

Sunday, August 04, 2013

Laughter Yoga and the Sacrament of the pie for Unity of Centralia, guest speaker Justin Wright AKA Jusby the Clown

I'd like to start by having us make a group oral agreement. Ok? (Nod. Say okay.) Please put your right hand on your heart and raise your left hand. If this is impossible or you just want to be stubborn and have me stop and go back home by all means leave your hands in your pockets. I'll close my eyes. Repeat after me: I give myself permission to laugh. I give my neighbors permission to laugh. Laughter is healthy. And usually safe. If I hear my neighbor laugh I will remember this permission I gave them and myself. My laughter is my sacred gift. Ho! Ha! Hee! Ho-ho! Ha ha! Hee hee heee!!! Blessed Be.

People ask, "How long have you been a clown?" and usually I have told them about that Mother's Day weekend in 1996, when I first realized I was a clown during a student produced circus. I was a senior at Clown College (Evergreen) with one month left, and I was hearing my calling. I was discovering my clown rather than deciding to become one.

Recently, my mother found a journal from when she was pregnant with me. In it she had drawn a clown-faced baby bozo. So she may have subconsciously known even further back, and the realization I had that weekend in '96 was that I had been one all along. So since either '96 or '69 depending on how you count.

After graduation, however, I was unprepared and unwilling to get prepared to take on the duties. I had assumed I would be a dancer, a photographer, a writer, an actor, but not a clown. Joseph Campbell could have predicted this. I heard the calling, and I refused it as unrealistic, hazardous, and vain. I modified what I thought it meant and shushed the voice of my calling, opting instead to pursue steady wages, with minimal creative discretion and zero laughter or applause.

This went on for a decade. Until I met my wife. I fell in love with her, married her and made a baby with her. Then she told me the truth. I was a guy with a clown collection. I had more plastic and ceramic clowns than I had experiences performing as a clown.

If I was going to keep saying that I was a clown I would have to prove it. I would have to do some clowning, seek out mentors & allies, go out of my comfort zone and do the work.

So with her support I set out on the path to transform myself from an amateur clown enthusiast to a professional fool whose reputation would precede me. "Jusby" is known as the pie-in-the-face clown, having delivered over 900 pies to willing faces in 5 states.

I did not set out to make my mark on the clown world in this way. I originally thought I would be a dancing, juggling, storytelling clown, and through a series of synchronistic opportunities I have found pies (in the face) to be one of my two most effective tools for entertaining, educating and easing the suffering of my clients. The other is Laughter Yoga. Remember the pledge you took as I get into this next bit.

The pie is meant as a sacred honor bestowed at the completion of a rite of passage – turning 5 or turning 40, for instance. The pie represents crossing into dreamtime, into a lucid euphoria, a liminal space between ordinary states, neither the known world nor the unknowable ground of being. It represents the union of the mundane and the divine.

A messenger arrives and the recipient *becomes* the message by donning a sweet pillowy mask of non-dairy clouds. It represents inspiration, expiration, ecstasy, synergy, epiphany, catharsis and spiritual transformation. When the clown comes, your life goes from the average

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to extraordinary. He brings attention to your experience. You are participating in an event that lasts seconds but whose residue lasts quite a bit longer.

I usually list several cultures of antiquity that practiced the pie-in-the-face ceremony. These are backed up by historical documents and artifacts (including black & white films, lithographs, illuminated manuscripts, hieroglyphics, and cave drawings). Pieing goes back further than I've previously ever described in public.

Turn of the century Spanish-American rodeo clowns have a tradition involving cow pies they delivered when a vaquero "buckaroo" was expecting a child, the pie symbolizing fertility and new beginnings. The Spanish word for clown, "payaso" comes from the combination of pie & ass'o ("Who was that ass'o with the pie?")

The ancient Frankian buffoons of Gaul (the French) called it La Tarte Blanche, sometimes translated as White Pie or Clean Plate but meaning humor in the midst of existential emptiness or a desert of empty calories

The Roman Cobbler Rasa was a pie act performed by Gladiator Clowns while the other gladiators cleaned the soles of their sandals and the audience enjoyed comedic relief between the brutal death bouts. The Cobbler Rasa was a Shoe-Fly Pie offered in honor of Psyche, goddess of the Soul or the Breath. The clown would say, "No pie for you... Psyche!" The pie delivery then caused a gasping for breath.

The Australian Aboriginal Walkaround clowns called it Entering the Creamtime, which was a dimension of eternal sweetness they entered by striking one another with pies made from kangaroo cream. This is the origin of the phrase, "Good on ya, mate."

The proto-human clown shaman Homo Sapiens Scurra Bozus did sacred therapeutic initiations with pre-historic and psychedelically active banana cream pies made of plantains and mushrooms. This was done when members of the tribe contracted "the sadness disease". The combination of the well-intentioned surprise and the alchemical ingredients (MAO inhibitors to increase Serotonin & Dopamine, and psychoactive indole alkaloids) created waves of healthy laughter that allowed the member to save face through a ritual of "losing their face".

But Billions of years prior...

First Clown looked at Eternity and noticed Darkness and Lightness were forming cliques. Darkness gathered into insular and exclusionary gangs. Lightness pulled together into elite ranks sorted by brightness.

First Clown watched and saw there would be trouble, so First Clown decided to teach them a lesson. First Clown took darkness and lined it all up on one side of Eternity. Then First Clown gathered Lightness into a dense ball and flattened it out into a pie shape.

