and gestures. Having established a humane bonding, I asked them to wait for me as I proceeded towards the temple.

Once inside, I was again confronted with another huge line of people holding flowers, garlands, coconuts and other offerings. Their hands full, this was a complete antithesis of the line outside that stood with empty hands. We waited patiently and as we entered the big cave we saw nearly 100 to 150 people sitting with folded hands, heads bowed, and eyes closed in hushed prayer.

As I stood on one side, it soon dawned upon me that almost everyone present inside had a list of desires, which they hoped would be fulfilled, by the blessings of Lord Shiva. Hope writ large on their faces, they unabashedly continued their barter with God. In that moment of reckoning, I couldn't help but reflect on my own motives. I asked myself,

'Why am I here? What do I want? I became conscious of my desires. I too had something to ask for, like the thousands of devotees who thronged the temples each day.

According to my own understanding, I categorized these people into three kinds:

Shopping List: These had a list of simple needs and desires, similar to a shopping list. They begged for these to be fulfilled—I wondered, what was the difference between them and the beggars? Both were constantly asking for something or the other. Well, I was no different. The beggars begged outside, while I begged inside.

Blaming God: Then there were those who were going through a crisis, praying consistently and cribbing, 'Why me?' 'I prayed each day, made all the offerings, remembered you and yet I suffer, please help me through my troubles'; they seemed to be telling God. This was like blaming God himself!!! The Almighty is left with no choice but to lend a keen ear to his devotees and fulfill some of their needs in order escape the charges!!

Security Concerns: This group of people is most scared of troubles creeping up and is anxious to keep their peace intact. They pray hard to ensure that everything remains fine. With every prayer, they remind God to keep them safe and protected from all evil.

Well, after much give and take inside the temple, it was time to get back to the group that was waiting for us outside. As they saw us, there was a big grin on their face and we decided to spend some time playing and laughing with them.

I did some laughter exercises with them, which they thought was funny and they started laughing too. Within minutes there was a deep connection and I felt very close to them. Though I did not know their language, we were communicating through laughter and play. Soon, the story reversed itself. Instead of asking me for money, they started putting some coins in my hand. Before long, they had given me all

the money they had!! It was a complete experience of Spirituality and Godliness.

Before leaving, I hugged them and gave them some money. As we walked away, they continued to laugh and wave their hands happily. I felt so much at peace with myself.

Back in my room, I remembered the words of my spiritual teacher, Swami Sukhbodhananda who said that if you can raise your spirits by yourself and if you can raise someone else's spirits, you are a spiritual. You don't have to meditate for years or sit for hours in the temples, chanting mantras. Laughter is a great act of spirituality as it helps to raise your spirits as well as spread cheer to those around you.

Though I pray every morning, I don't have a particular God. For me God has no form and shape, it is a higher intelligence and I am a part of it.

I have thrown away my shopping list for God and have even stopped blaming him. All I do is acknowledge all the gifts that He has given me. I visualize and express my gratitude to all the people who have made a difference in my life. I ask my lord to make me worthy of helping others and give me the inner strength to get over my problems. I ask for strength to except what I cannot change.

I pray for world peace.

Wipe Someone's Tears - You Are Spiritual

Life is nothing but living with contrasts. Happiness is always tinged with sadness and poverty always skirts prosperity. What then is true happiness? Here's a story that shows you the path to real joy and contentment.

Years ago when I came to this big metropolitan city of Mumbai, I was ambitious and like any other youngster was pushing and striving to make quick money and become rich and famous. But somewhere I think I was blessed. I did not lose my compassion to this rat race. Whenever I came across the poor sleeping on the road and begging my heart warmed up and I tried to reach out to them.

As a practicing physician I made a choice never to charge the poor and the underprivileged. My clinic was open to all irrespective whether they could afford the fees or not. Domestic servants, security watchmen, gardeners, workers and laborers could all knock at my door anytime of the day.

A painting contractor, Maulana used to visit the clinic frequently and also bring in a lot of poor people who needed help. One day he brought a young Muslim guy Naseem who had shaved his hair,

mustache, beard and even eyebrows. He was very thin; nothing but bones. He had high fever and was coughing. I knew beyond doubt that it was a case of acute tuberculosis of the lungs.



He had contracted the disease in his village but had no money to continue the treatment. His relatives and friends deserted him and there was not a soul who was willing to help in his time of crisis. Depressed and dejected he decided to end his life by giving up food and water. He awaited death. Suddenly it occurred to him that he did not want to die among people who were heartless and showed no kindness. He borrowed some money and came to Mumbai. On meeting Maulana, he gave him all that money and asked him to arrange for his funeral when he died. Seeing his plight, Maulana comforted him and immediately brought him to my clinic.

On hearing his story tears rolled down my eyes and I reassured Naseem that tuberculosis is fully curable. I told him he would feel better within a few days. I arranged for his medication and gave him money to buy high protein food.

His health gradually started improving day after day and he started smiling a little bit. Soon his fever subsided and the coughing had almost stopped. He gained weight and was feeling much better.

One day he was overjoyed as he brought me some apples and told me that he had taken up a painting job after months. He fell at my feet crying and I lifted and hugged him. We both cried and I felt a surge of spirituality. It was an experience which left me flushed with joy and true happiness.

I helped Naseem to get more house painting jobs through my friends. He was very happy and within a span of three to four years managed to

save Rs. 85000. He wished to go back to the village, buy a tractor and cultivate the land he owned. I helped him get a loan from the bank to start on his new venture. But as there was not enough money he had to fall back on his relatives.

Years passed by and I heard nothing about him till one day I came across his brother who told me that Naseem had once again fallen into bad times. People in the village had fooled him and the bank interest had piled up. He was in deep trouble.

Saddened by the turn of events I prayed to God to keep him safe and help him out of his problems. My prayers were soon answered.

A few days later Naseem was at my door. He burst out crying on seeing me. I was overwhelmed and consoled him with a loving hug. He was weak but thankfully not sick. He begged me to save him from his disastrous condition. He was in heavy debt. The village people cheated him and the bank was after him to repay the loan.

The court had also served him a notice that if he failed to pay a sum of Rs.1, 47,000 they would mortgage his house and put him behind bars. He promised to work hard if I could bail him out. I gave him Rs.15000 to pay to the bank immediately to avoid any drastic action. He went back to the village to bring the loan papers and settle the amount.

When he returned I remembered an old friend of mine who lived in Dubai. I straight away contacted him and requested him to help Naseem with a job in Dubai. Tears flowed and emotions flared. There was an inherent happiness watching Naseem back on his feet. His smile gave me what the riches of the world could not. It was perhaps the beautiful gift that filled me content and joyfulness.

In one of my workshops someone asked me the definition of spirituality. I said, 'To be spiritual one need not to go to the Himalayas; one need not meditate for hours; one need not sit in temples or churches; one need not chant prayers and mantras-all one needs is to wipe someone's tears' ...

Blind Faith - A Source Of Joy

This experience enriched me with such joy and contentment that no riches could ever impart. Leading the blind to smiles and laughter was the most gratifying part of my life as a Laughter Guru.

It was in the year 1997 that I was invited to a blind school in Mumbai to conduct a laughter session. Though I agreed, I must admit I was a little apprehensive as to how to make them laugh? Usually, in the Laughter Clubs, we use eye contact and laugh by looking at each other as it is infectious. But, it was obvious that this technique was unsuitable in a blind school.

As I pondered over the problem, I invited my friend P.T. Hinduja to join me in conducting laughter exercises. On our way to the school we discussed many possibilities of making them laugh. But it was of no use. We were quite clueless and finally decided to think of something right on the spot.

Before proceeding to do a laughter session, I realized it was important to first establish an intimacy with the students by talking to them. As they were disabled, this connection would facilitate a bond and create a rapport which will help them to laugh. I went closer to the students and greeted them. I shook hands and touched each one of them and asked

them their names. I could sense a very positive response to a physical touch. They felt secure when close. I requested them to make pairs and touch and feel each other's face. The experience was exhilarating for them. Their faces had a certain spark which conveyed their emotions.

Touch was almost similar to eye contact. We then went ahead with the laughter session. They put their hands on each other's shoulders and did the laughter exercises. They shook hands, hugged each other and felt the vibration of laughter.

Though inhibited in the beginning, they soon opened up and laughed their way to tears. It was my moment of joy and happiness. Seeing them laugh so heartily, I decided to make them laugh twice a week.

They looked forward to these sessions and we became very close. I inquired about their families, their dreams, hopes and aspirations. Most of them were keen to learn some skills which would help them to become independent. They did not want people to sympathize and take pity on them. Wanting to be self reliant and accepted as being normal was their utmost need.

During one of our discussions, I expressed a desire to take them out. 'Let's go for a movie,' I suggested. No sooner had I said it, I realized my faux pas. I had spoken without thinking and was worried they would be extremely offended. But, I was pleasantly surprised when they all agreed and said it was a good idea. They said that they would see the film with their 'ears' instead of their 'eyes.' I could see the self-confidence in their ability.

They were really excited when we reached the theater. There was much amusement among the other people as they were surprised to see blind people in a movie theatre! Some of them couldn't believe what was going on. There was absolute amazement and the whole exercise had generated a lot of attention.

We were accompanied by a television crew from an international channel who was recording their feelings of joy every moment. It was



a very popular Hindi movie with many songs. They were fully involved with the story of the film and were emoting at every situation. At the end of the movie they were flushed with happiness because this was their first such experience. They touched me with immense gratitude and immediately had the 'laughing doctor' in tears!!!

This was a spiritual experience- humbling and satisfying. When I met them after a few days I was amazed that most of them remembered the story. In fact, some even remembered important dialogues. They were right -they could see with their 'Ears.'

This beautiful episode taught me that nothing is impossible. With faith in one's abilities and confidence in one's potential, one can build a better world for oneself as well as for others. Never be afraid of failure. It only enhances the prospect of success.

Learn to laugh at disappointments and be willing to try again. It's never too late for anything. So just go ahead...

The Wisdom Of A Bumblebee

In December 2007, I was on my way to Singapore and Hong Kong for Laughter seminars. As it was Christmas time most of the hotels were booked in advance and it was very hard to find a good place to stay.

In all the holiday confusion, I decided to stay with my student, Avi Liran, who was very insistent, and only too happy to welcome me. I had a great time with his family for four days before leaving for Hong Kong for another seminar. As I had to return to Singapore after three days, Avi requested me to again stay with him. Though I felt very gratified, I realized I was occupying his son's room, which might be a cause of inconvenience to the family. I didn't want to impinge on their privacy for too long, so I thanked him and politely told him that I will let him know about my plans later on returning.

Just a day before leaving for Hong Kong, an Indian businessman, Narayan, invited me to dinner with his group of friends. He had heard a lot about the growing popularity of Laughter Clubs and was very curious to meet me and have a good laugh.

Everybody in the party was interested in knowing about the origin of Laughter Clubs and what was it like to laugh without any reason. I

showed them some ways to laugh, and as expected, the group started crackling with laughter. It was unstoppable. Sitting next to me, Dr. Mahesh, a gynecologist and obstetrician was laughing like a child. There was an instant connect with everyone, as the power of laughter had broken through all barriers and had helped the group to open up and laugh heartily like never before. I felt like I knew them from before. We just didn't seem like strangers.

At the end of the session, I was looking for someone to provide me home stay, when I returned from Hong Kong. At once, Dr. Mahesh offered a room in his house. It was extremely kind of him to welcome me in the middle of the night, when I arrived in Singapore on 14th December at 11:45 p.m. I spent a week in his guest room, which was peaceful and serene – just the place for writing my book. Dr. Mahesh and his wife Vanita treated me to every luxury and I had a great time with them. Being doctors, we discussed the prospects of medical research on laughter and he was deeply interested in conducting further studies on Laughter Yoga.

Before I left Singapore, I was very touched by his generous offer to stay with him on my next tour, but I knew that encroaching on people and their space was something that I wouldn't like to do. I also realized that the family has to spend a lot of time and attention during my stay. Providing all the meals at home or taking me out, doing my laundry and other things was quite a burden, and I wouldn't want to put them through all that increased workload.

I reminisced about the age-old Indian wisdom of old Indian scripture, *Bhagwatam Purana* which mentions about *Dattatreyas'* 24 gurus or teachers. *Dattatreya* is worshipped as an incarnation of God. He has mentioned the names of his 24 gurus, most of them were depictions of nature in the form of earth, moon, sun and water. He also spoke of the wisdom and the insight that he imbibed from animals, birds and insects like elephant, deer, fish, honey bee, spider etc.



While staying with my friends in Singapore, I remembered the lesson learnt from a bumblebee, which was one among *Dattatreya's* 24 gurus. This is what he wrote about the bumblebee:

A bumblebee, even before sucking the nectar from a flower, creates an enchanted atmosphere of joy and delight as it hovers and hums and dances around the flower. It takes very little nectar from one flower and then moves on to another. It actually gives more to the flower than takes from it. It sings a song of cheerfulness and happily pollinates the plants, thus helping them to prosper. This clearly demonstrates the art and the joy of giving. One should accept, only if one can give back. It is important to keep the interest and the well being of others in mind as it goes a long way to create genuine relationships.

This lesson was very relevant when I was staying with my friends in Singapore. I realized that one should never take generosity and kindness for granted. It should be cherished and reciprocated with an equal amount of consideration and concern. Favors should be taken just a little at a time, which leaves room for further interaction and

people should not start looking upon you as a burden or an unwanted company. Though both Avi and Dr. Mahesh were very warm and hospitable, but a longer stay would have put them through a lot of bother and would have been an imposition on their space.

This understanding is universal – it is not just about a stay in someone's house, but about everything in our lives. The moral of the story says take as little as possible like a bumblebee, but be mindful of giving something back to the source.

This is how we can enrich each other's lives.

Restaurant No 72

Let me tell you about a very special act of kindness I personally experienced in August 2006, when my wife, Madhuri, and I went to Langkawi, a beautiful island in Malaysia. While on our way from the airport to the hotel, our host decided to stop for lunch. We went to a Chinese restaurant, which was perhaps the most unique eatery I have ever come across. The whole concept in that place deeply touched and inspired me.

To begin with, the restaurant was strangely called '72', which was the actual street address. On entering, we were completely taken aback – there were no waiters, no menu cards, no managers and no system of billing! There was just a tastefully laid out buffet with a board that read, 'Eat as much as you want and pay whatever you can afford'.

What a treat! There was rice, noodles, soup and different kinds of vegetables. Being a vegetarian, I completely enjoyed it. Then there was another strange custom followed after meals. Since it was a self-service establishment, we had to rinse our own dishes when we finished eating. But, the best was yet to come. There was a huge donation box at the counter for whatever contribution one felt like making before leaving the restaurant – That was it. The generosity and trust in such an unbelievable concept really moved me.



By now, I was very curious to know the person behind this ingenious idea. Luckily, the founder – a young Chinese lady happened to drop by. She looked very happy as we sat down to chat. I had seen several charitable organizations serving food for free but never seen a restaurant in a market place that literally offered a free fare. The kind hearted lady told me that Langkawi is a haven for tourists but very often some of them, especially students, do not have enough money to pay for meals. She told me that all the cooks were volunteers and while she only supplied the raw material, they prepared the food in their house and brought it to the restaurant.

Intrigued by her logistics, I couldn't help but ask her how she managed the funding as there was no guarantee how much people would donate. She said, "You'll be surprised to know that we never run out of finances. People always put in more money than they eat."

Incidentally, I had put 100 USD in the box which was much above the actual cost, but I was very impressed by her benevolence and the contribution was just a small way of thanking her.

Meeting her was no less than a spiritual experience. Seeing her radiate with happiness doing this divine job as she practiced random acts of kindness on a daily basis made me realize that service to mankind is the easiest way to become spiritual and to glean true happiness in life.

These random acts of kindness are done without expecting anything in return and whose value cannot be underestimated. This story is a beautiful example of kindness in order to generate true happiness which is bringing a smile to someone's face, and then creating a bond for life.

As you practice the art of laughing, you will realize that generosity and the ability to give are the natural byproducts of laughter. It is the easiest method to dissolve the ego and start flowing from the inside out. Rather than taking, start giving. As Gandhi said, "The fragrance always remains on the hand that gives the rose." You have so little to lose and so much to gain – just do it!

Remembering My Purpose

Every once in a while, a moment or an event will come along and remind us of our purpose on this earth. On two occasions in the recent past, I have been fortunate to be able to save two lives – an experience that has made me very grateful and happy to be doing the work that I do.

Most of the time, I only talk about life changing experiences but on November 7th, 2007, I actually had a life saving experience with an elderly lady who suddenly collapsed in front of my eyes.

My wife, Madhuri and I were invited for a house warming party. Though tired, I thought it would be a great break from work. About 200 people were gathered singing, clapping and dancing. Just five minutes before dinner, the host's mother Mrs. Raj Khanna collapsed and everyone yelled out to me for help.

On examination it seemed like a cardiac arrest. There was no pulse, no breathing and no heart beat. Another doctor present suggested she be rushed to the hospital. But I jumped in and started giving her a cardiac massage and mouth to mouth respiration. I was very well aware that if the heart stops for more than three minutes, she would be brain dead, and rushing to the hospital at that moment would have been of no use.

There was chaos and confusion and most people left for dinner. Meanwhile, I kept pumping her chest and giving her CPR for nearly five minutes when all at once she started breathing and her heart beat came back. It was miraculous. We rushed her to the hospital for further investigation and medical treatment. It was discovered that the reason for the cardiac arrest was very high levels of potassium in the blood due to chronic kidney failure.

After two days she was discharged and I went to see her. The whole family was grateful and blessed me for my endeavor. This was the third time in the history of my medical career I had revived someone from cardiac arrest. It was a humbling experience, but I felt good that I hadn't forgotten my medical skills, even though I did not practice medicine regularly.

Faced With A Challenge – Once Again

Just a month after the critical life saving experience, I was on my way to Singapore from Mumbai on a business tour. The plane took off at midnight and two hours later, I heard an announcement: "If there is a doctor on board, please get in touch with the cabin crew. There is a medical emergency." I got up immediately and saw a woman lying in the aisle. She was gasping for breath. She could hardly speak and was clearly having a crisis. Seeing her use an inhaler, I realized it was a severe asthmatic attack. The flight attendant tried to give her oxygen through a mask, but it wasn't working. Her respiratory passages were swollen, and she was choking. The woman panicked and started praying because she thought she was going to die.

I asked the attendant if there was a medical kit on board. He pulled out a First Aid bag and showed me all the emergency drugs in the kit. I was relieved to find hydrocortisone which I injected immediately. But, her condition did not improve. I looked for some other medical relief and found another injection: adrenaline 1:1000– a lifesaving drug for asthma patients. I wasted no time and injected it subcutaneously (under the skin) into her thigh.



It worked like magic, and her bronchospasm ceased. She felt better within a few minutes and was breathing almost normally after five minutes.

I kept a close watch on her condition until we landed in Singapore three hours later. Just before landing, the flight attendant came to my seat and handed me a gift coupon of one hundred US dollars to thank me for my services.

After landing, I helped the woman carry her bag to the immigration desk. We chatted on the way, and I found her name was Priya, also from Mumbai. She felt really indebted and grateful and hoped that we would meet again in Mumbai.

I expected her to call me and maybe invite me for dinner to express her gratitude for saving her life. At times, I felt bad because she never called. I wondered how people could be so ungrateful. This was my ego mind which had expectations and was making me uncomfortable. Then I had a dialogue with myself and realized that I should not expect

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any returns for good work. Just do it for the love of it. Perhaps this was my human side.

I work full-time with Laughter Yoga, traveling almost eight months in a year. Whenever I'm in Mumbai, I see patients—free of charge—who cannot pay for doctor services. I help them, but actually it is they who help me keep my medical skills sharp.

In the incidences with these women, I was given the divine chance to use my medical knowledge to save their lives. One is not confronted with life and death situations very often, but I'm so glad I was there to help them and save them from near fatal circumstances.

I am very grateful to my mother who encouraged me to become a medical doctor and serve humanity — whether in Laughter Yoga or medical emergencies, my work is helping people around the world. And that is my greatest joy. As for the hundred dollars, I will always keep it with me as a remembrance of the moment that saved someone's life.

Pay Extra - It's Worth It

There are times when our rational mind gets completely hijacked by our ego thus affecting our behavior towards others. This is a common phenomenon and is just the design of life. Nobody is perfect.

Normally, I'm a person with passion for all without being judgmental or discriminatory. In fact, I have a special place for the less privileged and make it a point to help the poor and the needy. Yet, there have been occasions on which I have faltered. My decisions have been biased and I have regretted my behavior. I would like to share a story of my duality which still makes me feel very guilty and I wish nothing like this ever happens again. I hope my sense of better reasoning never gets clouded by a moment of weakness.

In May 2008, I was invited to make a Laughter Yoga presentation in Bangalore, India. I reached there on the 21st which was the night prior to the event and was invited by a friend Yossi Ginsberg from Israel for dinner at the Le Meridian which was about 4 kms away from where I was staying. I decided to take an auto rickshaw instead of the hotel cab which would have been almost three times more expensive.

