

**Laughter is Serious Business**

**#1**

**Laughter seems to be part of physiology of human being.**

**Question: What triggers laughter?**

**#2**

**Pirkei Avos 3:16**

*...and receive every person cheerfully.*

**Question: What are the positive effects of laughing?**

**Talmud, Taanis 22a**

*Rabbi Beroka Hozaah asked Elijah the Prophet: Is there any person in this market who is destined for the World to Come [i.e., Paradise]? He replied, no. ... While they were conversing, two people passed by. Elijah said: These two are destined for the World to Come. Rabbi Beroka approached them and asked them what they did. They replied: We are comedians, and we cheer up people who are depressed. Also, when we see two people who are quarrelling, we work hard to make peace between them.*

**#3**

**Talmud, Makos 24a**

*Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva were walking towards Yerushalayim. When they reached Mt. Scopus (from which it is possible to see the Temple Mount), they tore their clothing. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox running out of the area where the Holy of Holies had been. They began to cry, while Rabbi Akiva laughed.”*

*“They said to him, ‘Why are you laughing?’ ”*

*“He responded, ‘Why are you crying?’ ”*

*” ‘If from the place about which it is written, ‘And the stranger who enters there, shall die,’ we see a fox coming out, should we not cry?’ ”*

*” ‘For that very reason, I am laughing. Yeshayahu the Prophet said, ‘I will bring two reliable witnesses regarding my People, Uriah the Priest and Zecharya... ‘(Yeshayahu 8:2) Now what do Uriah and Zecharya have to do with each other? Uriah prophesied in the time of the First Temple, and Zecharya in the time of the Second Temple! But the verse in Yeshayahu makes Zecharya’s prophecy dependent on Uriah’s.’ ”*

*” ‘In Uriah’s case, it is written, ‘Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed under like a field.’ (Michah/Uriah 3:12) In the case of Zecharya, we find, ‘Yet again, elderly men and elderly women will sit in the streets of Yerushalayim, and each will have a staff in his or her hand from great age. And the streets of the city will be full of children, playing in her streets.’ (Zecharya 8:4-(5)) Until I saw the fulfillment of Uriah’s prophecy, I had some doubt as to whether Zecharya’s prophecy would come true. Now that I have seen Uriah’s prophecy fulfilled in full detail, I know that Zecharya’s prophecy will also be fulfilled.’ ”*

*“Hearing that, Rabbi Akiva’s colleagues said to him, ‘Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us.’ ”*

**Questions:**

**Why was laughter the appropriate response?**

**What can we learn from this story that we can apply to our lives?**

**#4**

**Question: Are there negative effects of laughing?**

**#5**

**Pirkei Avos 3:17**

*Rabbi Akiva said: Jesting (literally: laughter) and levity (literally: lightheadedness) accustom a person to immorality...*

**Pirkei Avos 6:6**

*...Torah is acquired with 48 ways. These are:..limited levity (laughter)...*

**#6**

**Sotah 42a**

*There are four groups who will not merit to receive the Divine Presence: people who regularly engage in flattery, people who regularly speak gossip, people who regularly lie, and people who engage in mockery.*

**MacMillan Dictionary**

Mockery, definition:

*1 Something that makes a system, organization etc seem stupid or useless.  
Mockery of: The Jones trial was a mockery of justice.  
2 Remarks or behaviour intended to make someone seem stupid, for example laughing at them, copying them, or saying something that is not kind.  
‘How interesting,’ he said with a hint of mockery.*

**Question: Why is mockery so terrible?**

**#7**

**Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Mesilas Yesharim, chapter 5**

*A single cynical comment can push away a hundred rebukes.*

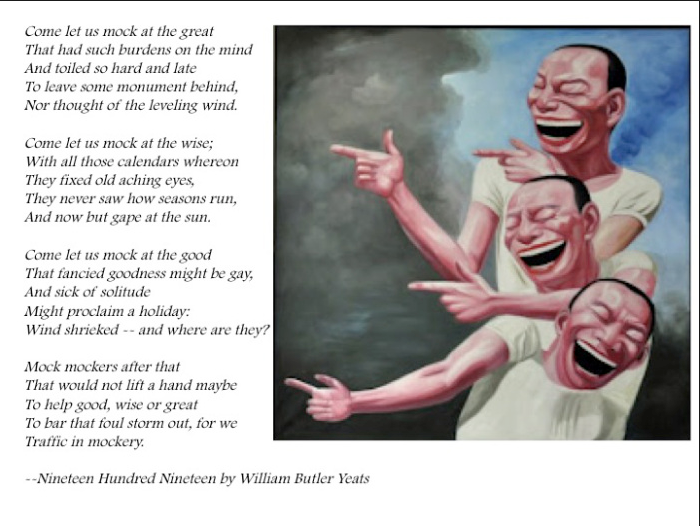
In the context of the work above, “rebukes” means serious words of self-improvement.

**Questions:**

**(a) Why does one cynical comment dissolve all inspiration?**

**(b) Why do some people feel the need to make sarcastic comments during or after powerful, inspiring, serious, or meaningful talks or conversations?**

**(c) Did you ever experience talking to someone about an important and serious issue and the person you speak to was making jokes about it? How did you feel? What was your reaction?**



**#8**

**Rabbeinu Yonah, the Gates of Repentance (3:173)**

*Anyone who is wastes his life in idleness is called mocker.*

**Question: Why is he called a mocker and not a lazy person?**

**#9**

**Talmud, Megillah 25b**

*All forms of mockery are forbidden, except for the mocking of idolatry.*

**Questions:**

**Why?**

**Can it be applied to other areas in life?**

**#10**

**Question: What is your takeaway from today’s discussion?**