

Laughter: a lapse from gloom

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essay: Laughter: A Lapse from Gloom
essay A melancholy young man (or woman) is a contradiction in terms because youth is the period of spring and spring is the time of joy and high spirits. The young aspiring to go ahead, trying to climb the fallen ladder of life, need a sense of humour more than anything else for the purpose. John Dryden says, "It is a good thing to laugh, at any rate; and if a straw can tickle a man, it is an instrument of happiness." Laughter, which bursts from a smile or a sense of humour, is related to personality.

It is not only a healthful "exertion" but also a badge of a bright personality. A person with a "long face" becomes a sad spectacle of society. This is not a mere assumption, nor an abstract philosophy. It is now an established scientific fact. Research has put valid foundation under the premise popularly known as "laugh and last". Laughter is a therapy better than any physician can prescribe. According to a study conducted by the University of Maryland Medical Centre, watching a funny movie has a healthy effect on blood vessels function while watching a mentally stressful one can cause the lining of the blood vessels to narrow and restrict blood flow.

"Laughing is important to maintain a healthy heart and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease," says Dr. Michael Miller of the University. Laughter offsets the impact of mental stress, which is harmful to the heart. Humour is an essential part of psychotherapy treatment given to heart patients. Five minutes of laughter is good enough to rejuvenate the body for twelve hours. Humour therapy is used extensively in yoga and other alternative therapies.

Joggers having a hearty laugh early morning in parks are a common sight. Contrarily, people with heart disease are less likely to recognize humour or use it to get out of uncomfortable situations. They generally laugh less, even in positive situations and display more anger and hostility. When Norman Cousins, Literary Editor of New York Times, found out he had only a slim chance of recovering from a sudden mysterious disease, he had very little to laugh about! Within days his body had degenerated to the point that he had difficulty moving himself. In his article in New England Journal of Medicine, Cousins tells of his recovery, inspired by the discovery that 10 minutes of genuine belly-laughter had a telling effect and would give him at least two hours of pain-free sleep.

His laughter therapy included screening motion pictures and sometimes the nurses would read to him out of humour books. Especially useful were Treasury of American Humour and The Enjoyment of Laughter. His work in humour therapy, mind and body medicine, and the role of positive emotions won him name as it added to his life span. A research paper Effects of Laughter and Relaxation describes how laughter is a therapy. Twenty male and 20 female subjects listened to, first, a 20 minute laughter cassette, second, a 20-minute relaxation cassette and third, a 20-minute dull, narrative cassette.

After the laughter and relaxation cassette experiences, subjects felt reduced discomforts. Forty female subjects went through a similar clinical text. Relief was evident.

Relief is written on the physical act of laughing on physiological accompaniments. Relief brings in sympathy by ending anger. Relief gives and adds value to laughter. The “ happy convulsion”, as Leigh Hunt called laughter, is a spillway for energy. The expenditure of energy by the convulsed body is visible in motion.

Action is called for an action must occur if waste products are not to clog the body. So laughter rehearses the situations of calling on and calling off to give a physical exercise that use up the energy generated. There is a similarity between laughter and crying.

Crying, like laughing, is basically an act of respiratory muscles. It may be called “ sorrowful tittering”; and laughter “ glad sob”. Crying is sorrowful because it is vain and laughter is joyful as it is relaxing. It is an expression of relief. Dr Johnson counts it as one of the pleasures of the mind. It does something by doing nothing! A burst of belly laughter releases bodys natural pain- suppressing agents. William Fry has described laughter as a “ total body experience” in which muscles, nerves, heart, brain and digestion participate. The body is exercised.

In mirth, the body relaxes and is soothed. Such is the effect that it is called internal massage. Laughter is a diversion, a pleasant expenditure of energy released from other activities. It is a momentary lapse from gloom! A good exercise ventilates the lungs and leaves muscles, nerves and heart warm and relaxed. It exercises not only the upper torso, but also muscle groups in shoulders, arms, abdomen, diaphragm and legs. Hundred laughs a day is equivalent of 10 minutes of jogging.

