Wake Up Laughing
An Insider’s Guide to the Cosmic Comedy

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With Special Uncommentary by Swami Beyondanda
Steve Bhaerman
aka Swami Beyondananda

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In his “past life” (before Swami), Steve started an alternative high school in Washington, D.C. and co-authored a book about his experiences, No Particular Place to Go: Making of a Free High School. A political science major, he later taught history to autoworkers at Wayne State University in Detroit as part of the Weekend College. In 1980, Steve co-founded Pathways Magazine in Ann Arbor, Michigan, one of the first publications bringing together holistic health, personal growth, spirituality, and politics.

Since 2005, Steve has written a political blog with a spiritual perspective, Notes From the Trail, hailed as an encouraging voice “in the wilderness.” His latest book, written with cellular biologist Bruce H. Lipton, PhD is Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and a Way to Get There From Here (Hay House, 2009). Steve is active in transpartisan politics and the practical application of Spontaneous Evolution. He can be found online at

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First of all, I would like to acknowledge you the reader for buying this e-book. Not only are you saving trees by using this digital product, you are improving the atmosphere on the planet by releasing plenty of laughter. If we’re lucky, we might even heal the hole in the Bozone layer.

Next, I want to acknowledge our Wake Up Laughing Co-Hearts who financially supported this e-book in its infancy, and now get to enjoy it in its adultery. No, that’s not exactly right, but you get what I mean.

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About the Cover

The Wake Up Laughing cover art is the work of the artistic hand and comic mind of Brian Narelle, whose work can be found at http://www.narellecreative.net/

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Introduction: Why Wake Up Laughing?

“There are two kinds of mystics in the world -- the optimystsics, and the pessimystsics. The pessimystsics are telling us, ‘The sky is falling!’ The optimystsics say, ‘No, it only looks that way because we are ascending.’”

--Swami Beyondananda

There is an ancient Chinese blessing (or curse, depending on one’s perspective): May you live in interesting times.

Well, here we are.

Depending which eye we see with, the multiple crises we face are either signs of impending doom ... or impending breakthrough. Fear or excitement, it’s the same chemistry only a different interpretation. And it turns out, that in our interpretation lies our destiny.

For the past three years, I have immersed myself in writing a “serious” book with cellular biologist Bruce Lipton. The book, *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future and a Way to Get there From Here*, offers an encouraging view of humanity’s future based on modern science, and -- not surprisingly -- ancient spiritual wisdom. That view is that we humans are each and all cells in a new super-organism called Humanity. In other words, love thy neighbor because if we don’t -- well, there goes the Neighborhood.

Bruce Lipton’s work as an evolutionary biologist reveals that every evolutionary phase -- whether it’s single cell organisms becoming multi-cell ones, or human society evolving from brutal to compassionate -- is characterized by two things: Expanding awareness, and growing community.

Laughter -- and the appreciation of life as a “cosmic comedy” -- is one of the easiest, most enjoyable ways to awaken awareness and connect community. It is also one of the most underrated. There is a classic cartoon where a clown is on the psychiatrist’s couch, saying, “Nobody takes me seriously.”

It is precisely that -- our tendency to not take humor seriously -- that gives it its power. As we will discover later on in this book, humor is a magical interface between the logical and intuitive minds. Consequently, it has the power to bypass the left-brain’s linear gatekeepers and allow outside-the-box ideas to come in under the radar.

Which is not to say that all comedy awakens. We’ve all experienced brutality thinly disguised as “humor,” usually with the unfunny disclaimer, “What’s the matter? Can’t take a joke?”

Some kinds of humor perpetuate prejudice, misunderstanding, denial, separation. They are merely reflecting the prejudice, misunderstanding, denial and separation that now exist. The best
kind of humor is a vehicle for love that not only leaves ‘em laughing, it leaves ‘em smiling.

By understanding, embracing and practicing humor at its best, we can add to the “laugh force” on the planet, and allow enlightening humor to strike more frequently.

Laughter Is Medicine ... and More

“Laughter is medicine.” We’ve heard it so often, it’s almost a cliché. To go a bit deeper, laughter is “medicine” in the Native American sense ... a form of magic that can transmute suffering into insight, rigidity into flexibility, separation into connection. As an alchemical (or we might say, all-comical) tool, humor has the power to heal the heart and free the mind. Wholehearted hearty laughter naturally kindles joy. Simply laughing -- even if there’s nothing funny to laugh at -- actually creates healthier brain chemistry.

In other words, laughing for no reason gives us reason to smile ... and smiling also alters our brain chemistry for the better. As Marci Shimoff reports in her book *Happy for No Reason*, we don’t smile because we are happy ... we are happy because we smile.

- Laughter also frees the mind from judgment, from limited thinking, from the boundaries of what has been done or thought before. The word “healing” has the same root as “wholeness.” Fundamentally, healing is that which restores wholeness.
- Physical healing restores the body’s coherence as a whole system.
- Emotional healing likewise integrates the “whole picture,” by first feeling and then releasing repressed emotions.
- Mental healing integrates polarizing opposites so we transform “assaholistic” positionality into holistic functionality.
- Spiritual healing, the most profound of all, gives us a “God’s eye view” of our situation, allowing us to step outside the matrix of belief and personality.

A Joke That Changed the World

On rare occasions, a joke fires on all cylinders. One such story, purported to be true, is something that happened during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. As you may or may not remember, this is the closest we as a world have come to nuclear holocaust. When it was discovered that there were Soviet missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles from American shores, the crisis quickly escalated into a colossal game of chicken that could have turned us all into fryers. Fortunately, wiser heads and hearts prevailed on both sides.
However, in the midst of the crisis there were some American and Soviet delegates meeting to discuss possible trade between the two countries. When news of the missile crisis hit, there was tremendous tension and the room fell silent. Finally, one of the Soviet delegates stood up and proposed that they take turns telling jokes. He volunteered to start. “What’s the difference between capitalism and communism?”

“In capitalism, man exploits man. In communism, it’s the other way around.” The room erupted in laughter, the kind of explosion that heals. When the laughter died down, they were able to continue their business in peace and equanimity.

Ever since I heard this story many, many years ago I have held it as the highest octave of humor -- a joke that offered physical and emotional release, and mental and spiritual insight. Instantly, the room was transformed as each individual recognized him or herself -- as well as everyone else -- as humans, united at the heart.

I was privileged to experience something similar back in the 1970s when I was a freelancer for a newspaper in Michigan. I went to hear comedian and social activist Dick Gregory speak at Oakland University. As it turned out, the auditorium was packed, and was equally divided between white folks and black folks. Gregory took out his comic cudgel and proceeded to deconstruct white men. Then he went after white women. This pleased the black folks to no end, but they were next. Off he went on black men, and then finally, black women.

It was one of the most masterful shamanic performances I have ever seen. In each case, he walked the delicate line between love and truth, always able to tell the great (if uncomfortable) truth because of his great love. By the end, each of the four quadrants -- black and white, male and female -- had been at once busted, and elevated. In some magical way, Dick Gregory had been able to lay bare human foibles, while celebrating our glorious best at the same time.

As we filed out of the auditorium, it was one of the first and only times I saw whites and African Americans looking one another in the eye with both love and understanding. The veils of illusion that keep us separate were parted, as we all bathed in the sunshine of true, unconditional love.

Speaking of veils, the root definition of “apocalypse” is “the lifting of the veils.” So perhaps the feared disasters associated with the word can be averted if we lift the veils together. And when we do, what will enable us to “metabolize” the accumulated toxins of our inhuman nature (which we have been wrongly taught is our immutable human nature) is love. Love and laughter.

And so, back to wake up laughing. Why wake up? And, why laugh? According to the teachings, Buddha defined himself as “awake.” What was he awakened to? First and foremost, that we humans impose our own suffering through our attachments, and that love, forgiveness and compassion release us from our self-imposed bondage.
**Inner Space: The Final Frontier?**

Meanwhile, biologists tell us that our planet is in the throes of the sixth great extinction. The other five episodes involved collisions with large chunks of debris from outer space. Currently, the planetary ecosystem is threatened by the human ego system. It is the debris from “inner space,” the collective emotional toxins, culturally-inherited misperceptions, and largely invisible beliefs, that have put humans on top of the “endangering species list.” And, of course -- because the planet has many more resources for survival than we do -- at the top of the endangered species list as well.

Regardless of how fit or unfit you and I may be as individuals, the planet is now reckoning our fitness as a species. Folks, humanity is now on the verge of flunking third dimension.

The gateway to our evolution is our awakening -- to those same things Buddha awakened to when he got struck by enlightening. Perhaps in these dire times, we need to simplify greatly. Maybe instead of Ten Commandments, we need One Suggestion: “We are all one with the same One.” In other words, love thy neighbor as thyself because thy neighbor is thyself.

That is another function of evolution -- the efficiency of working as a functional whole that benefits all involved. Or, as the Swami has said, “We must use our energy to fruitfully re-grow the Garden rather than fruitlessly scrapping over the scraps.”

**How’s This for a Joke: Reality Is Make-Believe!**

So, how do we “get there from here?” How do we activate our true human potential -- what Swami calls Humanifest Destiny -- to create, or at least allow, this spontaneous evolution to take place? Once again, I refer to my friend and colleague Bruce Lipton’s transformational work. In his book *The Biology of Belief*, Bruce offers biochemical evidence that our perceptions and beliefs become our reality.

Consequently, so much of what we think of as “reality” is no more than beliefs that are so invisible and pervasive that we don’t recognize them as such. As we will see when we explore more deeply “the cosmic joke,” life is a lot less grim than we’ve come to believe, and in large part the reason the world is in such serious condition is because of our serious conditioning ... to be serious. Seriously.

Enlightening humor and hearty laughter can awaken us to a more enduring reality. The burst of laughter can instantly restore joy and aliveness. Equally important, the flash of insight that often follows a paradoxical joke can dislodge illogical logic that culture and habit have convinced us is “reality.” And speaking of paradoxical jokes ...

We are living in a world of make-believe. We make what we believe.
That’s great news because it means we can choose what we believe. And based on awakened awareness, we begin to use our intelligence more intelligently. Kevin Danaher, director of Global Exchange and convener of the Green Festival, offers this all-too-apt analogy: We’re all in the same boat, and that boat is the Titanic, and the Titanic is sinking. We have several choices. We can ignore and deny the impending disaster, and “re-arrange the deck chairs.” We can loudly protest to the captain. Or, we can jump to the party boat that has pulled up alongside.

In Spontaneous Evolution, Bruce and I use another familiar analogy -- the caterpillar to butterfly. To put it simply, the caterpillar is falling apart, and the butterfly is emerging. There is no “fixing” the caterpillar ... it must necessarily transform. The “too big to fail” caterpillar structure of “lowest common dominator” is a lot like that “too big to fail” mega-boat called the Titanic.

Now here’s something else very interesting about the butterfly and the caterpillar. They both have the exact same DNA. They are simply receiving different signals.

In human society as well, both the caterpillar of obsolete structure and the butterfly of evolutionary emergence are receiving different signals. Quite simply, those signals are either predominantly love, or predominantly fear. Those who fear change are more likely to stick with familiar structures that have “outlived their uselessness.” Those more willing to embrace lovingly the connection the vast majority of humans share beyond their individual and cultural beliefs, are strengthening the butterfly field.

In this world of “make-believe,” we can choose to believe in and make love ... or, we can go the way of the dinosaurs. While this contingency isn’t all that funny, humor that illuminates the human comedy and evokes love will help us through this passage.

The Human Condition and the Humorin’ Condition

In what Tom Paine would have called “soul-trying” times, we can choose the evolutionary path of connected community -- or the devolutionary path of dissonance and separation. Or, to paraphrase another American evolutionary Benjamin Franklin, we can either laugh together ... or cry separately.

The purpose of this Wake Up Laughing e-book is to help us illuminate the darkness by making light of it. Because it is now an evolutionary necessity, we must also face our individual foibles and shadow parts, and celebrate together our shared foolishness ... and our magnificent love.

Part I of this book, The Way of the Foo Ling Master, offers humor as a tool for spiritual understanding, and enlightenment. It includes a provocative and “third eye-opening” view of the Cosmic Joke, and the awakening that comes in the wake of “getting it” and laughing wholeheartedly at the punch line. Next, we take the Fool’s Journey, and see how “self-facing” humor accompanies every hero and heroine on their path. Then we look at the Alchemy of Humor and see how to turn the base elements of life into the healing brew of love and laughter.
In Part II, *Humoring Yourself and Others*, we take a look at what Swami calls Ho-Ho-Holy Hee-Hee-Healing and how laughter heals physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Next, we see how the alchemy of humor can help us Transform the Trances we live, personally and globally. Finally, we offer guidelines for writing our own Laugh Story, and using loving laughter to liberate ourselves from our old stories ... leaving us free to write a new one.

Part III, *Humor Resources*, offers Zen Cohens -- jokes that brighten and enlighten, that leave awakening in the wake of laughter. Then, to dispel any semblance of seriousness in the book, we have Swami Beyondananda’s FUNdamentalist (accent on “fun”) Humanifesto with guidelines for his new “non-dominational” non-religion. Finally, we present the Wake Up Laughing Co-Hearts, individuals, organizations and businesses whose work (or play) adds to global and local happiness.

Thank you in advance for signing on to this cosmic comic voyage to the heart of the human soul. May it help us through this next evolutionary portal. May we wake up laughing ... and leave laughter in our wake.

Steve Bhaerman,

November, 2009
PART ONE:
THE WAY OF THE FOO LING MASTER
"If you think you cannot be fooled ... you are fooling yourself."

-- Swami Beyondananda

Tongue Fu Warrior With a Black Belt in Borscht Belt

I am here because of a joke. Consequently, I have always taken humor seriously. The story begins before I was born, when my father was in the army during World War II. My dad was a wonderful amateur comedian, a great storyteller and a master of dialect. I still have a photo of him in military uniform, behind a microphone, wearing his hat askew and a goofy expression on his face. I don’t know exactly what he was doing, but I know what the audience was doing. They were laughing.

