

《研究ノート》

Study of Dr. Sutorius' Theory Concerning Laughter

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Introduction

This is a report concerning laughing meditation that was first proposed by Dr. Sutorius in the Netherlands. Dutch -born Dr. Sutorius, a dermatologist, has given up pills and potions. Instead he proscribes a good belly laugh, or to give this "therapy" a more exciting title, the ancient art of laughing meditation.

He said that laughing is a very special phenomenon. Unfortunately its (psycho) therapeutic value is underestimated and the incredible transforming positive force, hidden in laughter, is not used to its full extent. Laughter is a very good anti-stress and gives profound relaxation. He likes to draw our attention to the laughing meditation, a structured exercise of fifteen minutes with three stages: 1. Stretching all the muscles, 2. Laughing (and /or crying) 3. Silence.

He emphasizes the laughing meditation is no therapy, but it can be, as laughter is so healthy, very therapeutic. It can be used as an adjunct in all kinds of therapy and also in other situations it can enhance the coping with all of life's woes.

Since 1978 he has conducted this laughing meditation, which he learned from the Indian philosopher Osho in 1976, at all kinds of medical symposiums, congresses and meetings, sometimes partly broadcasted on radio and television in different countries. In 1985 he founded the CENTER IN FAVOUR OF LAUGHTER in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and since then he also has conducted what he calls "Laugh-shops."

He says laughter brings us in no time in this moment, in touch with the present. The laughing muscles are in general rather rigid, but will get better trained if we laugh more often. And everyday it will be easier and easier to do. Meditation can be described as awareness without thinking or to be in the NO-MIND condition. That is possible in many situations when we do something totally without awareness. This can happen when we are running, dancing or working in the garden and practicing Zazen.

Instruction

Laughing meditation is a morning meditation, but it is also possible to do it later, before lunch or dinner. Bladder and stomach should be almost empty. It can be done with yourself or with "the other" in the mirror or with any group of participants. Stay all the time in the present and be totally in command every second of this short meditation, without forcing any conclusion.

Allow us to laugh without a reason. However, we may use any reason or situation, which let us

laugh. Or use a first class trigger. Make a list of the top ten of our favorite problems in such a way, that the heaviest problem number is number 1, and so on and so forth. Suddenly we look at existence from a totally different angle and more in perspective with all other things in life. Laughter transforms and makes things lighter. Dr. Sutorius says, "Sometimes I feel it myself as if I dive from the hell in my head into the paradise in my belly."

It is better to laugh with than to laugh about someone or something, placing us on a pedestal. Laughing at or to laugh about is cold and unpleasant; to laugh with someone is warm and acceptable. That is why it is so pleasant to laugh with our partner, with children, with friends, with colleagues or with grandmas. It is all energy originating from emotions.

As laughter and crying are very close, it is possible that in the second stage our laughter suddenly turns into crying. If that happens, enjoy the crying; cry with all our energy from our belly, until the crying finishes by itself, and then start actively laughing again. So we may also laugh with our tears or cry with our laughter.

Dr. Sutorius quotes if we can cry and allow our total being to get into it and dissolve into it; we will have a totally different quality of laughter arising in us. Allow it to happen. It is beautiful.

Stages of the Laughing Meditation

1. Stretching, total stretching (5 minutes)

First we use our energy to stretch our muscles and if possible, start yawning. While stretching it is good to breathe out, in the same position inhale and continue stretching breathing out. In the last minutes of this first stage stretch our fingers and our face muscles and without laughing make strange faces.

Following pictures show some examples of how to stretch:

2. Laughing and /or crying (5 minutes)

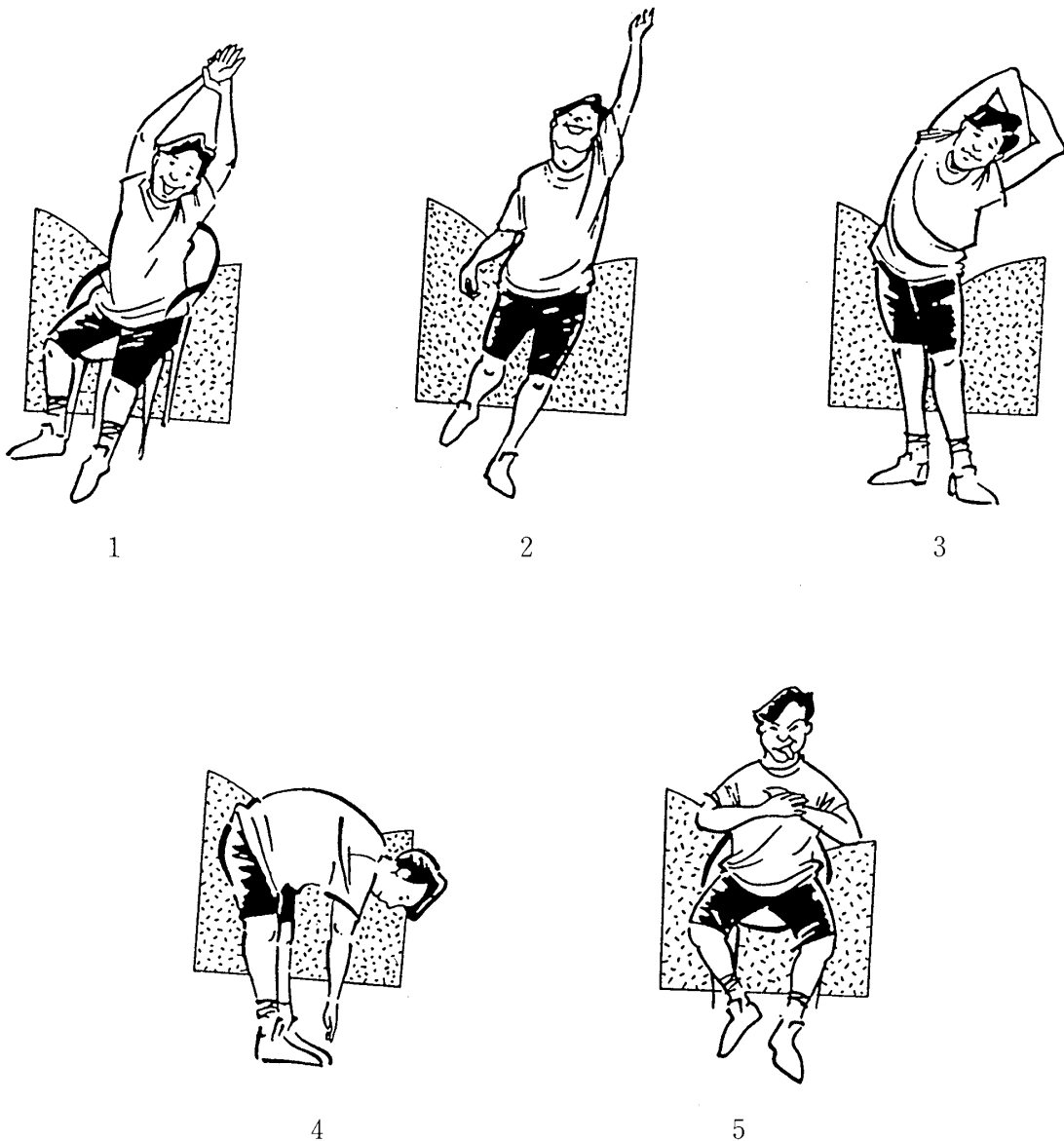
Secondly we smile and slowly, with a relaxed throat, start laughing without any exertion until we have a really heartfelt belly laugh. We must focus all the time our awareness on what there is at the moment and whatever we feel in that very moment, laugh with that in mind. It is more a matter of allowing and of letting go. Letting-go is the secret of meditation.

Especially in the first minute let it built up slowly, just let it happen. No forcing at all, "*allegro ma non troppo*", no screaming, no yelling, only laughing and /or crying, not from the throat, but relaxed from the belly. Just allow it to bubble from our belly; let it be a belly ballet.

If we have another feeling or emotion, for instance when we get angry, then use the total energy of that other emotion to laugh or cry with it. In the last minute of this stage, we close our eyes and continue laughing.

3. Silence (5 minutes)

Suddenly we stop laughing and keep our eyes closed. Let our whole body be still without any movements. The slightest movement will change our state of consciousness. Breathe in total silence without controlling the rhythm of our breathing. Just let it happen. Every time when we



1. Stretching with upraised arms, clasping the back of one hand with the other hand as much as you can and alternate from time to time.
2. Stand and stretch upward with one arm, keeping the other arm at your side, as if you are picking an apple from a tree, alternate from time to time.
3. Standing with arms interlaced over head, bend the body from the hips from side to side.
4. From a standing position, keep your legs straight (upright) and touch your toes with your fingers.
5. Either standing or sitting, clasp your hands together in front of your chest, and stretch each finger individually. Exercise your face by grimacing and rolling your tongue around in and out side your mouth.

find ourselves thinking, feel a "good bye" for those thoughts and focus our awareness on our body, contact with Mother Earth and also on the feelings we have at that very moment, whatever we feel, whatever it is, feel a "YES" to that.

