

SPIRIT OF HUMOUR

April 1, 2007

Capital (Marian)

FUFON (Martha, Janice)

Salt Spring (Sharon)

*Sometimes we get so busy we forget to laugh.
On this April Fool's Day, come explore the lighter side
and see how spiritual it can be!*

CALL TO WORSHIP

“April Fools” by Lisa Freidman in *How We are Called*, pg 18-19.

April Fools

Spirit of Life and Love,
We gather on this day dedicated to fools and whimsy.

We do not know who created this day,
But surely it was a wise soul,
Hardly a fool.

For there are indeed days that come to us all,
When we are one with the Trickster,
Delighting in the world of surprise and laughter,
And it lightens our spirits.

Then there are days
When it feels that the joke must surely be on us,
When we wonder if there are other fools like us in the world:
Clowns whose smiles are not so different from their frowns.

But the good news is that there are—
We are all fools of a kind,
And not just once a year.
We have foolish hearts that dare to love,
Foolish minds that dare to explore,
Foolish spirits that dare to dream—
Look around!
We do not live by reason alone.
We need something more.

So let us pause for a moment,
To be grateful for the fools
Who live in each of us.

Let us not be afraid to let them out,
To laugh and fall and stand again,
For we can never know what wisdom
We might yet learn.

READING/MEDITATION

Today's reading is taken from notes written during a workshop sponsored by the UU Women's Federation at General Assembly in 2004.

An important element of life is a sense of humour.

Humour originates in different parts of the body.

Some people's humour originates from their feet,
which they like to have tickled.

Some people like to have their legs pulled,
or have a knee jerk reaction.

Some are the butt of a joke
or enjoy a belly-laugh

while others have heart-felt responses to humour
or release their humour by letting go through their shoulders.

Then there is the ear for hearing humour
and the tongue for those who enjoy wit and puns.

There is also the glint in the eye from shared humour,
and some people enjoy a hair-raising sense of humour.

Today is April Fool's Day. It is a good day to get your leg pulled, to have a belly laugh, to let your eyes tear from laughing too hard. Laughter is contagious. Laughter is a universal language, it is for everyone and everyone can do it.

Think about the last time you laughed. It could have been when you were by yourself or when you were with others. Take a moment to remember...

Where did your laugh originate?

How did it feel to laugh?

How did it affect the moment, the situation, the day?

How often do you laugh?

Once a year?

Once a day?

Do you expect to laugh?

Are you afraid to laugh?

When is the last time you laughed so hard you thought your sides were going to split?

When is the last time you laughed with someone?

Now, bring your thoughts back into the room.

Be ready to laugh, now and always.

SERMON

A man was out hunting. He just happened to be hunting bears. As he trudged through the forest looking for the beasts, he came upon a large and steep hill. Thinking that perhaps there would be bear on the other side of the hill, he climbed up the steep incline and, just as he was pulling himself up over the last outcropping of rocks, a huge bear met him nose to nose.

The bear roared fiercely. The man was so scared that he lost his balance and fell down the hill with the bear not far behind. As he tumbled down the hill, the man lost his gun. When he finally stopped at the bottom, he found that he had a broken leg. Escape was impossible and so the man, who had never been particularly religious (in fact this just happened to be a Sunday morning), prayed, "God, if you will make this bear a Christian I will be happy with whatever lot you give me for the rest of my life."

The bear was no more than three feet away from the man when it stopped dead in its tracks... looked up to the heavens quizzically... and then fell to its knees and prayed in a loud voice, "O Lord, bless this food of which I am about to partake."

I could only imagine if this was a Unitarian prayer, the newly converted Unitarian bear would have the classic UU conundrum of debate vs. action. Since each limb or section of the body has inherent worth and dignity, it must

therefore be fully contemplated before taking any action whatsoever. Perhaps a committee should be formed...

In the meantime, as the Unitarian bear is debating all the possibilities, the hunter escapes.

Sigmund Freud observed that people joke about whatever is most important to them in order to reduce the tension created by that importance.

The bear's dilemma of how to apply Unitarian Universalist principles, specifically the first principle of inherent worth, speaks to all of us as Unitarians. We try to live by our principles but we also love to debate, to have conversation, to pour a cup of coffee and talk some more. Maybe even form a committee, a study group, a task force. A white paper might be in the offing. Who knows, this could develop into a Statement of Immediate Witness at one of our general conferences...

It is good to know who we are and what is important to us. It is also good to laugh at the tensions all of this creates. It is good to step back and laugh every now and then. It keeps things in perspective.

Laughter also keeps us healthy.

Laughter is not only a way to provide mental balance; laughter affects our physical well-being too.

In 1964 Dr. Norman Cousins was diagnosed with a crippling and extremely painful inflammation of his body. With his physician's assistance, he checked out of the hospital and into a hotel to utilize as many natural resources as possible to treat his condition. His experience became a controlled study in pain management and overall healing.

Dr. Cousins had a strong will to live and knew if he focused on love and faith, he could generate positive emotions. He decided to experiment with laughter to create a positive factor in altering his body chemistry to be in a healing mode. Dr. Cousins systematically watched Candid Camera classics, Marx Brother films, and read books like E.B. and Katharine White's *Subtreasury of American Humor* and Max Eastman's *The Enjoyment of Laughter*. He later wrote, "I made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep." He recovered from this condition and spent the next 20 years teaching about the merits of laughter and humour in healing.

