

The Man With No Nose, or Wake Up Laughing

Preface

An experience remembered

In the Winter of 1998, I went to Lawudo Monastery, up in the mountains of Nepal.

My intention was to stay there on retreat long enough to study, and meditate on a book I had found in the early nineties, and had cherished since that time, called Samatha Meditation.

I wanted to experience what is taught in this precious book more fully, and to prepare a summary, for my own use going forward.

Now, I hadn't had the intention of trekking in Nepal when I went there. It was already early Winter, and I knew that soon there would be cold, and snow, but in Kathmandu, they made it so easy back then to get a short flight to the town of Luckla, and from there to trek to Mount Everest, or to head to Lawudo, so I got some warm clothing and headed up there.

I was ready to stay as long as needed. They have a small hut, in an enclosed area, and the kind hosts there would bring food and place it outside the gate as needed. It was ideal. Everything seemed set.

What I didn't anticipate (how could I?) was the extreme conditions in the Winter there. Even though it hadn't started to snow yet, once the sun set,

within minutes the temperature would plummet. I'd head to bed and cover myself up until the next day...

Now, I had started to meditate, but within a week or so I knew that I wouldn't be able to tolerate being up that high for weeks, or a month or longer, in an open ended way, as I had planned. Already I could hear the streams freezing, the sound of the waters in the valley below got quieter and quieter each day.

Holding my intention still, to meditate, and to understand these teachings more fully, to experience what they are talking about and to write a little for my own sake going forward - it looked like I wouldn't be able to complete what I went there to do. I was anxious, and a little depressed about it too.... which is really no condition to meditate well

And then, something strange and marvelous happened, that I remember to this day. I have written about this before, but I can't find it, and so here I am again typing out a little of what I experienced, 26 years later.

I went to sleep with all this on my mind, and I had a very interesting dream, or vision that woke me up, and repeated over and over for some hours as I lay there, like a story being told.

It was about *an invisible person*, and what his life was like... of course, that person was me, but what was interesting about it was how funny this story was.

I titled it *The Man With No Nose, or Wake Up Laughing*, because that's how it was for me.

As I laid in bed, covered up and waiting for the day to begin and warm up a little, I was laughing so much, and this went on for a few hours, as I remember it.

At last, I got up and meditated, and, much to my surprise, my body felt light, and my mind was very clear.

I felt like I was being helped by the spirits of that sacred retreat place, by my teachers and by Noble Ones, and on account of this, I was able to understand and experience more of what is in the book *Samatha Meditation*, the teachings on calm abiding. I was also able to complete my first version of *A Verse Summary for the Practice of Calm Abiding Meditation* {the one in 63 verses}.

What I learned from this, and what has stayed with me more or less tangibly since then is that, we can't force our mind to be calm and clear, and that we need kindness, and gentleness, patience, joy and humor.

Then the mind is bright, and we can look more deeply and understand more fully our experience of body and mind.

I hope to be able to find what I wrote back then, as well as the story I wrote out, but seeing as this has been on my mind again lately, I thought to write this recollection.

May we all meditate with flexible minds...

(2024)

The Man With No Nose, or Wake Up Laughing

So now we can hear Emily saying to Jackie, I just can't go on seeing you like this... Obviously she had gotten to the point with Jackie where she didn't have to be too careful about just how she phrased things. But why, he said, when we're so good together? O- you know why- but if I have to say it, well, you know- it's because you have no nose! This was her nice way of putting it. Actually, to tell you the truth, Jackie had no ears or eyes, head, neck, torso, arms or legs either. O.k., to put it bluntly, about the most you could say about Jackie was that he was a disembodied voice with a bank account in Nassau. Emily, why don't we try to work things out?- O you know why- It's because I really think I want children- But we can adopt! O Jackie!

Over the last four months they had been spending more and more time together, going to movies (for half the price of a so-called 'normal' couple), going on walks and talking, and reading to each other. In fact, it was their shared love of reading that brought the two of them together in the first place.