The three wheeler rickshaws in Bangalore are driven by the poor who find it hard to make ends meet. I had heard stories that they generally fleece foreigners and charge unrealistic amounts. I was a little

apprehensive as often I am mistaken for a foreigner, and that could have put me in a fix.

I hailed a rickshaw, and the driver asked for 80 rupees which was a bit steep for barely 4 kilometers. I tried to bring him down, but he left. Anyway, there was another but alas he was worse than the first one. He demanded 120 rupees which was ridiculous. By then I was quite annoyed as I realized they were trying to swindle me. But left with no choice I hired one and finally ended up paying 80 rupees much against my will.

Still upset by what had happened, I stepped into the finest and the most expensive restaurants in a five-star hotel to dine with Yassi. Seeing the great ambiance and sophistication, my anger simply vanished and all was forgotten! We had a great time, but it was late and I had to return to my hotel. I arranged for a hotel cab as it was difficult to get an auto rickshaw at that time of the night. A smart, well dressed chauffeur welcomed me and asked for 400 rupees. Without batting an eyelid, I just said 'Yes'. I was surprised at my own effortless ease with which I agreed. I knew I was dealing with five star rates and did not hesitate to pay an amount 4 times higher than a rickshaw.

As I sat in the plush taxi, I started thinking about my discriminatory egoistic mind which made me a fuss over paying 80 rupees to a poor man, while there I was ready to give 400 rupees without a hitch.

I felt awful and terribly guilty about my attitude. How could I be so thoughtless towards a poor rickshaw driver in trying to safeguard my ego and social status? In a moment of lapse, my finer sensibilities had been seized by petty reasoning. I so wished I could have met the auto driver again and apologized to him.

I had learnt my lesson. Never again was I going to bargain with a poor man for a paltry sum. It was quite a realization. In fact, now I make it a point to tip them over the usual fares. The smile on their face is so rewarding. What's with parting with a couple of extra bucks? No big deal; it's worth it.

Nothing Is Impossible...

My philosophy of life is that everything is possible and nothing is impossible. Every problem has a solution. All you need is a creative mind like children who play a lot and are therefore very creative. Physical playfulness leads to playful mental attitude which is the seat of creativity. In fact, whenever I have some problem, I start playing around with ideas and suddenly something pops up in my head. Ingenuity leads to beautiful insights which finally help you find a solution.

Here are two beautiful stories that were a result of my intentions to find some solution. The most important thing here is that I always believe that there is something going to happen and I will find a solution.

Cooking Underwear!

Have you ever cooked your underwear? Well, if you haven't just read on and find out what's with cooking underwear...?

In October, 2004, my wife Madhuri and I went to Rome on a Laughter tour. While in transit, we left most of our luggage at Frankfurt airport as later we were supposed to take a flight back home from there. We just took two handbags with few clothes to Rome.

Laughter leader Laura had arranged for a home stay with one of her friends. The owner of the house was a very sophisticated German lady

in her late 30s. She was very well organized like most Germans and was a perfectionist. The house was very neat and clean and everything looked in order. Madhuri was worried about my messing up with the house. She taught me how to close the door very gently so that our host sleeping in the next room would not wake up. She instructed me to open the tap of a wash-basin in the kitchen very gently as it made a funny noise. She was always concerned about me making too much noise and disturbing the host. I tried my level best to remember her instructions, but there was no way I could minimize the sound of the toilet flush and running tap water in the bathroom.

After two days our host decided to go to her aunt's house leaving us alone in the house. One morning, I got up at 7 am and after my laughter and breathing exercises decided to go for a shower. I realized I didn't have spare underwear. The one I wore the day before was still wet. I had an option of wearing the same underwear for another day but hated the thought.

Though in a bit of a dilemma, I made up my mind to dry the other one. I searched the house for any gadget that would help me in my venture. Even a hairdryer could have done the trick. But alas, I found nothing. Suddenly while looking around in the kitchen, I noticed a huge frying pan. I got a brainwave. Why not heat the pan on a low gas flame and just dry the underwear in it. I was a little worried about the elastic that might melt so I kept moving the underwear continuously and did not allow the elastic to stay in touch with the pan for any length of time. Guess what? It took five minutes to dry my underwear. Even the elastic was intact. Now's that's what I call being creative. I actually had a 'crispy stir fried underwear'!!!! Ha ha

Madhuri and I were in splits but were hesitant to tell our host about this. She may not have reacted well to people cooking garments in her pan!!!

This makes me believe that every one of us has infinite potential of the mind. Usually we use just a small part of our brain but if we challenge

its unlimited potential and higher intelligence to flow; everything is possible.

Heating Pizza with a Hairdryer!

In 2007, I visited Canada for a workshop. One day I returned to my hotel after an evening walk and was quite famished. I thought of ordering food in my room service but it was too late and the hotel did not take any room service orders after 10 pm. Suddenly, I realized I had some left over pizza in my fridge. But it was too cold and there was no microwave in the room or any other facility to warm it up.

I started challenging my mind. How can I heat a pizza?

I kept searching for something that might help. Finally, I landed up in the bathroom and my eyes went on the hairdryer hanging on the wall. Eureka! That was it! I put the hairdryer on and swirled it over my pizza. I had done it again. I laughed as I ate my dinner – nice and warm. How's that for an ingenious idea?

What You Want In Life – Just Ask

Who says life is a struggle and one has to work hard to get what one wants? On the contrary, it can be very simple if you gather enough courage to ask for what you want. This is based on the Universal Law of Abundance. It's like the Universe is full of things; to get something from it all you need is to be sure of your intentions, your dreams and your purpose, and you will get it.

Most people are conditioned to believe that things in life don't come by easily; one has to constantly struggle to get what one wants. Presuming this, we always expect things to take a complicated route. We hesitate to ask others because we feel they may not give us what we want which can get embarrassing and hurtful. We may be besieged by feelings of worthlessness and failure, which make us believe we did a wrong thing by 'Asking'.

Here is an interesting story of a business tycoon from India named Dhirubhai who made his fortune and became the number one industrialist from a small-time share broker! He went to Portugal in search of a job, hoping to strike it rich. He constantly bothered an Indian friend there to give him a break. Fed up, his friend decided to pull his leg and invited him to play golf though he was fully aware that he did not know even the basics of the game. At the golf course, the friend asked

Dhirubhai to put the ball into the hole and promised him a job if he did so. Dhirubhai saw the ball lying a few feet away from the hole. He had no idea how the game was played, so he quietly picked up the ball with his hand and put it in the hole with a smile on his face. The friend was completely taken up by his amazing presence of mind and gave him a job. Such was Dhirubhai's commitment towards his conviction that nothing deterred him from his mission of getting a job.

This is what happens in life. Sometimes, what we want is just a few feet away, but years of conditioning and undue sensitivities create a block in our minds and stop us from grabbing it. We fail to make the concerted effort.

An opposing example to the one above is about life in a village. People in the village are simple, unaware of finer nuances of urban living. Being brought up in a small village in Punjab, I was exposed to their straightforward ways and uncomplicated lifestyle. They could ask anyone for almost anything without a hitch.

I remember accompanying my mother for shopping and meeting people on social gatherings or just sitting outside the house watching strangers pass by. It was amazing to see her communicate with all and sundry, as if she had known them for years. There was an effortless ease with which she asked people for what she wanted and got it most of the time. I think it was the purity of her heart and the innocence of her good intentions which made this possible. Another factor worth mentioning is the prevalent belief system in the village which remains untarnished by vanity and conditioning. People are more open and light hearted to ask for anything unlike their city counterparts who lack such simplicity of emotions and sentiments.

In my process of transition from a village boy to a medical doctor, I adopted the same philosophy. When I shifted from my village to the city, I communicated with everyone and asked for what I wanted and fortunately, most of the time I got it. I sometimes tried for the impossible and was surprised to find that even that was not difficult... ha ha ha

Another interesting incident happened when I went to Moscow. It was July 2008. I was traveling from The Holiday Inn on the outskirts of Moscow to the centre of the city for a seminar at 8 p.m.

We started an hour and a half early as my friend Alexander told me that Moscow traffic is unpredictable. He was right. The traffic was quite neurotic, but we arrived well in time. I thought we could have a cup of coffee and grab a bite before the seminar.

There was a great coffee shop down the road, but there was no parking facility. As we looked for a spot to park, I told Alexander not to worry. Even if the parking lot is full, I somehow knew I will find a parking spot somewhere. Alexander was a little bewildered but continued to look for the right place to park, but it was of no use. There was just no place to park our car.

Just then, I saw some people sitting in a car, and it appeared they were planning to leave. But, there was no movement at all. They remained seated. The parking situation was going from bad to worse. There was a long queue behind us – all waiting to park.

While we looked for another place, I asked Alexander to find out if the people inside the car had any intention of moving, and guess what? They told they would be out in the next 2-3 minutes. That was it. I got my parking spot.

Looking back at the crucial moments, I realized that had we not taken the initiative to ask, we would have been waiting like the rest. Very often we hesitate and do not make enough effort to get what we want. Keeping in mind, my mother's wisdom I had the confidence to ask for what I wanted.

Nothing is impossible. When you want something and want to succeed in life do not give up and do not make assumptions - just go ahead and ask for what you want, but always remember to have the purity of intentions and an unwavering commitment.

Wu-Wei -To Do Without Doing

Nowadays, there is so much to do and very little time available. It seems life is on a fast forward button! In fact, there are some people who get so used to working that they feel uncomfortable when there is nothing to do. I'm talking about workaholics who can't relax ever. Even when they're on a holiday and supposed to relax, they get restless without any work. In effect, human beings are fast becoming 'Human Doings'.

I want to share with you something different where 'you can do without doing'. It is a concept from Taoism called Wu Wei which literally means to act without action. For the past several years, I have been studying about different emotions like anger, love, joy, fear, guilt, jealousy and have often speculated as to how people from different faiths, religions and philosophies deal with the most volatile of all emotions - Anger. While I toiled on the subject, I found an unusual solution in Taoism - quite the opposite to the Western philosophy which primarily focuses on the root cause of any problem and tries to fix it in order to stay conflict free. But, many times, despite our best efforts there may not be any solution to the problem. In that case, try Wu Wei. I tried it and can vouch that it really works and makes a lot of sense.

Here's my experience of this philosophy:

Laughter Club was started in 1995 as a social movement run by volunteers. These clubs are free and not much money is involved. A few years ago, a journalist asked me how I managed such a large network of Laughter Clubs worldwide. I told her, much to her amazement, that the Laughter Club movement is growing because I don't manage it! I said I don't control anyone, which is perhaps why the laughter leaders respect me. I only give guidelines and then leave it up to them. But on the flip side, there are times I do get into trouble when people don't agree with my ideas. I get scores of mail from laughter leaders complaining about those who are not conducting laughter sessions in the correct manner or following wrong practices to promote Laughter Yoga. They want me to give them strict instructions about rules and regulations. At times like this, I have no answer, I get stuck. I then try Wu Wei and it works. Read this story to find out how.

In 2004, while in Europe I got two emails from laughter leaders, one from Sweden and another from Germany, both complaining about someone who had his own idea about laughter sessions and was trying to promote Laughter Yoga in his own way. Both wrote huge emails expressing their concern. Unfortunately, or should I say fortunately, I barely glanced through their emails as they were too long and I was too busy. I had no idea how to solve the problem. I did not want to ignore it, but did nothing. A week later, when I reached Mumbai I received two more emails from them. The first was long and full of grievances, but the second one read as follows: "Please disregard my first email, all my problems are now solved." I laughed and realized that had I tried to do something and offered some solution, it could have complicated the matter. Everything was done without me doing anything.

This is how Wu Wei works. At times we all need to just leave off and not look for any solution. Let the natural process take its course. Taoism says if you don't understand what to do, don't do anything. In fact, if you get confused and stressed, chances are you may make a wrong decision.

Therefore, take 'Time out' like we say in soccer. I don't recommend you should apply Wu Wei everywhere, but if you can afford to wait and watch some issues will definitely resolve without you doing anything.

The only important fact to remember about this philosophy is - if you are not doing anything or taking any action, you must still be aware about the problem. Do not be indifferent or ignore it. Stay in touch with the situation and maintain a continuous flow of positive energy from your mind towards the people involved. Keep a positive mental attitude of hope and optimism while saying in your mind that something will happen and the problem will be solved.

In my younger days when I used to read Dale Carnegie, I remember he once wrote if you have lots of problems in life, most will get solved with time. He suggested we write our problem on a piece of paper and stash in the drawer. After few days just cross out those which get solved without you doing anything. I do the same when I get confused and have no idea what to do. I just sit back and do nothing. Believe me; most things just fall into place.

I Learnt Two Lessons In A Day

One day I got up at 4 in the morning to work on an article about Laughter Yoga with cancer groups. I got so engrossed in writing that I completely forgot I was invited to a local Laughter Club in Mumbai to celebrate their 10th anniversary. No sooner did I remember, I rushed with my wife Madhuri and thankfully just managed to arrive in time for a wonderful welcome. There were about 70 members who greeted us with ho ho ha ha, very good, very good, yay!

We spent a wonderful hour with them and when I returned I realized that my visit had enlightened me about many things relevant to daily living. Small as it may seem, there are instances that leave one thinking and help to improve one's attitude and approach towards life and people.

Well, here are some things we both learnt from our extremely hurried trip to the Laughter Club.

Lesson no. 1- Negativity Affects Us More than Positivity

As we were already late, I kept pestering Madhuri to hurry up which made her very stressed and she felt a strong physical reaction in her

body. At that moment, she relented and did not say much, but on our return she promptly asked me why negative things affect us so quickly and strongly, whereas the positive things do not have such an impact on the body.

I explained that the answer lay in the unique design of our body: when in stress, our sympathetic nervous system (arousal system) becomes activated, while the parasympathetic system, responsible for relaxation, takes a back seat. I had also discussed this phenomenon with psychologist Dr. John Ryder who pointed out that if you study the anatomy of the autonomic nervous system it shows that 75% of our nerve fiber forms the sympathetic system and only 25% forms the parasympathetic system, which meant that our body is designed for fast and efficient stress arousal.

Now, this was a necessary advantage in prehistoric times when we lived in caves we needed it to trigger our 'fight or flight' response to survive emergencies. However, the circumstances are very different today. We live in a world with fewer emergencies that require an extreme reaction, but unfortunately our body retained the same nerve fiber configuration. We have more nerves carrying stress messages to our body than those carrying relax messages. That is why negative stress affects our body quickly and forcefully while relax messages take longer to process.

As a large proportion of our parasympathetic nerve fibers are found in our diaphragm, Laughter Yoga aims to train our body to stimulate the parasympathetic system. Laughter and deep breathing helps to activate it thereby allowing us to relax more quickly and freely.

Lesson no. 2 - Life is How You Perceive It

Another significant lesson learnt was when we offered to give Laughter Club member Mrs. Kapoor a ride back home. She told us how she looks after her granddaughter who was 7 years old, as her daughter-in-law goes to work. She took her to school every day, and one day the little

girl was advised to wear glasses as her vision was getting affected due to eye strain. This really upset Mrs. Kapoor because she did not want her granddaughter to wear spectacles at such a tender age. She started looking for treatments to eliminate the need for glasses, but much to her chagrin, her granddaughter just loved the idea of spectacles and was in no mood to get rid of them. After much ado between the two, Mrs. Kapoor realized that even children have a distinct mind and have their own way of looking at life while grownups view life in a different manner. While she wanted to get rid of the glasses, her granddaughter wanted them forever.

This is the beauty of life. Everyone looks at it in a different way and yet everybody is right. It is all about perception – One man's right is another man's wrong. But to live harmoniously in this world, one needs to learn the qualities of acceptance, consideration and understanding. The inner spirit of laughter helps you to do just that. As you imbibe the principles of virtuous living through laughter, it gives you a makeover from being self-centered to selfless; from a bickering person to an appreciative one. It enhances the altruistic nature and promotes the positive attitude which in turn leaves you spiritually enriched and internally joyous.

Life Is Like A Mirror

Some years ago, while in Denmark, I visited a Laughter Club in a small town. While having dinner, laughter leader Heine Hansen, told me he first learnt about Laughter Clubs from a newspaper and immediately joined one as soon as it started in his area. He motivated his mother to accompany him to the Laughter Club as his wife initially refused and snubbed the idea. Later, out of curiosity, she attended one laughter session and was surprised to find how so many people could laugh so much at absolutely nothing. In fact, she even admitted laughing the hardest ever in her life.

Heine acknowledged he was a very serious person working on the computer the whole day, in a textile factory. But, after joining the Laughter Club and attending the first few sessions, he found a significant change. Whenever he walked through his office his colleagues would smile at him which was rather unusual. It really surprised him. On inquiring, his colleagues said that they were just returning his smile as they found him smiling like never before. Heine realized that it was a change in his behavior and attitude that had brought about a change in the behavior of others. He was just getting back what he was giving. A smile for a smile!

Mirroring In Relationships

Dr. Clifford Kuhn in his book 'The Fun Factor' says, 'The number of smiling people I see is the reflection of how much I am smiling'. It is amazing to see how much we act like mirrors to each other in our relationships. If you are getting negative responses from your spouse, friends and from people who are in a relationship with you; it could be that unknowingly we are also acting in a similar manner.

Here's something very interesting I'd like to share. Years ago, when I did not have much money I used to feel edgy if my wife Madhuri wanted to buy something, especially while traveling abroad. Being a typical 'shopaholic', she loved picking knick-knacks from every country we visited. Scared that I may not be able to afford the bills, I would try and dissuade her by saying, "Darling, I don't think we need this; we have a similar one back home". I felt awful at having to refuse her simple demands, but at that moment in life, I was helpless. It went on like this for years until my financial situation finally improved.

Now, money-wise we are much better off. Today, I don't think twice before buying anything. But, much to my surprise, Madhuri stops me from being a spendthrift. Whenever I pick up something from the shop, she takes it away and says we don't need this; it is sheer wastage of money. I wondered what the reason was behind her strange conduct and soon realized she was just mirroring exactly what I had done with her years ago. She was giving me back what I gave her.

This is very true in all relationships. Unconsciously, we do several things to others and when they do the same unto us, we sometimes get offended. Remember, others will always treat you the way you treat them. So in case you don't like what you get from others, it could be that we are treating them in a similar manner. Your own actions are responsible for people's reactions; they decide what comes your way; be it good or bad.

Even Thoughts And Intentions Get Mirrored

Have you ever wondered that even without saying anything to someone, why do they react unfavorably? There is a kind of unsaid negative aura that surrounds the relationship which makes people act and behave negatively towards you. Let me explain why this happens.

We communicate with people not only through the words we speak and the actions we do, but also at a very subtle level. Many times, we think negatively about others, talk ill about them behind their backs and harbor some sort of hatred. Though we seem to think the other person will never know our intentions, but this is not true. Mysteriously, all this gets transmitted and communicated in the form of negative energy which travels like a wave. Your intentions are mirrored by others and much to your surprise you find yourself at the receiving end.

Therefore, always be mindful not just of your spoken words, but also of your thoughts and feelings, because what you say to yourself in your mind about other people, sooner or later will get back to you. Remember, what goes around comes around. This is the Law of the Universe.

Why I Became A Vegetarian

These are just my thoughts on how a simple thing like becoming a vegetarian can actually dispel violent thoughts and negative emotions. Almost all great spiritual leaders in the world have spoken against violence and have endorsed non-violence in daily living and thinking. As Laughter Yoga is based on unconditional love and an inner spirituality of a sort, it can be an important tool to drive out destructive thoughts and change one's attitude towards life.

The root of vegetarianism comes from my family. My mother, a strict vegetarian, did not allow any sort of meat to be cooked in her kitchen. It could only be made in the courtyard outside the house, with a separate set of utensils! Most women in my family are strictly vegetarian, but the men eat meat twice or thrice in a month. Earlier, I used to eat non-vegetarian food occasionally but never really developed a taste for meat. This may have come about because when I was a child, my brother encouraged me to eat meat, while my mother always asked me not to.

In the 90s, when I gave up eating meat completely, no one was happier than my mother. Often people ask me what made me take

this decision. I tell them it's because I love life. Gopal Mehta, a friend in Mumbai, also a vegetarian, once told me something very insightful. He said, "Madan, if you cannot kill an animal yourself, you have no right to eat it." It was that day I decided to become a total vegetarian because when I asked myself if I have the heart to kill an animal – the answer was no. Later, this belief became more profound as I practiced Laughter Yoga which teaches unconditional love for one and all.

Vegetarianism has evolved through years and is an integral part of Indian culture, and has something to do with the principle of non-violence. If you study the history of India, it has been subjected to several invasions by foreign rulers, but on its part has never retaliated violently. The credit goes to the core Indian ethos of non-violence. We call it *Ahimsa* in Sanskrit. Himsa means violence or to kill or to hurt, while *Ahimsa* means absence of violence. Our greatest hero, Mahatma Gandhi, liberated India from the British rule only with his philosophy of non-violence. The weakness of Indians was that they were not great fighters. Gandhi turned this weakness into the greatest strength. Our war of Independence was perhaps the only one in the world fought without resistance and with the policy of non-violence. Interestingly, Gandhi was a vegetarian!