(www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Shaw2.html)

Laughter and humour have been used throughout history for healing. In the ancient world, King Solomon noted in the Proverbs of the Jewish scripture “a cheerful heart is good medicine.” (*Proverbs 17:22*)

“In the 1300's, surgeon Henri de Mondeville reportedly told jokes to his patients in the recovery room. In the 1600's, educator Richard Mulcaer recommended laughter for those suffering from head colds.”

(www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Shaw2.html)

There has always been a relationship between humour and health. As early as 2500 B.C.E., Greek, Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine, linked the body with the cosmos. They believed the earth's elements were converted during digestion into bodily fluids. Over time, these fluids were called ‘humours’ and reflected qualities of temperament and disposition. They also tied in with the seasons. Although western medicine has advanced beyond calling the bodily fluids ‘humours’, we still judge a person who appears happy to be well, regardless of ailment.* This spring we are once again emerging from another winter season of dark days, cold temperatures and rain, in which many people suffered from Seasonal Affective Disorder, or ‘poor humour’ as the ancients might have called it.

(www.humorforyourhealth.com/articles/ancient_history_of_humor_and_health.html)

I think of examples when a good laugh or shared humour has lifted my spirits.

(personal examples from presenter – these are from Marian)

I have an interview coming up in a few weeks. I am not looking forward to it. In fact, I am dreading it. The thoughts of the meeting have begun to invade almost everything with a sense of dread. I talked to a friend about this. She listened compassionately as I whined and complained. At the end of the conversation, she asked if there was anything she could do. Knowing my friend was a pagan who loves ritual, I asked her to light a candle for me. Her quick retort was “no problem, but in your case, I’ll have to light a hundred candles!”

I can also think of times when others have been lifted by humour.

A minister recently visited a middle-aged woman in the hospital. She had advanced cancer and was undergoing grueling treatment. She was telling the minister how much she missed being at home and working in her garden, especially this time of the year. Knowing that going home was not in the near future for this woman, the minister said - in his gay man’s southern drawl - “Well sweetheart, next time I come to see you, I’ll just have to bring you a big ole bag of potting soil.” She laughed for the first time in days.

During our time of fellowship after the service, I invite you to grab a cup of coffee or tea and share stories with each other about how humour has played a role in your life.

Humour has a long history of being used for health and healing. Humour is also used to teach. Many cultures and traditions have jesters, tricksters and fools who make us laugh but leave us with knowledge about our very nature. Poets, prophets and storytellers do this too. They make us pause.

The Islamic tradition has a storyteller whose work was so popular, that it has been added to over the centuries. The storyteller, Nasreddin is considered to be a 'holy fool'. His messages are timeless.

A neighbour came to visit Nasreddin and asked, "Would you lend me your donkey today? I need to travel into town."

Well, Nasreddin didn't WANT to lend his donkey to the neighbor, but he didn't want to seem rude. So Nasreddin answered, "I'm sorry, but I've already lent him to somebody else."

Suddenly they heard a loud, tell-tale HEE-HAW from the backyard.

"You lied to me!" the neighbour exclaimed. "There it is behind that wall!"

Nasreddin said, "Well, I have NEVER been so insulted --whom would you rather believe, a donkey or your teacher?"

Here is another story from the holy fool.

A neighbor found Nasreddin keenly examining the ground. “What are you doing?” he asked.

Nasreddin explained, “I’m looking for a ring I lost.”

The neighbor joined him in looking, carefully parting the grass. Finally he turned to Nasreddin and asked, “Do you remember where you were standing when you dropped it?”

“Oh yes,” he replied “I was standing inside my house, in the kitchen.”

“But why are you looking here in your yard if you lost the ring inside your house?”

“Well,” he said, “the light is much better out here.”

Sometimes it takes a fool to show us how silly we can be.

Humour benefits the mind, body and spirit, so why do we set aside a just a single day, April 1st, to laugh?

Perhaps it is to allow us to be a kid again, to be foolish. We can joke, poke fun at, and ‘get another’s goat’ and then say “April Fools!” What more permission do we need to let our playful side show. Once a year we are reminded to lighten up, to come into balance, to share in the universal language of laughter.

The historical roots of April Fools' Day are uncertain. It almost certainly derived out of pagan traditions celebrating spring. The first official beginning was in 1582 in France when the Gregorian Calendar was introduced. In this new system, New Year's Day was moved from the spring to January 1st.

In those days, news was slow to get around. Folks traveled by foot and it took several years for some folks to hear about the change of calendars. People who were slow to get the news were often ridiculed as backward folk and labeled as 'fools'. Often they were sent on "fool's errands".

Over time, April 1st became a day of pranks. The tradition spread to England and Scotland in the 18th century and migrated to North America with the settlers. From there, it has spread in various forms, around the globe. April Fools' Day is an international day of fun, laughter and celebration.

(wilstar.com/holidays/aprilfool.htm)

It would be good to join with others in the hopes that we can all partake in a little humour on this first day of April 2007. It is said that laughter is the shortest distance between two people. Take time to connect, to joke about what touches us the most, to laugh at ourselves and to be lifted by humour. It is good for our body, mind and spirit.

Finally, spend time daily practicing laughing out loud. Maybe smiling first, then leaning into a giggle, then outright belly laughs. Now move beyond thinking about laughter and humour. Go ahead . . . it's safe . . . you can do it . . . ready, get set, laugh!

(www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Shaw2.html)

Blessed be and amen.

BENEDICTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Success is –

- to laugh often and much
- to appreciate beauty
- to find the best in others
- to leave the world a bit better
- to know even one life has breathed easier

because you lived.

(extinguish chalice)

Go know in peace and love and remember that as long as you can laugh at yourself you will never cease to be amused.