One day Emily was in her favorite bookstore, looking through a copy of a new book, called 'Emotional Intelligence', when she heard a voice behind her say, 'That sounds like a really good book'. Without turning around she replied, Yes, I've read about it too- it sounds interesting. Listen, said the voice, why don't I buy it for you, and you can read it to me? Before she could respond, Ron, the manager of the store called out from behind the counter- Jackie, are you scaring away my customers again?! I was just- I know what you were doing! I'm sorry Miss, you're going to have to excuse

Jackie there. He doesn't mean any harm. Ron, you have to admit I'm one of your best customers. Yes, that's true, he said with a little laugh, but how many people have you spooked too? I'll be more careful, I promise! That's what you said last time!

All this time, Emily was looking high and low for where the voice was coming from. She looked behind the door, around the shelves, on top of the bookcases- everywhere she could think of. Finally she said O.K., I give up. What's going on here? Ron said, Miss, believe it or not, Jackie here, he said waving his arm in a general sort of way, Jackie here is pretty much... well... he's pretty much just a voice- he sure does like to read though!, he said laughing.

You've got to be kidding, she said. No, it's true, said the voice, this time from right next to her. I try to be careful not to scare people, and you just seemed so, well, nice, that I thought I'd try to talk, you know, and say something, uh, not threatening? So how 'bout it? Can I buy that book and you read it to me? Whoa! Hmm... This is straaange, she thought. Hah! A thought occurred to her, and she thought she had them... Emily said, If you're just a voice, then how are you going to pay for this book! Silence. She turned to Ron, who was standing there, just smiling. Well Miss...ah...Emily she said... Well Emily, you see, that's all taken care of. Ah, you see, Jackie here has an account with us. (He said this brightly, like it was nothing out of the ordinary.) With a phone call we can just subtract it directly from his bank account. Ha! Now I've heard just about everything- a voice with a bank account! She laughed. Ron too, and Jackie also joined in, the three of them laughing... Ho ho ho, ha ha ha, hee hee hee, laughing laughing laughing.

Well, said Jackie, when there was some pause in the going around rounds of laughing, well, he said, ha... that's not the whole story- but if you do let me buy you that book, we can go to the park and read and I'll tell you as much as you want to know. O.K., C'mon- Is this legit? She asked. Ron nodded, seriously this time. O, this is just too strange! 'My date with a voice!' ha ha ha! Ow Kaay, she said, throwing up her hands, I'm game! Why not? Woo Woo! (She was acting just a little bit loony at this point) Ha! Why not! What do I have to lose, after all? It's not like I have to worry about him pinching my butt or something a ha ha ha, they all laughed. Eventually they got quiet again. Then Ron rang up the sale for the book, and Emily was seen walking, apparently alone, out of the bookstore and up the block to Washington Square park.

He could read to her too, Jackie said, if she got tired. But, well, you see, because he had no hands, he would need her to turn the pages. So they took turns reading, and talking about other books too. Jackie liked to read just about everything- classics, philosophy, mysteries, adventure, while Emily said she also liked poetry, and history, psychology and mythology. Then, suddenly jumping up, Emily said, O my God! I'm late! I have to get back to work. Tomorrow?, said Jackie, Same time? O.K., said Emily, not sure just what she was letting herself in for, same time. Bye, he said, and thanks. Don't mention it, she said. Weeeird, she said, but o.k.. Ha! They both laughed. See you tomorrow. (Oops, she thought later, maybe I shouldn't have said that last part, 'See you later'- maybe he's, you know, sensitive to me saying something like that... but she asked him about it the next day, and he said it's o.k., you can't go through life being so sensitive about every little thing, you know...)

It must have been a strange sight, those pretty summer and fall afternoons, with Emily sitting there, apparently by herself on a park bench, reading out loud, or laughing, and then sometimes with the book propped up on the bench and her occasionally turning the pages. She'd bring her lunch, and Jackie would read to her, or tell her jokes, or sometimes he'd even recite poetry he'd thought of just for her. He made her feel special. And she was to him. She laughed at his jokes, and liked some of his poetry too. Sometimes she even forgot that he was just a voice, but when she remembered to think of it, this was one of her favorite things about him.

