

## **Joker**

How we get clever horses: based on a true story  
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Imagine living in a large crowded City with huge bright majestic comfortable buildings. But the air is always polluted and the sky a thick ceiling of haze. The perpetual bright lights blind us from seeing all this. The air we breathe in is thick with pollutants but we are so used to it—we just cough it out. We don't have to climb stairs, we use lifts; we never speak of climbing heights or hills.

We see ourselves as a happy crowd, meeting, eating, drinking, laughing. Yes, there is so much laughter and fun. We even laugh at those who just look serious. We scorn those who even suggest that the air is polluted: what we don't see should not trouble us. This bright sun-free ambience is even good for bleaching the skin: let's be fair! Such pessimists who cannot laugh and talk of such unhappy things, that's beyond us!

## **Crowd laugh**

Life is so crowded in the Cities, and the buildings so vast. People see each other everyday, and feel so happy seeing each other everyday. Everyday, they would gather for "Happy Sessions." This is when they listen to Funnies, and make one another laugh. In fact, this is how they keep themselves happy. Once in a while, the City Elder will lead the Happy Session, and tell some of the best Jokes. Everyone has bellyfuls of hearty laughs.

Imagine a world without laughter! They heard rumours of "happies" high up in the mountains. Happy people who do not laugh (they actually heard: "who do not need to laugh")! Ha ha! The City Elder warns them (with a big horse laugh) how can they ever be happy when they don't laugh! They lack Oxygen up there high in those terrible hills without lights and buildings!

## **Joke city**

One of those City dwellers who went up the "way of one-going" out of the City because she felt so peaceful just looking at it, was at once pulled back by City friends. "Listen to the City Jokes! Don't go up that dreadful path!" Another wisely quipped: "Don't you know: life is a joke! Laugh at it!" "Come join our Joke jam tonight, and meet the Joker himself!" promised another.

True enough, having listened to the Joker, she had a really good mouth of belly laugh. Wow! She exclaimed, "You're right, laughing is good for the belly." That explains why most of the City dwellers have such round lovely bellies. Oh! There is even the Big Belly Buddha with a bigger smile. He grants you anything you want: just rub his belly with a laugh. Who wants to take the tiresome path of one-going up to those dreadful green heights?

### **The one-going path**

Few indeed are those who dare take that path of one-going—up through and beyond the low dark dusty ceiling we call “sky.” Beyond that is the bright sunlit forest of flowers, grass, trees, hills, rocky crags, rivers, streams, lakes, nature resonant with the calls of peacocks, songs of birds, the dance of playful animals, fruit-laden and colourful plants.

The people there live in simple clean warm dry huts. The weather is fresh, invigorating; a joy when it rains and thunders, feeding the rivers and plants. Then, the sun smiles in the open sky radiating its nutrients into the plants and our lives.

### **Buddha smiles**

The sun shines alone embracing all life. It reminds us of the lone Buddha sitting radiant under the Bodhi tree teaching us whenever we just listen. The Buddha is always smiling. Like the Buddha, there is a natural sweet smile on everyone’s face and heart. We don’t have to laugh since there is nothing at laugh at. All is so peaceful yet beautiful, good and enjoyable.

We only need to sit, and the mind is at once calm, rain or shine, clear and radiant with joy. We see plants sprout, flowers fruit, the greens turn gold and earthy. The waters flow silently into gurgling brooks that fall noisily over high rocks into deep bubbly pools below. They are all teaching us impermanence.

### **Sky window**

Now, it is said that once in a rare while, there is a breach, a small gap, in the ceiling of haze and dust above the City they call “Sky.” For a moment, a radiant sunray pierces through. Almost no one notices this liberating ray of light, being so used to the bright blinding City glow.

But those who chance to look up through that momentary window in the sky, clearly see the mountains, beautiful trees, rivers, birds and light. For a moment, their eyes really see. It is a haunting vision, like waking up from a hellish laughing nightmare. What are we laughing about?

### **Laugh at others?**

These words echo in their minds: “While this world is ever burning, what’s this laughter, what’s this joy?” (Dh 146). They do not understand what this means. They just laugh at it. Some of the ancient wise in the City’s history—called Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes--all warned us that laughter was bad for the character because it frequently results from a feeling of superiority, coming as it does at the expense of others.

“Ha ha! These old geezers are a joke!” loudly laughs the Joker. And so they keep laughing on with “the roar of triumph in an ancient jungle duel” (this sounds familiar, but no one recalls what—just laugh at it).

## Love not laugh

Up in the green hills of joy, people are so happy and radiant in nature's light. They don't have to laugh; they never laugh at another. They just brightly smile when their playful children laugh. Whenever a child laughs at another, their parents or elders will ask them why they do that. In that way, the children quickly learn how not to laugh but to **love** one another unconditionally, seeing only good.

## The clown

Here's a sobering warning from Kierkegaard's "Either/or" (1843):

"In a theatre, it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they became still more hilarious. This is the way, I suppose, that the world will be destroyed-amid the universal hilarity of wits and wags who think it is all a joke."

(*Either/Or* Part 1, tr Hong & Hong, Princeton, 1987:30)

Who laughs at others, laughs best and last, they say.  
Who's happy needs no laughter, who's joyful with love.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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