

One Thousand Laughs

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Phinney Laughter Club – It Really Is The Best Medicine

By Craig Blackmon

Dreary, drippy, dark days of winter got you down? Well, all is not lost. Follow the sounds of laughter emanating from the Red Room of the Phinney Neighborhood Center every Wednesday from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. – those sounds lead to a healthier, happier life. Or at least a life with more laughter – and that’s not bad.

So what’s everyone laughing at down there? What on earth is so darn funny? Well, nothing actually. It’s a meeting of the Phinney Laughter Club, a group of people who get together once a week to improve their physical and mental health through laughter. That’s right – when all is said and done, it turns out laughing is no laughing matter.

The laughter club movement started in India in 1995. Dr. Madan Kitaria and four others recognized the benefits of laughing. They met regularly to laugh together, and Dr. Kitaria promoted laughter among his patients. Soon a movement was born. In 1997 Madan invented World Laughter Day, which was celebrated for the first time in Mumbai (Bombay) on January 10, 1998.

At about the same time, American psychologist Steve Wilson was preparing to lecture in India and was intrigued to learn that there was an Indian physician prescribing laughter for his patients. Madan and Steve met in India and developed an instant rapport based on a shared sense of urgency in promoting the benefits of laughter. In May of 1998, Steve invented the World Laughter Tour, which adopted the slogan “Think Globally, Laugh Locally.”

According to its website, WLT has since come to be recognized as a significant global influence in the practical applications of laughter and humor for health and world peace. Today there are more than 800 laughter clubs in India, and clubs are springing up throughout this country as well. For more information about WLT, check out their website www.worldlaughtertour.com.

Laughter (much like milk) does a body good. As reported by WLT, laughter provides many benefits: improved immune functions; causes vibrating muscles to give internal massage; benefits the cardiovascular system; relieves stress through the discharge of physical and emotional tension; and promotes a cooperative work environment.

At laughter club meetings the participants alternate laughing exercises with breathing and stretching. The laughing exercises consist of particular laughs. Each laugh has an individual theme that focuses the laughter. Examples of particular laughs include the Lion Laugh (based on a yogic posture), the Skipping Laugh, the Hearty Laugh and the Silent Laugh. Every session ends with three affirmations and each person goes home happier and healthier.

If you're interested in participating, stop by the Red Room any Wednesday evening or contact Teresa Verde at 206-784-9776/onethousandlaughs@yahoo.com.

So what are you waiting for? Stop sitting around and start laughing!