Violence is an outcome of our ego mind which is a false mind and has selfish tendencies, insecurities, fear, hatred, aggression and competition. It is entirely centered on the self and believes the only way to happiness is through acquisition of power and material possessions. This hankering can sometimes become a dangerous breeding ground for negative and aggressive thoughts, and can sometimes result in violent behavior. One invariably struggles for more comfort and luxuries, even after the basic needs have been fulfilled because one is being dictated by the egocentric mind.

Gandhi once said that there is enough in this world for the need of everyone; but not for the greed of anyone. If we observe our life, we all have very few needs, but we build more and more needs which

perpetrate violence in many forms. Down history, it has been proved that many a war has been fought just to acquire more. Today, the aggression at international levels is a mere extension of greed and ever-increasing wants, which cause mental stress and increase negative emotions like anger and frustration largely responsible for violent behavior.

Though it may seem inconspicuous, there is some truth in the fact that the kind of food one eats has a direct link to the kind of thoughts that penetrate the mind. Therefore, becoming vegetarian and deciding not to kill animals, is just one way to practice non-violence. The best way to practice non-violence is to watch our thoughts. To control the mind is very difficult as it has the habit of falling back to old patterns, and memories programmed in our subconscious mind.

Laughter Yoga is a great way to check one's thoughts as it emphasizes the inner spirituality and unconditional love for one and all. According to the spiritual principles, we are one, and belong to the same source. Once we understand this oneness, it will reduce the differences and the hatred, and bring forth virtues of goodness. In fact, I am proud to say that I have inspired a lot of people in the laughter community worldwide to become vegetarians, and this only because of unconditional love and compassion brought on by unconditional laughter.

Leading People From Behind

Some years ago in Hamburg, Germany, I was interviewed by a journalist writing an article for a business journal. Towards the end of the interview, she asked me how I managed to spread the Laughter Clubs in so many countries. How did I manage people and how many people did I have in my office.

She was really surprised when I said, "I don't manage people. In fact, that is the reason why Laughter Clubs spread so fast! Secondly, I don't have many people, just my wife and a couple of assistants." Completely taken aback, she asked how I managed to communicate and network with so many laughter leaders worldwide.

While we were sitting in the restaurant and sipping coffee, I told her about the leadership skills I learnt during my numerous visits to different countries. I explained that Laughter Yoga is an organized exercise routine in which one needs to learn the techniques of how to laugh without jokes, humor and comedy.

To do this, one needs a laughter leader who leads the group through series of laughter and breathing exercises. I realized that in order to spread Laughter Clubs around the world, I need the help of laughter leaders who can run the social Laughter Clubs for free, as volunteers. It

was quite easy for me to find volunteers in India, as most Laughter Club members are retired people, and had plenty of time to volunteer. But, it has been quite challenging to motivate people in the West to give their time for a social cause that did not bring any income.

All this was not easy, especially in its initial stages. It was quite hard to deal with so many people who work as leaders as most of them have their own perception. Often egoistic, they landed up in conflicts making it difficult to maintain good relationships on a long-term basis.

This is where an age-old Indian wisdom taught me the most important lesson of my life. Somewhere, I had read a beautiful quote which said – ‘A good leader is not the one who has more followers, instead he is the one who can create more leaders.’ In other words, helping others to become leaders is the real leadership quality. This set me thinking on how to help others become leaders and how to support them, and keep them motivated to serve the cause.

The art of leadership is the art of people skills-to connect with others through appreciation. Every human being wants compliments and accolades, as they are the most positive reinforcements which help a person go a long way.

So, whenever you manage people, remember to treat them with respect and dignity. Always appreciate their work, and encourage them further, without being negative. Give them the freedom to think and execute their creativity and vision. This will help in creating everlasting relationships.

This is the secret of Laughter Yoga going places.

Any Shit In Your Life- A Step Forward To Greatness

Merv Neal from Melbourne, Australia has always been a great help in spreading the laughter movement. We share our moments of highs and lows and inspire each other in good times and bad. Once, he wrote an email saying he was invited to appear on a popular reality show on TV called 'The Apprentice.' He was also asked to conduct a Laughter Yoga workshop for the show. Merv was very keen on the publicity and the awareness that the show would generate as it enjoyed a large viewership. He asked me for some guidelines and I explained what we can do to make the best of this opportunity. He was so excited as I called him the "CEO of Laughter Yoga - Chief excitement officer" - ha ha ha.

But alas a few days later, he wrote back- Oh Shit!! The TV channel decided to drop the segment on Laughter Yoga. Sensing his disappointment, I wrote to him about a similar experience I had a few years back when I was unceremoniously dropped from a show which was an even bigger 'shit', ha ha ha...

Here's an excerpt from my letter:

Dear Merv,

I can understand how you must be feeling, but since I am a born optimist let me explain that every shit which happens, it happens for a reason and it is good for you. Try and view it from a different perspective.

In fact, with this shit you have moved one step towards greatness. You must be wondering what is so great about being dropped from a show. Well then, just read my story which will tell you that I had faced a much bigger mess some years ago in UK.

I was invited to participate in a talk-show, 'Richards and Judy', which had a viewership of millions. I was thrilled. A black Mercedes limousine was sent to take me to the studio in London. After a hearty breakfast, I spent nearly half an hour getting my make-up done. I invited all my laughter leaders from London to join me and demonstrate Laughter Yoga. Everyone was excited and well prepared. We all waited in anticipation of a call, which never came. I was in the Green room with make-up for nearly two hours wondering what could have happened. Suddenly, all lights were put off and the show ended. Now this was something we were not ready for.

After an agonizing wait, the producer finally appeared profusely apologized and broke the upsetting news that due to lack of time our program had to be canceled. That came as a rude shock to all of us. Some leaders started fuming and fretting. They felt terrible and thought the whole thing was ridiculous.

As the negative energy was building up, I started laughing loudly and soon everybody joined in. People in the studio were stunned at our behavior. Instead of being angry, here we were all laughing. As the news spread to the hosts of the program, they requested us to come back the next day for the show. But, the leaders were adamant not to return. On the contrary, I thought that if we did the show, we would still be able to promote Laughter Yoga to millions of people. We should not dwell on what happened.

Against everybody's wishes, I decided to go back the next day. It was the same long travel of four hours in the limo, make up was done, but this time we were on air. The show went very well. People appreciated the positive attitude despite all the mess that happened. As a result,

we got enormous publicity and more opportunities to spread Laughter Clubs in UK.

In retrospect, I wondered if I had taken the fiasco to heart because it hurt my ego, it would have done no good to the laughter movement. I would have lost out on the great exposure and promotion we got. Therefore, it is wise to convert our frustrations into fascinations as there is nothing more valuable than being positive and maintaining a calm attitude in the face of a crisis.

So, dear Merv, it does not matter if they dropped the show. One thing is sure, they are now aware of Laughter Yoga, and this will manifest sometime later. It might even bring even far better awareness. Who knows?

I totally believe we have no control over what happens to us, but we have full control on what we do when any sort of a mess happens.

Remember-whatever happens; happens for a reason, and it is good for you. And this I have learnt from Laughter Yoga.

Love and Laughter

Madan

The Positive Side Of Terrorism

I live in Mumbai which has been the target of terror attacks several times. It is so painful to see innocent people killed for no fault of theirs. In fact, terrorism has become synonymous with life today. Every country lives in the shadow of fear from a handful of misdirected elements with warped thinking and inhuman approach to mankind. Their mindless rage against beliefs which contradicts their own has led to devastation, destruction and a lot of sadness around the world. As I watch the images of these dastardly acts either on television or read about them, I wonder what goes on in the mind of a terrorist. How could anyone ruthlessly mow down innocent people? What psyche allows such unthinkable acts of violence?

There is a feeling of helplessness, insecurity and vulnerability as the people try to tackle this problem. As a proponent of world peace people ask me very often how laughter can deal with terrorism. The explanation is simple - laughter brings out the best in everyone. It teaches one to love unconditionally with no barriers of caste, creed or religion. I believe that in the fact that there is always some streak of goodness that emerges in the face of crisis. A born optimist I am designed to look at the brighter side of life. So what is good about any

terror attack? Well, here are some of my thoughts and feelings that I would like to share with you.

A terror attack can strike anyone and anywhere in the world. No matter how strong or weak a country might be, we all are susceptible to the consequences of terrorism and militancy. Be it New York, Mumbai, Iraq, Afghanistan or any other place – the whole world gets affected in some way or the other by terrorism. But, there is a commonly noticed phenomenon that whenever a tragedy strikes, people forget all personal rivalry and conflict and come closer to help each other. Every terror attack makes us stronger and brings us nearer to world peace.

It brings out the best qualities of unconditional love, compassion, kindness and generosity towards fellow human beings no matter which region or country they belong to. Perhaps, the truth is that sometimes it takes a crisis of this dimension to bring nations together and work in harmony to create a kind of oneness which never happens under normal conditions.

Another aspect of humanity seen under such circumstances is that people realize that one can never win a war against terrorism as war can only bring more war. People have become aware that it is not the physical being that needs to be destroyed; it is the mind that needs to be enlightened. The inner spirit of laughter is a powerful force that helps one to introspect and look for goodness from within. It enhances the capacity to comprehend and accept others with love and compassion. It dissipates destructive and negative thoughts and replaces them with positive ones which help in sensible living.

Laughter Yoga is an ideal tool to adopt and practice in order to forgive and forget all that is hateful and intolerant. The breathing exercises is a great way to connect with each other as we all breathe into the same environment thereby creating an indirect connect with whole world. In fact, you can actually experience the intimacy if you reflect the images of the victims on your mental screen and breathe for them in order to provide some solace via the common mantle of the Universe.

As the concept of Laughter Yoga is based on unconditional love, it gives you the strength to breathe even for the perpetrators with the intention of providing some sanity to their misshapen minds. The inner spirit of laughter and its fundamental mantra of forgiving and forgetting will in due course result in shrinking all conflict, divergence of beliefs, and will finally lead to peace and harmony.

SECTION 4

Five Spiritual Laws Of Inner Laughter

1. Law Of Oneness

2. Law Of Impermanence

3. Law Of Imperfection

4. Law Of Karma

5. Law Of Opposites

Five Spiritual Laws Of Inner Laughter

If we want to laugh more in our lives, we need to understand how life works and what laws govern it. Certain unseen laws and principles called universal laws or spiritual laws, influence every aspect of our life. These unwavering or unchanging principles, sometimes referred to even as laws of nature, are the basis through which the entire Universe continues to exist, develop and expand.

There are several spiritual laws, but here I will discuss five major ones which I have experienced personally. From the several instances given, you will learn how to harmonize with these all-pervading universal laws and how to use them in a conscious and intentional way so as to be grateful for each event, condition and circumstance encountered as various aspects of your life unfold. Once you understand them you can have more control over what it is that you are experiencing each and every day. This will help to bring more laughter and joy in your life.

The 5 spiritual laws are:

1. Law Of Oneness
2. Law Of Impermanence
3. Law Of Imperfection
4. Law Of Karma
5. Law Of Opposites

LAW OF ONENESS

**We all are one and inter-connected and belong to the same source.
Everything belongs to me and I belong to everyone.**

Everything in the Universe: human beings, animals, plants, environment, planets and all living or non living material objects are a part of universal consciousness which is a constant flow of energy. Our life as human beings is also a part of the cycle of this Universe. Our birth is a transition of some form of energy manifested in human form. We take birth, grow, and after death our energy still continues with the sequence of eternal consciousness which has no beginning and no end.

We all belong to this intelligent system - call it universal intelligence or higher intelligence - and we are nothing but a flow of energy from one form to another. Our ability to find oneness in everything in this Universe is called spirituality. The richness of the system lies in the fact that we are diverse and have different likes and dislikes, and hopes and aspirations. When we encounter someone with whom we resonate, we find ourselves in unity and oneness with that person. Others who are different from us raise feelings of apathy, dislike or even hatred.

What creates this difference is our thinking mind or ego mind that has one agenda: 'I', 'Me' and 'My'. This mind starts comparing: I am better or worse or equal to 'them'. This thinking separates us from others and creates fears, anxiety, sorrow and jealousy. To achieve spirituality, we need to overcome this thinking and need to accept, love and help every other person equally. Spiritual unity and oneness comes when you allow people to be who they really are, without trying to change them. Make sure to create a loving environment despite differences. Your right-hand will never hurt your left hand because it belongs to you. Spirituality is the awareness and sense of belonging towards one and all. When you realize that everything in this Universe belongs to you and you belong to everything- you are spiritual. There is no duality, no conflict but complete harmony.

We all are one whether we live in the east or west. We are interconnected, and cannot ignore nations which are poor and underdeveloped because their wellbeing affects the rich nations equally. For instance, ecological imbalance occurring in any nation, rich or poor, is bound to have global consequences, and lead to the spread of diseases like SARS and H1 N1 from poor to rich nations. Even conditions of unrest, violence and terrorism are the result of this inequality. Therefore, unless we feel the oneness and learn to care for each other as one global family we cannot live in peace and harmony.

This is easier said than done. At an average level of consciousness our ego mind dominates and pursues a selfish agenda. We need to elevate our consciousness to a higher level through spiritual practices and by following spiritual values, in order to become more open and flexible towards others.

Spirituality Is Like Logging Onto The Internet

I have been struggling to understand spirituality all my life and to find a simple way to describe it. While thinking about how the internet has changed our lives, this parallel came to me: The entire Universe is an intelligent creation - the way it works is in itself a miracle. Consider for example the human body: an egg and a sperm unite and develop into a complex being with many organ systems working together in perfect harmony. Our heart beats non-stop from birth till death; we breathe non-stop; the way our digestion, metabolism, mind, muscles and organs work with thousands of hormones and enzyme-systems all cooperating in perfect automation is complex beyond the scope of imagination.

There are endless species of animals and plants, of planets and galaxies, all working together in perfect complex harmony and amazing unity. The Universe is infinite and unlimited. This order and direction is driven by cosmic intelligence or higher mind or simply, God.

How Do I See The Internet Connection

Our human mind can be compared to a personal computer with limited knowledge, intelligence and capability. Even with great capacity our personal computer cannot go beyond a few hundred Giga bytes (GB). By plugging that same computer into the internet, it connects and gains access to a higher, comparatively unlimited knowledge and intelligence. If we as humans 'log on' and connect to the higher mind or cosmic intelligence, we gain access to higher knowledge and intelligence. This process of logging on to higher intelligence is known as spirituality.

We are not even able to understand the complexities of our own mind, emotions, desires and our relationships with fellow human beings. To live a spiritual life is beyond the comprehension of our human intelligence. To log on we need a password. Each person must find his own password. For some it is meditation. For others, it may be abiding by spiritual laws and inculcating spiritual values. It can be done in a religious or a non-religious way. Each one of us has the ability to log on to higher intelligence and has a right to use the unlimited potential available there.

Why We Need Spirituality

We all want to be happy and do not want any pain or suffering. We all have different needs and desires, which if unfulfilled, lead to a stressful situation. As we try to achieve these goals, many times we find ourselves very frustrated and helpless, which hampers the accomplishment of happiness, and creates anxiety and constant nervous tension. It is then that people invoke a higher intelligence or a higher force like spirituality to help them cope with their inabilities and accept reality.

Spiritual practices help us to tackle problems and face them with equanimity. We can take the ups and downs of life in our stride and no longer yo-yo between extremes—climb peaks of happiness and then plummet to depths of despair. It helps us cope.

Spirituality is all about working smart, not working hard. One has to put in a lot of effort if working with lower intelligence as it has limited

abilities and skills. On the other hand, spirituality is all about working smart and getting maximum results with minimum efforts. With a spiritual approach one can attain everything that one ever wanted with minimum effort. This is how universal intelligence works. Instead of toiling and struggling, one needs to flow effortlessly. It's like walking with the wind assisting you from behind. All one has to do, is to align oneself with spiritual laws and laws of nature and let these forces glide you to happiness.

Spirituality helps to create new ideas, new visions, creativity, and intuitive abilities to reach our aspirations. It helps build a magnetic aura around you that attracts people towards you. It creates an energy that gives a sense of security, power and fearlessness.

Better Emotional Intelligence

Handling emotions is perhaps the most difficult of all human abilities. We spend almost 75 per cent of our time trying to sort out the varied and complex emotions, while the other 25 per cent is spent in emotional reactions to the situation and the people around us. Negative emotions, literally drain our energy and affect the quality of our lives. Since it is difficult to manage these reactions with a logical mind, you need to resort to a process that will help you to rise above all that is depressing. This is where the spiritual approach is helpful as it has the power to alter the negativity of the mind to a positive pattern.

I have personally used this approach to spread the laughter mission worldwide. With hardly any resources or any great assets, I managed to set up thousands of Laughter Clubs in over 65 countries. It was spirituality which helped me cope with all obstacles that came my way. It is indeed a powerful tool which helps in realization and fulfillment of one's dreams and aspirations.

Unfolding Unlimited Potential Through Spirituality

All of us have access to unlimited intelligence. Call it God, higher intelligence, cosmic intelligence, quantum or unified field. Every human

being has the ability and potential to connect to the higher mind which is the ultimate creative force and works like a miracle. Science tells us that we use only 10 per cent of our potential; the other 90 per cent of our creative energy lies dormant. Spiritual practices like meditation, breathing exercises and even Laughter Yoga can help us activate our right brain which is the seat of creativity and unlimited potential.

Log On Meditation

From the metaphor of the internet let us do a meditation which will connect your mind to the higher intelligence and will help you to unfold your unlimited potential to work and perform.

Sit or lie down in silence and relax your body for a few minutes. On your mental screen visualize a beam of golden light emerging from the horizon and traveling towards your body. Just before your feet it divides into two parts and enters through the big toe of both feet. Feel the energy of this light traveling through your ankles, calf muscles and slowly rising through your thigh muscles to enter your spine and go up all the way to the crown of your head. It takes a U-turn and flows down through the arms traveling to the tips of your fingers. Feel this continuous flow of energy revitalizing each and every cell of your body. You will become aware of the presence of higher intelligence within you. You can do this meditation for 5 minutes or more several times in a day.

After doing this meditation, you will observe a transformation in your personality, communication and relationship with other people. You will flow effortlessly with your work and mysterious coincidences will start happening like telepathy, ESP etc and you will feel that you are guided by a higher force in whatever you do.

Practice Non – Judgmental Exercise

Human mind always makes judgments about everything. When we walk on the street, we are always judging people, even those we don't know. We don't like the way they walk, dress up or their behavior etc. I guess this is because of our insecurity. We want to feel safe and protect ourselves so that no one can take advantage of us. Maybe its part of our

ego mind which wants to prove and feel superior to others. Later on this becomes a part of our unconscious habit of judging people even if there is no need.

When you judge people you feel separate from them and there is no unity – a state of duality exists between you and other people. As Mother Theresa said, “You cannot love people if you judge them.” From this law of oneness, we understand everything in this Universe belongs to you and you belong to everyone.

Next time you walk on the street, make a deliberate conscious effort to feel that whoever you see and meet are a part of you. Tell yourself that each and every person is an extension of you. After some time you will be surprised that you no longer judge people.

Personally, I have been doing this exercise since many years. It has helped me to stop judging people and learn to accept them as they are. It has even changed my attitude towards them and transformed my relationship with them.

LAW OF IMPERMANENCE

Life is a change and everything is changing; nothing is permanent.

Another significant law which defines our life is the spiritual law of impermanence which states that the only constant is change. Everything is transient and is likely to perish or go through a transformation over a period of time. The law of impermanence asserts that all phenomenon are subject to constant change, to rise and fall, and no permanent states, either physical or animate, exists. Whether it is our body, our thoughts or the Universe, every one of them is continuously under the process of changing. Even our body changes with every breath we take. In fact, the Universe is a prime example of constantly changing celestial occurrence. Whether we're aware of it or not this is the reality of life. Yet we criticize and feel threatened by the changes we perceive. We need to accept change as being positive and a part of living.

We are delusional that we will live forever, though deep within us we know that life is ephemeral. Everyone has an innate desire to do something extraordinary in their life so as to be remembered even after death. Preserving bodies, erecting monuments, and even cloning to some extent are examples of human desire to defy impermanence. Right through life we fight uncertainties and insecurities by amassing wealth and property. But, the fact is that no amount of money or property can prevent one from dying. From the second we are born we start dying – that is the only truth of life. Yet, to keep our ego alive, we indulge in unfair practices, cheat and exploit people we love, seek pleasures and comforts without realizing everything in this world is transitory.

Adversity Brings Out The Best In People

True to the saying that it takes adverse circumstances to bring about a definite change in people's attitude, perception and behavior, I know some people who said that their life improved after they survived cancer. All through, they had been indulging in luxuries and working day and night to achieve financial goals which left them with no time to enjoy life. But, when faced with death it all changed. They realized the importance of time and healthy living. They started eating sensibly, behaving agreeably and helping others. The awareness of death brought out the best in them and they gave up all arrogance to live a life of virtue, kindness and compassion.