A healthful “ exertion, it is a help to digestion and the practice of positive excitement at dinner table is founded on medical principles. Victor Hugo says, “ I like the laughter that opens the lips and the heart.” Herbert Spencer was one of the first to stress the massaging effect of laughter. He believed that laughter serves as a wonderful safety valve for coping with an “ overflow of nerve force” and for discharging “ disagreeable muscular motion.” Laughter is essential for restoring physical comfort, biological harmony and internal order. To study the blinding effect of laughter, eighty seven students were asked to solve a difficult mathematics paper.

Immediately afterwards, the students were made to listen to relaxation cassettes and to watch selected camera clips. Both relaxation and laughter helped to enhance circulation, relax muscle tension, soothe the sympathetic nervous system and regulate heart rate.

Their performance bettered. It is not only laughter that can help a person to relax, release and generally let go of tension. Smile, amusement, hopefulness and joyful feelings, acceptance of ones worth also inspire and enhance relaxation and recreation. A happy, relaxed mind is an ideal environment for biological balance, harmony and order of the human system. One important reason why laughter affects such relaxation for the whole body has to do with the effect of laughter on respiration. Laughter commences with a long, drawn-out- exhalation. This is well-known.

In a burst of laughter, our exhalations are longer than inhalations. After laughter, we are forced to take in and exhale long, slow, deep breaths. The action of this breathing, a combination of deep inhalation and full;

exhalation, often inspires ventilation, rest and release. Also called “music of the soul,” laughter ushers in immunity against physical, emotional and mental setbacks, slamming the door on the physicians nose. One is uplifted by its spiritual splendour liberating joy that lies deep within. We are all strings in the concert of His joy. If we consider the frequent relief we get from this “happy convulsion”, and how often it breaks the gloom that depresses the mind, we would be wise enough not to rob ourselves of this great pleasure of life. The most utterly lost of all days is that in which you have not once laughed, wisely suggests Cham fort.

There is laughter of a child, innocent and captivating. There is naughty laugh of a teenage girl who is tickled. But the sweetest laughter is that of a woman you love. There is loud laughter, which signifies a vacant mind and is also branded as bad manners. You are advised not to laugh loudly in genteel company.

There is a phrase in English language “to laugh like hyena”. As the name suggests, it is animal laugh marked by beastly intentions. German poet and philosopher Goethe has aptly observed, “Men show their character in nothing more clearly than by what they think laughable.” Then you have the “horse - laugh”, which is equally revealing. It indicates coarseness or brutality of character.

The hint is obvious-refrain from it. Laughing at others means making fun of them. It is bad manners.

Hence, it is discouraged. We should laugh with people, not at them. But laughing at our own self is a good quality. It should be practiced. Some famous and honorable men had this quality, which lent halo to their personality. This capacity to poke fun at ones own self is a valuable personality asset.

The person who invites you to laugh at his own foibles is a delightful company whereas the one who mocks others is a dreadful bore. Former is lovable, latter loathable. This “ gift” has other advantages, too. Even when you are boasting, throwing in a joke about yourself, running yourself down, it reduces or eliminates resentment against you. Also, it helps keep your perspective and sense of humour. Thus, you display the charming aspect of your personality. A finalist at a beauty contest was asked to name the most important man in the world. She named American humourist Bob Hope.

Reason? “ He makes the world laugh by laughing at him.” Bob Hope himself is on record on the issue. When complimented on his having a sixth sense, that of humour, he quipped, “ if because I do not have the other five.” This ability to laugh at his own self not only brought him love, appreciation and fame but also a fabulous fortune.

He made millions out of it. Talking about his skill at boxing in younger days, he had a dig at himself. “ I was the only one who had to be carried both ways - into the ring and out of it.” ;,? essay essay -X