My dad was home on leave one day in 1944, and he was kibitzing with the family. Someone mentioned “putting your foot in your mouth,” so my dad actually did. Except he dislocated his hip in the process. He was in traction at Fort Hamilton hospital for several weeks, and when he returned to Fort Lewis, Washington his outfit had shipped out to the Battle of the Bulge. Very few returned.

So ... were it not for that silly joke, I would very likely not be here. At least not in this form.

My earliest memories as a child are sitting with dozens of aunts, uncles and cousins in my grandparents’ small apartment in Brooklyn, the room filled with the delicious aroma of food, and the sound of laughter.

At school, I became the class comedian. My forte was verbal wit, particularly the art of the wisecrack and the put-down. In the housing project where I lived, we called it “ranking out,” but I suppose we would now call this art of verbal warfare “tongue fu.” It served me well as a survival tool, because when older kids asked me for money, I would look at them and say, “Listen, I live here. If I had money, would I be living here?”

Generally, they laughed and left me alone.

Looking back on it, I remember a particular moment where my calling as a Foo Ling Master was made clear to me. It was in the school lunchroom, and it was the first time I made another kid laugh so hard that milk came out of his nose. So it was, that the gods of comedy gave me a sign that I was chosen.
As a junior high school student, I became an aficionado of Mad magazine, and even made a pilgrimage to their cramped office in lower Manhattan. There, I got a glimpse of “the usual gang of idiots” who through their monthly offerings helped me cultivate my own comic intelligence.

Never did I even dream of being an actual comedian. I was rather introverted and alienated, and like so many of my peers -- we will learn more about this in the chapter called The Fool’s Journey -- I was told to “get serious.” So I did, pretty much -- with a few notable exceptions.

I found myself at Brooklyn College, a misfit trying to misfit in. One day, I was sitting in a sociology class in a huge lecture hall with 250 other bored students. I was hovering in a state somewhere between sleep and deep sleep. Out of the corner of my ear, I heard the professor talking about social mores. When she asked, “Who can define for us social mores?” I suddenly sprung to my feet. And in what only could be described as a comedic tourette’s, I sang, “When the moon hits your eye like a big-a pizza pie, that’s amore...”

The room burst out laughing, but the professor was not amused. Although I was running a B in the class, she gave me a D. I take pride in the fact that I earned that D.

I went on to great adventures teaching in Washington, D.C., starting an alternative high school there, writing a book about my experiences, teaching autoworkers at Wayne State University ... but then a funny thing happened.

And Then ... A Funny Thing Happened

As we will see later, those words “a funny thing happened” represent the invisible hand of Cosmic Comic Consciousness tossing us a low outside curve (or a high inside fastball) to insure that we “strike out” in a different direction.

In this case, I got laid off from my job teaching autoworkers. Although I was a popular teacher -- the workers would sometimes bring their wives to class because they found it so entertaining -- I didn’t have tenure. And so I found myself desperately seeking a job, any job. Since I had lived on a farm a few years earlier and had experience operating farm equipment, I got a job with the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan doing tree work.

While it was initially enjoyable to give my mind a rest and exercise my body in the great outdoors during my first summer there, when Michigan winter set in, the great outdoors wasn’t all that great. In that dark winter, I found myself going through a dark night of the soul. Here I was, a former professor, a published author, now spending my days in a jumpsuit and hardhat chipping brush. Somehow, my mother couldn’t quite brag about “my son the tree surgeon.”

But then another funny thing happened. They put a new guy with me, Larry, who turned out to be a brilliant psychologist disguised as a truck driver. Larry offered up a bright and life
changing idea. “You’re a writer,” he said. “Why don’t we start a newspaper?”

And so we did. We created States Wire Service, an anonymous humorous paper for the guys at the shop. Purely by accident, through the magic of playfulness, we transformed the workplace. We created an ongoing, interactive situation comedy where our fellow workers were the “stars.”

You can read the long story in the first Thank God I... book. But the short story is, this “funny thing that happened” changed not just the workplace, but my own path. I got to experience first hand the power humor has to bring people together, to create fun and celebration, and to “tell people things they don’t want to hear in a way they want to hear it.”

**Enlightening Strikes**

Upon leaving that workplace, I started another publication, Pathways, for the new and growing holistic marketplace in Southeastern Michigan. My partner in that venture and I both recognized that the all-too-serious domain of personal growth and spiritual pursuits needed an infusion of humor. Once again, something funny happened. I got struck by enlightening during a brainstorm, and the name “Swami Beyondananda” popped into my head.

Swami became our comic mascot, and I watched Pathways readers turn immediately to the Swami’s teachings on the inside back cover of each issue. Whether it was Swami holding forth on how to “Teach Your Dog to Heal” (dogs are natural healers) or the practice of “Tantrum Yoga” (use your anger to heat your home in the winter time), or “Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know About Sects” where readers learned that “unbridled sects can lead to unwanted misconceptions,” the Swami quickly became the most popular feature in Pathways.

A few years later, in December 1986, my wife Trudy and I embarked on the traveling Swami and Trudy show ... and that’s when my education as a Foo Ling Master really began. While I was already adept at many aspects of humor, the Swami gave my comedy a “heart transplant.”

There was something about this slightly mischievous, irreverently uplifting character that awakened in me the “heart” that had always been at the heart of my humor. I just didn’t know it until then.

**From Wiseguy to Wiser Guy**

As someone who spent my “deformative years” on the streets of New York using humor both as a weapon and a shield, my heart was the last thing I wanted to expose. I remember during my first year teaching in Washington, D.C., another teacher noticed some of the comments I had made on a student’s paper. “Wow,” he said. “That’s mean.”
“Come on,” I insisted. “It’s funny.”

“No,” he said. “It’s mean.”

It took me years of dismantling defenses to begin to recognize the difference between humor as a delivery system for love, and joking as thinly veiled aggression. Even the transformational comedy I did as part of my newsletter for fellow tree workers had the sharp edges suitable for an all-male workplace.

It wasn’t until I began working with audiences who were largely openhearted that I began to recognize these distinctions and consciously choose my path as a Foo Ling Master. Very early on in my Swami career, I found myself performing at a Mob-run club in Chicago (you’ll have to ask me sometime how I successfully collected money from the Mob). As I did my show, three drunken audience members began heckling. I stopped my performance and addressed them, “You know, I think you are baiting me. And when you bait a great spiritual master, do you know what that makes you? That’s right ... a master-baiter!”

The audience laughed, the three drunks slunk out of the bar, and I had a classic comedy club “triumph.” Except it wasn’t quite the satisfaction I desired. While I was quick and clever enough to hurl insults with the best of them, I recognized that I had a different calling. I decided at that point to leave the comedy clubs to the club comedians. I didn’t want to “club” the audience with my comedy, but rather to tickle their hearts and minds open.

After two generations where being funny and hip have been associated with cynicism, it’s been quite a task to cultivate open-heartedness when audiences are used to insult and negativity. The heartening news is that now, after two decades of proliferating a different kind of humor, I am finding that young people in particular are hungry for humor with an edge -- but with a healing edge.

In pursuing my comic craft in this way, I have come to recognize the spiritual foundation of healing comedy. To put it most simply, either the comedy serves love -- or it serves the absence of love. The most transformational humor of all is alchemical in nature, transmuting the absence of love into love.

In this section of the book, we explore the metaphysics of humor. Beginning with The Cosmic Joke, we see how human life itself is the Divine Comedy. Next, we celebrate the path to enlightenment as the Fool’s Journey, as we learn to laugh lovingly at our human foolishness. Finally, we delve into the Alchemy of Humor, as we apply the elements of nature to transmute the suffering in life into the gold of laughter and insight ... the “aha” that follows the “ha-ha.”

Truly, the FARCE is always with us. So now, let us align ourselves with the FARCE.
Chapter One:  
THE COSMIC JOKE

“Life is a joke -- but God is laughing with us, not at us.”  
-- Swami Beyondananda

I am going to violate the cardinal rule of comedy. I am going to begin with the punch line. Ready?

Here is the punch line to the Cosmic Joke:  We have everything needed to experience happiness, yet we impose suffering on ourselves.

You’re not laughing?  Well, welcome to the human race.

Now before you get your pantaloons in a twizzy about the suffering of all those on the planet who don’t have enough to eat, ponder this: How do you explain the suffering of those on the planet who have plenty to eat?

More specifically, we humans have the nature-given tools to live and love abundantly, but we have been misprogrammed to believe otherwise. Consider the lilies of the valley who prosper in the sunlight of original blessing ... and the millions if not billions of humans who are mired in the belief (consciously or unconsciously) of original sin.

The true avatars seem to have recognized the simple formula for heaven on earth -- and most of us have done everything in our powerlessness not to follow their advice.

Jesus gave us a clue: Love thy neighbor as thyself.

Buddha offered another helpful tip: Life is suffering because of our attachment to outcome (not to mention income).

Meher Baba boiled it down to a homily so simple that some find it insulting: “Don’t worry ... be happy.”

The unfunny side of the Cosmic Joke is that we tend to cling fiercely to our own personal suffering story. If we happen to be part of a group that has suffered at the hands of another group, and this has occurred over time, we have built our story a thousand stories high. Since these stories of travail, pain and limitation “define” who we imagine we are, so many of us fail to step outside that story because we can’t imagine who we would be without it.

Every now and then, however, someone we know or read about -- or maybe it’s happened...
to us -- gets struck by enlightening, and is catapulted out of “this world,” to an understanding far bigger than their story. This can come as a result of a near-death experience ... or a near-life one. Some get it from a mind-expanding chemical, others from a spiritual practice, still others have their epiphany for no reason whatsoever, other than grace.

In many or even most of these cases, there is a profound sense of joy and peace -- and there is often laughter. Why laughter? Because the discrepancy between the Universe as it is, and the Universe as we imagine it to be is so completely opposite that it is downright funny.

I know, I know. You’re still not laughing.

Life Is a Comedy of Situations ... And You’re Just Having an Episode

Perhaps the greatest secret delivery system for Buddhist principles in modern times is ... the situation comedy. From Lucy to Seinfeld to 30 Rock to whatever comes next, sitcoms may really be meditational “sit calms” because they allow us to observe ourselves in the least threatening way possible: through laughing at someone else.

Were we to take the plots literally, situation comedies might just as well be “situation tragedies,” given the suffering the characters endure for our viewing pleasure. Whether it’s Lucy trying to break into show business or Seinfeld’s George Costanza trying to break out of neurosis, the best-laid plans are always thwarted. And we laugh.

We laugh because the situation is exaggerated. We laugh because there is a laugh track. And we laugh because it’s happening to someone else, and not us.

Every caricatured thwarted effort for romance, success, recognition that sitcom characters experience is a lesson in attachment, and the suffering that results. Consider that in Seinfeld, the character who suffers most is George because his happiness is always conditional -- usually contingent on an unattainable condition. The one who suffers least is Kramer, because he is the most flexible. As the archetypal “crazy wise fool,” Kramer shape shifts reality to suit his mood and the situation. Sure, he drives other people crazy ... but all the while he is driving himself sane.

Next time you watch one of these shows -- particularly a re-run, which makes it easier to step outside the plot and reflect -- imagine it as a situation tragedy. Notice the attachment the character has, and the accompanying self-delusion. You will be able to see the inevitability of their failure. You might even have a more enlightened awakening as you see reflected a trait or attachment of your own.

You may wake up laughing.
What’s So Funny, Anyway?

Here is a cosmic comic paradox. We laugh because it’s not funny.

An example:

A swami, a rabbi and a hedge fund manager were traveling through the Midwest. They needed to stop for the night, and knocked on the door at a farmhouse. The farmer told them he only had two beds and one of them would have to sleep in the barn.

Being a humble man, the swami volunteered immediately. But five minutes later, there came a knock on the door. It was the swami. “True, cows are sacred to us,” the swami explained. “But it is not right for me to sleep near one.”

“I have no problem with cows,” said the rabbi, and off he went to the barn. Five minutes later, there was another knock on the door. It was the rabbi. “You didn’t tell me you had a pig. Pigs aren’t kosher, and sleeping near one wouldn’t feel right.”

At this point, the hedge fund manager stepped up. “Look,” he said. “We need to get some rest. I have no issues with any animals.” And off he went. Five minutes later, there was a knock on the door. It was the cow and the pig.

You laughed, didn’t you? The reason why that joke is funny is because ... it’s not funny. It’s especially not funny in the light (or dark) of the recent economic disaster caused by hedge fund hedgehogs.

Perhaps that’s why we laugh at situation comedies that are situation tragedies. As the Madonna tune goes, we have to laugh to keep from crying. It could be that laughter is the healing tool we are given to mitigate unmitigated disaster. When we are able to voluntarily laugh in the face of such adversity, we gain imagined power over the situation. And, since it turns out that smiling changes our chemistry for the better, that imagined power is also real.

As Norman Cousins -- who really did heal himself of a life-threatening condition by watching Marx Brothers movies and Candid Camera re-runs -- said, “He who laughs, lasts.” Later on, we will learn more about how laughter heals physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

For now, let’s consider another aspect of the Cosmic Joke ... the “funny things” that happen to us.

God As Practical Joker

Sometimes the “funny things” that happen in life are funny, and sometimes they’re not. Sometimes life presents us with a playful little sign reminding us to lighten up, and sometimes it’s a whack over the head with a cosmic two-by-four to spur us to wake up and change direction.
We can take delight in the innocent jokes life presents us with, if we cultivate the eyes to see and the ears to listen. Several years ago, my wife Trudy was dismantling her parents’ home in Michigan after her mom went into assisted living care. If you’re from the Midwest you know that homes there all have basements -- not just for tornado shelter, but as space for stuff. Trudy’s parents were collectors of everything and anything, gathering stuff for the Big Garage Sale that would happen one day. Believe me, their entire home, from basement to attic was stuffed with stuff.