Even natural calamities like tsunami, hurricanes, earthquakes, accidents, epidemic etc brings out the best of human nature. In such times, people forget all conflict and help each other irrespective of religion, culture, or country. Supplies are rushed for the affected victims from all parts of the world and people come forward to assist in rescue operations. But, where does all this goodness disappear in good times. Why does it take a crisis of some sort to shake our consciousness? One is really unable to comprehend this truth. But, one would like to believe that the cycle of evolution and progression of thought may bring about a positive change in the attitude and behavior of people.

Caught In The Clutches Of Desires

I may be a Laughter Master but I am no different than anyone of us. Sometimes I too struggle with desires, habits and addictions. But, I am getting better now because I have understood that though there is no harm in pursuing desires; one should not get obsessed by them as that can cloud all rational thinking and reasoning ability. Following desires blindly is often a cause of pain and misery and should be avoided at all costs.

Read the following story which highlights the dangers of blindly running after desires which render a person incapable of getting out of the self-created mire.

The Blanket Does Not Leave Me

There is a legendary Indian tale about two saintly persons sitting on the bank of a river, when all of a sudden they saw a black blanket floating on the water. While one didn't quite bother, the other desperately wanted to get it. He jumped into the river and caught hold of the blanket, but something didn't seem quite right. His friend saw him bob up and down as he struggled to return to the shore. He frantically shouted out to him asking him to leave the blanket and swim back. In reply he said, "I am trying to leave the blanket but the blanket doesn't leave me." This was because it wasn't actually a blanket, but a big black bear which he mistook for a blanket!

In this story the bear represents our desires. It is a common plight. First, we run after our desires, then desires run after us. The prime objective of seeking pleasure is primarily for self gratification, whether it is physical or mental. It starts as wanting to have just an occasional

social experience, but slowly turns into an obsession and we find ourselves well entrenched in its clutches. So much so, that even when we do want to get away, it becomes almost impossible. Take for instance, smoking and drinking. Both habits start as an affectation, but end up as an addiction. No matter how hard one tries, it becomes very difficult to shake off the habit.

It is important to create a balance in life and have some control over desires, or else it can lead to adverse state of affairs. Life is a measure of checks and balances. There is no harm in wanting to be a part of a larger society, gaining its acceptance and approval and being in sync with people we interact with. But, when we lose sight of reality and head towards a point of no return, a simple habit can turn into a deadly vice. It makes you feel helpless and exposed.

Desires- A Double Tragedy

George Bernard Shaw said that a man meets tragedy twice in his life. Once, when his desires are not fulfilled, and second time when his desires are fulfilled. One can understand that it's a tragedy when desires are not fulfilled, but what's tragic about when desires are fulfilled? This can be explained by a two-fold theory of adaptation and neutralization.

Adaptation: When one is in regular touch with sense objects, the body gets used to them, and in order to get the same sense gratification each time, one needs a higher dose of stimulus. This is how people slowly get addicted to sensory stimulus and wanting it again and again. The dependence which is psychological to begin with slowly becomes physiological dependence i.e. the body starts getting withdrawal symptoms in the absence of the sense objects.

Neutralization: The second phenomenon is called neutralization. An alcoholic might not get much pleasure in drinking alcohol every day, but immediately gets withdrawal symptoms the day he does not drink. Similarly, a person may not get much pleasure out of his wealth, but after some time he may feel miserable without money. This is a kind

of neutralizing effect when desires and wants lose their attraction once fulfilled, and the person no longer craves for them, but their absence leads to physical and mental discontentment. It's a kind of suffering that most people go through after fulfilling their desires. There is a kind of emptiness which leads to counter reaction.

The Thin Line Between Experience And Addiction

Some people may argue that why not enjoy good things in life. What's the use of living without indulging in good experiences? After all we're not here to live like saints. So what's wrong in seeking pleasure when we can afford it? The answer is simple. There is no harm in indulging in your desires occasionally, but there is a thin dividing line between operational experience and getting addicted. Any stressful and negative experience of life can drive you across this line and before you know you are already trapped. The mind is like a rubber band. It keeps on stretching and asking for more and more until it breaks, and then it becomes like a car without brakes.

The problem with most people is they cannot resist temptation. There is always a struggle between the mind and senses on one side and inner consciousness on the other. The moment we lose our inner strength, the mind goes out of control. It runs after all sense objects seeking gratification. The impulse of desire gets so strong that all rational thinking is overruled and one becomes enslaved by the mind.

Mind Control

No doubt, it is very difficult to control the mind. In fact, at times it gets counter productive. The more you try to control it, the more difficult it gets. But, there is a way you can master the mind. And the best way to is to 'mother' the mind. It is said that the mind is like a child. In order to control it, just watch a mother how she brings the child to follow what she wants. She usually makes the child understand by being very patient, loving and repetitive while talking and instructing her child. She never uses force or anger as she knows it would be counter

reactive. Similarly, we need to be very loving and patient to deal with our own mind. 'Mastering the mind is like mothering the mind'

Lower Pleasures versus Higher Pleasures

People familiar with higher pleasures of the intellect like feelings, imagination, morality, passion and compassion prefer them to the lower pleasures like greed, physical pleasure, self –indulgence etc. which are highly addictive as they stimulate the senses and bind one in their momentary satisfaction.

Higher pleasures are much more difficult to achieve and the level of contentment may initially seem to be lesser than that of the lower pleasures. But the inner satisfaction and joy one gets from them is unparalleled.

It is very easy to get tempted and carried away by one's desires but always remember to put self-imposed brakes –'Line of Control', which will keep you within the accepted parameters of indulgence as well as give you the satisfaction of being in good command of your life. Mastering the art of self control can be attained by regular practice of yogic discipline and some spiritual knowledge which enhances the superior consciousness and helps to control the mind and keep temptations at bay.

Attachments Stop Us From Laughing

We have discovered five major roadblocks, taken from Indian scriptures, which have proved to be the biggest challenges or obstacles on our way to attain spirituality and which stop us from laughing. They are:

1. **Kama** (Desire and Lust), 2. **Krodha** (Anger), 3. **Moha** (Attachment), 4. **Lobha** (Greed), 5. **Ahamkara** (Ego).

Your Laughter can become Yoga only when you are free from bondages and attachments in life. You can become like Buddha (enlightened person) when you remain unaffected and undisturbed, by every situation that comes your way. To achieve a neutral state of mind under

all circumstances of success and failure, pleasure and pain, love or hatred, one needs to liberate oneself from all attachments.

Attachments basically arise out of your ego mind which tries to possess and own the objects of your desires. The ego mind has only a selfish agenda like my car, my business, my family, my wealth etc. These attachments lead to dependence, dependence leads to slavery and you will find yourself being controlled by your desires. If you are not able to achieve what you want, you become miserable. On the other hand, if you get what you want, it will lead to the fear of losing it. One becomes chained to these objects of desire and there is no freedom of expression and behavior.

The question now arises is how to become detached and liberate oneself from the bondage of the ego mind which tries to hold on to everything in life. At the outset I want to make it very clear that detachment does not mean you renounce or give up your goals and ambitions. It does not mean that you should not seek pleasures, build your business or wealth. The goal of detachment is inner freedom under all circumstances. It is the ability to remain unaffected in the face of challenges and adversities.

How To Get Detached

This is easier said than done. There are several physical and mental tools available which can be repeatedly practiced over a period of time until they become a part of your being. In my experience, physical tools in the form of action and behavior are more effective than mental tools of understanding and intention. This is like Laughter Yoga, in which laughing from the body is easier than laughing from the mind.

Start by analyzing and reflecting on your thoughts, actions and behavior, which indicate an attachment in life. The ideal time to do this is just before going to sleep. Another time to reflect is after Silence Meditation. In our Spiritual Retreats, we found that during the silence phase, one connects with the deeper self and gets to know more about it with profound clarity.

Here Are Some Ways And Exercises That Can Help In Detachment

1. Accept

Once you identify attachments, don't feel bad about it. Accept them as they are, without any judgments and feelings of guilt. Keep in mind we all have attachments, including the person who is writing this article ha ha ha!!

Exercise: In Laughter Yoga Spiritual Retreats we have an exercise for acceptance, which is a kind of self-dialogue, and it goes like this:

"I completely accept my weaknesses and inconsistencies"

"I am perfect as I am with my weaknesses included in it."

"I love myself when I am attached"

"I love myself when I am not attached"

2. Understand Universal Law Of Change

Everything in this world is changing. Nothing is permanent. Weather changes, people change, and you are changing every moment. Attachment occurs because the ego mind presumes that one is going to live forever. On the contrary, one doesn't even know what will happen the next moment. If we remind ourselves that the only thing that is constant is change, and that nothing will stay forever, detachment becomes easier.

Exercise: Repeat the following mantra everyday while you sit in silence:

"Life is a change, everything is changing, and nothing is permanent."

Repeat at least 10-20 times, and take a deep breath every time you say it.

3. Giving

Since the root cause of attachment is the ego mind, all the exercises are directed to dissolve the ego. Remember, the ego wants to achieve and possess, therefore, giving is a very powerful exercise or a ritual which dilutes the ego.

Exercise: Each day before you sleep ask yourself a question:

“Have I given something to someone today?” It can be in the form of service, help, smile, compliments, charity, intentions, prayers, volunteering your time and efforts for a social cause etc.

Everyday do one small act of kindness which will make a difference to the lives of others. Serving the Universe and to love everything and everyone without judgment, likes and dislikes, will develop a universal attachment which leads to personal detachment. Through the network of Laughter Club members we share such acts of kindness and as a group dynamic we keep inspiring and motivating each other until it becomes a part of conscious habit.

4. Find Higher Attachment

If you ask a child to give you his tricycle, chances are you may not get it. But, if you show him a bicycle, he will give you his tricycle! This proves that when you get attached to something higher in the mind, you get detached from the lower one. Thereby, get absorbed in the higher spiritual path, and you will soon forget about the pleasures of the lower mind.

5. Breathing Meditation

Our mind has a habit of staying in the past and remembers the glorious moments we had. We sometimes miss the wonderful things that happened. From frequent visits to the past, springs a desire for repeat actions and one longs for more experiences in the future. But, if we train our mind to stay in the present moment and try to enjoy the best of it, we will not have any longings or attachments.

Exercise: In Laughter Yoga Retreats, we have ‘Soooo-Hummm’, a kind of breath meditation – in Sanskrit it means: I am a part of the Universe. The microcosm and macrocosm are the same and connected.

Focusing your awareness on the breath will keep you in the present moment, as both breathing and laughter, are activities which can only be performed in the present; you can’t breathe in the past or future.

How To Do Soooo-Hummm

Step 1: Watch your in-breath and out-breath from beginning to end. While inhaling say Sooooooooooooo (in your mind - non verbal) and while exhaling say Hummmm (also in your mind). With complete attention on the breath and the mind occupied on the mantra, you will notice your thought process will slow down significantly and you will experience a calmness of the mind.

Step 2: Try and breathe as slowly and deeply as possible. You should take about 4-6 breaths in a minute. (Normal breathing rate is 15 per minute). This will slow down the heart rate, and other physiological parameters.

Step 3: While bringing your awareness on the breath, imagine you are breathing into the entire body, not just into the lungs. Feel the air going to each and every cell of your body. And finally, with each breath, imagine your body is expanding into the Universe to become one with the Universe. When you are completely engrossed in breath awareness, you will feel a sense of lightness as if there is no body. There will also be very few thoughts in the mind.

Important: In the beginning, while focusing your awareness on the breath, some thoughts will keep crossing your mind. This is okay, but do not get upset with these thoughts. Let them come. Your job is to keep bringing your awareness back to your breath.

6. Laughter Yoga Exercises

One value-based Laughter Yoga Exercise, we do in the Laughter Clubs is 'Laugh at Your Own Self.' Point a finger towards your head (symbol of ego mind) and also towards the middle of your chest. Laughing at your own self makes one humble and keeps one grounded. This also means accepting all mistakes and weaknesses without getting upset.

LAW OF IMPERFECTION

Perhaps the most difficult of all spiritual laws to grasp, is the illusive Law of Imperfection. We have since birth been grilled in all aspects of

perfection – “She was the perfect baby”, “Theirs was the perfect marriage”, “He was the perfect student”, “Aren’t her skin and teeth just perfect?” etc, etc. The never-ending quest for perfection is an exhausting exercise in futility. Fear of never being good enough, coupled with thoughts of constantly wondering what people think, relentlessly badger the brain, often leaving those who endlessly seek perfection feeling guilty, depressed, rigid, obsessive, compulsive, unmotivated, immobile, lonely and hopeless.

Who declared what the basis was for these notions of “perfection”? How were the guidelines for perfection established? The truth is imperfections are what make you perfect! Take a deep breath, relax, lean back and think about that for a while. There is no such thing called a perfect life. Yet, we constantly strive towards achieving a level of perfection in everything we do hoping it would lead us to that ‘elusive happiness.’ And when we cannot find it we get disheartened and become miserable. The truth of the matter is that perfection is just a perception. A thing is perfect only until we find another and a better way of doing it. The definition of perfection itself is therefore relative.

Even the Universe, which is seemingly perfect is a conglomeration of millions of imperfect things put together to create perfect harmony and order. Consider the snowflake – beautiful, delicate crystalline configurations, each perfectly formed but determined by science that not one single snowflake exactly replicates the next – perfect imperfections. Regardless of their differences, each and every one in our eyes as well as in the eyes of the Creator is perfect. In fact, it would seem that imperfection rather than perfection should be the rule of thumb; perfection is merely in the eyes of the beholder.

Perfection Is Because Of Imperfection

One needs imperfection in life in order to understand the value of perfection. For instance if there was no ugliness, one wouldn’t know what beauty is. If there was no anarchy, people would not know

what order is and if everything was just so similar, there would be no significance of something different and original.

Perfection and imperfection will always co-exist as perfection itself has so many imperfections built-in. For example, a piece of art is perceived as being perfect because it starts with a series of imperfections all put together to produce what looks perfect. We can say that imperfection is like a substratum or a launching pad from where we work towards perfection. Imperfection is inherent in us because of which we are able to assemble a perfect expression of creativity.

Even God loves imperfection! His creations are all so different, with several integral imperfections, giving us the discerning eye to understand and recognize a perfect thing. Ancient societies have also honored the importance of imperfection. For example, the sacred rugs of Persia are always made with a deliberate imperfection in recognition of the intrinsic imperfection that God has woven into nature.

Wabi-Sabi Philosophy

Have you heard of the intriguing wabi sabi philosophy – of seeing beauty in simplicity, in finding appeal in the natural imperfection of life? This philosophy is a celebration of the perfection imbibed within imperfection. Sabi is defined as a beauty that comes with age, literally meaning, “The blossom of time”. It denotes a natural progression from gloss and sparkle to tarnish, hoariness and rust and can further be translated as “sad beauty”. In its essence, wabi sabi is the Japanese art of finding beauty in the faulty artistry of nature, of accepting the natural cycle of growth, decay, and death. It’s simple, and orderly, and respects genuineness above all. American novelist, Richard Powell, states, “It (wabi sabi) nurtures all that is authentic by acknowledging three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect.” Thus, perfection is a concept of the mind. What may have appeared perfect at one time, may now no longer appear that way. Seeds of imperfection are always there to change the perception of perfection.

A ceramic plate is wabi sabi, a porcelain one is not. A hut with a thatched roof is wabi sabi, but a concrete roof is not. The lined face of an old man has wabi sabi, but the contrived perfection of a retouched face does not. Wabi-sabi is flea-markets, not warehouse stores; aged wood, not chrome; earthen pots, not plastic bottles. It finds beauty in cracks and crevices and everything that time leaves behind. It reminds us that we are all transient and will finally return to the dust from which we came. For instance, instead of a new book, wabi sabi favors an old book, worn and yellow, passed down from generations. According to the belief, the book has taken on the essence of all the people who came in touch with the book, and thereby is of much more value than a brand new book. This unique viewpoint teaches us how to value the simple things of life and to admire and respect what there is even if it may not be the most perfect thing. Therefore, always remember not to wait for perfection as it is like a mirage and does not really exist.

The cornerstone for this belief is that less is more – seeing beauty in the ordinary without being influenced by grandeur. We, in India, embrace the wabi sabi concept. It is the only way for millions to live peacefully in a country racked with poverty. However, wabi sabi is not an excuse for shortcomings or laziness. It is never messy or slovenly. Spaces and belongings are thoroughly and lovingly cleaned and cared for and as an elderly relative, become more precious with time.

Picture in your mind a fragrant rose in full bloom. If it were never experienced as dried, wilted and withered, would the rose at its zenith be so appreciated? So it is with life. Adopting a wabi sabi attitude allows us to accept the fact that nothing in life is perfect; with life comes change, and with that change, if we are to live happily, all phases must be cherished, accepted and enjoyed as the ongoing process that is life, itself.

How beautiful life would be if we all adopted the wabi sabi concept. We would realize that our greatest moments are those when everything seems to go wrong and nothing seems to be right. We would

understand that the maximum learning of life takes place during the 'imperfect' moments which eventually age, bloom and wither away, but in the end will be cherished like a bent-over, frail, respected and well-loved old woman.

Perfection And Perfectionism

To fully understand imperfection, we must first define what is perfection and perfectionism. Perfection is what you are now; weaknesses and inconsistencies included. That is perfect. Once you are aware of your failings and imperfections you feel relieved, and there is ample space for growth, improvement and flexibility. On the other hand perfectionism is your belief that tells you how things should be. It hinders you from accepting things as they are and there is no room for flexibility and acceptance. Perfectionism does not make you feel good about yourself or others as one always feels either they are 'not good enough' or else 'what will other people say'.

Perfection is created by nature, while perfectionism is created by man in order to prove their superiority and is engendered by the ego mind. The quest for perfection is exhausting and unrelenting and leads to competitiveness and negativity as people become obsessed in trying to better what is already perfect. But hard as they try, it is not possible to achieve what they feel they should, thus making them miserable and despondent.

When people think about perfection there are two things which come to mind. One is the desire to be superior and stay ahead in competition, and the second is that people are afraid of letting people know about their weaknesses. This puts a lot of pressure on the mind and it goes into a state of turmoil. For example, most people are obsessed with looking good rather than feeling good. All the time they strive to reach the pinnacle of perfection, for fear of being rejected. This is the ego mind working, which if not satisfied, can slip into a state of depression and obstruct the course of inner peace and harmony.

Perfectionism is like a mask we wear to look good and it takes lot of energy to hold on to this masquerade. We are all the time struggling to compete with others and trying to improve our own standards fearing that someone might beat us. Perfectionism is an unrealistic belief that we should look perfect, act perfect and live perfectly in order to minimize or avoid the pain of guilt, judgment, and indignity. However, this fake armor surrounding us not only makes our life and the lives of all those it touches miserable. It severely weighs us down and will not allow the freedom of moving toward any attainable goal.

At the heart of perfectionism is lack of self-acceptance and self-love which is due to serious deficiency of self-worth and results in feeling unloved, unwanted and unworthy. Such people have unrealistic expectations of how they should look, think, act, speak, feel, and behave in both personal as well as professional life. Unfortunately, expectations and criticisms do not end there. The perfectionist selflessly extends this 'courtesy' to everyone and everything he meets. This person is a study in rigidity and uptightness.

The negative consequences of perfectionism stems from low self-esteem to guilt and depression to lack of motivation and obsessive-compulsive behavioral traits. Perfectionism is not about simply being the best you can be, but an unhealthy desire to attach unrealistic expectations for everything and anything experienced in life.

What Is The Solution

How do we resolve this negative cycle that engulfs all sense of good reasoning and understanding? I am not saying we should not set high standards for ourselves or that we should not strive for excellence in all that we do – we absolutely should. However, when constant perfecting becomes extreme and relentless, it can and does prevent forward movement. It hampers the ability to make decisions. We must learn to accept our mistakes and imperfections and take it along with us and work towards perfection and create excellence.

Perfectionism is based on logic and is a very left brain phenomenon. There is no space for mistakes or emotions, only hard facts. You are working always mindful of not making mistakes thereby working under stress which will prevent you from doing your best. Therefore, those who are not too hard on themselves and use the right brain approach to being perfect are the people who excel and create new ideas and concepts.

A keen eye for detail can be a huge asset unless we get stuck in details, lingering longer than necessary to make petty improvements, thus wasting precious time. The perfectionist never knows when enough is enough, never realizes when much is too much. The simplest task becomes monumental, taking on proportions that often hamper the initiation of the project, resulting in serious procrastination. The mind of the perfectionist blows everything out of proportion as he subconsciously fears failure.

Dwelling on details, fearing an 'imperfect' outcome, anticipating unfounded problems, the perfectionist is unable to distinguish the forest from the trees. He is unable to grasp the fact that life is not perfect.

The question is: How can one resolve such a malignant state of mind? First and foremost, the perfectionist must recognize that it is not the world, it is him. He must want and accept help to knock down the walls and to acknowledge the situation for what it is. This takes a huge amount of courage and will require much time and patience to break down those barriers. It may even require the skills of a professional psychologist or life coach as well.

The perfectionist must accept himself as a human being with a multitude of frailties. He must learn to love himself and believe that good things are his God given right. Realistic expectations and goals should be set, while at the same time, being mindful that a goal is just something to be worked towards, but not necessarily reached 100 percent of the time. Flexibility and patience should be the

bywords. Incorporating into that mindset is the fact that the human condition is one of continual imperfections and mistakes without which there would never be growth or wisdom.

