

Go forth and practice random acts of laughter. Ripples of laughter will wash the brightest pearls onto the shores of your life. Laughter makes life the merriest of go-rounds and will keep you from getting dizzy. Most of all, be sure to laugh at yourself. Others are laughing at you, so why not you, too?

You can explore Richard Lederer's Web site at www.verbivore.com

LOOKING AT LANGUAGE
The Power of Laughter

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An Apache myth tells us that the Creator made man able to walk and talk, to see and hear -- to do everything. But the Creator wasn't satisfied. Finally he made man laugh, and when man laughed and laughed, the Creator said, "Now you are fit to live."

In Navajo culture, there is something called the First Laugh Ceremony. Tradition dictates that each Navajo baby is kept on a cradle board until he or she laughs for the first time. Then the tribe throws a celebration in honor of the child's first laugh, which is considered to be his or her birth as a social being.

We are not only Homo sapiens, the creature who thinks. We are Homo guffawus, the creature who laughs.

Did you know that babies are born with certain natural instincts? Neurologists have discovered that the reason babies cry right after they are born is that they instinctively understand the magnitude of the national debt they are going to be saddled with.

Just kidding. But I'm completely serious when I report the fact that five-year-olds laugh naturally about 250 times a day. How sad it is that as we age, we almost inevitably gain girth and lose mirth. Many of us don't laugh 250 times a month!

"Man is the only animal who blushes - or needs to," wrote Mark Twain. He could have added, "Man is the only animal that truly laughs. Or needs to." How solemn can God be if He endowed us with the priceless gift of laughter?

We all need to laugh. Recent studies have shown that he or she who laughs lasts. Norman Cousins, who used laughter to conquer a debilitating disease, writes "Illness is not a laughing matter. Perhaps it ought to be. Laughter moves your internal organs around. It enhances respiration. It is an igniter of great expectation It has always seemed to me that hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without having to go outdoors."

Laughter stimulates the circulation, tones the muscles, energizes the lungs and respiratory system, stimulates endorphins in the immune system and provides superb aerobic exercise. In "Make 'Em Laugh," Stanford University professor William Fry explains, "When laughter gets to the point where it is called 'convulsive,' almost every muscle in the body is involved." Laughter is also an elixir for the mind. Tests administered before and after humor therapy reveal a reduction of stress and depression and a heightened sense of well-being and creativity. More and more, science is discovering that it hurts only when we don't laugh. "Laughter is to life what shock absorbers are to automobiles. It won't take the potholes out of the road, but it sure makes the ride smoother," observes Barbara Johnson.

According to Robert Provine, author of "Laughter, A Scientific Investigation," we laugh also to promote social bonding-- a trigger that appears to be genetically determined. His studies document that we actually laugh more frequently during the course of conversation at things that aren't funny to show agreement or approval, than we do to voice our amusement at something that tickles our funny bone.

"Humor is not a trick," writes author and "Prarie Home Companion" host Garrison Keillor. "Humor is a presence in the world-- like grace-- and shines on everybody." The profound act of laughter is a special blessing to us who live in the long, dark shadow of that day terrorism shook our land. The late and beloved humorist Erma Bombeck, whose column "At Wit's End" was read by millions, speaks to us today: "Laughter rises out of tragedy, when you need it the most, and rewards you for your courage."