Dr. Sutorius' remarks:

If you totally want to stop laughing, then you can. The sudden silence in this third stage of the laughing meditation is the big difference with all the other laughter. Your whole awareness is needed to be totally present in the moment.

The key of this meditation is always to focus your awareness on what is occurring for you in that very moment. Whatever it is, laugh (or cry) with it.

Laughter has everything to do with ACCEPTANCE: the moment you accept totally the situation, the others or yourself you can laugh. If someone gets some insights in a certain-sometimes difficult-situation, then quite often a roaring laughter emerges from the belly as a reaction. It is also possible to do this the other way around: starting with laughter...and the insights follow as shadows.

Osho, his teacher says, "When you have a heartfelt belly laugh, all parts of your being, the physiological, the psychological, the spiritual, they all vibrate in one single tune, they all vibrate in harmony."

Some responses of participants:

Some responses of participants after having done a laughing meditation:

A deep relaxation / a feeling of being "whole" / a feeling of being unburdened / a feeling of peace / the pain is gone or the pain is less / I feel my tears or / I feel sad / I feel as if I took a shower inside myself / a feeling of ACCEPTANCE: a huge "YES" for what is NOW, what I have NOW, for what I am NOW.

Henriette Adama Van Schelttema wrote in her book *DEAD IS NO MORE DEAD*, "my experience with dying" in Zeist, Netherlands, 1988.

In this book she describes shortly her experiences with the laughing meditation, which Dr. Sutorius conducted at the 10th anniversary of a medical center in Zeist in the Netherlands:

"After five minutes being silent (third stage of the laughing meditation) with closed eyes, we all find one or two words that express our feelings. "Surprised" I felt. I did not have special thoughts and felt nice next to my friend. The pain that I had gotten in joints of my fingers, by trimming a rosebush, was suddenly gone. I felt energy streaming through me. I decided to laugh more. That helped me surely on my way. It was almost similar to dancing."

Wouter Van der Schaar, Medical Psychologist from the University of Amsterdam, did in 1985 a research about the effects of this laughing meditation done by chronic pain patients. After three weeks having done a daily laughing meditation, they felt generally better, laughing more during the day, using their laughing muscles more during the day, the pain was not always less, (sometimes it was, sometimes not), but they could always handle their pain better. So in their process of daily laughing meditation their attitude toward life generally improved.

Dr. Sutorius explains that people with high-pitch voices will get a voice coming at a more natural level. Speaking, singing, crying, and laughing come from the same center in your belly. When a child falls on the floor, anyone can hear if the crying comes straight from the center in the belly or a little bit higher; a little bit harder to let know the parents or the caretaker to give a hand to help. Also with laughter, you can hear if the laughter is forced, if the laughter is harder than the person feels it. The sound or the timber of the laughter or the crying reveals clearly if it is forced or not.

Conclusion

The author mentioned in this paper the outline of laughing meditation, which has been developed by Dr. Sutorius in the Netherlands.

First I thought that Dr. Sutorius' theory of laughing meditation had some contradictions, because meditation is usually practiced in *Zazen* at the temple very quietly without laughing in Japan. But soon after I met Dr. Sutorius at the Seminar House OININIO in Amsterdam near Central Station and watched the video which he used in his laughing meditation session at one of the TV programs in England, all my contradictions concerning his theory disappeared. He demonstrated how to stretch (first stage), how to laugh (second stage), and how to meditate (third stage) in detail very kindly. Naturally I became one of his students. I found myself practicing laughing meditation with him. And I learned its effectiveness through experience.

Dr. Sutorius was invited to many international congresses such as British National Conference "Stress Management" in York (UK) and International Congress of Chronic Diseases "Patient Education 2000" in Geneva. I think that his theory has already been recognized in Europe.

Before I left his seminar house, he suggested that I postpone my opinion about the effects of the laughing meditation until I had done this every day for at least three weeks. And everyday, as if it is for the very first time, it opens something new. To him, even after many laughing meditations, every time is new, fresh and mind-blowing. He also suggests making my own Laughing Meditation Diary. Before and after each meditation it is good to find one or two words, which are the closest to the feeling I had in that moment. And if no words are rising then perhaps I can see an image or picture that shows my feelings of that moment the best. After the laughing meditation I had better write down those words or images or pictures I had in my mind and also -as a personal sharing or feedback- how the laughing meditation was at that time. Then I will have a very interesting laughing meditation experience.

I thought Dr. Sutorius' laughing meditation is very usable for the university regular classes if I practiced it well. Because these days laughing is disappearing from our classes in the University. It seems to me that laughter is a very strong energizer for students. .