Feeling Good Versus Looking Good

Most people are obsessed with looking good and in the process they sacrifice the real 'feel good' factor. Unless we let go of this fixation we cannot be at peace within. This is where Laughter Yoga can help, because laughing without a reason is a blow to the ego mind. As the essence of laughter stems from imperfections of life, it teaches you to laugh at your own self, at your weaknesses and inconsistencies and be comfortable with it. If you observe we never laugh at perfect things. We invariably laugh and joke at incongruous and imperfect situations.

You Can Live An Imperfect Life Perfectly

When we know that there's no such thing as perfect, then why do most of us spend an incredible amount of time and energy trying to be perfect? We all need to feel worthy of love and belonging, but our worthiness is at risk when we feel we are never smart enough for the other person. This makes us run after perfection. But, the fact of life is that a perfect person is actually intimidating. Most people identify with those who are imperfect because we all are normally made up of imperfection and numerous weaknesses and inconsistencies.

So, how do we build up the courage and compassion to help us embrace our imperfections and recognize that we are adequate and worthy of love and belonging? Though difficult, it is not an impossible task. Simply accept that life is imperfect and deal with what emerges.

When I came up with the idea of a Laughter Club, it seemed such an imperfect idea to most morning walkers who I was trying to convince. They snubbed it as being illogical and thought it involved a risk factor for me as a medical practitioner in that locality. I had a choice of abandoning my idea or carrying it out. I chose the latter without any excuse and fear of rejection. Had the idea not clicked, it would have

been a talk of ridicule for me. But I did not wait to find perfection in its implementation. I just went ahead. Today, it has created history. What started as an imperfect idea in the beginning made perfect sense later. Imperfection is the initial stage of perfection. Like an artist who first draws lines of imperfection to finally finish a perfect painting. A sculptor also makes several imperfect structures before creating a masterpiece. Therefore, only think of the best and do not justify or make an excuse for not being able to do anything.

It is our perception about life which makes us perfect or imperfect. There is nothing like perfect or imperfect about life; it is the way you look at it. For example, a dried and decayed stem of a tree can seem like a perfect piece of art for some and can fetch millions when placed in a museum or art gallery and viewed with a different perception. We imperfect human beings are somewhat like these rough imperfections that need to be polished and placed in the art gallery of life.

Several years ago, while editing my health magazine in Mumbai, I wrote an inspiring story about Vishwanathan under the section – ‘Such people exist’. He worked as an accountant for a transport company in Mumbai and told me that his job throughout the day was rather boring, but after five o’clock it was very enriching! A great social worker, he would set out for 2 to 3 hours at 5 pm every day and meet some philanthropic people to raise money for the less fortunate who suffered from heart ailments and needed money for cardiac surgery. He was proud that he was able to raise enough money to get more than 30 open heart surgeries done. At the age of 58 he was very agile, happy and contented. He said that though he had lived in meager means of income all his life, he always had something in abundance. It was the happiness and joy of giving and helping other people.

I think this is a great message for people who complain that their jobs are not very interesting and fulfilling. Whether you like your profession or not, there are always ways to make your life seem perfect and do things that provide an innate sense of joy. Just keep the job to pay your bills!

Read the philosophy of Hundred Meters Wisdom given below that emphasizes that all inaction is a result of indecision which stems from feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-confidence. One is embroiled in trying to become perfect and reach that indefinable and unrealistic level of perfection which is an obstacle to any action. People are incapable of moving ahead as they feel they are not competent enough. They fear making mistakes and being rejected. This example tells you how one can learn from their mistakes and forge to the fore instead of being rooted in apprehension.

In order to succeed in life, it is important to make a decision and act on it. One should not oscillate and get caught in the mire of perfection which can lead to unhappiness and misery. In fact, all my actions to make the Laughter Yoga movement succeed have been an afterthought. Initially, when I got the idea, I did not wait for ideal and perfect circumstances or to gain adequate knowledge. I just got up and launched the movement within hours of conceiving and as you can see, it has really succeeded and become a global phenomenon.

Hundred Meters Wisdom

I don't remember where I read it but it has become a part of my unconscious habit. Hundred meters wisdom can be explained as follows. When you're traveling by car on a highway at night, you can barely see 100 meters at a time. When you reach that point, you can further see another 100 meters and so on... You can complete a journey of hundreds of miles in this manner by seeing only 100 meters at a time.

I think this is a great insight. It can help people reach their goals slowly and steadily as they learn to look ahead and overcome obstacles and several intricacies of life. It is a great way to success and accomplishment. Whenever I undertake any endeavor, I only see the initial steps and go on moving forward keeping the entire picture in mind. There are times when I don't have any clarity about my venture in the beginning, but as I cruise along, everything falls into place.

The whole idea is not to get deterred by the rough path that may lie ahead ... just go on. At this point, also remember not to start analyzing your decision logically or else you'll be left with an unfulfilled dream. The only thing I do is to remember my purpose and my mission. I am very sure of the first few steps after which it makes it easy for me to plunge into action. This is something great about emotional decision-making. Some people feel that this could be hasty and rash, but to achieve something in life, you have to make a beginning. You cannot sit and think and do nothing. Thinking without implementation is futile and wasted.

Another thing I realized was whenever I took a decision focused on my selfish agenda it was hard and very often I never even got started. Whereas, any decision which was aligned with spiritual principles were all successful and easy for me to take. All the projects directed to fulfill my personal needs or ego needs were difficult to decide, but any decision I made for the good of everyone, the universal intelligence always helped me to say yes and get started.

So here lies the wisdom... don't just think - just get started.

About Making Decisions

For any accomplishment one has to make a decision. The moment you make a decision, there is a heave of mental energy and an imminent action is ready to happen. Yet there are many people who make a decision and keep the energy flowing through their body and mind, but fail to transform this energy into action.

Making a decision is not as simple as it seems. It involves a lot of thinking, soul searching, weighing the pros and cons, consequences etc. Mostly it is the left or the logical brain involved in making decisions. This usually takes longer as people ponder over various risks, threats and possibilities. They try to think logically thus delaying the process of decision-making as well as implementing it into action.

On the other hand, the right brain is responsible for quick decisions as it thinks emotionally rather than logically. Emotional decisions, though quick, have an element of risk. They can make or break a person. Most of the time I take decisions based on my emotions. Though initially I try to calculate and think logically, but if it stops me from taking a decision, I just go ahead and listen to my right brain. Emotional decisions come straight from the heart or from the gut. I rely heavily on my intuitive thinking and perhaps this is the reason I can make quick decisions and also because I know the heart has only two decisions to make – Yes or No. And it doesn't take much time to get the feel of a right decision.

About Taking Action

The key to my success with Laughter Yoga movement is taking action. Right from my younger days, I've been very prompt in taking action because I believe that nothing happens if one doesn't move ahead. Thoughts in the mind are like dreams which only come true when you do something about them. Life is not a spectator's game, you need to play it.

Learning From Mistakes

There is a business community in the southern Indian state of Kerala, always willing to help anyone from the community who has failed in business and wants to restore it again. The only condition being that the person must tell everyone why he failed. This is because the others want to learn from his mistakes and not repeat them.

Mistakes are inevitable, but they can be real assets if we are willing to learn from them. Acknowledging them freely is the first step in turning our frustrations into fascinations, scars into stars and perils into pearls. The most obvious thing we learn from our mistakes is, they teach us what doesn't work in life. They also force us to develop new behaviors, new coping skills and additional perspectives while going through inevitable changes in our lives.

Remember, if you go through life afraid to make a mistake, you'll spend most of your life doing nothing. There is no harm in making mistakes. It is an essential part of going ahead and is a part of our learning process. Be brave enough to accept your mistakes, but don't blame yourself for making them because your whole existence is not dependent on a small or even a big mistake. When you become aware of your mistake, it is time to think seriously, and take care to analyze it and find the causes to ensure never to repeat the same mistake.

No one likes making mistakes, but unless life is lived in a cocoon, in self-imposed isolation, it is impossible to live without making them. Mistakes are a marvelous educational tool which teach us how to avoid future potholes and pitfalls and propel us forward enabling a smoother and a more trouble-free ride down the road of life.

Mistakes play an essential role listed under the category of self-improvement. Do not allow mistakes to overwhelm you with guilt and regret, instead view them as a catalyst for change and improvement of the human condition. Be willing to own and accept your mistakes. If others have been harmed by them, acknowledge the mistake and offer a sincere apology to them. Do not try to justify your mistake or blame it on someone else – it is yours, own it. No long explanation is needed. Say simply and sincerely, "Yes, I made a mistake. I am sorry and I have learned from it." However, a word of caution – once the mistake has been made, the apology given, try your hardest not to repeat the same mistake or your credibility and sincerity will become suspect.

Mistakes occur for various reasons. To avoid repeating them, you need to understand the underlying reason. For example, when you speak in anger and haste, the mistake you make is to say unkind words. However, what led you to be angry in the first place? Perhaps you were chronically tired or perhaps you were nursing an unrelated grievance. If you make mistakes because you are permanently tired, try to get more sleep. If you are permanently stressed, look at ways to relax and detach from the stress of work.

The important thing is to view mistakes as a useful stepping stone to a higher reality and better outlook on life. Free yourself from expectations and the continual need to edit and reject. The fact is, just as 60 is the new 40, this imperfect life will one day become the perfect life! When you are able to allow life to flow effortlessly, when you are willing and able to accept every mistake as a necessary stepping stone in this never-ending constantly flowing river of life, you will experience the beauty of imperfection.

We have a special laughter exercise to learn from mistakes. It is called Guru Laughter. Guru means teacher. Put your left hand on your head and say: "I learn from my mistakes" and put your right hand on top of the left hand on your head and say, "I learn from other's mistakes" and then laugh ha ha ha ha...

Horrible Singing Contest- From Flop Show To Super Hit

Did you know that your weakest point can be the strongest point? If not, read this story...

In September 2002, more than 300 laughter leaders had gathered from all over India in Goa to participate in the 3 day All India Laughter Conference, which is an annual event full of fun learning and sharing.

There were many laughter sessions, and participants from different cities shared their experiences of how Laughter Yoga changed their lives. Besides the scientific sessions and explanations of Laughter Yoga, we had also organized an excellent cultural program with traditional Goan dances and food, kite flying competition on the beach, and a talent contest e.g. poetry recitation, singing or telling funny stories. Initially, about 4-5 people came on stage and started singing, but they were so out of tune that the audience was bored to death! I could see the restlessness among the people as some started walking away while others started talking.

Suddenly, I had a great idea. As it dawned on me that most people cannot sing well, I announced a special competition called 'Horrible

Singing Contest.' This was for anyone who sang most horribly would get a prize of Rs 5000 (about \$100) I had no idea whether people would come up and participate in this strange challenge as most of them thought I was being sarcastic.

Next day, we gathered in the auditorium for the competition, and just as I had anticipated there were only two entries, as people considered it to be a joke. But, I was not backing out from my commitment and we decided to go ahead with the two singers. When the first singer came on stage, he sang in such an unmelodious and funny way that it made everyone laugh like crazy. Even the second participant had the audience in stitches for nearly 15 minutes. Soon I found a group of people going to the MC and registering their names for the contest, and there was a request from the audience for more and more!!! In fact, what happened was that even before the singer started singing, people started laughing in anticipation. One after another, we had several participants exhibiting their talent (should I say non-talent ha ha) and soon it became a blockbuster super hit comedy show.

Mr. Bhandari from Nasik won the first prize and we had two runners up with several consolation prizes. This competition became the highlight of the conference and now is a regular feature for all Indian conferences. We even had a similar contest in the All America Laughter Yoga conference held in San Diego.

What I learnt from this experience was that people make bad singers mainly because they are hesitant to try and experiment. They may be good 'bathroom singers,' but when it comes to public presentation, they are very diffident. Actually, singing is one of the four elements of joy we propagate in Laughter Yoga philosophy, and over the years people have got rid of their shyness and inhibition and have become confident of showcasing their talent without any fright and apprehension.

This new experiment showed that your weakness can become your strongest point if you are not afraid of making mistakes. Silliness is a way to creativity. Once you start getting involved with any playful activity and not bother about how you look. Mysteriously, something will happen. Nobody is perfect and it is due to imperfections we laugh. But, if you are overly sensitive about your weaknesses and are not ready to take any risk, you will never experience miracles. It took a little courage to convert an embarrassing singing moment into a hilarious experience. People like this idea because it frees them from being perfect. I myself was not a good singer a few years ago, but now I can sing anywhere, any time.

LAW OF KARMA

By far, the single most asked question at spiritual retreats is, why must we suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why would a religious, loving, good-hearted person suffer the pain of serious illness, such as a stroke, cancer or other crippling disease? Why, if God is a God of love, and is omnipresent do these things happen to good people? Why does He allow the most horrendous of natural disasters to happen, and innocent children who have done no wrong to suffer genetic deformations and incurable disease? Conversely, why, so often, does it seem that those with evil characters manage to live lives of ease and affluence? Why would a God of benevolence allow this?

The logical mind will never find a suitable, convincing or compassionate answer for such perplexing questions; however, according to Albert Einstein God does not play dice with the Universe, nor does He play dice with us. Realized or not, everything that happens in this Universe, happens for a reason. This can be explained with the Law of Karma.

What Is Karma

Although Karma is usually associated with eastern philosophy, it is easier to understand the theory of Karma, by associating it with physics,

specifically with Newton's Third Law which states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Karma is simply extrapolated from that law.

According to Newton's accepted premise, we live in an elastic cosmos with the push and pull of all physical things perfectly counterbalanced, due to equal and opposing forces constantly at work. Karma applies this concept to the will as well and not simply to our physical actions, but also to the consequences of those actions, feelings and thoughts in our current lives as well as our past and future lives.

Karma literally means a deed or an act. More broadly, a universal principle of cause and effect, an action and/or reaction that governs our lives. Karma is not about fate, but about creating our own destiny. If goodness is sown, goodness will be reaped and if evil is sown, evil will be reaped.

No Time Frame

The important thing about this philosophy is that there is no time frame surrounding actions and their results. Results from actions can take moments, months, years, sometimes even a lifetime, but be assured, every action will result in an equal and opposite reaction. According to Indian philosophy, this law also applies to previous lives because it is believed that the cycle of life continues from one birth to another. From a logical point of view, this concept can be daunting. However, who can say what happened before birth, any more than what one can hypothesize what will happen after death.

Understanding Why We Suffer

When we talk about karma, it is important to know that whatever we are in this life and whatever will become of us in the future is all based on our actions performed either in the past or in the present. We are assigned to bear the consequences of our actions every day of our lives, no matter what. To understand this perpetual connection between action and its result, we must seek to identify with the

Indian philosophy of life after death which very easily rationalizes all our sufferings as well as our pleasures and dubs them as fruits of our actions performed either in this life or in the past life. When we have no answer to our pain and suffering, we just hold the stockpile of karmas collected over a period of time or perhaps even another life, some which we know of, and some which we are unaware of, responsible for our condition. This makes it simple to comprehend that whatever is happening is happening because of the diverse quality of our karmas. If good, we experience gain and if bad, we experience pain.

Suffering Does Not Always Mean Misfortune

We all suffer in one way or another, be it physically, mentally or emotionally - suffering is universal. This is one of the four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

These sufferings play an important role in personal growth because without struggle, one would fail to grow. If a butterfly did not struggle to remove itself from the cocoon, it could never fly. So it is with the hardships of life. The harder the struggle, the greater the potential for growth and appreciation for life itself. A life of ease often kills incentive and motivation. Furthermore, that very struggle will ultimately yield greater pleasure and satisfaction.

As a child, growing up in a small Indian village, I would watch in amazement as workers in the fields ate with gusto simple bread without vegetables or fruit, washing it down with water, their faces filled with total joy and satisfaction. Now I understand how pleasure becomes abundant when hardships are great.

Suffering allows you to experience and realize your fullest potential. Suffering is not punishment but the Universe's way of rewarding patience and persistence. It not only makes one stronger, it also builds courage, increases focus and steadfastness, while shielding from the trivialities of life.

What is the general attitude regarding suffering or severe challenges? How are negative situations in life approached? Challenges

come to both good and bad people. What one does with that challenge depends upon the attitude towards life and the mindset. A negative state of mind cannot be a creative mind. Solutions will be difficult, often impossible. However, a peaceful mind is a creative mind. Positive energy will flow allowing major breakthroughs despite the challenges.

The philosophy of karma fosters a positive state of mind by accepting the situation and moving on. It promotes a better understanding of being at peace with what the Universe has provided and allows the creation of meaningful experiences from seemingly hopeless situations, thus providing a better understanding of why bad things happen to good people. Bad things do happen to good people, enabling those good people to become better, but never bitter.

Karma Theory - A Good Coping Mechanism

For matters of discretion, let us assume that this is just a hypothesis, and believing in it will help you find answers to your many questions which would normally make a logical mind upset. As we cannot explain and find it very hard to cope with sufferings that cannot be explained by reasonable explanation, believing in this philosophy will help you to accept a negative situation in a much better way. It will give you a peaceful mind to cope with and create new possibilities to find solutions. It will enable you to make new choices and perform new actions that can shape your future. In contrast, if you don't believe in this viewpoint, it becomes difficult to accept and you may not be able to do anything about the persistent negativity and your anguish.

Is Our Life A Destiny Decided By Nature Or Do We Have A Free Will

Are we like pawns in the drama of the Universe where each one of us goes through a series of actions and reactions decided by Almighty or do we have a free will to make our own choices to shape our destiny?

There is no doubt that we're born with an undisclosed script of our life, which is like the seeds of our past karmas we carry into this life. Most of the time we don't have any control on what happens to us because we

don't know what our actions were in the previous birth. But, one thing we are very well aware of is our actions in the present life. Whatever may have been scripted as our destiny, we have the will to take appropriate action and make the right choices and do the right actions to make our future destiny. Figuratively speaking, it is like a script of a movie which can be either good or bad. The making of a good film lies in the hands of the director. Such as, in the hands of a skilled and experienced director, a bad script can turn into a good film while an incompetent director can completely mess up a good script. Therefore, remember your destiny is in your hands and will be the result of the quality of actions you perform.

How accomplished one becomes, how well a talent is cultivated and manifested, whether it is shared with the world, is a matter of personal choice. The sky is the limit. You are the master of your own Universe. How one arrives in the theater of life is beyond human control. However, what role is played and how well it is played will be determined by personal choice. In the aria of life, the choice is yours – will you be on stage, laughing, singing and dancing your heart out or will you be sitting quietly in the audience, hands in lap, simply waiting for the next act.

In other words, we have no control over what happens to us but have a hundred percent control over what we can do when something happens to us. The core message of the karma philosophy is, "You are the master of your destiny by your actions."

Natural Justice

Suffering can be explained by a doctrine of karma called natural justice. It is the destiny of past karmas or actions to be passed on to this life as well as from lives in the past. These karmas are like coded seeds buried within the heart and soul ready to grow according to their own actions and choices which are their karmas. When the farmer plants his seeds, the Earth does not dictate what kind of plant each sown seed will become. Similarly, the Universe does not dictate how you will respond

to what has been planted on the landscape of your soul. Should pain and suffering be a part of that harvest, whether it is stored or given away, is all a matter of personal choice. Your destiny, your life's harvest, is in your hands and no one else's.

What Is Karma yoga - The Yoga Of Actions

In accordance with the Indian ethos, if you believe in the karma philosophy, you need not worry about the fruits of your actions. All you need is to keep doing your karmas without any attachment to the outcome. As we all know that good karmas will bring good results and vice versa, there is no need to worry about the results. Just focus completely on the action being performed; not on its outcome, or else you will not be able to give a hundred percent to your actions. Therefore, there is great wisdom in the belief - do your best and leave the rest.

Karma yoga can also be explained simply: "if what you are now has been the result of your past actions, it certainly follows that what you wish yourself to be in future can be produced by your present actions. So, now you know how to act."

My Personal Experiences

Law Of Karma Spreads Laughter Yoga Message

The Law of Karma spread the laughter movement across the world. More than 15 years ago, I had a golden vision of setting up Laughter Clubs all over the world but had no inkling of how such an undertaking would evolve. Whether people, let alone countries, would embrace the concept of Laughter Yoga or how long it would take to accomplish such a feat was unknown to me. Regardless, I kept pressing onward with my best efforts because of my belief in the Law of Karma. Now, after years of diligent perseverance, I am seeing the outcome. Without marketing or advertising, Laughter Yoga has now spread to more than 65 countries. There was never a business plan and no expectations, just constant work. I was doing something I loved and fervently believed in.

Planting Seeds

Years ago, a Laughter Yoga leader organized a training session in Germany. He worked very hard advertising and promoting the training, but only 11 people signed up for the workshop. Disappointed and disillusioned with the outcome, I told the leader not to worry; his efforts would not be in vain.

After six months, another training program was scheduled in Germany, but this time 35 people registered! Upon inquiry, I discovered that 18 of the 35 people trained, came because of the previous advertising. The seeds had been planted; they simply needed time to germinate and bloom.