Knowing I love anything related to baseball, Trudy looked for a treasure she could bring back to me. In all the tons -- yes, literally tons -- of collectibles and discardables, she only found one piece of baseball memorabilia. A Kellogg’s Cornflakes Yogi Berra baseball card. The card was holographic, so when you turned it one way you saw Yogi’s face, another way and you saw him batting.

When Trudy ceremoniously presented me -- the alter ego of Swami Beyondananda -- with this gift, I said to her in amazement and delight, “All the thousands and thousands of different baseball cards, and the one card you find for me is a shape-shifting Yogi.” (I still have this card to the left of my computer, cradled by a beanie baby Pillsbury Doughboy, who is of course, “my roll model.”)

In learning to “see funny” -- something I help people cultivate in my coaching and workshops -- we are more likely to discover this kind of “found humor” in daily life.

Some of life’s little practical jokes -- those funny things that happen -- are chance, unexpected encounters that change our life path. Sometimes disappointments give way to ... well, to divine appointments. I am reminded of a young woman I knew who was used to getting her way around just about everything. She read about a guru, was deeply moved to meet him, and booked a flight to India, where she showed up at his ashram. She was absolutely taken by his presence and “decided” she wanted to live there.

However, the guru went out of his way to ignore her. She fully expected that when her visa expired, he would agree to have her live there, thus extending the visa. But he didn’t. She would have to leave the ashram and go home.

She was incredulous. Such things didn’t happen to her! But then, a funny thing happened. On a boat trip headed for the flight home, she met her future husband.

Sometimes “a funny thing happens” and we have to wait months, even years to appreciate the humor. While waiting to find “the joke hidden in this picture,” we might want to ponder the loving punch line for the Cosmic Joke: the Divine Comedy.

The Divine Comedy

Dante’s famous tome was called a “comedy” not because it was ha-ha funny, but because it was written in the vernacular. While it did have its moments (fortune-tellers in hell having their heads on backwards), the Divine Comedy I am talking about here offers us something more fundamental about the nature of life.
In the Greek tradition, tragedies were four act plays that ended sadly and badly -- kind of like situation comedies without the laugh track. Comedies, on the other hand, had a fifth act where the sad or bad circumstance that ended Act IV is resolved. So ... comedy encompasses tragedy, thanks to an Act V.

Thinking of life as a comedy in this sense would seem counterintuitive. Far, far more humans exit this world suffering than do laughing. However, the presumption there is that the end of earthly life is the end of existence. As physicists have discovered, it seems that all of existence is “here now” -- and through our perceptions, we the observers choose reality on a “need to exist basis.” In this sense, there is no such thing as past or future. Everything that has ever existed or ever will exist is in existence now.

Meanwhile, we have the numerous and often similar reports of “near death experiences,” where those who return report seeing blinding light, feeling overwhelming love, meeting divine entities and loved ones. Are these experiences “real?” Are they just a function of brain chemistry offering one last chemical impulse?

Of course, our current dominant paradigm of scientific materialism would have us believe that these experiences are purely chemical. On the other hand, we have thousands of years of human spiritual tradition that tells us otherwise. Among those stories is the story of a Tragedy, and a Comedy. The story of the crucifixion would have been a tragedy ... had it ended there. However, a fifth act has been added on to the story. The Resurrection transforms the tragedy into a Comedy.

Whether or not you buy the body of beliefs that comprise Christianity, don’t you think it’s significant that the leading western religious authority all but proclaims that life is a comedy? And if that’s the case, why aren’t they laughing? Why aren’t we laughing?

We aren’t laughing because we have been conditioned to believe that life is serious. Perhaps this conditioning to seriousness is why the world is in such serious condition. Perhaps to get to both the “ha ha” that is the punch line to life, and the “aha” we get when we awaken in the wake of cosmic laughter, we need to look at life itself as a journey to “fool realization.”
Chapter Two:
THE FOOL’S JOURNEY

“The Creator is tuned to the Comedy Channel -- and WE are what’s on.”
-- Swami Beyondananda

About 20 years ago, I received an intimidating invitation. I was invited to Yogaville, Swami Satchidananda’s ashram just outside of Charlottesville, Virginia to do a performance for the venerated Swami himself.

Needless to say I was a bit apprehensive. It’s one thing to do shows for American swami wannabes. It’s another to do one for an Indian Swami who already Is. We arrived at the ashram just in time for Friday night satsang with Swami Satchidananda. I was relieved to find “Gurudev” to be good-natured, good-humored and even a bit mischievous. When he told us that if we wish to achieve enlightenment, we must desire nothing, it gave me an idea.

When I did my show the next night with the Swami in attendance, I did a routine about a product I was selling at the time -- a box of Absolutely Nothing. After the show, I ceremoniously presented Gurudev with his own box of Nothing -- to help him achieve enlightenment.

Five years later, when he celebrated his 80th birthday, I was among the “celebrities” invited to perform, and I did the Nothing routine especially for him. I still remember his countenance and demeanor, which conveyed simultaneously the wisdom of the ages, and the playful innocence of a child.

He was a fooly-realized master.

We too can become fooly-realized once we realize our own foolishness, and lovingly laugh with the Creator at ourselves (actually the Creator in disguise). The first step toward this enlightened state accessible to all is to recognize the Four Stages of the Fool’s Journey.

Stage One: The Innocent Fool.

We all begin life as Innocent Fools. I say that with no disrespect, but rather with the understanding that as newbies to the world, we are curious to discover the who, what and why of earthly existence. And because of our limited experience, we are easily fooled.

This can be seen in the first game we learn as babies, peekaboo. Peekaboo. Now you see it, now you don’t. It is the first riddle of existence. Where does something go when it’s not “here?”
Peekaboo is a moment-to-moment experience of reincarnation. From existence to nonexistence to existence again. Peekaboo is the first trick of life, and as babies we love it.

Later, we come to enjoy riddles and magic tricks, puzzles and mysteries. Why? Each of these is a way to trick ourselves into thinking something is missing -- when it is there all along. This is true of the joke itself. The punch line is simultaneously invisible, and yet present throughout the joke. When it is revealed at the end, we laugh in surprise and delight.

Peekaboo.

We delight in children’s innocent foolishness. Art Linkletter made a career of it half a century ago with his TV show, “Kids Say the Darndest Things.” I remember being at an outdoor retreat a number of years ago. There was a little boy about five years old, and he had a dog by the tail, and he was furiously wagging the dog’s tail back and forth. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“I want the dog to be happy,” was his cheerful reply.

But there is a downside to being an Innocent Fool. According to my biologist cohort Bruce Lipton, prior to the age of six, our brain waves are primarily in delta and theta states -- the same states we are in as adults when we are being hypnotized. In other words, we are highly suggestible ... and can be tricked into believing the most ridiculous nonsense.

While belief in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny can be readily outgrown, the innocent mind is susceptible to believing anything an adult -- particularly a parent -- suggests. My parents were well-meaning and loving people. However, as I realized a number of years ago, the only time the word “God” was ever mentioned in my household was in the phrase, “God will punish you!”

Welcome to the world, little fella!

With beliefs like these staking claim to largely vacant cranial real estate, is it any wonder we have fearful children, and paranoid adults? (In my own case, I am happy to report, having the additional affliction of dyslexia was quite helpful. As a dyslexic paranoid, I am convinced the world is plotting to make me happy -- and there isn’t a thing I can do about it!)

So ... I pose for your reflection ... what kinds of foolish nonsense were YOU tricked into believing when you were an innocent fool? Whatever is was, it very likely has inhibited your seeing the humor in the human comedy. On the positive side, recognizing that foolishness for what it is, and shining the light of laughter on it might be the first important step in liberation.

Along with everything else we were tricked into believing, most of us learned somewhere near childhood’s end that life is serious business. And that brings us to the Second Stage in the Fool’s Journey.
Stage Two: The Serious Fool.

As any good joke-teller knows, the purpose of the joke itself is to keep us away from the punch line until the very last minute. Just as surely as we are drawn in by the narrative of a good joke, we are drawn into the narrative of our own life. By the time most of us are done with adolescence, we are seriously committed to something serious.

Think about it. We may by then be in a serious relationship. We may be seriously considering medicine or law or teaching or business. We may be seriously committed to world peace, or saving the environment, or social justice. We may even have a serious ambition to become a comedian.

Chances are, by the time we come of age in this so-called civilization, we have become Serious Fools.

So, what does it mean to be serious? And why “serious fool?” One of the signs of being “serious” (a condition that in its extreme form has been termed “humorrhoids”), is a single-minded focus on achieving something that is expected to lead to happiness. Regardless of what that might be -- money, fame, relationship, the perfect physique, the right car, the right clothes, the right job, or even the right guru -- the condition is the same. I must achieve ____ so I will have ______, which will make me happy.

The focus on “getting there” (i.e., somewhere that is not “here”), keeps us out of the present moment. It robs us of playfulness and spontaneity, as we doggedly pursue happiness ... as opposed to actually catching it. A few rare souls can go through an entire lifetime deluded that this pursuit is what life is about. However, for most of us, the illusion is shattered when ...

... we encounter a serious problem.

Sometimes we find ourselves betrayed in relationship. Sometimes our dream career ends up being a nightmare. Sometimes we are disillusioned by a guru or hero who is all too human. Well, as the Swami says, the primary cause of disillusionment is ... illusionment.

When the relationship fails, or the dream crashes and burns, or the material wealth fails to materialize happiness, we have our first awakening to our serious foolishness -- not to mention our foolish seriousness. At the point that we become conscious of how we have been fooled, we become Conscious Fools.

Stage Three: The Conscious Fool.

There’s no fool like a conscious fool, whose mantra is, “Won’t get fooled again.” The Conscious Fool is awakened to life’s trickery, and makes a commitment to never fall prey to hope or illusion again. The problem is, the serious pursuit of something continues ... it might even
be the same thing: a career, wealth, or the right relationship (as opposed to the one that recently ended).

There is no less attachment then there was earlier. Only this time, ambition is tempered with a guarded cynicism. Once the Conscious Fool has his or her eyes open, it’s too often the heart that closes. The Conscious Fool has wised up. He or she is consciously aware of how they have been fooled, and can often describe -- with great humor -- how they were led down the path, and have now wakened and wisened.

Most comedians fall into the category of Conscious Fool archetypes. Their minds are fooly awakened to the pitfalls of life, and we laugh with them because we recognize that we have been fooled in similar ways. Particularly over the past half century, as we have collectively lost our innocence as a society, so has comedy.

The Red Skeltons and Sam Levensons of the 50s gave way to the Mort Sahl's and Lenny Bruce of the 60s, the George Carlin's and Richard Pryors of the 70s and 80s, and now an entire industry where hip comedy is synonymous with cynicism, if not nihilism. Everything that the Lenny Bruces of the world deconstructed needed deconstructing. In a world of greed, hypocrisy and mass manipulation, where “family values” have been superseded by Soprano Family values, the deconstruction is welcome.

The problem is, nothing has been reconstructed in its place. We can marvel at the brilliant mind of a George Carlin -- his Modern Man riff is to me the Beethoven’s Ninth of Comedy -- and yet his view of humankind is as a sorry, hopelessly flawed and ultimately doomed species.

Is that really who we are?

Well, Jesus and Buddha, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, America’s Founding Fathers would beg to differ. And so would the Greek playwrights. In one more cosmic comic irony, modern comedy is more representative of Greek tragedy than Greek comedy!

And that brings us to the fourth stage of the Fool’s Journey ... and the place where Fool Realization can occur.

**Stage Four: The Cosmic Fool.**

As I suggested earlier, I was groomed by my environment to be the classic Conscious Fool. By the age of 13, I had fully embraced the Mad Magazine worldview that reflected my own alienation. In fact, my first political act was putting up Alfred E. Neuman for President posters. As a young teacher in inner city Washington, D.C., I was the one who pasted a Sergeant Pepper mustache on the classic painting of George Washington.

Nothing was sacred. Nothing was sacred to Madison Avenue -- as Mad Magazine gleefully pointed out in issue after issue -- so why should anything be sacred to me?

But then ... a funny thing happened.
Through this character who chose to express himself through me, I began to understand cosmic comic consciousness. When my associate Josh Pokempner and I launched Pathways magazine in early 1980, we recognized that the greatest thing this newly-emerging holistic spiritual movement needed was to laugh at itself.

However, we were both “insiders.” That is, we went to the local ashram to chant every week, we had done the est training and had gotten rebirthed. While neither of us were true believers, we were explorers. We were curious. We played the “believing game” as much as we played the “doubting game,” and this Swami character we constructed reflected both innocence and wisdom.

Perhaps my first public appearance as the Swami -- a story I rarely tell -- reflects the true nature of this character, and of the Cosmic Fool archetype, at once wise and childlike. One of the seminars I had taken back in the early 1980s was Arnold Patent’s Money Mastery Seminar. Arnold had written a book called “You Can Have It All,” and his mantra was, “the Universe handles the details.”

Shortly after I decided to pursue humor as a career in 1985, I got a call from Arnold to teach and perform at a weeklong retreat in California. I hastily prepared a “Swami costume” from the only things I could find ... my baseball uniform, colorful suspenders and a rainbow clown wig. When I walked out on stage in this get-up, of course I got a laugh.

But then a funny thing happened.

As I opened my mouth to say my first word, the microphone mysteriously plummeted in the mike stand. This got a laugh, and the sound techie hastily came up and raised the mike back up. Once again, I opened my mouth to say the first word, and once again the microphone and stand collapsed.

This time the audience laughed even louder. Not bad. I hadn’t said a line yet, and I’d gotten two big laughs.

Again, the sound guy -- a bit more embarrassed -- came to raise up the stand.

Once again I got ready to speak to this crowd who had been hearing from Arnold for a week that “the Universe handles the details.”

And guess what?

One more time, as if by some cosmic comic magic, the microphone did the same thing. Now the audience was hysterical. This time, I didn’t wait for the sound guy. I picked up the mike from the floor and uttered my first words as Swami in performance: “Well ... looks like the Universe fucked up!”