"You will be balanced! You will get along from the past to the future and all through this present moment" said First Clown," which begins Right Now!" and threw Lightness right in the face of Darkness.

First Clown laughed and the Universe was created, every bit of Lightness balancing every single bit of Darkness forever.

Now I did not realize that I was performing such a potent ritual when I started. The first pie I delivered was an April Fool's joke a friend wanted played on his wife... while he was conveniently out of town. In typical fashion for me, a year went by before I delivered my

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second, but I was motivated, and I was getting great reactions. By 2009 I had delivered 200. I knew I was on the right path when I convinced author, Monica Drake to accept a pie in honor of her first novel "Clown Girl". She showed up with 3 other first time authors. She really got it, literally and figuratively. She wrote an essay about the experience that went on the Paris Review Daily blog. We met at a public rose garden in Portland, and a crowd gathered to witness it and to volunteer their faces. She writes,

"Could it be they sensed the possibility of a transformational magic through public spectacle, a moment out of time, carving a significant experience out of an otherwise fleeting, incidental slice of existence? Maybe not. Maybe we were in a modern day town square, lining up to be pied by the village idiot. Who, exactly, was the fool then?

"Everything I've ever done that matters has been through saying yes, haltingly, in the face of doubt.

"And I felt in my body the beauty of saying yes against doubt: it's necessary. Yes to the future, and to this moment, and to our daughter, the most important decision we'd ever made. I wanted to give back to the world. I was in love, in that wedding ceremony way. Everyone should have the right to say yes, wildly, within the law. The crowd smiled back at us. I beamed into the camera. I wanted our lives to have meaning, our actions to take on a narrative shape.

"A messenger arrives and the recipient becomes the message," Jusby said. The camera flashed.

"The world went dark. I couldn't breathe. He'd caught me off guard. The aluminum pan pressed against my face, my nose, my mouth—the whip cream was giving, but the pan wasn't. My nose flattened. I was drowning! I'd suffocate under cheap whipped cream. It was no way to go. The audience roared. They laughed. This was the end.

"I'd made a mistake, said yes once too many times. I heard a child yell, me next! And I wanted to tell that child, *Go back. Don't do it!* I flapped an arm, tried to drop my husband's hand, but he held on. Then the pressure on my face subsided. I blew whipped cream out my nose, opened my mouth to gasp for air. Somebody put a towel under my fingers.

"The sun came back, while my eyelashes were heavy and clotted. I gulped for air and laughed out loud, and now the laugh was at my own fear of death. My heart knocked against my chest. "You may kiss the bride!"

"I was newly baptized, married, initiated. I was the fool and the folly. Maybe I'd hand-sell one book out of this. My books weren't even there. It wasn't about books. It was about the careless freedom to make random adult mistakes and see what would come next.

"I have photos of that day. They're as lovely as any from our wedding. Over a year later, I'm still sorting out why the pie-ing was important. Jusby's explanation goes like this: "When the clown comes ... you're participating in an event that lasts seconds but whose residue lasts quite a bit longer."

My path continued and a year later I was at the 65th birthday of Dr. Patch Adams. They made a movie about him, you know. Nice guy, and he takes a pie to the face graciously. He really got it. And as a medical doctor he has made his mission to practice health care based on generosity and compassion with laughter an integral element of effective doctoral care. He is a rare modern shaman, Clown Doctor, & Sacred Fool.

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Another medical doctor who broke with tradition is Dr. Madan Kataria, who created (or perhaps discovered) Laughter Yoga. Although I have not pried Dr. Kataria... yet, my wife and I are both Certified Laughter Yoga Leaders. We have found that this absurd practice also represents and promotes inspiration, expiration, ecstasy, synergy, epiphany, catharsis and spiritual transformation, and it can almost always be enjoyed without concern for soiling your clothes. When people are gathered with the express intention of laughing they can quickly dispense with their inhibitions and get to it, and they get deeper into it with the assistance of a laughter professional prompting them. I'm offering a sample of this experience today. Our typical sessions last a half hour or more, but I've done all this blathering about historical context. After the service I can also deliver a few pies if you want to experience that.

These are the elements of the laughter yoga session:

CLAPPING: 1,2 – 1,2,3; HO-HO, Ha-ha-ha

DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES-the yogic element

CHILDLIKE PLAYFULNESS: "Very good! Very good! yeah!"

LAUGHTER EXERCISES:

followed by

LAUGHTER MEDITATION:

and closing with

AFFIRMATION:

Stretch: neck, shoulders, hips, mouth

Greeting/ Namaste

Coffee/ Tea/ Cocoa*

Silent/ Stifled

Chicken/ Snake/ Lion/

Flower* (Rose, Lilly, Lotus)

The Cell Phone. We can use this technique when we need a laugh and want to save face in public. Pull out your actual phone or just pretend by holding your hand to your ear and laugh like you just heard the funniest wrong number ever.

Very good, very good, yay.

Solfège/ Scales/ Beautiful Round Notes/

Heart Butterfly

And we'll conclude with a Laughter Meditation. We start in stillness and continue into silliness. Let the laugh spread and grow as naturally as you can. At the conclusion we'll switch to a hum.

Using the traditional closing for a session of Laughter Yoga, join us in the following affirmation:

I am incredible!

You are incredible!

We are incredible!

Blessed Be!