

God Loves Laughter  
Clark Knowles

It is a hectic time of year. We are surrounded by cultural and religious celebrations, sudden snowstorms, and an abundance of candy, cookies, and cakes. Every time I turn around, I am presented with another “time” related challenge. It isn’t just the traditional holiday season that induces this sort of rushed approach towards life—it just seems to be magnified during these days. Today was no different. I went to work, went shopping, cleaned the house, answered some correspondence, and tried to spend some quality time with my family. And just now...I found out I had to write an article for this week’s In Good Faith column. I had been expecting to write the column, but the timing surprised me, and I had to find some moments in which to collect my thoughts. Sometimes, having one more item added to my “to-do” list is all that it takes to remind me what is most important. It also reminds me that although God, our Creator, may be all-powerful, wise, and loving, he also has an impeccably timed sense of humor.

There is a long history of humor in our different religious traditions. Even mainstream popular culture has attempted to portray God as a deity with a love of laughter. The 1975 film “God” stars George Burns as a cigar-chomping Creator who makes fun of the “mistakes” he made during the creation process. (He claims that the duckbilled platypus is a mistake, and the avocado, too, was something inherently faulty in design. The pits, he says, are too big.) In the more recent film “Bruce Almighty” Morgan Freeman portrays God as a humble, playful Creator showing man what is it like to “be” God through a series of humorous vignettes. Of course, these are only two movies. Many comedians, satirists, and comic strip artists routinely cause us to laugh, giggle, and chortle by poking fun at our fallibility as human beings, and by allowing us to take our serious lives not so seriously.

Baha’u’llah, the prophet-founder of the Baha’i Faith, once wrote that we should “tell the tale of happy days gone by, that land and sky may laugh aloud today, and it may gladden mind and heart and eye.” His son, Abdu’l-Baha, also extolled the virtues of developing and maintaining a sense of humor. Once, while visiting Green Acre in Eliot Maine (now the sight of the Green Acre Baha’i School) he said: “May everyone point to you and ask: Why are these people so happy? I want you to be happy in Green Acre, to laugh, smile and rejoice in order that others may be made happy by you. Let us become oblivious of our own selves, and drinking down the wine of heavenly grace, let us cry out our joy, and lose ourselves in the beauty of the All-Glorious.”

And perhaps that is what is often lost in our hectic lives, the idea that by forgetting ourselves, by looking beyond the limitations of our physical body and personal timelines, we can begin to connect on a deeper level with the greater power of the universe. When I am able to look beyond the schedules and appointments of this season (or any other), when I can cease to view my worldly business with such dire seriousness, when I can stand back just a bit and enjoy the beauty and absurdity of a miraculous existence, perhaps then I am one step closer to a deeper understanding of the “wine of heavenly grace.”

Shoghi Effendi, another important figure in the Baha’i Faith wrote that “true happiness and joy and humor are parts of a balanced life that includes serious thought, compassion and humble servitude to God...these characteristics enrich life and add to its radiance. Humor too is an essential element in preserving a proper balance in this life and in our comprehension of

reality.” How nice it is to ponder a creation in which humor is not only encouraged, but also embraced as fundamental to maintaining the proper world view.

So today, in the midst of all the hectic pressures of this joyous season, I hope you have time to and enjoy a good belly laugh, to have a fit of the giggles, or to just smile quietly as you observe the unfolding of your holidays. Perhaps if we can all step back in this way, just for a few moments, we will have a keener sense of the peace, serenity, and joy this holiday season symbolizes.

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