And the crowd went wild. I took it as a sign.

I have never used the F-word in performance since. The one and only time was enough.
The outrageous irreverence of that word actually served the scene. And ... uttered by someone as utterly innocent as Swami, it was embraced by the audience.

At the time, I had no idea what the Swami was up to, only that he got a laugh. I have since come to recognize Swami as the Cosmic Fool ... or the Conscious Innocent Fool. That fourth and all-important stage of Fool Realization brings childlike innocence to the wisdom acquired by experience.

In spite of the badness of the big, bad world --- and perhaps because of it -- the Cosmic Fool brings the openhearted love an innocent child has to the situations life presents. We see glimpses of this in Charlie Chaplin’s Little Tramp, and in Roberto Benigni’s performance in Life Is Beautiful, where the lead character is able to find joy in a concentration camp.

Those steeped in the “cynical-is-hip” worldview seem embarrassed and discomforted by the notion of openhearted humor. When the Swami in his early days was accused of being “corny,” he cheerfully replied, “Yes, but it’s hard-pore corn!”

Over the past few years, the Swami’s audiences have gotten younger, and young people seem to enjoy the word play, the innocence, and leaving the venue inspired as well as entertained. And just in time.

At a time when Humanity stands on the threshold of either evolution or oblivion, we need both the awakened mind of the Conscious Fool and the awakened heart of the Cosmic Fool. And while human intellect has helped us evolve to this point, during this next stage the Heart must take the lead. Of all our human qualities, love is our greatest asset.

So ... how do we get up off our assets, and enlighten up? The next chapter will show us ways to use the alchemy of humor to help transform our perspective, our lives, and our world.
Chapter Three: 
THE ALCHEMY OF HUMOR

“We have been given the human jester system to turn the material in the material world into laughter.”
-- Swami Beyondananda

You have now taken two important steps in your initiation into the Way of the Foo Ling Master.

You’ve been made privy to the Cosmic Joke, and see it is designed not just to leave us laughing, but to leave us smiling as well. And, in reflecting on your own journey to Fool Realization, you recognize that ultimately, the healing element in laughter is the universal harmonic of love.

You are now ready to use the alchemy of humor to transmute pain into release, tension into insight, rigidity into flexibility, separation into connectedness. In my research into ancient alchemy and physiology, I was amused to find there is actually a science called Humoris. No kidding. As Casey Stengel used to say, “You could look it up.

This science is based on the theory developed by the first physician, Hippocrates, about the Four Humors. These “humors” are represented by the body fluids of black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood, each of which corresponds to a personality type: Melancholy, bilious, phlegmatic and sanguine. And while there is something naturally funny about any humor with “phlegm” in it, for our purposes we have chosen a simpler system that we call the Four Elements of Humor:

Earth Humor.
Water Humor.
Fire Humor.
Air Humor.

By combining these elements, we can ignite an explosion of laughter to spark insight and transformation.

Earth Jokes Are Easy

Earth Humor is ... earthy. It is humor at its most basic; it is simple and physical, and involves mimicry and exaggeration. Earth Humor is the Keystone Kops doing slapstick, Buster Keaton doing pratfalls, and Danny Thomas shpritzing coffee. The 16th Century Italian comedy team of
**Punch & Judy** represented Earth Humor, as do the **Three Stooges, Road Runner & Wile E. Coyote**, and **Bugs Bunny**.

Earth Humor is culturally universal, because it doesn’t require language. **Patch Adams**, visiting the Soviet Union in the early 1980s, made people laugh just through his costumes and gestures. Rubber-face comics like **Joe E. Brown, Jerry Lewis** and **Jim Carrey** have likewise generated laughter without uttering a word.

Earth Humor is primitive, if not primal. Some theories suggest that laughter itself is a physical release of emotional tension, a response our ancestors might have had after safely eluding a saber-toothed tiger. We can sense reverberations of that response when we laugh nervously in a tense situation. Along the same lines, Earth Humor can be rude and crude. Think of the above-mentioned Road Runner cartoons, the Three Stooges, and pro-wrestling, and you can see the very thin line between comedy and violence.

On the positive side, Earth Humor grounds us. It brings the highfalutin’ and lofty down to earth, and can restore childlike playfulness in the overly serious. I remember speaking with an attorney who had been involved in a very contentious lawsuit. At one point, the opposing attorney made an offer, which our guy found blatantly outrageous and insulting. All he could do in response was utter a Three Stooges, “Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk.”

To his utter amazement, the opposing attorney responded with his own, “Ah, wiseguy, eh?” They both burst out laughing, the tension was broken, and they ended up resolving their differences almost immediately.

In my early days as a comic swami amongst the spiritual seekers, I often -- and largely unconsciously -- used Earth Humor to bring the prematurely-ascended back to this plane of reality. One of the early pieces I did as Swami was an illustrated article on “tantrum yoga” -- “use your anger to heat your home in the wintertime.” I was surprised to find so many people who put the article on their refrigerator until I realized that the Swami’s earthy humor was a way for them to accept the very human emotions of anger and frustration.

If you find yourself spending lots of time up in your head, Earth humor can bring you back down to earth. If you’re into Xtreme “comic-kaze” humor, you might want to run up the down escalator next time you’re at the mall. If that’s a bit too vigorous, spend some time around children, who have no problem being playful or silly. As Swami tells us, as soon as we are old enough to get serious, our “sillium” levels begin to fall.

Back when I still had a TV, I used to watch **America’s Funniest Home Videos** -- with the sound turned off. Watching physical humor was the perfect antidote to my addiction to thinking (I think the 12-steppers call it “Thunkenness”). Without burden of commentary, I celebrated the souls in the videos, whose antics -- often unintentional -- helped heal my mind and soul. According to the Ascended Foo Ling Masters, when someone laughs at your expense, it goes on your cosmic expense account and you get to skip a karma payment.
While Earth Humor offers the benefit of physical release, Water Humor can release the energy held in feelings. E-motion stands for “energy in motion,” and if humor can do anything, it can help us move ‘motional energy. In one of my early humor workshops, a therapist told me a story about something that happened soon after he started his practice. One of his first patients was a young woman who’d been molested by her grandfather. Being sensitive to a delicate situation, the young therapist gingerly walked on eggshells as he questioned his patient. “And when exactly did your grandfather molest you?”

“Before he died,” was the reply.

For some reason, the therapist found this funny and began to laugh. In fact, he couldn’t stop laughing. And before long, the young woman was laughing, and she laughed ... until she cried. And it was after the flood of tears that for the first time, she could speak about the experience.

Flow of laughter ... flow of tears ... water humor puts us in the flow, and in the process can cleanse and release suffering that no longer serves a purpose. Think of those great comics whose humor evokes emotion, sadness even. Charlie Chaplin, Jackie Gleason’s “Poor Soul” character, or any other variation of the “sad clown” archetype, move us past the mere pratfall to empathy, a “pre-blesser” to love. In the cynical world of modern comedy, these softer edges of humor are often dismissed as mushy or sentimental. And yet, in all compelling film comedies, there is a sense of love prevailing in the end.

Meanwhile, another and deeper dimension of Water Humor has gained popularity, and that is irony. Irony represents the “gap” between reality and our desires, between what is and what should be. The larger the gap, the more emotional energy an irony represents. On the surface of the water, we find the classic oxymorons: jumbo shrimp, minor surgery, airline food. Go deeper, and we find contradictions so huge that they cannot be seen with the naked eye. A good example of this is Holy War. A Holy War in the Holy Land? Holy cow pie, Batman!

That’s why the best comedians -- George Carlin comes to mind here -- are adept at “pumping ironies,” at bringing the subconscious to consciousness and allowing emotional release through laughter. The aforementioned Conscious Fool archetype has done a magnificent job at helping to cure “irony deficiency,” which is why more and more people get their news from the Daily Show. In perhaps the most ironic irony of all, more truth can be told through fictional news than real news.

The danger in staying stuck in merely pumping ironies is that we build up an immunity to “evil,” and we resign ourselves to nothing ever changing. Fortunately, as the Cosmic Fool archetype grows in influence, we can move past both syrupy sentimentality and bitter irony to wholehearted loving laughter at our human condition -- and human conditioning.
Fire Humor Causes the Loudest Ejoculation

Two college wrestlers, we’ll call them Biff and Chip, were reading the newspaper one day in the cafeteria, when one pointed to a news item. “There’s this Japanese sumo wrestler coming to town,” Biff said, “and he’s offering $10,000 to anyone who can pin him in the ring.”

“Listen, I read about that guy,” said Chip. “He has this thing called the ‘pretzel hold’ that’s supposed to be the most painful thing anyone can experience. I wouldn’t do it if I were you.”

“Hey,” said Biff, “I could use the cash. I’m gonna go for it.”

The evening of the match arrived, with Chip in the audience, and Biff in the ring. When the sumo wrestler walked out -- all 485 pounds of him -- Chip said to himself, “I have a really bad feeling about this.”

Sure enough, with just seconds into the match, the sumo wrestler had poor Biff on the mat. “I can’t look,” said Chip, and he closed his eyes.

Within seconds, there was a huge cheer from the crowd, and when Chip opened his eyes, it was Biff who had the sumo wrestler pinned!

Chip went back to the locker room to congratulate Biff, and when all the press had left and the hubbub had died down, he said to his friend, “How’d you do it?”

“Well,” said Biff, “you know how they say the ‘pretzel hold’ is the most painful thing you can imagine? Let me tell you, you can’t imagine! I was completely clenched in pain, and at one point I opened my eyes, and there in front of my face was this huge pair of balls. I bit them as hard as I could!”

“Wow!” said Chip.

“Yeah,” said Biff, “it’s pretty amazing what a guy can do when he bites himself in the balls.”

I heard a psychiatrist at a Healing Power of Humor conference tell this joke years ago to illustrate how the elements of humor come together to ignite an explosion of laughter. As we will explain in more detail later, a joke -- particularly a story joke -- is similar to a magic trick. The listener gets drawn into the story, and is intentionally kept away from the punch line until the very last second. When the proverbial rabbit is pulled out of the hat (i.e., the punch line comes) there is a loud “ejoculation” -- an explosion of laughter sparked by the shock of surprise.

Fire Humor is nothing more than a sophisticated game of peekaboo, or perhaps “gotcha.” In the case of this particular joke, tension builds as we are drawn into the story. We cannot help but have a visceral feeling about the young man in pain, and it may even evoke memories of times we were in severe pain. The punch line packs a triple-whammy. First -- particularly for guys -- it evokes an even greater visceral response. Secondly, there is the embarrassment of the sexual reference. Finally, the punch line lands as a complete surprise.
If you want to experience fire humor in action, learn this joke. Change the wordage, if you like, to fit your own style but don’t change it much. You’ll find that the more you draw your listener into the story, the more you build tension, and if you pause briefly between, “I bit them as hard as I could” and “you know, it’s amazing ...” you will get a loud, loud laugh.

Unless, of course, the listener has heard the same joke recently. Or, unless the joke is inappropriate for your audience. If that is the case, they may laugh ... but they won’t be smiling afterward. They will have felt “had,” tricked into laughing at something very embarrassing for them. So ... this joke in particular ... use with care. That is my disclaimer.

The “alcomedian” learns to use Fire Humor to dislodge logic, and send the one-track mind down another track, particularly when mental structures need to be disrupted. I was once doing a talk on humor, and to illustrate “irony deficiency,” I made reference to “pro-lifers” who are against abortion but believe in the death penalty.

A woman, obviously an abortion opponent, came up to me after the presentation very upset. I got an idea, and I told her a story about three religious leaders who were recently on TV discussing the issue of when life begins. The first one, I told her was a priest who said life begins at conception.

“Yes, that’s what I believe,” said the woman, who obviously didn’t realize I was telling her a joke.

Then came the minister, who said that life begins at birth. I could see this woman was totally drawn in, as she shook her head no.

“Then,” I said, “they asked the rabbi, ‘when does life begin?’ ‘Life begins,’ he replied, ‘when the children leave home and the dog dies.’”

The woman burst out laughing, and for that moment there was an opening where she could see beyond the “dueling dualities” to a third way. In blowing apart the structures of the mind, the joke put us both squarely into the heart, that place where structure yields to love.

Air Humor Helps Us Rise Above
Whatever Has Been Bringing Us Down

Air Humor is transcending ... and consequently can be “trance-ending.” At its best, Air Humor offers us a “God’s eye view” of things, a cosmic perspective that helps us recognize we are bigger than our situation. At its less-than-best, Air Humor can be a form of mental masturbation, using the mind as a distraction instead of a gateway to awareness.

Back in the 1990s when I lived in Texas, I was asked to be a judge in the O. Henry Pun-Off, where practiced pun-slingers would go up against one another with a nonstop rat-a-tat-tat of
wordplay. After about a half hour, I found it hugely boring because the words were just words. They lacked the emotional power that context provides. They weren’t “personal;” that is, there was no human in the story, and consequently the string of puns wasn’t linked to anything that made us care. It was mere cleverness.

Over the years, I have been approached by people -- almost always men -- who complain, “Nobody appreciates my sense of humor.” After seeing and hearing them in action, I realize that their humor puts up walls instead of building bridges. They are so in their heads, so absorbed in their own cleverness that they fail to recognize that they’ve lost connection with their audience. In some cases -- and I can relate to this because I’ve been there -- the humor is used as an escape, as a way of avoiding unpleasant emotions instead of healing and releasing them.

On the other hand, sometimes transcendence is necessary, and Air Humor becomes a way to access the higher mind. In his book, Man’s Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl recounts his experiences in a Nazi death camp during World War II. He and a fellow inmate made a pact. Every day they would find some reason to laugh. That way, even though they were physically imprisoned, they could experience the spiritual freedom of choosing to laugh at their situation.

As an indication of how transcendent humor gave individuals in this most dire of situations a sense of internal power and leverage, one of the jokes that circulated inside the camps involved two Jews who decided to assassinate Hitler. They knew that Hitler’s motorcade passed a certain intersection every day at 11:00 a.m., and so they wait for him. 11:00 comes, but no motorcade. 11:15, and still no Hitler. When the Führer fails to show up by 11:30, one of the assassins turns to the other and says, “Gee, I hope nothing has happened to him.”

