

Laughter is the Highest Practice

By Carolyn Reynolds

My first hatha yoga teacher would often place little bags of catalogues and information at our feet while we were in relaxation. One of the catalogues was The Kripalu Experience. That was the one that stayed in the “reading room” to be perused over and over again. The biographies of the residents revealed bright, professional people who had lived at the ashram for up to 10 years. That was a big impetus for me to accept this very unorthodox thing to do at that time in my life: sign up of a one month’s stay at an ashram for a yoga teacher training program. But first a short stay was in order to confirm my intuition and check out the place. Todd Norian led a workshop for people who were new to Kripalu. One of the things he said that made me really like the place was, “The only sin at Kripalu is seriousness.” I realized that I had been taking my life so seriously that I didn’t remember when I last had a good laugh or had been able to laugh at myself. Of course there were serious times during that month of teacher training but they were balanced by play and laughter. It was a great month that July of 1989.

Why is it so easy for some of us to view our lives with such deadly seriousness that we can end up in clinical depression, believing with all our hearts that we are victims of others’ mean actions or twists of fate? And it happens very early in our lives. There is so much to learn when you first come into the world to make you socially acceptable to the important adults. Don’t touch that, don’t pee in your pants, don’t spit that out-eat it, don’t talk to people like that, don’t bother me, wipe that grin off your face, shut your mouth, and on and on and on. It’s all so serious. You could have fun only when you were with your friends. Then you had to turn it off and come in the house to reality. We get older and playing outside with our friends is too often at the end of the never-ending list of things to do. Only the serious stuff gets done. And then Todd gave us permission to not be serious and even called it a sin. Boy did that rattle around for awhile because I didn’t know where to put it. But I liked it. However, it takes more than permission to have fun to know how to do it.

My friend invited me to a Champagne Ladies trip to New Orleans. My first firm response was, “Hell, no.” There is too much to do. There is a long list of things to do, books I want to read, practices I want to do, I have got to meditate, and I feel guilty about leaving my husband. But my friend is a great salesperson and a great friend. I ended up saying OK to the trip. However, as the time came nearer, I was more and more disgruntled with my acquiescence.

It was about 6 o’clock in the morning and folks were arriving for the bus trip. The theme is Outrageous Red and husbands are dropping off wives in red sequenced gowns, red baby doll pajamas, red fish net stockings, garters and bustiers with red feather boas and 6 inch red high heels! Most are crone-aged women doing Aphrodite and having an absolute ball. There I sat in my red sweatshirt mesmerized with these women who went outside to play with their friends. Many bottles of champagne were opened on the way to New

Orleans. Music enticed dancing in the aisle. Finger foods abounded. And a lesson learned.

When these experiences were shared with my first yoga teacher who is now my spiritual sister/mother/mentor, she said, “Remember, Carolyn, that it is ALL yoga, even the outrageous red and the champagne. It is ALL yoga.”

Yoga is the mind/body/spirit connection and nothing nourishes the spirit/soul like connecting with our fellow humans in fun and laughter. Take time for balancing your serious side with levity and making soul connections. It may take some planning but, boy is it worth it. And then, when you attain the perspective to laugh at even the serious stuff, you know you are a yogi.