



WORLD PEACE THROUGH LAUGHTER

"Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone."

Intrigued by a notice of a Laughter Club meeting in Grey Lynn, Ponsonby News went along to experience this world wide phenomenon firsthand. Many moons ago the movement had its origins in India, (where else?) with mainly older men getting together in open parks to practice group laughter.

Eventually, in 1995, a Doctor Madan Kalaria got on to a good thing and formed a Laughter Yoga Club in Mumbai. It started with just five people laughing their socks off in a local park but the concept spread like a bushfire. Presently there are more than 10,000 laughter clubs in sixty countries.

What on earth motivates people to shed their inhibitions and engage in what many would regard as a very eccentric exercise? Well leader of the Ponsonby Laughter Club, Bob Harvey spoke of why he is an enthusiast. For years he was clinically depressed. Medication didn't seem to alleviate his condition and he was sick and tired of being such a drag.

Boredom is a great motivator, so he yielded to his wife's persuasion and went with her to a laughteryoga session. To begin with it didn't have much effect but he persevered, and lo and behold, it started to work. The downs became less deep, the depression less severe and now his life has turned around for the better. For him "laughter is the best medicine".

Now one's sense of funny may not be in accord with another's but that's inconsequential as far as laughteryoga is concerned because apparently the body does not differentiate between fake and real laughter. Either sort combined with yoga breathing sends more oxygen to the brain which in turn has both physiological and psychological benefits. A typical session includes talking gibberish, playful method acting techniques, ho ho ha ha dancing, meditative breathing and gentle stretching. Anyone is welcome to give it a go and the only cost is a gold coin donation. Once the session is ended the Ponsonby group do a bit of socialising at the Williamson Road Café.

This year World Laughter Day is on the 2nd of May and there's every chance a record will be broken in Sydney by having more than 10,000 people in attendance at a single laughter event. Is it possible the movement might fulfil its aim of bringing about world peace through laughter? An Alan Alda quote: "When people are laughing, they're generally not killing each other". Well I wouldn't like to lay a bet on that one but who knows? One can't help but admire such optimism.

In the meantime the Ponsonby Laughter Club meets every Saturday morning from 10.00am to 10.45am at 13 Mairdstone Street, Grey Lynn where they really whoop it up and have a lot of fun. (DEIRDRE ROELANTS) PN

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