One day Emily said, O.K., C'mon... You said you get your money from writing- but how do you write- you can't type, she said, and they both laughed. So how are you a writer? Well, writing isn't the same as typing, he said. So?- You get someone to type for you? Well... Yeah... O.K., A few years ago, I met this fellow named Marcus- who'd really like to be a writer himself, but, well... he thinks too much about it! He's such a perfectionist that he's never satisfied with anything- I think he's got what you call a 'writer's block'. I used to notice his light on late at night, and I saw him walking back and forth, back and forth, and talking to himself, of all things. Then, once in a while he'd run to his typewriter- only to stare at it, as if it defied him to just try and type something out. And when he did plink down a few words, after a short while he'd read it back and pull out the page in disgust, then he'd bunch it up and throw it near the trash basket. You should have seen it- his floor was covered with all these balls 'o paper. So finally, one day when I couldn't take it anymore, I said, Man, Why don't you just cool it and let it flow however it wants to flow- You can do it!

He looked around- spooked I'm sure- and said Whaat?? I said just relax... You got tons of stories inside you, if you just learn to relax- No, he said, I mean, Who are you? Where are you?! Are you some sort of ghost?, or angel?, Or what? Like my guardian angel? No, said Jackie, I'm not any of that. I'm just this- voice- and I noticed that you really seem to want to write. Yeah right!- but what's the use? Ah, don't put yourself down... This is odd, thought Marcus, usually my thinking is inside- between my ears- but this sounds like it's coming from- behind the sofa!- so he hurried up and looked there and didn't find anything but a few coins and some dust bunnies. You're not a dust bunny, are you? No. Ooh boy! This time I think I'm really losing it! Now I'm hearing things that are not just in my head! Ooh boy- I know I should have taken that job at the shoe store. That I can do- Would you like to see something in an open- toed sandal, Miss? Now just calm down, said Jackie- You're not going nuts. Oh yeah, right, You're not the one hearing voices! Wait- I can prove it! Your landlady, Mrs. Wurtzheimer, she's blind, right? Well, have her come over and have a cup of tea or something. We can all have a nice chat. O sure, right- Mrs. Wurtzheimer, would you please come meet my invisible friend to prove I'm not nutso? Yeah... You must think I'm stupid or something... he stopped and then he thought what did he have to lose? O Mrs. Wurtzheimer... Would you come and taste my pasta sauce to see if it needs anything? Mrs. W said sure dear, and came in (she lives just across the hall) Mmm, perfect, maybe just a little more oregano, she said. Hello, I don't think we've met, said Jackie- I'm Jackie, a friend of Marcus. Marcus looked- Mrs. W said So nice to meet you. Are you going to have some pasta?- this sauce is almost just right!

Well, after that Marcus learned to trust Jackie, but despite the encouragement, he still couldn't write much. No job, No writing, he'd

complain- until one day Jackie said Look, Marcus, you've got this typewriter- maybe we can work together on some things- and if we write anything good together you can publish it under your name, and we can split the profit- 50/50. How's that sound? I don't know... I don't want to be some secretary or something... I just want to be a writer. Yeah, but think of it as a collaboration - we'll do this together- lots of people do it!

And so that's how it started- Jackie told stories and Marcus typed them, and when they had a good one they sold it. Soon enough Marcus had a separate pile of cash for Jackie, who, it seemed, couldn't spend any of it anyway. Then one day Marcus said, look, we have all this money up here, just laying around- if someone breaks in here they'll take it all! Jackie said, Well, I guess we need a bank account, huh? Yeah right! How are you going to get a bank account? How about Direct Deposit? Well, said Marcus, everything is so automated now, who'll know the difference? For all we know the whole banking industry is run by disembodied voices- it's all 'the automated this' and 'the push-button that' anyway- and they both got a laugh out of that thought. And soon after, Jackie had his very own bank account.

Over time, Emily became more interested in hearing the stories that Jackie told her, and he got to trust her more and more too, so he told her whatever she wanted to know. One day she asked him how he spent the rest of his time, when he wasn't writing with Marcus or with her at the park. Well, he said, thinking a little... Sometimes I try to cheer people up. How do you do that, she asked. Well, aah, usually it doesn't take much- I might say something like 'You don't have to worry', or 'It'll be o.k.'. I'm that little voice that people hear sometimes. So you're the one! Oh, I'm not the only one-

that I'm sure of- but sometimes if I see someone who's looking down, I'll try to say something without scaring the bejeebers out of them. And where do you find those people? Oh, it's not that hard- you can usually tell if someone's looking particularly glum, or if they're talking to themselves and giving themselves a hard time. 'Oh I'm such an idiot!', you know, that sort of talk. And where do you find them? There are some places people go to walk and think, so I just hang out there sometimes. Also, elevators are good places for talking to people because no one looks at each other. Even if people do turn around, no one will make eye contact, so it's a pretty safe place to communicate.

