

The last laugh - dissolving into the paradox

N.B - The following is very unlikely to be amusing....

For most people the nature of the state of “self” is very strongly present, whether it be it through an expression of a personal and highly sensitive feeling of anxiety or a detached aloofness about the world. However several things can render the “self” less powerful which are associated with the sensory perceptions, for example looking in the way suggested by Douglas Harding www.headless.org where one is able to see from a headless position that there isn’t an absolute “me” or an absolute “you” that’s “looking out”, and this can trigger a sense of Oneness. Also with physical touch such as a hug, or with connection to an object, it’s hard to sense the specific point where “you” begin and the object or other person ends. Similarly with hearing, who is actually hearing what’s heard, who is the person listening... interestingly the sound is always occurring in the same place and at that point no-thing exists. Even with taste and the sense of smell, those things aren’t occurring to anyone, they’re simply happening. However when it comes to words we have a major problem, they’re a cognitive expression and in a lot of ways they block the senses, through them we’re using the analytic process of the mind, of thinking and trying to understand something, and as a result of the processes of the mind we become separate from the senses.

Interestingly many of today’s expressions of comic wit/sarcasm, especially in the Western world, are verbal. There are also of course elements of slapstick but in either case the humour is visual or associated with cognitive expression. Fundamentally, such humour completely baffles the senses, contrary to the way we think/see things should be, it flips reality on its head. So with slapstick comedy where somebody may be run over or fall from a skyscraper, even though somebody may be hurt at the end of it there’s an absurdity about the nature of how they’re hurt, a making light of something which would otherwise be viewed as a situation of immense suffering. In this way humour is forming paradoxes, by doing the opposite of what we expect it to, drawing the mind to the limit and beyond its normal boundaries, by ridiculing something or as a gesture of craziness upending what is otherwise a normalcy of human life. Steve Coogan is a good example of this with his fictional character of Alan Partridge, as are Eddie Izzard, Monty Python and the Goons, and of course the non-verbal slapstick of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, all of these expressions completely overturn reality.

This is important to the human mind because what’s occurring through these paradoxes causes a short-circuiting, and an expression which breaks down social conformity. It is anarchic, completely uprooting the formatted idea of “self” or the human adult, this simply allows the freedom or nature of the childlike expression to come to the surface. Unsurprisingly the Court jester or joker are associated with childishness and are also often in close proximity to people such as Kings and Queens who are expressions of conformity in the world, the jester/joker thereby serves to break down conventional behaviour and turn it into complete anarchy. It’s interesting that Kings needed jesters to be involved to make them laugh to shatter the seriousness of the adult world and break through the misery of the adult’s confinement.

Throughout history this has been the case, essentially the sage is also associated with the court jester and certainly in Taoist expression, where the “self” has evaporated, the initial response is one of hilarity, everything that’s considered to be important in the world is in fact seen to be completely ridiculous, the madness of the individual, of the so-called impersonal or personal is completely dissolved into complete hilarity. Therefore this bursting open for the fearful or personal expression of “self” by the introduction of hilarity can then be a movement into a state of calmness that what was taken so personally, isn’t personal. For the more detached, cut-off expression of “self”, humour shatters this and engages the person in a warm expression with the world, thereby ending their feeling of separation.

So the nature of humour is incredibly important for humans today, when the identification with “self” is so strong, because it’s one of the few triggers of humans’ cognitive processes through which one can get to the end of words, ideas and ideologies, obliterating them in a mad explosion which is essentially the joke. Even if only for a fleeting second, the process of actually laughing is a dissolving of the “self”, just as when one dissolves into tears, or passion or creation, there is a dissolving of the “self”, humour perhaps being the most universally accessible. Interestingly in many warmer climates such as Africa, Brazil, India and other equatorial countries where there is an indigenous population, the people are often clearly smiling, making little jokes or engaged in humorous activity. In the West, especially in northern regions, there’s less natural exuberance and openness simply due to the climate. The surface of the body is a lot cooler in temperate regions and the nature of a cooling atmosphere creates a more hidden expression which in a certain sense creates a “champagne cork” effect, the energy of the “self” being contracted and held in for a long time. So humour comes through like an explosion, a busting-open, whereas in warmer climates the laughter is simply in the atmosphere constantly.

The last laugh essentially is when the “self” dies and the paradox of the joke breaks open and completely obliterates the nature of “self”, for “self” and the joke cannot co-exist. When there is a dropping-away of “self” and liberation from this contracted state, though not necessarily just through a joke, very often initially there’s a huge hilarity at how the humans seem to be so contracted into this state of “self” and believe it to be extremely important and absolute. The seeing-through of this causes laughter and the realisation that this is a complete illusion. So when the paradox breaks for the last time it is an expression of the last laugh, in fact they call it the cosmic joke. In a certain sense this only happens once, because thereafter there is a movement back to nature. Laughter can of course still happen, but from then on it does so without the “self”, without it being a personal issue or something associated with the breaking down of reality, it simply happens because of the nature of paradox within a sentence or a situation. However most jokes we only experience at a superficial level, where the paradox is seen only in a particular situation or experience, a joke setting, such as delivered by comedians, but the comedians are not necessarily expressions of liberated energy, even though they laugh at their own jokes!

The nature of the joke for a split-second touches on something which goes beyond the “self”, the paradox it illustrates, in fact any paradox that occurs is the

humorous because the mind can't get around or over it, the mind is stopped in its tracks. So this laughter is a complete end of "self", it is death, ending in an explosion of emotion, even in tears. Similarly when people die often others are grief-stricken because there is a mini death of "myself" in association with the one who has died, the "self"- has to go through a re-structuring process.

So laughter and humour, while mostly associated with the exuberance of life and joyfulness, also relate to a death, they associate with a dying of what we consider to be "real" and breaking that down into something else. When we see magic tricks or illusions, someone is shown to be flying or is making something disappear, or is demonstrating a card trick, people's response is laughter and cheering, gasps of incredulity because of the impossibility of what's going on. Yet this is the nature of the illusionist, they're breaking up what we consider to be real, making things that are solid invisible, saying that what we perceive to be something is in fact no-thing. This is a difficult concept for the human being, the mind can't cope with it, rather than going deeply into the paradox and falling apart, the "self" manages the situation after breaking away for a split-second by returning strongly and quickly categorizing whatever it's seen as being a particular thing, i.e. the joke as a joke or the illusion as an illusion. So it's only at the last laugh, where "self" dies away and then all there is, is laughter, one could say it's a laugh to end all laughs, or a grief to end all griefs, it's the end of the line for the "self" which simply dies away.

So the process of humour is deeply healing, as understood by doctors such as Patch Adams who uses humour in most of his connections with patients, simply because it lets go of the "self" for a brief moment and there is relief because there's no more tension around "me" needing to be something finite. The joke breaks the finite "self" into the infinite boundless quality of nature.

David Nassim
06/03/2012