Even if we think that there is no logical or scientific explanation of whether or not there is really previous or next life. Even if it is an assumption, it helps our mind to understand which can be very good.

This is precisely what I mean when I say that no effort will ever go unnoticed. The Law of Karma has no timeframe, it can happen any time. All that is needed for good things to happen is patience, perseverance, positivity and full belief in what you do.

Since applying this principle to my life, I have experienced tremendous relief. There are no deadlines; instead my focus is to do my very best every day. My work takes me all over the world with my only goal being to spread the joy of laughter. There are no other expectations and everything is working out beautifully. As far as my work is concerned, I do not measure my achievements, nor do I think about competing with anyone. My only focus has been and continues to be, the worldwide growth of the Laughter Yoga movement which is happening at amazing speed.

If perchance, something does not work out I am at peace knowing that either the results will come later or that possibly something is not as good as it should be. Without expectations, I re-evaluate my efforts, review my goals, possibly modify my plans and practice patience knowing my actions and efforts will not go unnoticed.

No Effort Is Ever In Vain

My elder sister, Janak Narula, runs a Laughter Club in the city of Chandigarh, North India. After attending the National Conference in Trivandrum, Kerala, in 2007, she was so impressed by the success of Laughter Yoga in schools; she embraced the cause and wanted to promote the concept with the schoolchildren in Chandigarh.

In November 2007, she asked me to send a DVD and some guidelines about how to conduct laughter sessions with schoolchildren. The Department of Education organized a presentation for her. Subsequently, she gave the DVD to the school authorities and told me that although they seemed to show tremendous interest and enjoyed the session, two months had lapsed without hearing a word from them. The usual story of people being initially enthusiastic but with time becoming lukewarm. Janak was terribly disappointed, feeling her efforts were in vain.

Encouraging her to be patient, I reminded her of the Law of Karma which states that no effort is ever in vain. I told her that her presentation was like a seed that would blossom under the right conditions. Sooner or later there would be results.

Some time later, I announced to an excited and delighted people of Chandigarh that I would be arriving to celebrate my birthday on December 31st with my family. Eagerly anticipating my arrival, she notified all Laughter Clubs in the area as well as the local media of my plans. The well-attended laughter session was vastly covered in the daily newspapers the following day with many calls requesting seminars and personal interviews. But what was the most important call of all? The Department of Education called with a proposal for my sister to introduce Laughter Yoga into their schools. Having seen the session with the children and teachers, the head of the Department of



Education immediately authorized implementation of the program as well as additional research into various methods of laughter. The media generated even more awareness about the concept by quickly carrying the story of Laughter Yoga being implemented in the schools which, in turn, created even more curiosity about Laughter Clubs.

My sister, who was extremely happy by the response realized that everything falls into place when the time is right. She thanked me for reminding her of the age-old wisdom of the Law of Karma which like Newton's Third Law of Motion states all actions and reactions are equal and opposite.

As You Sow, So Shall You Reap

This is a wisdom I have aligned myself with. While spreading the laughter movement in Western countries, the process was slow leaving many laughter leaders disappointed when very few people showed up for laughter sessions or trainings. Encouraging them to be patient and reminding them of the Karma philosophy, the initially discouraged laughter leaders were ultimately pleasantly surprised with overflowing

rewards. Therefore, work should continue without any attachment to the outcome allowing the mind to be free and fully devoted to the process.

Focusing on results and outcomes routinely reaps misery since consequences rarely match expectations. However, focusing on actions and efforts while diligently and patiently continuing the work will surely result in not only dreams being realized, but more importantly, in untold inner happiness and joy being enjoyed.

LAW OF OPPOSITES AND BALANCES

Our life is a constant buzz of change, inconsistencies and ups and downs. It can never be viewed in black or white. It is the shades of grey that govern us right through our living days. We all want good things to happen in our life. No one wants bad things or unhappy events to befall them. Everyone wants to succeed, no one wants to experience a downfall. But, this is not the way life works, because what goes up must come down is the philosophy of life. However efficient the system may be there is something like the law of averages which lends a balance in life. You will see that star players who have once been on top plummet at times even though they are the best. These conflicts and contradictions are a way of life and the faster we learn to accept them as a part of us, the sooner we shall discover the true sense of happiness and contentment.

The right balance is struck when we learn how to confront the challenges of life as well as graciously acknowledge the good. There is no use in succumbing to difficult times as no phase in life ever remains the same. The law of averages ensures that we all get our fair share of pleasure and pain. No one can get away from this rule of life. So, remember that the good shall follow the bad and vice versa. Once we master the art of acceptance and patience, it will help us tackle various situations with a positive and a hopeful outlook.

The Chinese subscribe to the concept of Yin and Yang which is a belief that there are two complementary forces in the Universe. One is Yang which represents everything positive or masculine and the other is Yin characterized as negative or feminine. They are both essential and we need a good balance of both, as too much of either one is bad. If you know this law you will be able to accept the situations as it is and deal with it in a much better way.

Besides the theory of Yin and Yang, there are other principles like those of polarities, rhythm, cycle and gender which direct our life. These are like codes on which we base our actions, reactions, thoughts and behavior. Without the amalgamation of these codes of living, we would be quite lost and confused about all that happens in our lives and what makes it happen.

Polarity

Let us examine the principle of polarity which states that everything is measured on a scale and has an opposite. We can suppress and transform undesirable thoughts by concentrating on the opposite pole, but the paradoxes will never end. This principle establishes the twofold aspect of reality. Everything has its double, for instance, hot and cold, positive and negative, light and darkness, love and fear, mortality and immortality. Everything has opposites which are identical in nature, but different in intensity. The proof of this law can be seen in the polarization of planets and the different celestial bodies that includes our earth, solar system and galaxy. Without the law of polarity or the attraction of opposites nothing would work whether it is light, gravity or electricity.

Besides affecting our lives in a physical manner, the principle also manifests itself on our mental plane. It makes possible the choices we make in life between good and evil, right and wrong, generosity and greed, love and fear, truth and lies. The law of cause and effect is closely

connected to variance and holds us true to the choices and actions we make by returning to us what we have measured out to others. Like the pendulum, it always returns from where it began.

Rhythm

There is a rhythmic cycle of life which states that life has a cyclic pattern. Maybe we can call it the circle of life. This phenomenon is a fundamental factor in establishing different seasons of the year, stages of development and the changing life patterns. During each cycle of life, we must try not to get very excited with the good and the positive and at the same time not allow the negative to penetrate our consciousness.

On a physical level, this is the most visible of all principles and its power is observed within the forces of nature which determine the waves and tides of oceans and the continuous change of seasons. It is observed in the continuous cycle of life, death, and the rebirth, rise and fall of nations, constant creation and destruction of celestial bodies and galaxies.

Mentally, this rhythmic cycle determines our wide mood swings. It can be seen as extreme happiness which can swing to extreme sadness or from being calm to an extremely violent behavior at the blink of an eye. Rhythm maintains the equilibrium in everything and returns to us what we measure out in life. There is no escape from the effects of this immutable law. This law holds us true to what we believe, or not believe, and compensates us accordingly.

We can either use this law to our advantage or become its victim as the door of universal law swings in all directions. The final result depends on what we choose to believe and whether or not our belief system allows us to see the truth as it really is. As the laws suggests whatever and how much ever we put in will determine our reward or retribution accordingly.

Gender

This law underlines the fact that gender is manifested in everything. The masculine and feminine law is at work in every sphere of life, be it physical, mental or spiritual. On a physical level, all living beings are categorized as being either male or female and their role in reproduction is thus set. On a mental level, gender manifests as masculine and feminine energy that exists within each and every person whereas on a spiritual plane, the gender becomes the principle of the infinite and the omnipresent God – the Creator and the Protector of the Universe.

With the right balance and effective learning one can become a perfect blend of masculine and feminine attributes which engender a more well rounded persona and genuine qualities of responsibility, dependability, compassion, kindness and humane behavior which renders a more complete and blissful existence.

Read the following story which effectively explains the contradictions and the existing incongruities of life. How one should accept the good with the bad and move on relentlessly towards a more joyous and contented living. Black or White, Laughter and Tears, Ups and Downs are all an intrinsic part of life. Laugh in the face of adversity and take on any challenge with grace and dignity.

No Matter If It's Black or White...

Would you believe me if I told you that I very often wear different colored shoes? Sounds crazy! But it's true. I imbibed this peculiar trait from Patch Adams when I met him for the first time in Italy. I realized that laughter was a part of his entire persona and his whole being. He was a complete bag of laughs.

His glowing face, shining eyes, spiky moustache, long colored hair and bright attire was too little. He even had a spoon and a fork hanging down his ears! It was like Charlie Chaplin in Joseph's Technicolor Coat ...enough to have one in splits. But there was more. I couldn't help notice his socks-one green, one orange! What guts? By now I was in stitches. His appearance though weird had a compassion which drew me towards him and filled me with joy for nearly an hour that I was with him.

This holistic experience of laughter left me fascinated. I was awestruck by his personality and most of all by his different colored socks. I pondered over this when an equally wacky thought came to my mind. Why not wear different colored shoes with different colored socks?

My regular attire is blue jeans and a pair of white Nike sports shoes. Though my wife Madhuri doesn't quite approve of the 'stark' white shoes, I love the contrast. But alas! Giving in to a wife is the norm. I bought a pair of black Nike shoes in Zurich much against my wishes.

One fine day, I insisted on wearing the white shoes but Madhuri was insisted on the black. In a sudden flash I told her that I would wear both. She thought I was joking. But I actually wore a combination- one shoe white and one shoe black!! A little apprehensive, I stepped out and immediately became a wonder. I must have made at least a hundred people laugh as I went by. I fell in love with the whole concept and decided to continue with it. Madhuri still couldn't believe what I had done.

In July 2003, B.P. Hirani, Senior Vice-President of Laughter Club International joined me on my visit to Calcutta (now Kolkata) to decide the venue for our annual Laughter Conference, LAFF-2003. At Mumbai Airport I found many people were staring at my shoes and laughing. However, it was the officer at the Security Check who went into hysterics. As he started to frisk me from head to toe he noticed them. What's with the shoes? One black, one white...He burst out laughing and just couldn't stop.

After reaching Kolkata we went to the Safari Park Laughter Club where almost 400 members had gathered to laugh with us. They noticed my funny shoes and really cracked up. No one had ever seen such a strange combination. After the session one gentleman came up to me wanting to know the secret behind my black and white shoes. I promptly said, "It is for fun". Of course, he didn't believe me. He insisted on a proper explanation. I then told him that this was a result of a compromise I made for my wife as she liked black and I preferred white. But he was not convinced and demanded, "You must tell me what the real secret is".

After a brief thought I told him, "To me the white shoe represents laughter and the black represents sadness or tears. Life is a blend of laughter and tears. He was convinced and very impressed.



As he nodded his head in agreement I explained further. Life is imperfect. We are all full of imperfections. These shoes help me to accept my inadequacies and weaknesses in good spirit. He agreed and went away feeling satisfied. These words of spontaneous wisdom really struck me deeper and became a part of my life.

This incident reminds me of a laughter exercise that we do in our Laughter Clubs – Laugh at Your Own Self. This is a value-based exercise intended to remind the members the value of laughing, not at others, but at your own self. This act does not make one lose self-respect or degrade oneself. It frees us from unrealistic and harsh expectations of life.

Laughing at yourself is not any kind of humiliation. It's the ability to take ourselves lightly but take our responsibilities seriously. When we lighten up, we are more creative and resourceful. Trying to deny our mistakes and hiding them from others is a waste of time and energy.

I sometimes wonder how a small compromise in color has changed my life. I did not have any philosophy in mind when I first wore the

different colored shoes. It was just for fun. But later, I discovered a deeper meaning behind the black and white shoes.

I now wear these shoes very frequently. They are my source of inspiration when things go wrong. They remind me that life is a roller coaster ride-full of ups and downs. There are upsetting phenomenons every day. Instead of fretting and frowning one must learn to accept reality and move on graciously.

SECTION 5

Five Rooms Of Work - Life Balance

1. Self

2. Family

3. Work

4. Social

5. Spiritual

Five Rooms Of Work - Life Balance

People today are highly acquisitive in this market driven economy and the need for money, power and success keeps them on the run. They are left with no time for spiritual development, self-introspection or time to ascertain values and principles which would make living more sensible and meaningful.

Often, it is seen that both men and women are constantly trying to juggle work and home, as a result of which they completely ignore their own need to be happy and healthy. Personal sacrifices made for family or for business gains actually lead to an unbalanced state of living. In fact, people spend the first half of their life trying to accrue wealth thus stressing themselves and ruining their health, while in the second half they spend much of that money to regain health! In this maxim of life lies the irony that real happiness and joy is not in material wealth and success. It is in the enrichment of the inner self and learning how to skillfully balance work and life. Remember, while it is important to be thoughtful and mindful of others, it is equally important to keep one's own well-being and happiness in mind.

An old Indian wisdom states, life is like a house with five rooms, those being –

1. Self
2. Family
3. Work
4. Social
5. Spiritual

If real joy in life is to be realized, all rooms in the house must be in order and all elements harmoniously balanced.

Room no. 1 - SELF

Research has shown that people who take care of themselves create an internal landscape that fosters health, wealth, and love and life satisfaction. But, for some strange reason most people fail in this respect. The relationship you have with yourself not only determines your overall health and well-being; it also determines your relationship with others. Have you noticed how people around us affect our happiness? One negative person can negatively impact so many, especially if that person happens to be the head of a family or a business.

There is an old saying, 'You get what you give and that you can only give what you have.' If you cannot make yourself happy and laugh, you cannot make others laugh or make them happy. Therefore, your state of happiness is of paramount importance.

How many people suffer because they feel sacrificing their wishes will make someone else happy? The fact is, without being happy yourself, it is impossible to make anyone else happy. Caring for yourself does not necessarily mean being selfish. Selfishness is the act of putting your interests above others while seeking power, position and success. Doing so at the cost of others is selfish, but caring for yourself without affecting or harming others is a good thing. Therefore, always keep in mind the fact that **You** are the most important person in the world, regardless of profession, social status or worldly possessions. Looking after yourself is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and for those who matter to you.

For example, let's think about happiness vs. unhappiness. If you are unhappy, how does that affect those around you? Think about being happy – even if you have seemingly nothing to be happy about, feign happiness. That's right, just fake it. Your mind will do whatever your body tells it to do and very soon you will feel happy. Your happy and

positive countenance will create peace first within your soul, then within your family and then ripple out into the entire world.

Caring for Yourself

Answer the following relevant questions which will help you take care of yourself and make your life more gratifying and enjoyable.

Physical health

Ask yourself: What are my current food habits? Do I eat a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with other nutrient-rich foods, every day? Do I drink at least 8 glasses of pure water every day? Do I actually know what healthy nutrition is?

Ask yourself: Do I exercise my body daily? Do I prioritize exercise? Is there an exercise that I truly enjoy? Do I exercise enough to break a sweat, at least 30 minutes a day, three times a week? Do I have an exercise buddy? Do I understand the difference between aerobic, stretching and strengthening exercises?

Ask yourself: What is my current state of health? Am I suffering from a chronic disease, aches, pains, stiffness, or discomfort in my body? Do I get 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep every night? Do I see my family physician and dentist regularly for routine check-ups?

Ask yourself: Do I take time every week for some kind of play or recreation? Do I laugh alone every day? Do I laugh with others every day? What activities make me feel creative, playful or light-hearted?

Think about it:

The body is like a vehicle, a temple carrying your soul and spirit. What make and model are you driving? What does your maintenance schedule look like? When your oil was last changed, your tires rotated?! For that matter, when was your 'car' detailed, inside and out?

Mental health

Ask yourself: How happy am I with my life? What matters most to me in my life? What is the purpose of my life? What do I do on a regular basis

that satisfies and inspires, brings joy and clarity?

Ask yourself: What are my heart's desires? Are those desires fulfilled or unfulfilled? If money and time were not an issue, what would I be doing?

Ask yourself: Do I experience ongoing or chronic stress? Am I continually worried about something – a loved one, a relationship, money, my job, my health? Am I chronically depressed? Do I have difficulty managing my time, work, and personal tasks? Am I often feeling overwhelmed with commitments, deadlines, and unrealistic expectations? Do I ingest too much caffeine and sugar? Have I experienced any major stresses in my life the past 2-3 years, such as divorce, loss of a loved one, moving, lost or different job, major illness or injury, financial crisis? Is my work environment stressful? Is my home life stressful?

Ask yourself: Am I able to express my true feelings to supportive friends, family or a group? Do I respond to anger in the "fight or flight" mode? In general, are my emotional responses over-expressed or repressed?

Ask yourself: On a scale of 1-10, how would I rate my level of self-esteem? Do I love, respect, value and accept myself? Do I routinely participate in negative self-talk? Do I surround myself with positive people and environments?

Ask yourself: Do I have a strong, fulfilling connection with a Higher Power?

Ask yourself: Does my behaviour towards others reflect my own spiritual beliefs?

Think about it:

Ego is about masking and hiding the truth though your heart knows the difference. Your ego mind is what you show the world, what you try to be, but what you are not. However, your true self always knows the difference.

Ego generally prescribes, 'My way is the right way and I don't care what your opinion is.' Your ego self can be defined as that identity you have given to yourself, simply for the sake of looking good in the eyes of others. That identity does not match or necessarily identify with your inner voice which is the truth.

Identifying with your ego self increases fear and anxiety. Ego has an 'I', 'me' and 'my' agenda – it is not about other people. The true self is totally selfless when it is one with the Universe.

Ask yourself: Can I distinguish between my true self and my ego self? Do I know when I am pretending or when I am following truth and reality?

Ask yourself: Am I living life with my ego or with my true self? Am I listening to and acting from my heart? Or am I hiding behind a mask, doing only that which makes me look good?

Identify Your True Identity

Have you ever lied to yourself and tried to evade the truth? Have you ever discovered your true identity in the midst of different roles one plays in life? It is difficult. In this story I'm going to share with you what I learnt from one of my spiritual masters in India about who I am and what is my true identity?

We have two personalities within us – An actor and a spectator. The actor plays different roles. For example, I'm a medical doctor when I see patients, a teacher when teaching Laughter Yoga, a husband with my wife, a brother with my sisters. While playing these diverse personas, I keep stretching different rules every day according to the mind and the needs of the people I interact with.

Even as we take on these roles, there is someone watching us play them – it is the spectator. It clearly knows the reality. When we lie due to compulsion, hide facts or say something wrong, the spectator is the true inner self, the conscience, the soul or the ultimate reality - a part of

the higher consciousness which constantly keeps a watch and makes us aware of our actions. The actor on the other hand is a part of the thinking brain, ego or the intellect which is the lower consciousness and acts in accordance with momentary needs.

This story reflects on how I managed to identify the actor and the spectator within me which helped me to become a better person.

In October 2001, I sent out a newsletter with an article on the inner spirit of laughter and I wrote:

"If you laugh in the Laughter Club, and later shout at your partner at home, it does not make any sense. Laughter is not a physical phenomena; it has to come from within - right from your heart. It must reflect the inner attitude towards other people..."

Now this piece of advice which I wrote was actually given to me by the wife of a Laughter Club member in Mumbai. She came to the club and very sadly told me that though her husband laughed in the club, he would go back and shout at her at home. She questioned me if I was teaching people to laugh only in the clubs. She then went on to tell me that it was all futile if people did not practice in real life what they learnt in these clubs. She left me thinking and had taught me a great lesson that one must practice what one learns or preaches.

In response to this newsletter, a few days later, I received an email from Sheelu Srinivasan, head of a social organization saying though she respected my work and what I was doing, it was wrong of me to write someone else's viewpoint without acknowledging the person. It suddenly dawned on me that without even a blink I had used the woman's advice with no mention of her name or identity and had projected her opinion as being my own. I knew I had lied to myself.

For a moment I tried to evade the criticism with the excuse that she did not want her name to be mentioned. Then all at once my inner voice told me that I was trying to cover up and escape from reality.

I had indeed made a mistake. The spectator within me knocked on my consciousness and said, "You are lying. This is not the truth. Why can't you admit your mistake and apologize instead of giving false explanations." I felt so guilty and was ready to admit the truth.

I thanked my 'Inner Buddy'- my authentic self for following the righteous path. I immediately replied to Sheelu and apologized for my mistake. I even acknowledged the lady who gave me such a profound piece of advice.

Well then, remember whenever you lie to yourself, there is someone watching. All you need to do is to listen to your 'Inner Buddy' and follow what is right and the truth. The words we speak, the actions we do must be in sync with our inner self. When the actor and the spectator are in sync, you will be at peace and will be able to live to your fullest potential. Everything will flow with effortless ease without much struggle.

Understanding The Ego Mind

Man is an evolved animal and though we struggle for existence like other animals we have a highly evolved thinking process and reasoning ability. But, our selfish tendencies stem from our struggle for existence and are a part of our animal behavior. With the process of evolution from animal to man, these tendencies have also evolved, but there is a distinct difference between the predisposition of animals and man. While animals are selfish to the needs and necessities of life like food, shelter and security; man is self-centered and is greedy for power, control and position in life. Selfishness has become a prominent feature of human beings in the process of evolution and this unconsciously directs our actions towards goals which are primarily for our own benefit. The ego is a human tendency to look for: 'what's in it for me', while all the time it directs our energy and actions to meet the 'I', 'me', and 'my' agenda. This creates a major conflict between individuals and we disregard our relationship with other living beings and with the Universe.

