

Deseret Morning News, Monday, June 25, 2007

Utahns get a laugh out of yoga

Fake laughter is called as good as real thing

By **Elaine Jarvik**

Deseret Morning News

At its very basic, says Sebastien Gendry, laughter is simply a matter of the diaphragm moving rapidly in and out. But the myths about laughter persist, he says, that "you have to be happy to laugh, that you have to have a sense of humor to laugh and that you need a reason to laugh."

Gendry is a guru of a technique known as Laughter Yoga and is founder of the American School of Laughter Yoga in Los Angeles. This past weekend he presented a \$295 "laughter training" workshop in Salt Lake City.

Fake laughter is just as good as the real thing, says Gendry, who in the middle of an interview might just spontaneously say "ha ha. Ha ha ha ha." Start laughing, even if it's simulated laughter, and pretty soon you'll change the chemistry of your body — all that oxygen from breathing in so deeply will make you healthier, and the endorphins will lighten your spirits, he says.

Gendry is a Frenchman who was raised by two serious parents; he didn't give himself permission to laugh as an adult until he discovered Laughter Yoga, he says.

The technique, begun 12 years ago by Dr. Madan Kataria, a family physician in Mumbai, India, combines deep breathing and laughing.

"Laughter is a powerful workout. ... Science says you should laugh three times a week for 15 minutes," he says.

On Sunday, the workshop's participants stood in a circle and followed Gentry's playful lead.

"How would you laugh if your underwear was too tight?" he asked. "Now how would you laugh at the Laughter Olympics in the 'how would you laugh if your underwear was too tight' competition?"

"Let's start our laughter engines," Gentry continued, putting his hand on his head as if he were turning a key four times. "Ha. Ha ha. Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha." Then everybody pretended to drive around the room as if they were maniacal bumper cars. At first the laughter sounded like the laugh-track for a mediocre sitcom, random and sort of insincere. But soon everybody was genuinely giggling and guffawing.

"Laughter forces you into the here and now," Gentry says. "There's no room for the past, so there's no room for guilt. There's no room for the future, so there's no room for worry. And there's no ego if there's no past and no future."



Len Wright of Orem, left, gets all worked up in a Laughter Yoga workshop, conducted by Sebastien Gendry, right, at the Shilo Inn in Salt Lake City recently.

August Miller, Deseret Morning News

There are now 5,000 free laughter clubs in 55 countries, and 200 in the United States, he says. There are currently no Laughter Clubs in Salt Lake City, but two of the workshop participants plan to start one, and a third hopes to start one at the Taylorsville Senior Center. Len Wright, who does "quantum touch" therapy, started a Laughter Club in Orem this past spring.

"There's always time to have a happy childhood," Wright says.



Sebastien Gendry, sitting on bed, watches participants do a laughter exercise at a Laughter Yoga workshop at a hotel in Salt Lake City.

August Miller, Deseret Morning News

The workshop participants, who all are now "certified laughter trainers," hope to take their new skills to paying gigs at nursing homes, hospitals and corporations. Gendry says his typical fee is \$1,500 for a session.

"What would our title be?" asked one woman, wondering what she might put on her business card.

"Yoga has a negative connotation," answered Gendry, who offered this alternative: "stress management consultant."

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