O.k. So you try to cheer people up. What else? You can't be doing that all the time. Well, sometimes I give relationship advice. What?! You?! Yeah me! What's wrong with that! If I see some people who don't belong together I try to say something somehow. I may have to wait a while for the right time, but... What gives you the right to meddle like that! Jackie said, I don't think of it as meddling, well, not exactly... it's more that I think if I know something because I can see and hear things, well, then, I have some responsibility to say something, that's all. Well, o.k., so how can you tell that something's not right? Usually I only say something if I'm very sure- like the other day... this guy, he's got a roving eye like you wouldn't believe. And that's not all- trust me, I've seen him in action over the weeks- and this sweet lady- she'sso naive- she doesn't suspect a thing! He's really taking advantage of her, and I couldn't just stand by and watch- could I?, watch and do nothing? She was so innocent. So what did you do? Well, they were at the grocery, and while she's already starting to check out, he's over in the vegetable department obviously hitting on another woman. And so from behind I say to her, in this lady-like voice, or trying to anyway, I say, 'Honey,

that man you got sure is a dog!- He's after every sweet young thang he lays his eyes on. Sweetheart, you sure do deserve better than that!

She didn't even turn around to look who said this- instead, right there in the fruit and vegetable department, they had this big ol' fight. Fruit was flying everywhere- I think she nailed him with a pumpkin squash too. It wasn't pretty, but, well, I think I did her a favor. It sure sounds like you did!, Emily shouted. Wooo Wooo! And Jackie yelled- He got what he had coming to him! Emily said, boy, I sure wish I had someone like you around- someone to look out for me. What a lot of trouble you could have saved me! And they both laughed. Then, after a while, they got quiet- this awkward sort of quiet with neither one knowing what to say. They both knew what they were thinking though. They were both starting to really like each other. Could this be a good thing? There are worse things you know...

One day Jackie confided to Emily that he went to a therapist- not alone, of course, he said, its a sort of group therapy-six or seven of us- for disembodied voices. And the therapist? O no, she's got a body, and a thriving practice too downtown! O, that sounds just great! A therapist in a room with a bunch of nobodies talking- she must be wacko! Hey! Hey!, Wait a minute- we're not nobodies, you know, and Mrs. J isn't really that wacko. Mrs. Johansen is her name- and we meet on Thursday nights. Emily, why don't you come to one? Really? Yeah! I'll tell the group before to make sure it's o.k., but I'm sure it will be...

So that's now one Thursday Emily found herself in a big room with lots of empty chairs and with Mrs. Johansen saying, O.k., who wants to go first?- Did anyone have any interesting things happen this week? Anything we

want to talk about...? Finally one person, a guy named Roger, spoke up and said, um...I think I drove another person to drink... Ooh, that's too bad... Do you want to tell us what happened? Uh..., O.k.... It's just..., All I said was... I just wanted to watch Pro Wrestling, so I said to this guy, over and over, 'Pro Wrestling...', 'Pro Wrestling...' And he got angry, of all things, and started shouting! What do you think I am, some kind of idiot?!, and his wife heard him and asked what was the matter, and he said O nothing, and he started fretting something awful... Well, what did he want to watch, dear? I think he was watching An Evening at the Pops. Ooh, sighed the group all together. Um, you know, Roger, we can only give people suggestions if they already like what we want them to do, otherwise... Yeah, added someone else, it's like when I tell- um- suggest to that security guard at night that he put NPR on the radio... This took a moment to sink in. Yeah... I know, he said. I guess I just forgot...