On a lighter note, Air Humor is the playful mind at play, toying with concepts and disrupting our normal patterns of thinking. Air Humor is paradox, without the emotional charge of irony. A story told about nuclear scientist Neils Bohr is that a reporter once came to his laboratory to interview him. She was surprised to find a horseshoe above the professor’s door. “Professor Bohr,” she said, “you are a scientist. Surely you don’t believe a horseshoe will bring good luck.”

“Oh, was his reply. “Of course not,” was his reply.

“Well then,” she asked, “why is the horseshoe up there?”

“Oh,” was his reply, “because it works whether you believe it or not.”

And so, ultimately the use of Air Humor is to use the mind to trick the mind. In Part II of this book, Humoring Yourself and Others, we will see just how much the mind needs tricking -- and that in that regard, every trick is a treat.
PART TWO:
HUMORING YOURSELF
AND OTHERS
HUMORING YOURSELF
AND OTHERS

“To be happy in life you must be able to take a joke, and if you can leave a few that’s even better.”
-- Swami Beyondananda

Now that we’ve explored the metaphysics of comedy and the alchemy of humor, it’s time to turn our attention to increasing the laugh force on the planet. To do so doesn’t require us to “be” funny -- the Creator says we already are -- but to “see” funny, that is to recognize cosmic one-liners when we see them.

This section is about finding and creating humor, and sharing our findings with loving intent. We will examine some of the healing aspects of humor and laughter, delve into the architecture of a joke, and use all we’ve learned to write our Laugh Story. Once we see why and how the joke is on us -- and wholeheartedly laugh with God at our silly selves -- we are on the fast track to enlightenment (or at least lightenment).

Self-Facing Laughter

For universally positive results, the best kind of humor is the kind kind. This particularly applies to humor we do about ourselves. We’ve all very likely experienced the embarrassment of being around someone who puts themselves down in the guise of being funny. We feel uncomfortable because we sense the individual is using the joke to distract us from something else, likely something they are in denial about.

On the other hand, what we call “self-facing” humor can be a “put up.” Abraham Lincoln was adept at putting people at ease with his humor, particularly in relation to his appearance. A classic Lincoln remark was, “If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?”

In a similar way, the late Sen. John Tower of Texas -- who was quite short -- would introduce himself by saying, “My name is Tower, although I don’t.” In both of these cases, the self-effacing jokes had to do with appearance and size, things that pretty much cannot be changed.

However, when we begin to feel uncomfortable around a “joker,” it is often because their jokes are used to keep from changing something that can be changed -- like a self-destructive habit, or some form of emotional hurt.

Perhaps the clearest example of how a sense of humor can be transformed from defensive
to openhearted is the 1991 move, *Prince of Tides*. In it, the character played by Nick Nolte is an unemployed physical education teacher who comes to New York to help his sister. There he meets and begins therapy with a psychiatrist, played by Barbra Streisand. Initially, his jokes are like grenades lobbed from behind a wall. Through therapy, he begins to face -- and tell -- the truth about his dysfunctional childhood. Over time, he is able to release some of the pain through self-facing laughter.

As the movie proceeds, we can see his healthier psyche reflected in his healthier sense of humor. I highly recommend renting *Prince of Tides*, and watching it just to observe this transformation.

Sometimes the Universe nudges us along the path to fool-realization through “funny things happening” that we call “embarrassing moments.” These generally occur when we are particularly intent on looking smart, or looking good ... and the Universe has another idea. Sometimes it’s the proverbial toilet paper on the shoe on prom night, other times it’s something a little more intense. Like the woman I knew who was set to compete in a bike race. She was looking good and feeling great. Just before the race, she removed her sweat pants so she would be ready to race in her bicycle shorts. She didn’t think much about it being a bit drafty, until she looked down and realized she had removed everything.

Oops.

They say comedy is tragedy in retrospect, so the more quickly one is able to compress the time between the incident and the laughter, the more “fooly-realized” one is.

A friend was describing a Native American festival in Santa Fe, where the *Heyoka* (the tricksters characterized both as “vulgar” and “sacred”) were having a field day smashing watermelons on the street. Standing along the curb watching the events was a proud Native American grandmother, decked out in elegant turquoise. At one point, one of the Heyoka walked right in front of her, and ceremoniously smeared her beautiful outfit with watermelon innards. Her first response was shock, and there was a tense moment of silence. But then, she burst out laughing along with everyone else.

In her tradition, the joker trumps all other cards, and the cosmic joke washes away all structure and propriety.

**The Protocols of Openhearted Comedy:**

“I Was A Good Boy …”

Shortly after we decided to get married, my wife Trudy and I had a hilarious, irreverent and transformational moment. I being Jewish and she German, we both looked at our match as a symbolic healing. Her dad, however, was not comfortable with it, perhaps thinking my relatives would look at him as a Nazi (in actuality, he grew up in the Ukraine). His discomfort was a source of some tension.

Trudy and I were reading in bed this one night, and Trudy -- delicate flower that she is -- well,
how can I put it delicately? *Hey, honey, what did you have for dinner? I dunno. It escapes me right now.* Well what escaped her was long, loud and gaseous. Neither of us said a word, and after a few moments I ceremoniously lifted the covers and said, “Jeez, the Germans are still gassing the Jews.”

We both burst out laughing, and along with the wind, the tension was broken. In testimony to the power of “farce fields,” even though her dad never heard the story, the next time we saw him he had completely changed his mind. He thoroughly enjoyed the wedding, and he and I grew to like one another.

I felt comfortable enough telling this story at a humor workshop, and when I returned to that city a year later one of the participants said, “You know that story you told about you and Trudy? I was going out with a Jewish guy, and when I went with him to visit his parents, I told that story. But nobody laughed.”

Ah yes, permission. There’s a difference between an insider telling a story, and an outsider telling the same story. Years ago, someone asked Dick Gregory, “Why is it that you people can use the N-word and we can’t?”

“I guess we just don’t like the way you say it,” he replied.

Of course, at certain times and places, “permission” may be granted for other reasons. In his first New York nightclub appearance, Lenny Bruce found himself in front of an audience of hipsters, intellectuals and a smattering of celebrities. In the front row, with their dates, were Sammy Davis, Jr. and the basketball player Wilt Chamberlain. Early in the show, Lenny Bruce asked Chamberlain to pass his cigarette so he could light his own.

Lenny took hold of Wilt’s cigarette, looked at it, and said, “You’ve been nigger-lipping this.”

There was a collective gasp from the crowd and a moment of tense silence, and then Wilt and Sammy burst out laughing, and the entire place came down. Shaman that he was, Lenny Bruce intrinsically knew his being a “hipster” made him an insider, and gave him permission to offer this joke, as a way of making fun of prejudice.

However ... he was a professional. Don’t try this at home.

In comedy, as the cliché goes, timing is everything. And that’s not just the timing of the punch line. Have you ever known someone who infuses wisecracks into every conversation, making it impossible to have anything heard in a serious way? Since my mind makes funny pictures and hears funny sounds all the time, I have always been in danger of turning into one of those people.

I can’t help it if I see and hear funny, and I have a hair-trigger mouth. So, years ago I got an idea for how to enjoy these nuggets without disrupting the flow of conversation, or embarrassing an individual. It’s called, “I was a good boy,” or conversely, “I was a bad boy.”

If after a party or get together, I say to Trudy, “I was a good boy,” she’ll ask, “Oh, what didn’t
you say?” I tell her, and we both enjoy the laugh as if I’d actually said it. As an example ... oh, never mind. I can’t tell you that one.

Every now and then, I let myself be a “bad boy” if I sense the joke will land safely and be appreciated. Years ago, we were doing a show back East and were being hosted by a wonderful woman who told us she volunteered for the Humane Society. “During the spring when there are a lot of heavy rains, sometimes baby squirrels fall out of the trees,” she told us. “My job is nursing those baby squirrels.”

“Gee,” I found myself saying, “aren’t their sharp little teeth kind of hard on your nipples?” The gods and goddesses of comedy were smiling on me that day, because she laughed appreciatively. And we’re still friends.

But again, if you try something like this, you risk embarrassing someone -- and yourself. While you’re practicing, stick with “I was a good boy.”

Here is a general rule of thumb (or should we say “rule of foot in the mouth”): If the joke or story is delivered in a genuine state of love and heart-opening intention, something edgy stands a better chance of landing.

I often illustrate this point by telling the classic joke about heaven and hell as they relate to the countries in Europe: In heaven, the police are English, the mechanics are German, the cooks are French, the lovers are Italian -- and it’s all run by the Swiss. In hell, the police are German, the cooks are English, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss -- and it’s all run by the Italians.

This joke always -- always -- gets a huge and appreciative laugh, and it’s probably because of how I contextualize the joke. I always introduce it by saying that instead of acting like we’re all the same, we have to joyfully celebrate our differences. With the words “joyful” and “celebrate” setting the tone, the audience is cued in to how they are to respond.

Does a joke ever land like a lead balloon? It’s happened, and fortunately not very often. I have learned to read audiences, and certain jokes and lines come out only when I have a very strong sense the audience will take it in the right way. Is it possible that the entire audience loves something, but one or two or three people take offense? Yes. And that is why I am very, very careful which material I use in which setting. You can actually feel it when a joke fails to universally wow an audience, and it usually takes several jokes to build the energy back up.

The foundational protocol of healing laughter is the same as that of medicine: First, do no harm.

Of course, truly transformational comedy leaves people standing, and destroys mental structures that need deconstruction. We will discuss that in the Transforming the Trance section. But first, let’s take a closer look at how laughter heals -- physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Chapter Four:
HO-HO-HOLY HEE-HEE-HEALING

“A daily laughsitive will prevent irregularhilarity, not to mention humorrhoids.”
-- Swami Beyondananda

Ever since writer Norman Cousins healed himself of a life-threatening illness by watching Marx Brothers movies and Candid Camera reruns, science has been studying the healing power of laughter -- which is kind of like, “Well, it works in practice, but does it work in theory?”

Since that time researchers have found that laughter produces hormones called endorphins, which are our natural pain killer. Laughter improves immune function, and lowers the blood pressure because when we laugh, it causes our blood cells to dilate. And, as Swami is all-too-quick to point out, that’s better than having them die early.

In recent years, Laughter Yoga has become popular, and laughter clubs have sprung up everywhere. No comedy whatsoever is needed for this kind of laughter, because the entire focus is on simply laughing -- for no reason. Even without the above-mentioned benefits, laughter causes breathing, and as we know breathing is the key to long life. It’s simple. When we breathe in, we inspire and when we don’t, we expire.

So yes, laughing for no reason is good enough reason to laugh. However, there are a few laughter yoga “fundamentalists” who are so dedicated to laughing for no reason, that they actually frown upon laughing at comedy! As we will see in this chapter, the idea that humor is unnecessary is utterly laughable.

For in addition to the physiological benefits of laughing itself, comedy helps us heal emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Remember, healing means “restoring wholeness,” and the transformational nature of comedy gives us balance and perspective. While there are many, many healing qualities of humor, I have narrowed it down to four key ways that healing laughter and heartful humor make us whole:

- **Acceptance.** Laughter allows us to accept what we cannot change, and reminds us that we are bigger than our situation.
- **Defenselessness.** Openhearted laughter is disarming.
- **Release.** Laughter helps us face our shadow, and release judgment
- **Celebration.** Laughter puts us in touch with joy.

Acceptance: Restoring a God’s Eye View
The right joke at the right time can gently offer us a “God’s-eye-view” of our situation by reminding us we are bigger than whatever that situation is. Years ago, before I starting swami-ing as a profession, I worked as a freelance writer. When I made my declaration to the Universe that I wanted to pursue comedy as a full-time career, the Universe was so incredibly cooperative that all my writing jobs dried up instantly, and I went through what I called my “Baroque Period.” I was so Baroque, I was Haydn from the landlord.

That’s because we were three months behind in our rent.

During this very challenging period, Trudy and I had a spiritual practice of reading from *A Course In Miracles* every morning. One morning the lesson was, “You are not upset for the reason you think.” For some reason, that one really ticked me off. I knew why I was upset. We had no money, and we couldn’t pay our rent!

Just as we got done with this particular lesson, the phone rang and Trudy answered it. “Steve,” she said, holding her hand over the mouthpiece, “it’s the landlord. What shall I tell him?”

My answer came quickly: “How about, ‘you’re not upset for the reason you think?’”

We both laughed heartily, and sure enough within a short amount of time, we were all caught up on our rent. Trudy and I always looked back at that joke as a turning point, because the release helped us get out of our own way.

Sometimes, this healing perspective can be an inside job, and it may not require any comedy at all. A friend of mine, many years ago, was in the real estate business. One morning, he found out that a partner of his had gone bankrupt, and my friend had lost $90,000. (This was back when $90,000 was actually money.) My friend was not amused.

He went into the men’s room to throw some water on his face and cool off. When he caught his sour expression in the mirror, though, he got an idea. He looked squarely into the mirror, and went, “Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha.” He did this until he started laughing for real. When he was done having a good laugh at his misfortune, he cheerfully took his wife out for lunch. He never looked back in regret, and he has since become a millionaire several times over.

Something to keep in mind here. Laughing at your situation is a personal choice, and not something to impose on others. Telling someone who is suffering to laugh at their situation is akin to asking someone in the midst of a crisis, “Why did you create this?”

To me, that justifies hitting them upside the head, and asking, “And why did you create *that*?”
Defenseless Humor Tears Down Defenses

As a youngster growing up in New York in the 1950s and 60s, my passion was baseball and one of my baseball heroes was Casey Stengel, who was manager of the Yankees and then the Mets. As the story goes, when Casey Stengel was playing for Pittsburgh, the fans in New York took a disliking to him, and every time he walked onto the field or up to bat, he would get booed. One time, however, Stengel stepped to the plate, and when the fans started booing, he lifted his cap, and a sparrow flew out from underneath it.

