

**Yakov M. Wagschal**

# What's So Funny... About Laughter?

Why do we laugh? While the question may sound simplistic to you, it actually touches on a fascinating issue. It turns out that laughter is an amazing field that scientists have been studying for centuries and one whose depth they still have not thoroughly grasped. It turns out that laughter can bring us a whole host of benefits, and best of all, it's free and easy to use!



You're at a family gathering or a business meeting. Someone cracks a joke and everyone laughs. Why are they laughing? What is the "switch" that activates the "funny bone"?

True, it was a good joke. Still, why do we have to react by displaying our teeth, producing a strange vocal response and sometimes jiggle the shoulders while we go red in the face and fight to catch our breath? As if that's not enough, why do we sometimes laugh so hard that tears begin streaming down our face and we fall off our chairs?

Some of you may not understand the question. "What do you mean, why do we laugh? We laugh because it's funny!"

That is not strictly true. First, that does not explain why people express their satisfaction through a physical response. On a simple level, you should be able to enjoy a good joke the same way you enjoy, say, a good meal: a warm, satisfied feeling inside and then you go on with life.

Second, as we will soon see, laughter is not directly connected to jokes. So the question stands.

In the past 15 years alone, around 150 books have been published on the topic—and that's just in English! Yet, despite these efforts, scientists still do not completely know what makes people laugh. Which is pretty funny when you think about it....

### Everyone Knows How to Laugh

Laughter is a universal language; part of the non-verbal vocabulary of humanity. Unlike English, Chinese and Swahili, everyone in the world understands the language of laughter. We are born with the ability to laugh.

Not only is laughter universally understood, but even its subtle nuances are too. A friendly laugh shows that the other person has peaceful intentions. A sarcastic laugh is a signal that the person is poking fun at you. And a wicked laugh means that person has less-than-peaceful intentions.



The famous *badchan*, R' Yankel Miller, the Yarma Rav.

One of the fascinating aspects of laughter is that it is a subconscious reflex; it pops up on its own. Yes, you can control your laughter and suppress it, but it is very difficult.

Another interesting feature of laughter is that not only the mouth but also several other parts of the body are activated when we laugh. Laughter begins with a twist of the facial features together with an accompanying sounds produced by the vocal chords. And that's just a simple laugh. When it involves rolling with laughter, the stomach and leg muscles join in, and even the breathing is modified to enable the laughter.

And yet more: When a person is in the middle of talking, he usually does not begin

# THE TREND IS CHANGING

"If, on an average, boys would begin marrying even one year earlier than they do now, then, according to current statistics, **within ten years more than one thousand girls would be saved from lifelong *igun***. As Yidden who are responsible for each other, we are obligated to try our best to save them." (Kol Korei)

"Although some in our community have delayed marriage for various reasons, many boys have no need for this delay. On the contrary it is better for them to act in the manner of earlier generations. We come to encourage the wider community and our talmidim and the members of our congregation that they should make an effort to **get married at the earliest appropriate time and not to delay unnecessarily**. This will be better for them and for the community." (Kol Korei)

In a recent meeting of Roshei Yeshiva they concluded that many boys are starting shidduchim at a later time than they should and **it would be in their best interest and the best interest of Klal Yisroel for them to get married at a younger age**.

**BARUCH HASHEM, MANY PEOPLE ARE HEEDING THE CALL OF THE GEDOLIM AS DURING BEIN HAZMANIM THERE WAS AN UNUSUALLY HIGH NUMBER OF ENGAGEMENTS OF BOYS AGE 21 AND BOYS WHO JUST TURNED TWENTY-TWO.**

"It is well known to what extent we toiled to permit women whose husbands were missing to remarry. It is also known how our Chachamim made all *takanos* for the sake of helping *agunos*." (Rav Shteiman previous Kol Korei)

"*Hishtadlus* means that we must undertake whatever is in our hands to overcome a problem. Some people may say that the shidduch situation is a decree from *shomayim* and that we shouldn't mix in. Maybe the opposite is true. Maybe this is a *nisayon* from *shomayim*. **Maybe we are being tested to see if we will help each other.** Who decided that it's a *gezaira* and not a *nisayon*?" (Rav Eliyahu Levine in an interview)

## קול קורא