O.k., anybody else got a story they want to share?, said Mrs. cheerfully, Anybody else?... Uh, said a voice in the corner. Yes, go ahead Andrew, what is it? Well... (sounding dejected)...somebody called a priest on me this week. Oh!, said someone. Too bad!, said someone else. Now, now, said Mr. J., That's o.k.- Did anyone else have an exorcism performed on them this week? Anyone else?... Um... I did too, Mrs. J., said another. Ooh, sighed the group all together. What do people think we are?! Yeah!, said someone else. It's discrimination! That's what it is! Yeah! Yeah!, they agreed. If only people knew... we got feelings too! Yeah! Yeah! There are even some of us who are famous, but nobody knows about them do they? Ha! Yeah, boy, if they knew, what would they think? Imagine!... O.k. everybody, o.k., settle down, settle down... I think we've reached a good place here- people just don't know so we can't exactly blame them, now can we? Now can we?...

Oh...I guess you're right. Then the group, now more subdued, Yeah, yeah, they agreed, and then, sing song all together- You're right, Mrs. J. O.k., so that about wraps it up. Everybody try not to cause too much trouble this week, and we'll see you all same time, same place. That's Mrs. J. for you- bright and chirpy, and always so helpful...

Later, on the way home, Emily asked about what someone meant when they said there were famous disembodied voices, only no one knows about them. Oh yeah, there are lots of us. Like who?! Like who?!, she asked excitedly. Well, of the ones I know about... for starters, let's see... well, there's Don Imus, the radio talk show host... But I've seen him on TV. too, said Emily. Lip-synching, said Jackie, nonchalantly. Just like Alphonse D' mato. The senator?! You can't be serious. It's true, he said flatly. And then there's Milli Vanilli, the singing group, but then, of course, they got caught, which wasn't one of our finest moments, I can tell you... Wow!, said Emily, this is really something... Tell me more! And so Jackie told her all the people he knew of anyway that were lip-synching for disembodied voices, and it was astonishing to her- some of the famous people she thought she knew, and all these years... it staggers the imagination. If it weren't for her knowing Jackie, and trusting him- he never lied to her- he was as honest as anyone she'd ever met- she wouldn't have believed it- really...? Walter Cronkite?!- Who'd have guessed!

Sharing little things like this only made Emily and Jackie feel closer and closer. They laughed about a lot of things, and shared more and more of their thought and feelings as time went on. And so it happened that one week, when Emily's mother called, and asked, as she always does, Sooo...? Are you seeing anybody...?, Emily admitted, Well, I guess I'd say it a little

differently... How differently, dear? Umm..., I have been spending time with someone who doesn't...oh, um... His name is Jackie. So- Jackie? Tell me about him, said Emily's mother. O mom, she said breathlessly, he's bright, and funny, and really very considerate. O dear, he sounds special! He is special, Mom! Then suddenly Emily found she couldn't say any more. What's the matter, dear? It sounds like you finally found Mr. Just Right. Well... there is this one little thing... What is it, dear? Hmm... Gradually, Emily whittled Jackie down so that she could finally tell her mother the bald truth- Well as long as you're happy darling, that's all that matters. O Mom, I knew you'd understand!

So, when are we going to get to meet this Mr. Special, hmm? You don't think?- I don't see why not. I'll talk to your father, and I'm sure it'll be o.k. O no Mom!, I'll talk to him. You know how Dad is. O.k. dear, whatever you say. Why don't you invite your friend over for dinner on Sunday? I'm sure everything will turn out just fine. Oh Mom, if you say so...but let me talk to Dad- To make a long story shorter, at first her father wasn't too thrilled, but he finally came around, saying, At least he sounds better than that bum, long-haired, guitar player you picked up last time. O, Dad! O, What the hell, invite him over. How bad can it be. O Dad, thank you! And so this is how Jackie, despite being only a little more than a voice, got invited to Sunday dinner.

He was nervous at first, naturally. How should I act? What should I say? Just be yourself, Jackie...My parents are nice people- Oh, Whatever you say, said Jackie, but there's something I have to tell you... This is a first for me. Me too, said Emily.

Emily's father answered the door and kissed his daughter on the cheek. Hello sweetheart. Hi dad. Dad, I'd like you to meet Jackie- Dad, Jackie- Jackie, Dad. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Walsh, Emily's told me so much about you. Likewise son, likewise... Trying to be discreet about it, Emily's father then looked around in the bushes and under the car, and warily looked up in the tree in their front yard, just to be sure this wasn't some sort of a joke on him. Well I'll be...! Ow-Kaay! Well then, he said, throwing up his hands, come on in, son, come on in. We wouldn't want you to freeze your ass off out there now would we...