The fans laughed, stood up and cheered, and he was never booed again. In fact, he went on to become one of the best-loved characters in New York sports history. Now, think about that. One playful gesture opening the hearts of 20,000 New Yorkers, and changing their perspective forever. So I guess, the moral is, if you’re going to flip someone the bird -- it’s much better if it’s a real bird.

Here’s something you can try at home. I once received a very irate phone call after I completely forgot a phone appointment. I was definitely in the wrong, and I wanted to acknowledge the situation and apologize. So I called, and as soon as the offended party answered, I began to sing the old Brenda Lee song, “I’m Sorry,” including every “uh oh oh oh oh oh oh, oh yeah.” At the end, what could the person do but laugh? I not only said I was sorry, I sang it for three minutes.

Another time I was involved in a difficult negotiation on the phone, and it seemed that every word I said dug the hole deeper. Finally, I hung up the phone in frustration. And then I got an idea. I called the person back and said, “This is Steve Bhaerman. Did someone just call you pretending to be me?”

That person laughed, and we successfully completed the negotiation. Notice that in each case, I wasn’t fanning the flames of upset by making fun of them. Instead I used humor to take responsibility for my own creation. That created the space for them to do the same, and they did.

Laughter Makes Every Day Nonjudgment Day
... and Provides Karmic Relief

In a little town in West Texas at the turn of the last century, the town’s madame came to the local minister and said, “Reverend, I would like to make amends for my life. I want to donate all my money to your church.”

“Well ma’am,” said the minister, “I need to think about that. Come back tomorrow.”

The next day she returned, and the minister had made up his mind. “I’m sorry, ma’am,” he said, “but I can’t accept your offer.”
She left, and one of the parishioners asked the minister, “Reverend, why did you turn down her generous offer?”

“Because her money is tainted money,” the minister told him.

“What do mean her money?” was the reply. “That’s our money!”

I’ve done hundreds of Sunday morning talks at churches on The Healing Power of Laughter. I always tell that story, and it always gets a big, big laugh. Always. Why? Because it gently reflects back to us the shadow aspects of our human nature. In that moment when the punch line lands, “enlightening” strikes, and we recognize our own rationalizations and contradictions, and the ultimately absurdity of moral posturing that points a finger elsewhere.

Even though the unacknowledged shadow is responsible for many of our human failings -- hey, it’s not me, it’s him or her or it or them -- we really don’t like looking at the gunk that collects on the underside of our karma. That’s why situation comedies are so popular. We are really laughing at ourselves, disguised as caricatured characters on the screen.

The other aspects of the shadow our comedy can help us release are the parts of our own upbringing (or, in some sad, sad cases downbringing) that have been particularly challenging for us. While I am truly fortunate to have grown up in a loving, intact family, I did have a Jewish mother. The archetypal Jewish mother is a great cook who worries about everything. My mom was one for two. She worried about everything -- except her cooking.

Because my mom was not naturally gifted as a cook, she compensated by overdoing it. So, she overcooked everything, particularly vegetables. She would cook green vegetables until they were khaki. The first time I saw an actual green cooked vegetable, I was certain it was artificially colored.

What did my mother worry about? She worried about everything. Here’s a true story. When I started my tree-working job, and I told my mother I was taking down trees with Dutch Elm Disease, she got very quiet. When I asked what was wrong, she told me she was afraid I would catch Dutch Elm Disease.

“Mom,” I said, “people don’t catch Dutch Elm Disease, but dogs can get it.”

“Dogs can get it?” she asked, obviously concerned about Buster. “What happens to dogs?”

“They lose their bark,” was my reply.

If you’re laughing, thank you. You are helping me release my judgment about my mother, and in so doing you are giving me a happier childhood!
Laughter Reminds Us to En-Joy!

I once asked a therapist what she thought the most suppressed emotion is. Without hesitation, she answered, “Joy.”

As the Swami says, underneath all of the stress and distress and sadness in life, there is a deep well of joy. Every time we let laughter bubble up out of that deep well, we experience deep wellness. Of course, most of us have gone through a rigorous Serious Fool Training. Somewhere back there, we were told to get serious, and “wipe that smile off your face.”

To counteract that foolishly serious and seriously foolish notion, the Foo Ling Masters recommend a practice that’s the next best thing to waking up laughing. Upon awakening and walking into the bathroom, look at yourself in the mirror. (For some people -- particularly if you imagine you are looking at someone else -- that in itself is enough to at least elicit a chuckle.) If you don’t find the sight immediately amusing, put your hand about six inches in front of your mouth. Then, give yourself official permission to enjoy the day with this command: “Wipe that smile onto your face!”

Then, do it.

With that you are creating a field of “en-joy-ment” by bringing joy with you, instead of expecting it to come from the outside. As scientists are discovering, happiness is an inside job and we can actually pull our own strings by using our face muscles. When we allow the levitational pull to lift the corners of our mouth upwards in a smile, our body gets the message, “Oh, I must be feeling good,” and feel-good chemicals are produced ... making you feel even better.

Ah ha ... ha ha ha. Another inside joke, courtesy of the Cosmic Comedy.

So, how did we get so far off in misinterpreting the nature of life? A story is told about an old, old monk whose job it was to translate the ancient scrolls. He was down in the catacombs working, when the other monks heard a scream. They came running down, to find the old monk trembling and pointing to a text: “It says celebrate, not celibate!”

When we persistently create a field of playfulness, a funny thing happens. Actually, lots of funny things happen because in embodying playful joy, we create a “farce field” that attracts healing jokes. As an example, my wife Trudy and I were once in our favorite Chinese restaurant in Austin. The food was always excellent, but this one time Trudy took a bite, only to find a piece of steel wool in her stir-fry.

She called the waiter over, and of course he was embarrassed. They gave us our meals for free (so now I always carry steel wool with me). However, because both the owner and waiter were greatly embarrassed about the situation, the meal was a bit tense. Finally, we were done and the waiter brought the fortune cookies.

I looked at him, and motioned with my hand for him to come over. I could sense him feeling, “Oh my goodness, now what’s wrong?”
When he walked over to the table, I pointed at the cookies and said, “Excuse me, there’s a piece of paper in my cookie.”

We all laughed, and that became the “take away” from that meal, rather than the chunk of debris. We returned to that restaurant many more times, and the waiter and owner always gave us a smile when we walked in.

Yes, it’s true. I’m a professional. I get paid to come up with these lines. But sometimes I am surprised and delighted by the thoughts that fly into my head, and the words that tumble out of my mouth. Sometimes I have some of my best comedy custom-created by the Creator, and there is nothing for me to do but attune into the channel and deliver the lines.

Several years ago, I was doing a lunchtime program at a local HMO that shall remain nameless. The program, run by a brave yoga teacher, was called The Physician Wellness Program. One glimpse at the stressed out, uptight doctors, though, told me how oxymoronic that title was. They were squeezing this program into their lunch hour, which incidentally was just a half hour long.

As I launched my Swami routine, I couldn’t help but notice that at least two thirds of these physicians were from Third World countries. There was a bit of a language gap, but things were moving along okay. But then a funny thing happened. Right in the middle of my comedy set, I was loudly interrupted by a message coming over the P.A.: “Your attention please! Your attention please! Will the owner of a white Explorer, license number BK3 450 please move your vehicle. You are blocking traffic.”

The Swami looked at this gathering of mostly Third World folks and said, “You know, I have long believed that most of the problems in this world have been caused by white explorers!”

The room exploded with laughter, and the healers left that room healed.

While these blessed downloads happen just by the grace of grace, with practice we can call forth farce fields, simply through our intention and awareness. The next chapter focuses on how we can intentionally transform the trances we live though “alcomical healing.”
Chapter Five:
TRANSFORMING THE TRANCE

“What people believe is truly unbelievable.”
-- Swami Beyondananda

In his book Trances People Live, spiritual psychologist Stephen Wolinsky identifies two characteristics of the trance state: Narrowed focus of attention, and voluntary suspension of disbelief. Curiously enough, that is the same thing that happens while listening to a joke.

Imagine you are on a crowded bus or subway train. It’s lunchtime, and you’re really hungry. Or, you’re uncomfortable because you have to go to the bathroom. Or, you’ve just had a disagreement with a co-worker, or are absorbed in some other worry or concern. All of a sudden, you hear someone nearby begin to tell a joke to a colleague. “So the CEO of Tyson Foods manages to arrange a meeting with the Pope at the Vatican ...”

You begin listening, and for some reason you forget about being hungry or having to go to the bathroom or whatever has been on your mind. Your attention is narrowly focused on the story line. You don’t want to miss a word, because you know there is likely to be a laugh at the other end. The joke-teller continues:

After receiving the papal blessing, the Tyson guy makes the Pope an offer: Tyson Foods is prepared to donate $100 million dollars to the church if the Lord’s Prayer is changed from “give us this day our daily bread” to “give us this day our daily chicken.”

By now, you are so caught up in the tale, you’ve completely forgotten about everything else.

The Pope responds, “That is impossible. The Prayer is the word of the Lord - it must not be changed.”

“Well,” says the Tyson man, “we figured you’d be reluctant. So we’re prepared to increase our offer to $300 million dollars.” Again, the Pope replies, “My son, that is impossible. For the prayer is the word of the Lord and can never be changed.”

“OK,” the Tyson guy says. “Half a billion dollars, and that’s my final offer.”

At this point, your stop is coming up. But it doesn’t matter. You will ride to the end of the line to hear how this story turns out.

The next day the Pope convenes the College of Cardinals. “There is some good news,” he announces, “and some bad news. The good news is that the Church has come into $500 million dollars ...”
“And the bad news?” you find yourself silently asking, because from past joke experience you know that’s where this is going.

“The bad news,” says the Pope, “is we’re losing the Wonder bread account.”

Assuming you haven’t heard the joke before -- and you haven’t, or at least not recently, otherwise you wouldn’t have been so completely drawn in to the story -- you laugh with surprise and delight. The trance is broken, and you are back in the “real” world. You remember your stop, or your appetite or your bladder or whatever else.

In the unreal world of the joke, however, you completely suspended disbelief -- another characteristic of the trance state. In listening to this joke, you didn’t stop and say to yourself, “Now wait a minute. This is could never happen.” But when you enter into the domain of the joke by agreeing to give your attention to the joke-teller, you essentially give up your right to create or define reality until the joke is over.

A joke is never literal, and always contrived -- because the story is always designed to get us to the punch line. In the world of the joke, we have cannibals eating clowns, we have talking animals, we have a priest, a minister and a rabbi all walking into the same bar at the same moment -- all to build a bridge to a laugh.

We are so unconsciously familiar with the format, that we can even make jokes about it: A priest, a minister and a rabbi walk into a bar ... and the bartender says, “Say, is this some kind of joke?”

Or: A traveling salesman stops at a farmhouse and asks for a place to stay overnight, and the farmer tells him, “I only have one bed, so you’ll have to sleep with my son.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” the salesman replies, “I must be in the wrong joke.”

Zen Cohens: Joking In Quotes

In the aforementioned Trances People Live book, author Wolinsky makes the daring assertion that we are always in some kind of trance state -- even when we think we aren’t. Broadly speaking, we are in a trance state when we accept that this reality is the reality. We narrow our focus of attention to that which fits the acceptable paradigm, and all too often suspend disbelief, as we believe the most ridiculous nonsense just because everyone around us does.

In more than a metaphorical sense, we are always in a joke state as well. We are blithely following the story line, totally absorbed, and we don’t see the punch line coming. We thought we were doing this, making that, going there ... and then, a funny thing happened. If we’re fortunate enough, the funny thing that happens is actually funny.

So ... if we are simultaneously in a trance state, and a joke state ... what would happen if we
put the two together? What if the story in the joke and the story in our lives were so similar, that when the punch line hits, two trances are broken simultaneously, and we are jarred awake in the wake of the punch line? This would suggest that a joke could become the delivery system for an awakening insight.

The NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming) folks have a term they call “talking in quotes.” When a therapist directly offers a suggestion or command to a client, it often sets up defensiveness or resistance. But when they can quote someone else (“You know what someone said to me just the other day?”), look the client in the eye, and utter the same suggestion, the client is more likely to consider it. The suggestion might even take hold in their subconscious, and later they might imagine they thought of it themselves!

Over the years, I have taken to “joking in quotes” as a way of indirectly offering suggestions. I have termed certain transformational jokes “Zen Cohens” (see Part III of this book) because they ignite a moment of enlightenment with a spark of laughter. No, I’m not a therapist, but I am curious about the psyche. Sometimes people actually do come to me with problems, and sometimes my offerings are entirely unsolicited.

Once, I was having a phone conversation with someone who habitually used a cheerful attitude as a way of avoiding facing problems. When I asked about a challenging situation in his life, the man blithely replied, “So far, so good.”

I said it reminded me of the eternal optimist who accidentally fell from the observation deck of the Empire State Building. As he plummeted past the 43rd floor he said, “So far, so good!”

I could tell from the man’s change in expression that the joke “landed” just as surely as the unfortunate plummeter did.

Another time, an acquaintance had a change in her life she’d been wanting to and needing to make, but she kept coming up with excuse after excuse to keep putting it off.

So I told her it reminded me of the very, very old Jewish couple -- he was 98, and she was 96 -- who came to the rabbi and said they wanted a divorce.

“You want a divorce?” he asked. “How long have you been married?”

“75 years,” the husband answered.

“And you’ve wanted this divorce how long?”

“Since the beginning,” replied the wife.

The rabbi was incredulous. “You’ve wanted this divorce for seventy-five years? Why did you wait until now?”

“Well,” came the answer, “we wanted to wait until the children died.”
Naturally, the recipient of my joke-in-quotes laughed loudly, and got the point. The absurdity of the premise, the exaggeration of the point, even the embedded tragedy that this couple had stubbornly outlived their children, all of this gave enough emotional fuel to “explode” her own blocks to action in the outburst of laughter.