As a student of medicine, I learnt a lot about the conscious and subconscious mind, the emotional mind as well as the thinking mind, but there was never a clear-cut description of what is the ego mind. There was always an ambiguity surrounding the understanding of ego and what role it plays in our lives.

I experienced the development of the ego mind right through my childhood to adulthood even without being aware of it. But what I realized was that, in order to have a sense of self-worth and to live a stress free life, the first thing to be understood was what is ego and how does stress come from diverse ego states.

Ego is a state of mind or a false center which constantly tries to uphold your own point of view and almost completely disregards that of others. The whole focus of ego is—what's in it for me? It is a kind of a self-centered approach to life. Even as you pay attention to your ego, it is forever judging who is superior to you or inferior to you. It instigates in you a sense of comparison which makes you feel good and bad accordingly. It provides a false sense of pride driven by selfish agenda that makes us head towards greed and self-satiating acts, which in turn can leave us unhappy and discontented.

Through developing a deeper understanding of this seen and unseen connection which is infinite in nature, one can begin to consciously elevate the ego aspect of mind and harmonize one's thoughts, words, and actions with it and make use of it in a way that creates positive physical life experiences and help one feel fulfilled.

Ego & Stress

Ego comprises attitudes, beliefs and the resultant energies. It believes it is right and everything else is wrong. This disparity from reality produces a tremendous amount of stress and in order to have a meaningful life, it is imperative that we simply let go of the idea that we have the only right opinion. Right or wrong depends on circumstances - what is right

for one may be wrong for the other. Therefore, it is important that we accept the two mutually.

Both ego and stress do not exist in the outside world. But our reaction to what's going on in the outside world depends upon what meaning you are going to give to a given situation by evaluating and judging the events, people and objects in the outer world. Ego creates emotional stress which can be easily handled by understanding how the mind works. It's all about your perception of the outer world and the biggest instrument to help you understand the meaning of life is your thinking mind or the intellect. The understanding of ego states of mind will definitely assist in changing the perception and response to stressful situations unnecessarily created by our thinking.

Learning From Life

Looking back at my own life, I had a great childhood when I lived in the village. My mother's dream was that I should study medicine and become a doctor. From then on, I started experiencing ego states in school when I first started making sense out of this world. I worked hard to stay ahead in competition. Though there were moments of achievements, most of the time was spent in fear about what next? While in college, I started experiencing peer pressure like who is smarter and who'll get better grades. It was the time I started telling lies about myself and my family and started exaggerating the facts about who I was and what I was doing. My point was to prove myself superior.

Next were the expectations of my family which made me more conscious about finding my place in the world. When I became a doctor and saw other well established and famous doctors, something inside me told me that I must outdo them. My ego made me feel envious about people who were successful and rich. This generated negative feelings within and I began criticizing them. My ego mind pushed me in the right places and egged me on to make more money and become eminent. It gave me the momentum on how to make money in the

shortest possible time so that I can prove myself among my friends and relatives. I started working hard and running my life on a 'fast forward' mode. Day after day, even as I struggled hard, I felt that time was running out; age was advancing and I had to achieve much more. These feelings of insecurities, fear and stress was not the 'real' me - it was my EGO that made me do and think all of this.

Soon, I started losing my hair and was petrified that no girl will ever marry me if I'm bald. It was my ego mind which kept pushing me to get padded fast. In a nutshell, the entire focus of my life was to just prove myself to my family, friends and relatives. I was always more concerned about the approval of other people rather than what I felt within myself.

Laughter came as a great breakthrough in my life and released a lot of stress and tension which I had germinated over the years to pursue my goals and ambitions triggered by my ego mind. By laughing at all of it, the first thing I learnt was that I am not the center of the Universe. I realized that even if I had proved myself to the world, it wouldn't really care because people have their own problems to deal with and they would not be bothered with my feelings or apprehensions.

A little disillusioned, I delved into the philosophical side of ego and reminisced what my spiritual teacher had said that ego also meant edging God out i.e. When you think you are the whole sole doer and try to play God, you are operating from your ego mind. He explained the *gyan mudra* or the most commonly used meditative posture in which we join the thumb with the tip of the index finger. He said that the index finger represents arrogance or the ego mind while the thumb symbolizes the Universe or God. Thus, by joining the two, we make a complete circle which denotes that we have surrendered everything into the hands of the Universe. It is not about us; it is about a higher energy, a higher force through which the divine manifestation takes place. As the process of reflection and meditation continues, the ego

mind soon dissipates. The arrogance of the self fades away; instead one is left with a feeling of humility and selflessness.

Having learnt the spiritual meaning of ego, I underwent a definitive change. My achievements no longer made me condescending. I did not feel hurt by criticism because I realized it was not about me. I felt like an executive director of a higher power where all things good or bad were his doing. I was just a mere instrument that made them happen. In fact, I give the whole credit of spreading the Laughter movement worldwide in such a short period of time to a divine force rather than to my own intelligence and smartness.

Ego And Self-Esteem

It is important to understand what self-esteem is and how it is different from ego. Self-esteem combines a healthy regard for the self as well as others, whereas ego, on the other hand, always believes in its own self importance and undermines that of others. Ego always needs outside approval, justification, constant attention and gratification and believes in its own superiority. But when we express healthy self esteem, we are able to be compassionate without being mutually dependent. We can understand the viewpoints of others and have a real concern in them.

Those with healthy self esteem have healthy boundaries which lead to a stable and content life. There is no danger of an inflated ego that can lead to unpleasant situations.

Another virtue of high self-esteem is being patient as impatience is frequently a sign of egoistical people. Sometimes our impatience is the result of our own failures, but when we have a healthy self esteem, we show great endurance and live our lives strategically enough to cope with situations that require extreme patience.

But, paradoxically, we need ego to get to self-esteem. It is vital to have a certain amount of ego without which a person will develop a low self- esteem which in turn weakens the self-worth of the person. Therefore, ego is an essential part of one's being so long as it does not

go to a gargantuan magnitude and ruins a person's worthiness, potential and sensitivity. Always remember to chide your ego if it starts running away with your emotions. Learn to weed out the unhealthy component from your ego and head towards a more complete life with compassion, humility and generosity which are the sole ingredients for a happy life.

How To Dissolve Your Ego

Giving is the opposite of ego. Your ego wants to control and possess and does not ever want to give. It is always seeking. Therefore, one exercise to dissolve your ego mind is the spiritual virtue of being generous. Earlier, I noticed that the more I strived for, the more dissatisfied I got. But, when laughter came into my life, I experienced that the more I gave, the more I got. For the first time in my life, I learnt from the laughter movement that one can become rich and famous by giving and not by taking.

Let the 'E' Go

Another ego busting exercise is to remove 'E' from ego and let it go. But how do we let go. If you understand the following metaphor you'll understand the stress.

Stress is like a rope pulled by two. Stretching the rope can be easily relieved if the person on any one end let goes. Though there is no guarantee what the other one will do, you always have a choice. You can let go thereby mitigating stress and tension. But, what stops people is the ego mind. It tells them to hold on and prove their strength. All you need to understand the fact that stress can become chronic if one does not let go of it. Therefore, once you rise above your ego and think from a larger perspective, it will not be hard for you to let go.

Letting go is also about giving freedom to others. I learnt from experience that one of the reasons which built stress in my life was my desire to control other people. As long as I was obsessed with control, I found that stress was building up. The moment I decided to let go and set other people free, it was quite a relief.

Ego Is Necessary To Learn About The Real Self

To fully experience a life of harmony and accomplishment, one has to understand at a deeper level the role that the ego mind plays in creating the events, conditions and circumstances in your life, and how it can restrict and keep you from experiencing a full life. Though ego is a false center and provides false tutoring, the fact is that in order to know the real, one has to go through the false, so ego is a must. It is only through an illusion that one gets to know the reality. If you know what is false, the truth by design will dawn upon you.

Ego is a social need and everyone around you is involved in developing it. For instance, parents, school authorities, friends and relations etc are all adding to your ego and everybody tries to modify it in such a way that you don't become a nuisance to the society. While expectations and approval boosts the ego; criticism and disapproval does the exact opposite. It deflates the ego and balances the mind. It stops you from getting a swollen head. Therefore, when you mature through understanding, awareness, and realize that an inflated ego can be a cause of stress and misery, you will learn to strike a good balance between 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' ego.

Know Your Values & Why We Need Them

Most people are not aware of their value system. They live through life by default, not by design, as invariably there is lack of clarity about what is really important and what our values are. If you want to accomplish something great in life, it does not depend on the physical energy of hard work alone. In fact, it depends upon the psychological energy of the mind you put behind your actions. The intensity of this energy manifests as determination, interest, commitment, passion, drive, motivation or enthusiasm. When we examine the lives of famous people who have achieved something great, we find they all had some values that guided them to the top of the world. Everyone has an intrinsic value system, but most of the time we are not aware of them. Our lives are run by values which determine the difference between success and failure.

What Is A Value

A value is a belief system; a guiding principle or the philosophy which determines our decision, action and behavior to maximize our potential. It helps to guide our lives to take certain actions to produce desirable results. These guiding principles energize us and show others what is important to us. They not only make us successful but also help us to live a fulfilled and happy life. Some of the examples of values are courage, honesty, truthfulness, generosity, hard work, freedom, discipline, punctuality, simplicity, non-violence, concern for others, equality etc. Our values are like a compass which shows us the right direction to reach the destination. Running your life without values is like a ship without a compass. You wouldn't know where you're going.

Values And Relationship

There is a downside to having values. It can cause problems in relationship with others if we are not aware of their values or if we do not communicate our values to them. In fact, the most common cause of bad relationships is because we violate each other's values. It can cause conflict in your personal life, business life, or social life. Therefore, it is not only important to know your values, but equally important to communicate your values to others with whom you interact and work with. Knowing each other's values can lead to harmonious relationships. If you are unaware of your values, you need to identify and cultivate them. You can also develop new values and make some strategies to implement them in your life. That will open the doors to good health, income and all forms of material and psychological benefits.

Are You Forcing Your Values On Others

There are certain situations where you can force others to follow your values: For example, parents want to create some family values and in order to teach their children, they ask them to follow a family value system. But, when children grow up, they develop their own values and

may modify the existing ones to suit them, thus disallowing parents to enforce the older set of values. In another instance, when working in a company, the boss can force their employees to follow a value system laid down as corporate values which as salaried employees they are obligated to follow. Apart from these situations, if you're forcing your values on other people, it will cause conflict and bad relationships. Unfortunately, there are many who are in the habit of forcing their own values on their partners, relations, relatives and friends which constantly leads to unpleasantness. Be mindful of not forcing your values and similarly if you find someone forcing their values on you, make a choice and follow what you feel is right.

Types Of Values

Values can be both negative and positive. Even terrorists have some values, but they are not constructive. They are inclined to fulfill their own selfish agenda and are based on acquiring wealth, power, position and success at the cost of others. When you do something to prove yourself and feed your ego to compete with others, it is known as false values. They are not really needed for survival but are only required to prove that you are better than others. They are not driven by basic needs; instead they emerge because of the greed of the mind.

Categories Of Values

1. Personal values
2. Family values
3. Business values
4. Social values
5. Spiritual values

According to our goals we need to develop or cultivate new values that can help us accomplish our goals. We've always heard 'Silence is Golden', but for the first time during our Laughter and Silence Retreat we struck a goldmine. We learnt so much in silence which is not possible when the mind is filled with countless thoughts every day. We had a

new understanding about success, failure, fulfillment and happiness through silence.

List Of Certain Values

Please note that many values can overlap in different areas of life. For example, truthfulness and honesty can be a personal value, a business value, family value or even a spiritual value.

Personal Values

Good health, Discipline, Punctuality, Integrity, Promptness, Commitment, Simplicity, Pleasure, Beauty and looking good, Perfection, Adventure, Courage, Honesty, Cleanliness and orderliness, Fun and joy, Patience, Freedom, Openness, Appreciation, Gifts, Touch etc.

Family Values

Family values apply to your partner, parents, grandparents, siblings and other relatives. Also to very special friends who are like an extended family. These are: Peace and harmony, Trust, Responsibility, Security, Quality time, Support and care.

Business Values

Success and accomplishment, Honesty and loyalty, Quality work, Customer care, Creativity, Teamwork, Making money, Integrity, Perfection, Loyalty, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Competence.

Social And Spiritual Values

Concern for others, Justice, Flexibility, Hospitality, Gentleness, Righteousness, Faith, Oneness, Patience and tolerance, Generosity, Gratitude, Compassion, Community, Friendship, Equality, Honesty and truthfulness, Unconditional love, Peace and harmony, Contentment.

Room no. 2 - FAMILY

Family, whether blood-related or not, is defined as any group of individuals who share common beliefs, attitudes or goals and often live together. Within this family group, there is continual acceptance, support, understanding, companionship, encouragement – a place

where you can be yourself, a place where you are accepted for the person you are. It is that security blanket ready to wrap you tightly in a cocoon of warmth, joy and happiness that you know will always be there in good times, as well as in bad.

Whatever the size of your family unit, a strong foundation which will result in a cohesive bond cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, this extremely mobile society now allows families to live and work all over the world rather than staying together in the same hometown as once, not so long ago, was the rule. This mobility has greatly increased the ability for the family foundation to remain strong.

Our relationships, especially those with our immediate family are our greatest teachers and our most revealing mirrors. Because of them, we have the opportunity to develop our most virtuous qualities – compassion, patience, unconditional love, integrity, honesty, generosity and harmony. A loving, united family unit is like a well-built retaining wall that will protect and buffer against the worst of onslaughts which might threaten our daily lives not only as children, but also as adults.

From the moment of conception in a healthy family, a child is the recipient of genuine love and care. It is within that family unit that the child learns to receive and give love, one of the most sacred and powerful of all human capacities. It is the foundation of personal strength – self-esteem, respect, trust, service to others as well as the power to fulfil our life purpose.

Research has shown that positive, supportive social relationships greatly enhance recovery from surgery, chronic illness and infectious disease as well as having a positive effect on cardiovascular output and improved immune function. Research also shows that healthier, longer, happier lives were realized when spending time in a meaningful way with friends and family.

Those who have strong family bonds thrive in all areas of life. So

investing time in establishing them is of vital importance. Bond with your children by reading books with them, engaging them in the simple tasks of home life such as putting clothes in the washer and dryer, loading the dishwasher, vacuuming the floor, making beds etc. It may be quicker and easier to do these things alone but the bond you will build by including your children will be so worth the small amount of extra time spent working with them.

Plan family activities together like riding a bike, or sitting around the table at home with a board game. These are the times they will remember years from now, time that slips away too quickly, Make a definite plan, write it down and give it the same level of importance as any of your other appointments. Strong family bonds will produce strong, happy, well-adjusted adults.

Equally important is the quality time you spend with your partner. Keeping love alive and the bond tight requires constant and continual attentive care. Try to set aside an hour a day after the children are asleep to just focus on your significant other. Plan a date night or even better, a laughter date! Diffuse tense situations by laughing for no reason.

How important it is to stay in touch with your family. Saying hello after years of silence offers little or no support. Staying in touch with family is an investment that keeps yielding high dividends.

The unexpected benefit of Laughter Clubs has been that it brings people together in an unthreatening, safe environment, free from any expectations and often the members become very close, like an extended family - caring, sharing and supporting one another.

Since the majority of life is spent primarily with a partner, that will be our primary focus.

Life Partner

Ask yourself: What values do we have in common?

Ask yourself: What are the good things in our relationships?

Ask yourself: What aspects of our relationship are acceptable?

Ask yourself: What aspects are unacceptable?

Ask yourself: On a scale of 1-10, 10 being best, what grade would I give my current relationship? Is that good, average, very good, or excellent?

Ask yourself: Do I need a partner and if so, why?

Ask yourself: How will a partner fulfil me?

Ask yourself: Do I have unrealistic expectations from a partner? Do these expectations support each other's core values?

Ask yourself: Are our basic values in life in sync? Have we discussed and do we understand these values?

Ask yourself: Do I know, speak and practice the basic love languages - the giving of gifts, quality time, physical touch, positive affirmations and/or compliments and service?

Ask yourself: What are the positive points of our relationship?

Ask yourself: Is one silly thing worth destroying years of good?

Ask yourself: Did my partner do this deliberately or was it a result of poor judgement?

Ask yourself: Have I shared my feelings with my partner? How well have I communicated my likes and dislikes?

Think about it:

Are you ready to love without expectations? Are you ready to go the distance despite dents and dings along the way? Are you ready to forgive and forget and love unconditionally?

Children

Children are one of life's most rewarding experiences. They are the supreme gift of marriage – a gift from God. Ideally, parenting dictates

that we are selfless and live for our child, but what is the reality of the situation?

Ask yourself: (If you are thinking of having children) do I have adequate skills and knowledge to effectively parent a child?

Ask yourself: (If you already have children) Do I set aside quality time to spend with my children on a daily basis?

Ask yourself: Do I treat my children as if they are gifts from God?

Ask yourself: Do I treat my children with patience and kindness?

Ask yourself: Am I a good role model for my children?

Ask yourself: Do I spend time helping them with homework?

Ask yourself: Do I welcome their friends into our home?

Ask yourself: Do I actively participate in school functions with them?

Ask yourself: Do I insist that my way be the ONLY way? Do I try to see life from a child's point of view?

Ask yourself: Do I praise and acknowledge my children's accomplishments?

Ask yourself: Do I plan events that will include the entire family?

Ask yourself: Do I make rituals of meal-time, bath time, bedtime stories, and holidays?

Think about it:

Are your home and your family the focus of your life? Are you distracted by the complexities of your daily life? Are you actively creating within your home an environment that promotes growth of the human spirit or one in which that spirit will wither and die?

Room no. 3 - WORK

Most adults spend the majority of their adult lives working. Every job has its advantages and its challenges. Because the work we do greatly

influences our lives as well as our health, it is imperative that we acquire the proper insights, skills and attitudes necessary to make our vocation a positive, rather than a stressful, life experience.

Ask yourself: How am I taking care of myself regarding my work?

Ask yourself: Am I satisfied with my work? Do I enjoy the work I am doing or is it just paying the bills?

Ask yourself: Do I work well with my co-workers as a team?

Ask yourself: Am I obsessed with my work? Do I work so much that I ignore and neglect other areas of my life? Do I have adequate time for my family, my spiritual life, exercise, fun, recreation?

Ask yourself: Is my work fulfilling my life purpose?

Ask yourself: Does my job create stress in my life? What stresses me out about my work? How do I deal with the stress?

Ask yourself: Do I enjoy my work? Do I actually have fun at work?

Ask yourself: Do I feel my boss appreciates the work I do?

Ask yourself: Am I able to make use of my talents and creative abilities at work?

Ask yourself: Does my work have a negative or positive influence on my health, life and well-being?

Think about it:

Your work greatly impacts your life and health as well as the life and health of your loved ones. If expectations are dropped and intentions and efforts are genuine and sincere, beautiful things will happen, not only in your professional life, but also in our personal life as well. Be passionate and do what you do for the love of it!

Room no. 4- SOCIAL

Social relationships and interactions are complex processes which usually extend beyond family and include friends. These social

interactions often bring like-minded individuals together in a non-threatening environment where success as well as sorrow is shared. Highly important factors to note are multiple studies which link many illnesses including heart disease, cancer, hypertension and respiratory disorders to lack of social interaction. Good social interaction appears to be the key to living long and living well.

A 2009 study at the University of Chicago concluded that loneliness can, indeed, kill. Rats living in isolation were shown to have higher levels of stress hormones resulting in more fearful and anxious behavior. However, even more compelling was the increased rates of malignancy they experienced in late to mid life. Researchers found that rats living in isolation experienced a 135% increase in the number of malignant tumors and more than 8000% increase in the size of those tumors as compared to rats living in a social setting. This study established for the first time that isolation and stress could be a very real factor in human breast cancer risk.

The study also found that rats living in groups lived 40% longer than those living alone and recovered more quickly from illnesses. It has been hypothesized that people living alone do not recover as quickly from illness have higher systolic blood pressures and more restless sleep than those who were cohabitant. The bottom line is that social interactions and an active social life with good friends and family is the key to living a happy, healthy and fulfilled life.

Ask yourself: Am I there when a friend is having a crisis?

Ask yourself: Have I laughed with a friend today?

Ask yourself: Would I want me for a friend?

Ask yourself: Do I accept others for what they are, rather than what they can do for me?

Ask yourself: Am I a loyal friend?

Ask yourself: Do I make a conscious effort to contact my friends on a regular basis?

Ask yourself: Do I love my neighbor as myself?

Ask yourself: Do I even know my neighbours?

Ask yourself: Do I respect the beliefs of others?

Ask yourself: What kind of social interactions do I have?

Ask yourself: Do I seek out clubs or groups that support my common interests, purposes and life goals?