Mrs. Walsh, or Esther, as she's called, and Jackie hit it off just too fabulously, much to Emily's surprise and relief. And when there was the occasional awkward pause in the dinnertime conversation, Esther would say, My, my, If he's not talking you almost wouldn't know he's there, would you? Mom!, said Emily, a little embarrassed. O- it's o.k.- it's true!, said Jackie. And the Mrs. and Jackie shared a little private laugh together... As for Mr. Walsh, 'Art', he didn't say too much, but right at 7pm sharp, he jumped up and shouted- Time for the weekly Tractor Pull- Battle of the Mud Monsters! My favorite show! Dad just loves Tractor Pull, whispered Emily. What's a tractor pull?, said Jackie. Dad, Jackie here is a huge Tractor Pull fan too, said Emily, stretching the truth just the tensest bit. Jackie then, to Emily, a little more urgently this time, What's a tractor pull?!! O you'll see now go on along, Emily said, gesturing after her father who was already on his way to the living room and his favorite chair, while Mom and I clean up the dishes... But what will I say?... Well, just say things like- Look at that mud-baby go!, or Here comes the Big-wheeled Crush Monster!- those sorts of things... I've heard my Dad say things like that.

While they cleaned the dishes, apparently Jackie was busy going overboard with his enthusiasm. In fact, Emily's father came into the kitchen and said- Boy, I need a beer!- That fella' of yours has got to be the biggest Tractor-Pull fan I ever met, that's for sure. And Emily, he said, just so you know, he's o.k. by me... and with that he gave her a wink and headed back to the living room, where a Chevy was being flattened and Jackie was shouting- Look at that Big- wheeled Mud-Baby!- Crush, baby, crush! Maybe he's trying just a little too hard dear, said Emily's Mom. I think you might be right, but it's too late now. From the other room came Jackie's voice- Crush, baby, crush!...

Strangely enough, after that night of family bonding, Emily was trying to let Jackie down easy. I just don't think it's such a good idea anymore- But why?- Maybe we just need some time apart, Jackie- you know, to think about things, our future, you know... O please don't make this any harder than it has to be... Finally Jackie gave up- I can't be happy if you're not... but I still don't understand. O, Jackie, you're so sweet- where will I ever find anyone like you? I hope we can still be friends, but...but..

Jackie was heartbroken. He had never shared so many things with another person. And they had so much in common... Now he found himself going to all the places he used to go to try and cheer people up. He'd walk along the beach, go to movies and sit in the back, alone; he'd go to museums, to shopping malls... He never did so much walking, and thinking, and talking to himself... He thought of how they used to sit in the back of restaurants and how people would stare, because, even though she whispered, they could still see her lips moving and occasionally hear her laugh, apparently

at nothing. How stupid of me!, thought Jackie, I knew we should have gotten take-out more often! How could I be so dumb!...

Then one day as he was walking along the beach, later than usual, he heard another voice saying things like, Why me Lord?, and, Why can't I be like everyone else?... Automatically, without thinking, Jackie said softly- It's o.k.- you don't have to be like anybody else... he looked around to see who he was talking to and didn't see anything... O what would you know, said the other voice- a young woman's voice- she also looked around and up and down, not seeing anything. Hello?, said Jackie, Where are youuu? Where are you?!, said the other voice. Oh, I'm right here, said Jackie. The other voice: you don't mean?!... Jackie: And you?... (Other voice:) Seeing is believing! How about that!, said the other voice, My name is Jenny- I'm Jackie, and pleased to meet you. How strange that we were both here complaining. You too?, she said. Yeah, me too. Well, this is the place...

Jackie and Jenny soon found they had a lot in common, and they started spending time together. They went to the movies (for a full discount), and sat in on reading groups; went to the theater, went to cafes and read over people's shoulder, and went on walks... It's like they were made for each other.

So this is more or less the end of my story. I think they lived happily ever after, but I really can't say because it's still going on. Anyway, if one day you hear two people talking and you look around, up and down and all around, under the furniture and up on the ceiling and you don't see anybody anywhere- well then, by all means, say hello. Try saying, Hello Jackie and Jenny, and see what happens. You might be surprised. And if

you do get to talking, well, I'm sure you'll agree, there are some nice folks out there, once you get to know them...