A master of the transformational story was Milton Erickson, who has been called the father of modern hypnotherapy. Much of what is now called Neurolinguistic Programming is based on the techniques that Erickson used to “get inside people’s heads” and “pull the levers” that would give healthy and functional beliefs leverage over dysfunctional or unhealthy ones. I admire Erickson greatly, not just because of his brilliance and skill, but also because of his integrity. He always used his awesome abilities to help his clients empower themselves.

I have many favorite Erickson stories, but my favorite favorite occurred when he was doing his medical residency at a psychiatric hospital. One of the patients had delusions of being Jesus Christ, and Erickson had an elegant intervention. He handed the patient some carpentry tools and said, “I understand you have some experience as a carpenter.”

So the patient became a carpenter. What choice did he have? Erickson enrolled him in his own delusion, and empowered him to use it to do something constructive -- literally.

This technique -- called “reframing” -- can help us gain leverage over our own situation, and have a liberating chuckle about it as well.

**Humor As a Mind-Altering Substance**

In the Alchemy of Humor chapter, we suggested that paradox is using the mind to trick the mind. Why would we want to do that?

Well, because in our left-brain dominated civilization we too often mistake our mental structures for reality. We’ve become so accustomed to favoring “thinking” over feeling, that we end up experiencing life through our opinions and preconceptions rather than our experience.

So when we break up with laughter -- particularly when we are laughing at some absurdly exaggerated mental construct -- we are breaking down the hold our mind has on our psyche. Paradox, like the proverbial zen ko’an, is designed to stop the one-track mind in its tracks. In that open space between thought, enlightening can strike.

Many years ago, I was teaching a class of sixth graders, and hung a mobile from the ceiling. On side, it said, “The statement on the other side of this card is true.” On the other, it said, “The statement on the other side of this card is false.”

This little dangling paradox created hours of entertainment, and discussion.

As mentioned earlier, one of the functions of the cosmic comic is to pump ironies -- to bring
hidden contradictions to consciousness through exaggeration. Because human life is filled with contradictions -- ideals that fall short in daily life, for example -- this found humor can be very easily found. A good example is Jay Leno’s “Real But Ridiculous Signs” book.

The mind becomes so accustomed to seeing and hearing what it always sees and hears, that these contradictions often go unnoticed -- until someone with the ability to see or hear funny brings it to awareness.

Years ago, the city of Los Angeles instituted a “toys for guns” program to get handguns off the streets. Shortly before Christmas, the police department announced that they would offer free toys to anyone who turned in handguns. The program was popular and worked exceedingly well -- until someone noticed that among the toys being given away were toy guns.

Remember the Cosmic Fool? One of the gifts of being both conscious and innocent is being able to see as a child, with innocent perception. In fact, Stephen Wright, one of the most masterful weavers of paradox and nonsequitor, has said that he writes his humor by thinking like a child would, while using adult concepts and language. An example of one of his early gems: He wanted to learn Spanish, so he bought himself a record to teach him Spanish in his sleep. “But the record skipped,” he reports, “so now I can only stutter in Spanish.”

Humor so often involves taking folks down the road of the expected -- and ending up at an intersection with the unexpected. We laugh in surprise and delight.

When we break the “trances of the self-perpetuating usual” through comedy, we open our mind so new thoughts can come in, and come out. Back in the late 1970s, when I did my experimental humorous newspaper for my tree worker cohorts, after just a few months we found the workplace to be a livelier, more creative place. The unpredictability of comedy jarred folks out of predictable ways of behaving, and into the path of new possibilities.

Out of Our Heads, Into Our Hearts

As we near the close of this narrative on awakening through laughter, we can see how paradoxical humor can liberate us from the trance of certainty to the space of mystery. It is only from this space of “not knowing” that we can come to know what we don’t know now -- and don’t yet know we don’t know.

Remember, trances are more than the glassy-eyed state evoked by stage hypnotists. In a more useful sense, trances are unquestioned thought systems or behavior patterns. In a trance state, we are so absorbed in the “movie” that we forget it’s a movie. And, we forget we are not just the actor, but also the director and the audience.

When we break the spell with a liberating explosion of laughter, we become the observer of our own lives once again. We recognize we are not our story. Consequently, humor can liberate us from personal and societal trances of separation, powerlessness, victimhood, greed, fear, that keep
us from genuine freedom.

And the essence of that freedom? To live and love fearlessly, and to live, love and laugh with all our heart.

At its highest, humor takes the heart beyond suffering and the mind beyond duality. It reminds us that the mind, the intellect, the structures of life are in humble service to the heart. And the good news is, when the heart is in command, there is no need for the mind to control.

And now, let us gather the tools we’ve learned about to transform our own trance, to heal our heart and free our mind by writing our Laugh Story.
Chapter Six:  
YOUR LAUGH STORY

“Laugh at yourself, and the whole world will laugh at you too.”  
-- Swami Beyonananda

We have now come fool circle.

We have explored the metaphysics of comedy, and the alchemy of humor. We have shown how laughter heals our heart, and liberates us from less-than-useful mental structures. It is now time to turn our newly-opened comic eye inward, to deconstruct our own mental constructs and free ourselves from unnecessary self-imposed suffering.

The good news is, what you can laugh at wholeheartedly, you can heal. Remember, when we tell our story with compassionate humor, it makes us bigger than our story. And in rising above our story, it reminds us that we are not our story. This shifts us into the possibility of writing an entirely new story. And not a moment too soon.

So before you turn your life into a situational comedy, let’s review the tools and concepts we can work with:

✓ We recognize Swami Beyondananda’s FUNdamental truth that life is a joke, but God is laughing with us, not at us. Consequently, we give ourselves permission to laugh with Creation at our own foolishness.

✓ We recognize we have the ability to awaken in the wake of laughter, and in even the most challenging of situations, “find the joke hidden in the picture.”

✓ When we find the “joke” -- either the funny thing that happened or the way we got fooled -- we recognize that our entire “story” (that is, the narrative leading up to the funny or not-so-funny thing happening) has just been to get us to this punch line. Our job? Get the joke, and laugh.

✓ Begin your story as an Innocent Fool, and end it as a Wise Innocent Fool (i.e., a Cosmic Fool), and you will have the perspective of a true Foo Ling Master.

✓ Remember the alcomical tools in your toolkit. You have Earth Humor, Water Humor, Fire Humor, Air Humor, and you want to use these elements to balance any imbalance.

✓ Ask yourself, how can I “humor myself” on a regular basis? How can I use humor to accept and release? How can I use it to transcend and transform?

✓ Now that you are a bona-fide Absurdified Cosmic Fool with both wisdom and innocence intact, now what? Now that you’ve chosen to turn off the old programming, it’s time to tell a vision. Describe your cosmic comic self, and allow that self to journey into a funny and yet desirable future.
With these in mind -- or out of mind, but not too far from the mind -- let’s see if you can use the template below to create your own Laugh Story.

Remember, NEVER DEVIATE FROM THE TEMPLATE!

Just kidding, of course. Have fun, and may the Farce be with you.

1. A Fool Is Born

The place to begin is the beginning, and in the beginning there is the Innocent Fool. That was once you. Go check out your baby pictures, if you don’t believe me. Just as surely as you are sitting here now, that was you then. If you are lucky, you were a smiling baby. Look at the picture, and see if you can remember what you were smiling about.

Surely there was something uniquely funny about how you got here. Any “funny things” happening that caused your parents to meet? Any highly-dysfunctional ancestral behavior that you can alcomically reframe as “hilarious hijinx?” The more of these coincidences and the more willing you are to joke about toxic family history, the more quickly you will remember what that baby was smiling about.

Everyone is brought into this life on the wings of a story, and each story is different. As Swami says, “Each of us is totally unique, just like everybody else.” And so it is that your family story is the “warm up act” for the cosmic comedy routine that begins with the delivery of the little bundle of joy that is you.

You arrive as an Innocent Fool. Lucky you! Your situational comedy has been picked up the Network, and will run as long as you do. First thing -- name your situation comedy. Even if it’s The Joe Blow Show, call it something. You may even change the name before you’re done. Giving it a name reminds you that it’s a comedy, and will help attune you in to the laugh track.

To gather material for your situational comedy, there is no better place than the material world. Make a list of all the ways you were fooled while you were an innocent fool, all the things you were tricked into believing, or ways you were manipulated into behaving to get love.

End this first segment remembering the times you laughed the most, and the most enjoyable fun during your childhood. That way, you anchor in the feeling of love and innocence. This is good, because you will need it later on.

2. Setting Up the Punch Line

What we don’t realize as we enter the Serious Fool phase of our lives, is that we are the main characters in our own joke, and that all of our serious behaviors are simply setting up the punch line. So ... what were you foolishly serious about? What did you believe would make you happy if you had it?

And then -- how did you walk into your own trap, and get poked, prodded or whacked upside the head by the punch line?
Were you in the process of disabusing yourself about an abusive situation, when a funny thing happened and Grace showed up? Or was it her evil cousin, Kickboxer Grace that showed up? Maybe both happened. Maybe you suffered a comedownance, and out of surrender and humility you could hear Grace’s quiet knock on the door.

Whatever, this section should end with the sentence, “And then ... a funny thing happened.”

3. And Then ... A Funny Thing Happened

Here’s where the punch line you’ve been building to lands, and you make the old switcheroo from Serious Fool to Conscious Fool. What was the great moment of fool-realization when you realized you had been seriously foolish, if not foolishly serious?

This is an important moment in your laugh story. But you’re not there yet, even if you think you are. The first awakening can be heady, and sometimes it goes to our head. But if the heart is bypassed, there is simply the build up to another punch line just up ahead.

In looking for the story line in this phase, notice times or places where you said to yourself, “I’m too smart to get fooled again,” or “I’m too spiritually evolved.” Arrogance is always trumped by love, especially innocent love. And in your story, that is very likely what is coming up. When the next unexpected punch line lands, if you’re really fortunate it goes right to the heart, resulting in hearty laughter.

However, one of the reasons you are writing your laugh story is to laugh ahead of the punch line by figuring out the joke in the middle. I’ll give you an example. Many years ago, I was considering going back to school for a graduate degree. One night, I had a profound dream. It was one of those school anxiety dreams that many people seem to have. In this particular scenario, I was late for a final exam for a very important class. I was on the subway, but I couldn’t remember how to get to wherever the exam was being given.

And then a “funny thing happened.” In the midst of this familiar scenario, an unfamiliar thought came to me: Wait a minute, I don’t need to complete this class, and I don’t need this degree. I am fully prepared exactly as I am! And in the dream, I literally took the subway back to Coney Island and went to the beach.

Of course, when I woke up I had my answer. I got to laugh without going through the long shaggy dog story of getting another degree. I literally woke up laughing, and have never had another school anxiety dream.

We’ve all had these fortunate moments where a punch line was revealed before the end of the joke. However, by applying the elements of humor to balance any imbalances in the present time, you might be able to get the last laugh (or in this case the first one) on the Cosmic Trickster.
4. Open Your Present!

I’m sure you already realize this, but it bears repeating: The “now” you are in now is your greatest gift, so the next step is to open your present.

If you’ve recently been the subject of one of the Creator’s wild and wacky practical jokes, or if you suspect one might be sneaking up on you, now is the time to use the alcomical tools of the Foo Ling Master to playfully rebalance your life. Why now? Because it’s too late to do it sooner, that’s why.

So let’s unwrap your present, hopefully amidst squeals of delight. In fact, just for fun start squealing with delight right now. It will help.

As you unwrap your life as it is right now, recognize it as a gift. “Ooohh! Look what I got myself!”

If what you got yourself was in big trouble, all the more material from the material world for you to neutralize with laughter. Chances are most of your present is pretty darn good, a cause for celebration. As for the other stuff, let’s grab our alcomical tool kit and see what is needed to restore balance.

As you look at your life right now, where is there imbalance? Anything you are avoiding or denying? Is there something you are taking way too seriously? Is there an emotional upset you may be taking too “poisionally?” Any situation that could benefit from acceptance, forgiveness or release? Any mental structures or beliefs that require transcendence or transformation?

How can you apply Earth Humor to your situation? Any too-lofty notions that need grounding? Turn it into a butt joke. A friend of mine was involved with a very serious spiritual group where overly earnest aspirants were given to wearing robes and taking on lofty spiritual epithets. At one of these events where he was presenting, my friend was asked what title should be used in addressing him. “Call me Your Assholiness,” he said, with a big smile.

Whatever your situation, you can use Earth Humor to exaggerate it. How big was it? How bad was it? Etc., etc. There is nothing so bad it cannot be made worse by exaggeration! Exaggerate it to the point where you begin to laugh, and you have achieved fool realization.

How about Water Humor? Whatever the emotion, intensify it by exaggerating. If you find yourself suffering, see if you can enjoy that suffering. Create a grumpy grouchy alter ego. Or a peaceful angelic one. Tell your Laugh Story through that character’s voice.

Something in need of transformation? Call on the element of Fire. Is there a flash of enlightenment that can come from a spark of laughter? What situation in your life most needs to change? Imagine it as the exact opposite of what it is now, and write about that. Embellish and exaggerate. Anticipate a surprise, and then be surprised at what you get.

Air Humor is perfect for knotty problems that have furrowed your brow. If making funny
faces in the mirror and using your Mickey Mouse or Bulwinkle voice to express your frustration doesn’t help, you might need to rise to a higher level of levity. Let’s say your problem is taxes. Go to the dictionary or thesaurus and make a list of all the words that have anything to do with tax, money, and payments. Then see how the words fit together. Play with the words, and make up new words and concepts. That playfulness will lighten up the entire situation!

Years ago when I first started writing Swami material, I was doing a piece about weight loss. I went to the thesaurus, made a list of words, and had an amazing epiphany: Weight gain is caused by an unresolved Edible Complex. You think something is edible, you put it in your mouth and you gain weight.

You can use this same wordplay technique to lose weightiness.