Ask yourself: Do I belong to any professional organizations?

Ask yourself: Do I give of myself to serve others?

Ask yourself: Do I contribute my time and/or funds to people I don't know?

Think about it:

I often say a friend is one who believes in you when you have ceased believing in yourself. They share your happiness as well as your grief. They laugh with you and cry with you. Family is given, but good friends confirm your sense of worth to not only yourself, but to the entire Universe. They are that blessed support system that keeps on giving and giving.

Room no. 5 - SPIRITUAL

Spirituality is the cultivation of one's connection to their faith, the essence of their being, their truth, life's deepest meaning. The "spirit" can be known by many different names – God, love, peace, source of life, Universe, Higher Power, nature, service to humanity or as the focus of a singular religious belief.

Building on this foundation we develop our own code of ethics, thus discovering our ideals, goals, attitudes and life choices. Without this spiritual connection often there is an experience of stress, fear, disease, apathy, anger, depression, unhealthy relationships as well as violence.

The oneness felt when connecting with the Higher Power enables us to access our own inner power thereby helping us to cope better with life's challenges. It is interesting to note that those who are more spiritually focused report a greater life satisfaction, better marital satisfaction, experience better health and well-being and have better self-esteem than their non-spiritual counterparts.

Ask yourself: Do you feel you have a connection with a Higher Being?

Ask yourself: Do you feel your faith is strong and fulfilled?

Ask yourself: What do you think about God?

Ask yourself: What is your understanding of spirituality?

Ask yourself: What spiritual practices do you use?

Ask yourself: How does your life reflect your spiritual beliefs?

Ask yourself: What activities do you find spiritually uplifting?

Ask yourself: How do you identify with everyone in your world? Do you look with a loving eye towards all? Do you judge people who are different from you? Do you judge them for no reason at all?

Ask yourself: How do you feel when terrible things (natural disasters, war, poverty) happen? Do you want to help? Do you feel pity? Do you want to actively help or just pray, speak a few words, and donate money?

Ask yourself: Spirituality, being oneness with all, do you feel that everything in this world is yours?

Think about it:

The major obstacle toward reaching spirituality is the thinking, judging, ego mind which creates attachments and desires toward material, temporary objects and hedonic pleasures.

SECTION 6

Laughter And Silence For Self Awareness

Laughter And Silence For Self Awareness

If we want our house to be clean or our life to be balanced we need to clean all the aforesaid rooms and take care of these areas of life. Though most people are focused on their work, they leave other important areas of life unattended which creates an imbalance.

It is said that laughter deepens the silence and silence deepens laughter. Unconditional laughter that follows silence is very profound and intense. It comes from the diaphragm and flows like a fountain. This transcends the conscious and judging mind and unfolds the layers of the subconscious mind which can help you to get in touch with your true inner self. Most people are scared of silence. The reason they cannot meditate is because the moment they sit in silence they are inundated with fearsome and troubled thoughts which hampers peaceful meditation and retrospection.

Laughter & Silence

Generally, people find it hard to maintain silence even for a few hours; it would help if you learnt to intersperse periods of laughter while meditating in silence. This will enable you to bring down the number of thoughts and clear the mind of constant clutter. Do not focus on 'having no thoughts' in the mind. On the contrary, while in silence, contemplate on a particular area and study what thoughts are generated through the mind. Keep writing down all these thoughts even as you practice silence. This experience leads to a better understanding of human thought processes and how one can deal with different situations, perception, relationships and emotional expression. The idea is to

experience pure silence without active thinking. This introspective experience helps one to realize the power of silence and how it works towards bringing peace and tranquillity in our life.

3 Stages Of Silence

1. Silence from the body: It is said that stillness of the body is stillness of the mind. Our body and mind keep working even when we do not speak, and one can easily make out one's state of mind through body behaviour. In fact, if you observe some people when they are lost in their world of thoughts, their body is always moving. There is certain restlessness in the body due to a stream of uneasy thoughts flowing through their minds.

Since the body and mind are connected; if we bring stillness in the body, we can bring stillness in the mind i.e. by changing the body behaviour one can change the state of mind. Silence is the perfect tool to achieve this and the best way to silence your body is to put your mind and awareness into the body and scan through the entire body as we do in the practice of *yoga nidra*. When the mind is engaged and is observing the feelings in the different parts of the body, it cannot think and there will be no thoughts. This is the easiest way to silence your body.

This practice of observing periodic silence helps one to overcome the onslaught of unnecessary and negative thoughts that lead to a cluttered mind. It facilitates a change in the thinking pattern which finally determines one's actions, behaviour and reactions.

2. Verbal silence: Man is a social animal and loves to interact with other people. But the flip side is that when one gets too caught up in the outer world of useless gossip, unnecessary thoughts and agitation in the mind, it generates a great deal of negative emotions and feelings. Too much talking and interaction with others takes away the attention from focusing on the inner self and this constant process of action and reaction becomes detrimental to mental and spiritual growth.

Silence proves to be a great solution to this perennial problem as it leads to self-knowledge. The moment we decide not to speak, it becomes easier to concentrate on the thoughts in the mind and you can embark on a journey of self - introspection. Practice of verbal silence helps you to know yourself, makes you a better listener and teaches you more about other people. You can develop a better relationship with others and will also be saved from unnecessary gossip which normally leads to reaction and conflict. Verbal silence can be easily observed in the presence of others, even as you actively listen to them but decide not to speak much.

3. Mental Silence: Another way of keeping silence is to be alone and spend time by yourself. In fact, all great thinkers and philosophers have created their best while in solitude. This technique is especially relevant today as it helps to disconnect from other people, stress of the outer world and other material objects which makes the mind restless.

When in solitude, it sets you in an introspective mood and you start getting to know your true self. Realizations and realities about yourself and your relationships start to dawn upon you and you can perceive them with better clarity. It gives you an idea about what's going on with your life and what you can do about it. In the privacy of silence, you can hear your own voice without being contaminated by voices of other people. You stop being the 'doer' and start looking at life in a dispassionate manner. You will realize that most answers to your problems come through this silence. Better ideas, valuable insights, creative thoughts and beliefs are the positive outcome of being in quietude for some time. It makes one a better person and develops the ability to cope with different circumstances of life in a much better way. It lends a sense of calmness as one learns to stop and think before jumping to any reaction, thereby increasing self-worth and bringing an inner satisfaction.

What You Will Learn From Laughter & Silence

The purpose of any meditation is to reduce the number of thoughts in the mind and if you examine the quality of these thoughts; most of

them are negative because we go through more negative experiences than positive ones in our life. For example, our mind is constantly bombarded with negative information every day through media and other sources generating a chain of unconstructive thoughts in the mind which make us more fearful and agitated. We need a few hours of silence to contemplate and organize our thoughts into a positive and coherent viewpoint.

Focus and Concentration

As a young student, I used to experiment with a magnifying lens, focusing rays of sunlight onto a piece of paper, watching with child-like amazement as it burned. Such is the power of the human mind, that if it decides to focus on a specific thing, it can create wonders.

Jumping haphazardly from one thing to another, unable to reach the goals you want in your life is the result of an unfocused mind. Learning to focus, learning to direct your mental attention and energy towards a specific area in your life will result in tremendous personal power, yielding unlimited growth potential. The practice of silence will unleash your power allowing you to develop focus, concentration, along with improved efficiency within your daily life and ultimately, the realization of your goals.

Contemplation

Contemplation is an active thought process used during the silence retreat allowing your mind to recognize its current actions and behavior. During that active thought process, your mind will be able to focus more clearly enabling you to develop specific plans, strategies and commitments necessary for those changes to occur, thus improving the overall quality of your life.

Mindful Awareness

The mind has a sly way of slipping into the past; projecting into the future, while trying to avoid the present. The past is past, the future has not yet happened, so how can life, itself, be enjoyed if you are not clearly present

in this very moment? When in silence, you learn to observe your breath which will help to bring you more into the present. Placing awareness on your breath will allow you to become one with the moment and experience the beauty of life as it truly and currently exists.

My Day At Pyramid Valley

On 31st October, 2010, I spent an entire day with myself in silence at Pyramid Valley, 30 km from Bangalore city where people go to observe silence and meditate in a pyramid like structure. Though I did nothing, a lot happened. You must be wondering how that is possible. Well, let me tell you. It was a day of pure realization of the inner self, wholesome awareness about surroundings and a meditative journey into the deep insights about life. At the end of the day all this contemplation left me enriched and satisfied. I felt an innate joy and came back fully rejuvenated and energized.

It was indeed a great day. I reached the retreat centre at 9 am and the first thing I did was to switch off my mobile phone. Not wanting to be disturbed at all, I had even given away my watch the night before. I did not want to be bound by any timeline. I wanted to experience the feeling of total timelessness which does not define any deadline, any routine or any kind of limitation.

With no tools of restriction, the first thing that happened was that my life changed gears from 'Timeline' to 'Time Cycle'. All throughout the day, I did not know what time it was. Though not aware of time, I knew when it was morning, afternoon, evening, or night depending on the position of sun and the length of the shadows.

The second important thing in my time cycle that happened was that I had taken some fruit along with me and had decided to eat it



whenever I felt hungry. I did not want to follow the timeline and eat according to preset timings for lunch and dinner. I listened to my inner feelings which gave me new insights that I do not need to adhere to any timeline or any kind of conditioning; I can eat when I'm hungry. I think timeline eventually lead to deadlines which are a major cause of stress today. Man created time while nature created a time cycle. Following time generates tension giving rise to feelings of anxiety and panic, while following the natural time cycle helps to increase the productivity and efficiency. Whenever one knows that they are not time bound, their potential increases and the output is always the best. Therefore, try not be enslaved by time, rather use time to its fullest.

Another highlight was that I did not do anything throughout the day but was just 'being'. For the first time in many years, I took off my shoes and walked bare feet experiencing different kinds of surfaces. I realized I was no more used to walking bare feet as hard and stony pathways hurt me. But I took it in my stride. Each time a stone hurt me I imagined that my kidney point is getting energized, my liver is getting more blood flow or that my heart is getting stronger!!! ha ha.

Normally, I take a brisk walk to get a cardio workout but in the retreat, I walked very slowly enjoying and absorbing every bit of nature. In silence, I noticed all the intricate details of every plant and insect. Their beautiful colors and hues became so clear. I saw butterflies, chameleons, squirrels playing around, spiders, ants, several dogs, beautiful flowers, the gorgeous blue sky and floating grey and white clouds. Oh my God! Never in my life had I noticed so many things on any given day. Not even one negative thought crossed my mind. I didn't even think about what's going on in the office or in the business around the world of Laughter Yoga. I was in a different world where there was no hurry, no worry or any constraints.

Everything seemed to have changed. Though I eat fruit almost every day but the fruit I carried that day smelt and tasted different. It was because for the first time, instead of gobbling it down in 5 minutes, I took time to peel it and enjoy the taste and fragrance. The orange peel had never ever tickled my senses the way it did that day. In fact, unlike my usual sloppy self, I was very neat and tidy and did not make a muddle. I wish my wife Madhuri had seen me cutting and eating fruits perfectly without dropping because she always cribs at the mess I make... ha ha ha

I heard many birds without knowing what type of bird was singing. Normally, when you hear different sounds, you always know the source. But, this is perfect yogic meditation where you hear the sounds in a detached manner without bothering about the source of the sound. It is a great way of being non-judgmental as there is no pressure on the mind to evaluate who is singing and what they look like.

I am sure you know about the pyramids of Egypt and how these natural structures hold the cosmic energy and how it has a powerful impact on the body mind and spirit. I could feel a similar energy taking over me the moment I entered the pyramid. It is a huge structure where almost 2000 people can sit and meditate. There is a tower inside where you can climb up and feel the vibrations. Out of curiosity, I went to the top but it

was extremely hot and the flow of energy was so high that I came down quickly to the bottom which was as cool as an air conditioned room.

The most common meditation people do in the pyramid is to watch their breath flow in and out which is the Buddhist meditation called *Annapan*. It is said that by watching your breath, you are watching your subconscious mind which reveals many feelings and emotions stored in there. After meditating in the pyramid, I walked around and lots of thoughts started coming up about Laughter Yoga University, Laughter movement, my personal life, family life and of course my connection to the Universe.

I was so inspired by this experience I decided to observe a day of silence more frequently and go to a different place to meditate in quietude. It is true you can do much more after being in silence. It generates so much of creativity, ideas and insights about what's going on with your life and what you can do about them.

Laughter Yoga Resources

Training Videos – 4 DVD Pack

An excellent resource for Laughter Yoga professionals, these training videos provide in-depth knowledge about a laughter session, laughter meditation and grounding exercises. You'll also learn about marketing, public relation, leadership and presentation skills to help enhance your LY business opportunities.

Training Video 1: Concept, History & Philosophy behind Laughter Yoga

Dr. K explains the concept, history, philosophy and scientific theories which support this idea. Learn how to explain Laughter Yoga and its benefits in just '1' minute through the 5 point explanation.

Training Video 2: Systems & Procedures of Laughter Yoga Session

Dr. K explains 4 basic steps of Laughter Yoga which will help laughter professionals to learn and teach how to conduct a laughter session.

Training Video 3: Laughter Meditation & Grounding Techniques

This video explains Laughter Meditation in depth to help you learn on how to start and end the session and help people experience laughter from deep within. See visuals of Grounding techniques like Ho Ho Ha Ha Grounding Dance, Yoga Nidra and Humming.

Training Video 4: Laughter Yoga Marketing, PR, Leadership and Presentation Skills

Learn how to start a laughter club and the value of public seminars and the art of successful presentations. You will also learn how to deal with media, prepare press releases, business docs, video clips, etc. which will help enhance your PR skills.

One On One Laughter Coaching - 5 DVD Pack

A new program which enables people to learn and teachers to coach Laughter Yoga One-on-One. A great resource and value addition for LY professionals; it is ideally suited for people who have no access to

Laughter Clubs, are introvert and shy, for seniors who have forgotten to laugh, physically challenged and bedridden and also for those facing enormous stress and depression. Watch Dr. K actually doing One-on-One coaching and two inspiring laughter sessions with a paralytic patient and with a young woman suffering from Multiple Sclerosis.

Laughter Yoga – Concept and Step by Step Session (2 DVD Pack)

Dr. K gives explains the history, concept and philosophy of Laughter Yoga, and how it has changed his life and lives of thousands of people worldwide. In the second DVD watch a run through LY session along with Laughter Meditation.

Laughter Yoga Alone (2 DVD Pack)

Understanding Concept + Practice Session

Developed by Dr. Kataria, these new techniques are very beneficial for those who do not have an easy access to Laughter Clubs. Especially in the West where laughter clubs meet just once a week, this is an innovative way of practicing laughter exercises and reaping the same health benefits as from the clubs.

This 2 DVD pack comprises the concept of Laughter Yoga Alone and a practice session of laughter and breathing exercises to help people do Laughter Yoga all by themselves.

Laughter Yoga for Seniors - DVD

This DVD for laughter leaders and teachers presents new techniques from Allan O'Meara, the world's most experienced laughter coach for seniors.

Laughter Yoga with School Children - DVD

This video is for Laughter professionals and for anyone who wants to introduce Laughter Yoga to school children and bring more laughter in their lives. Watch Laughter Yoga being conducted with hundreds of children in different schools in India. You will also see special Laughter Yoga sessions with physically and mentally challenged children, deaf and mute children and also with street children.

Laughter Yoga In Business DVD

This DVD deals with different avenues where LY professionals can find business opportunities in areas like companies and corporations, Yoga studios and fitness centers, Senior (old age) homes, with cancer, self-help groups, mentally and physically challenged, professional speakers and HR trainings, hospitals, personal development and others. It also addresses the issues faced by the business community and provides guidelines on different kinds of programs for the business world.

100 Laughter Yoga Exercises on 3 DVDs

40 Foundation Exercises + Laughter Bank Vol 1 + Laughter Bank Vol 2

A collection of selected Laughter Yoga exercises, it is an effective blend of yogic, playful and value based exercises. It will help LY teachers to train laughter leaders and also those interested in learning more about Laughter Yoga sessions. Dr. K's description of each exercise is coupled with captivating visuals from different laughter clubs round the world.

Laughter Bank Vol 1 & 2

This is a collection of 60 more laughter exercises in addition to 40 Foundation Exercises to make your Laughter Yoga session lively and energetic as repeating the same exercises tends to become boring and monotonous.

Three Most Popular Fun Games DVD from Laughter Clubs

These fun games are designed to cultivate childlike playfulness among grownups. This DVD includes games viz. **Pizza Pasta, In The Bedroom and Whiff Piff**. Easy to play, they make people laugh and are excellent ice breakers for trainings and workshops.

Yoga Nidra Audio CD

Yoga Nidra or yogic sleep is a unique art of conscious relaxation without really going to sleep. It generates a sense of calmness to the mind and you will feel energized, cheerful and relaxed. Just 30 minutes of Yoga Nidra is equivalent to two hours of ordinary sleep, and is the fastest way to recharge and relax both body and mind. Hear Dr. Kataria as he takes you through guided relaxation and helps you feel refreshed and rejuvenated.

Humming Meditation - Audio CD

Humming involves deep and slow inhalation followed by prolonged exhalation which slows down the breathing rate significantly. Normally we breathe 15-17 times in a minute but with humming you can bring it down to 4-6 a minute which helps to slow down your heart rate and brings down your stress level.

It is a great way to break the chain of thoughts and their reactions and help relax the body and mind, induce good sleep and also control high blood pressure.

This CD has 2 tracks:

1. A comprehensive explanation of Humming Meditation.
2. A practice session with Dr. Kataria set to the beautiful strains of a classical string instrument from India called the "Tanpura". This will not only help to enhance the effects of this technique, but also keep you motivated to continue humming for a longer period of time.

Exhale & Relax (EXHALEX) - Audio CD

Hear Dr. K as he leads you through EXHALEX, a quick recharge method for highly stressed people. You can do it in just 10 minutes even while sitting in your office chair. We focus our mind on a particular part of the body and deliberately relax the muscles of that part while exhaling. In this process both inhalation and exhalation are prolonged and slow and help to release all fears, stress and tensions from the body and mind.

Track 1- Theory of EXHALEX.

Track 2- A guided session to help you learn & practice the technique.

Breath Connect Meditation - Audio CD

Breath Connect Meditation is a powerful yet simple and easy to learn meditation. It is a technique of visualization and breathing at the same time that helps you to connect with others in a mysterious way and improves your relationship with others. We use our Minds Voice and Minds Eye to reflect and remember some important people in our life

who have made a major difference. We see their faces on our mental screen, think about them and breathe for them. You can breathe for your partner and spouse, professional colleagues and also for people with whom you may be having a difficult time and a bad relationship. Any negativity or hatred towards that person will dissipate and you may see the changes in your behavior as well as in the behavior of the other person.

Ho Ho Ha Ha Grounding Dance - Audio CD

Grounding dance is a technique used in laughter clubs after a laughter session and meditation. Although most people feel energized after a laughter session, there are a few who get emotionally overwhelmed and unsettled. At times, they may experience sadness and may even feel like crying. Grounding dance is a spiritual method which uses the movement of the hands to direct the energy towards the ground making one feel emotionally stable and well grounded.

Laugh & Dance Party - Audio CD

Laughing and dancing are both expressions of joy which is the very basics of Laughter Yoga. This is a non-stop laugh and dance CD interspersed with popular laughter exercises from Laughter Yoga clubs.

E-book - Laugh For No Reason – CD

This is the only book on Laughter Yoga which explains the history, concept and philosophy behind the revolutionary exercise routine that has taken the world by storm since its inception in 1995. Dr. Kataria updates many developments and scientific & Yogic aspects of laughter. It also traces the growth of Laughter Clubs in over 60 countries, the multifold health benefits, World Laughter Day, Sensible living and many other benefits of Laughter Yoga.

240 pages & more than 110 color and B/W photos.

Resource Pack – CD

A Resource Pack DVD and CD which contain International news coverage video clips, Laughter yoga in corporates and in schools, scientific research on Laughter Yoga and some articles and photos for press and media.

THE INNER SPIRIT OF LAUGHTER...

This book is not just about learning Laughter Yoga, it will teach you how to imbibe laughter fully into your life and use it optimally to live sensibly and virtuously. The inner spirit of laughter is a powerful force that enables you to laugh not only at the best times in life, but also to keep the spirits high when life offers a dare.

"It's almost impossible to maintain any kind of distance or any sense of social hierarchy when you're just howling with laughter."

**John Cleese, British actor and comedian, remarked after visiting
Laughter Yoga Club in Mumbai in 2001**

"Laughter Yoga combines laughter with yogic breathing exercises. It is a perfect way to laugh and get exercise at the same time. It approaches laughter as a body exercise, so it is easy to laugh even if you are depressed or in a bad mood. Last year I highlighted Laughter Yoga on my TV program. I have tried it, and it works."

Oprah Winfrey in The Courier Mail (Jan. 14, 2008, Australia)

"I can't think of any mind-body technique that has caught on in this way. Laughter Yoga could help lower American health-care costs."

Dr. Andrew Weil in his interview to New Yorker Magazine