As you write your Laugh Story as it is today, the jokes you write will give you perspective, and you will catch yourself heartily laughing with the Creator at yourself.

Mazel tov! You have become a Cosmic Fool.

5. Sit Com, and Tell A Vision

Now that you have achieved fool realization, the next step is to give your Laugh Story a happy ending. Remember, comedies always have happy endings.

The Foo Ling Masters believe that when we leave this earthly plane for the heavenly domain, we are greeted by all our friends, who hold a huge banquet in our honor. Once the sumptuous meal is over, the laughter begins. (Laughing and eating should never be done at the same time -- we wouldn’t want anyone to upchuckle, would we?)

And the laughter is created as each of your friends goes around the table, telling funny and sometimes embarrassing stories about you, in a classic Friars Club roast. In fact, that is basis for the ancient FUNdamentalist (accent on fun) blessing: “May you roast in heaven!”

Now, put yourself at the head of that banquet table, and listen to the hilarious stories that people are telling about you. Recognize that you have fulfilled a major purpose in life. You have made God laugh! When you fooly get this profound truth, you will have opened your clown chakra enough to actually hear the laugh track!

And now track backward from this blessed celebration, and imagine all the funny things that happen between here and there. While there may be an unexpected pratfall along the way, see the funny things that happen as happy coincidences and synchronicities.

While you are tracking backward, track forward as well, as you write your own tell-a-vision program. Yes, that’s right. We can program our future by telling our vision. What would you like to be, do and have during your remaining lifetime? Make your plans -- and then laugh. Remember the old riddle:
Q. What makes God laugh?

A. Hearing our plans.

When we laugh along with God, though, a funny thing happens. We release our attachment to our plans. And through the Trickster Law of Attraction (you can only have that which you want if you’re not attached to having it), those plans might actually happen.

Ha ha ha.

A Final Blessing

And so we come to the end of our cosmic comic journey. However, it is just the beginning for you. We encourage you to write your laugh story, and if you are so moved, to share it with us. We will be selecting a Laugh Story of the Month, and you can submit your entry to info@wakeuplaughing.com. You may win a prize!

Even if you don’t win a prize from us, you will have a prized possession of your own. You will have the blessed perspective of humor, a light you can always shine on the dark corners of your life.

May you wake up laughing, and leave laughter in your wake.

May the levitational pull lift up the corners of your mouth in a perpetual smile.

And may you laugh, laugh, laugh till the sacred cows come home.

The FARCE is with you
PART THREE: HUMOR RESOURCES
PART THREE:  
HUMOR RESOURCES 

JOKING IN QUOTES:  
The ZEN COHENS of Harry Cohen Baba 

Zen Cohen:  A story designed to ignite a flash of enlightenment with a spark of laughter. 

Swami Beyondananda’s guru was the venerated and beloved Harry Cohen Baba, the Garment Centered Saint.  Harry Cohen Baba had spent many, many years in the Mountains (okay, it was the Catskills), where he studied with three of the great Foo Ling Masters of the 20th century ... Henny, Benny, and Lenny.  When he came down from the mountains, he brought with him many teaching tales, all of which have a punch line. 

Whenever presented with a question, a problem or a puzzling situation, Harry Cohen Baba would respond with one of his Zen Cohens.  We include five of his favorites below, in the hopes that you will use them to spark a flash of enlightening. 

Zen Cohen #1:  Unworthiness. 

After one of his talks, Harry Cohen Baba was asked by a student, “Don’t you think it’s a bit presumptuous to think that we human beings actually deserve to enjoy life?”  

Whereupon the Garment Center Saint offered the following parable:  It was Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement.  The doctor, the lawyer and the banker were all in the front row of the synagogue.  As was the custom, each was beating his breast and declaring his unworthiness:  “I’m unworthy! I’m unworthy! I’m unworthy!”  Just then, the lowly janitor walked in.  He observed the scene, and he too walked to the front and began crying out, “I’m unworthy! I’m unworthy! I’m unworthy!”  

The lawyer turned to the banker and said, “So look who thinks he’s unworthy?”
Zen Cohen #2: Happiness.

Harry Cohen Baba was once asked how one could remain happy despite the stresses of life, and he told the following tale: Two psychiatrists each had their practice in the same building for twenty-five years, but had never spoken. After a quarter-century in practice, one still appeared young and upbeat. The other looked old and beat up. One day, they found themselves on the elevator together. Unable to contain his curiosity, the prematurely-aged psychiatrist began a conversation with his colleague. “I’ve got to know,” he began. “How can you spend twenty-five years listening to people’s problems and still look so bright and cheerful?”

“What listens?” was the reply.

Zen Cohen #3: Gratitude.

Often students would come to Harry Cohen Baba, saying “If only I had ______, I would be happy.” The Garment Centered One would smile, nod and tell the following story: More than anything in the world, Mrs. Goldberg adored her four-year-old grandson, Joshie. One day, they were wading in the surf at Brighton Beach, and a huge wave knocked them over. When she recovered, Mrs. Goldberg saw that Joshie was gone. She was beside herself, and she began to beseech God, “Please, please, please return my grandson, Joshie. I promise to keep kosher. I promise never to fight with my daughter-in-law again!”

At that moment, another huge wave broke, and knocked her down. This time, when she opened her eyes, there was her beloved Joshie right beside her. She looked at Joshie, and then looked up and said, “Nu? He had a hat?”

Zen Cohen #4: It Could Be Worse.

From time to time, someone would arrive at the ashram who had the transcendence part down, but was a little weak in the compassion department. Individuals like this always got treated to this Harry Cohen Baba story: Two men meet on the street after not having seen each other for twenty-five years.

“Wow. Twenty-five years!” says the first one. “Tell me, how is your wife.”

“Don’t ask,” replies his friend. “We were divorced, and she took me for everything. Left me penniless.”

“Well, could be worse,” replied the friend cheerfully. “And how is your business?”
“Another terrible tragedy,” came the reply. “It burned to the ground. But my fire insurance expired a week before, and I didn’t know. I lost everything.”

“Could be worse,” replied the friend. “And your son? How is your son?”

“That,” sighed the poor man, “is the saddest tragedy of all. I had dreams that one day he would be saying, ‘I would like to thank the Nobel Prize Committee.’ Instead, he’s saying, ‘You want fries with that?’”

“Could be worse,” came the reply.

At this point, the afflicted friend became very upset. He said, “Look, whatever I say, you say ‘could be worse, could be worse, could be worse.’ How could it possibly be worse?”

“It could be happening to me,” came the cheerful reply.

**Zen Cohen #5: The Importance of Speaking Up.**

At Harry Cohen Baba’s ashram it was the custom for everyone to speak at once, and some people found this intimidating. “Speak up!” he would cheerfully insist, and he would tell the following story: A young man became quite wealthy, and took a trip around the world. He loved his mother and wanted to get her a unique and memorable gift.

He was in a marketplace in South America, where he came upon what he was looking for -- a mynah bird that spoke twelve languages fluently. So he paid $1,500 and had the bird shipped to his mother’s apartment in Brooklyn. When he returned to the States a month later, he eagerly called his mother. “So, ma,” he asked, “how’d you like the gift?”

“It was delicious,” she replied.

He was stunned. “Mom, don’t tell me you ate that bird! That bird spoke twelve languages!”

“So,” the mother replied, “he should have said something.”
I have long been a supporter of the human potential movement. No matter what I see on the 6:00 news, I still feel we have the potential to be human. But how do we actually actualize our humanity? How do we humanifest our full potential? Many teachers are telling us that the shift is already taking place. Perhaps you have felt the gears grinding in your own karma. Well, there is no better way to lubricate your transmission than with laughter. That is why so many formerly-serious people have joined the humorin’ potential movement and become FUNdamentalists -- accent on “fun.”

Like many of you, I began as a seeker of wisdom. I came of age during the sects revolution, and I explored all kinds of kinky sects. But I never felt fulfilled. I finally saw the light when I woke up one morning with a sugar hangover at a biker crash pad. I was wearing an orange leather vest and reeked of incense. Yes, I had become a Harley Krishna. I took a good look at myself in the mirror, and that’s when enlightening struck and I found foolfillment. I became fooly-realized the moment I realized that I was a fool -- and there was nothing to do about it but laugh. And I’ve been preaching FUNdamentalism ever since.

The Five Fundamentals of FUNdamentalism

1. **Life Is a Joke – But God Is Laughing With Us, Not At Us.** God is tuned to the Comedy Channel, and we are His Funniest Home Videos. We take turns being comedian and straight man (and yes, a gay woman can be a straight man -- it happens all the time), so we get the fool spectrum of experience. And we have free choice. We get to choose whether or not we laugh. While we FUNdamentalists are ardently pro-laugh, we are pro-choice as well. We honor every human being’s right to not be amused. But I figure, why resist a Farce that is greater than any of us? If life is a sitcom, might as well sit calm and enjoy it.

2. **Fun Is Fundamental.** FUNdamentalists believe that life is fundamentally fun -- that underneath all the stress, distress and negativity, there is an deep well of joy. Each time laughter bubbles up from that well, we experience deep wellness. A fooly-aware person need only look in the mirror to begin laughing. So play to God daily. Surrender to the Farce, and smile ... you’re on Candid Karma.

3. **A Laugh Track Has Been Provided.** The FUNdamentalist scriptures tell us that on the Eighth Day, God saw the world was funny and created Laughter. And since we were humoring Him, He decided to humor us. So He provided a laugh track so we could laugh along. But when
things get serious, we lose track of the laugh track. Fortunately, the best way to overcome gravity is with levity. We can use the levitational pull to help us rise above whatever is bringing us down -- and help us get back on track.

4. **We Are Put In the Material World To Get More Material.** Spirit is immaterial, so it must materialize to experience anything. Without material existence, there would be nothing to laugh about and no one to do the laughing. We have been given the human jestive system to turn the material of life into laughter. When we laugh, God laughs. And when we laugh with God, we are using the spiritual to heal the material. To be happy in life, you must be able to take a joke. And if you can leave a few as well, all the better.

5. **Nonjudgment Day Is At Hand!** When a majority of human beings would rather laugh than condemn, we will have an uncritical mass, and this will usher in Nonjudgment Day. On Nonjudgment Day, we will all win beauty contests. Lawyers will disappear, and all our trials will be over. On this glorious day when enlightening strikes, our clown chakras will open, we will become fooly-realized, and we will finally get the joke. The world will stop -- and everyone will get off.
INTRODUCING THE WAKE UP LAUGHING CO-HEARTS

We are pleased and honored to present those in the Wake Up Laughing community who have supported this venture wholeheartedly from the outset. Not only have they aligned themselves with awakening through laughter, but their vocation makes the world a healthier, happier place. In other words, not only are they bringing more laughter to the world ... they are bringing more smiles as well.

These individuals and organizations are members of our emerging “butterfly” community, and they are worthy of our support. Please take the time to click on their websites and explore their endeavors. You may find something that you’ve been looking for, and you may find something the world is looking for. If you appreciate their work, tell them and tell others.

We are at the very beginning stages of “weaving a web of mass-construction” in a grassroots economy that increases love, health, beauty and functionality on the planet. This web can and will prosper all worthy work, good goods and greater goodness. We are all in the same economic boat ... so may we all laugh all the way to the bank.

Steve Bhaerman
Tapping For Kids” by EFT Practitioner Angie Muccillo is an EFT Children’s book designed to teach 7-11 year olds how to use EFT as a tool to help them overcome their fears, worries and everyday traumas as well as build their self-esteem. “Tapping For Kids” offers a thorough introduction to EFT told through story, activities and rhyme, enhancing children’s learning and capturing their interest in EFT.

http://tappingforkids.com/

The Art of Play: Helping Adults Reclaim Imagination and Spontaneity

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http://www.blatner.com/adam/books.html#artofplay
Aurosoorya focuses on assisting organizations advance their fractal journeys to thereby increase receptivity to the possibilities arising from system-consciousness

http://www.aurosoorya.com/

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http://www.constancefunk.com/

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http://www.greatcosmichappyass.com/
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http://playlovelive.com/

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Elise Kloter offers subscribers, a window on emerging culture through the stories of individuals, projects and organizations that are literally changing the paradigm. We are dedicated to illuminating and accelerating the shift to a sustainable world that works for everyone.

http://newparadigmdigest.com/

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http://www.ivegottobeme.com/

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**Illumination Arts Publishing**

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**Lee Glickstein** -- Founder of *Speaking Circles International* and author of *Be Heard Now! Tap Into Your Inner Speaker and Communicate with Ease* (Random House)

I engage the alchemy of Relational Presence to dissolve the illusion of separation and thus self-consciousness that blocks free and bold expression and essential listening. We imaginal cells have a story to know and tell and hear in a way that strengthens the organizing signal we are receiving and sending toward the evolution of Humanity as a cooperative organism.


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Mark Iberg

http://www.lcsvs.com/

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http://www.stephanielahar.com/

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http://www.sedonawizardschool.com/
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Mitchell Jay Rabin

I went into psychology and the healing arts as a counselor, coach, therapist and Stress Management Consultant in the early ‘80’s to help people see how nutty we all are in the hope that by seeing that, we might just be able to come to a less nutty and wiser view, infused with humor, love and compassion. I founded A Better World and its radio and TV programs to continue this theme but to many others. And I continue to enjoy waking people up, including myself, every morning, to celebrate the magnificence of this life and the re-emergence of common sense, which I see happening across the planet. Through A Better World, I do my best to contribute this to our larger world in any number of creative, eco-entrepreneurial and exciting ways.

http://www.abetterworld.net/

Brad Blanton

How my work enhances happiness on the planet: Radical Honesty about what you think, what you feel and what you have done creates the possibility of authentic contact between you and others and creates the only chance of real intimacy between all of us.

http://www.radicalhonesty.com/

Cezanna Christine Malter
Naturopath
Founder of Joyous Living

Joyous Living is dedicated to health, wealth, and longevity. We are a global community of inspired leaders who are living our passion and empowering others to live their highest potential.

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