

***I Seem To Have Forgotten The Elephants* © Dorothy Freed, 1994**

Blissed Out
(The Guru Maharishi)

"Come to dinner on Wednesday night!" said my friend Jenny McLeod, Professor of Music at Victoria University of Wellington. "Are you free?"

"Well, not exactly," I replied. "I was wanting to go to a sort of lecture at 7.30, at the Indian Club's rooms in Newtown."

"What's happening there?"

Jenny knew that my two daughters Jane and Anna, both living abroad, had become members of some sort of spiritual movement called The Divine Light Mission. One of the teachers for the Mission, an Indian called Rajaswaranand, was to visit Wellington, to speak about it. I was amazed at how obsessed and changed both the girls had become with this mysterious movement. Jane was actually working in California as a musician in the movement's band, having given up her job in the first violins at Covent Garden's opera orchestra to do so. I was curious, and planned to go.

"That's O.K.," said Jenny. "Can I come too?"

And so we two women went along to that lecture after dinner that night. It changed my life considerably and completely overturned Jenny's for at least ten years.

We were told by Rajaswaranand about a young Indian guru, known as Maharaji, who was divinely inspired to teach and spread throughout the world something mysterious called "the Knowledge". More a philosophy than a religion, this young man's teachings, based on the grassroots of the common spirituality we all have within us, stressed the importance of love, service and meditation. This spirituality would become a strong force in our lives once we recognised it, and recognition would come through receiving the Knowledge at the hands of one of the young guru's teachers. It could be made available to us in Wellington if we wanted it. Rajaswaranand himself would come back to initiate us.

We were shown a video of this young guru, in India, England and America, holding forth (in English), sitting on a throne surrounded by thousands of adoring adherents. He seemed to be relaxed and witty, actually quite a down-to-earth type. He was 18 years old.

Rajaswaranand was a middle-aged man of great dignity and presence, formerly a judge in India who had given up everything, he said, to follow the master. He was quiet, self-assured and very impressive. He offered to answer any extra questions at a certain private address next morning. He was staying with a local Indian.

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I thought to myself that I would go, and ask him about life at Malibu where Jane was now living on an estate bought by the movement as an American base for Maharaji.

I had no idea what my academic friend Jenny McLeod was thinking about all this, but she was very quiet and still.

As we came out I said, "I think I'll go tomorrow. What about you?"

"Wild horses wouldn't keep me away!" was her surprising answer.

As we crossed the road to the car she seemed to be bewitched, She said she had never been so impressed with a human being in her whole life. And if he was so amazing, the man he called his master must be something out of this world!

We went to the meeting, and found a few new chums like ourselves along with half a dozen young New Zealanders who had already received the Knowledge in Britain. Learning of Rajaswaranand's tour, they were following him around the country. Nearly all these adherents were young people.

Rajaswaranand answered my questions about Malibu. He also gave us a short but intense little spiritual discourse, and Jenny started to cry. Others did, too,

"Why are we crying?" sniffed one girl.

"Why not?" replied the teacher. "Because it is so beautiful, of course!"

He left for other cities that day, but promised he would return to Wellington in about six weeks' time should we send for him, to give us the Knowledge.

He took pains to point out that no money would be involved, though his travel expenses might have to be taken care of.

Jenny was starry-eyed, transformed. She appeared to have fallen in love with this Rajaswaranand. She told me excitedly that she was personally going to organise a proper nucleus of the movement in Wellington, based at her big old house in Brooklyn. Did I think she could dare to ask the charismatic teacher to actually stay there?

"Why not?" I laughed. "He's only a man!"

Jenny seemed to feel he was much more than that.

We had been told that in order to receive the Knowledge we must first earn it. We must work hard. We had to do things for people other than ourselves, lots of it, every

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day, and certainly for no material gain. And we were to meet regularly with the half-dozen other already initiated local members, at sessions called Satsang.

I decided I would have to receive the Knowledge in order to really know what had sent my daughters into a state of blissful ecstasy and unquestioning devotion to this young Indian guru, Maharaji. So I, too, went along to Jenny's house regularly, listened to the discourses of the smiling enlightened, asked them questions, and for my "service", slogged away in Jenny's difficult hillside garden making the place look beautiful for the coming visit.

The great day. arrived, and those of us aspiring to the Knowledge who had been duly approved by Rajaswaranand gathered together at 9 a.m. We listened to spiritual discourse for two hours, then he explained what he was going to do. By touching our eyes in a certain way, we would see a light — the "Divine Light" of our inner spirituality. With practise we would be able to do this for ourselves. He would show us how to block out external sound in our ears and listen to "the music of the spheres", swallow the tips of our tongues to taste "nectar", a gland excretion like saliva which, he said, had kept Jesus alive during the 40 days and nights in the desert without food. He would teach us to listen to our breathing, breath being the source of life. And he would teach us to empty our minds. In other words, we were to be taught transcendental meditation.

Well, it all actually worked,. We sat on the floor for hours, and when it was over at last we were all more than faintly euphoric, smiling ecstatically and convinced that something new and wonderful had just befallen us.

We made our vows. The basis of these was love, love, love, unselfishness, help for others, daily meditation and spreading the good news. Certainly it was a brave creed that needed no excuses or explanation.

We, too, had now received the Knowledge. I thought, Well, I've got it now, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I felt good, but that was not real proof that all would be as promised.

Jenny was over the moon. She knocked down walls in her house and turned it into the Wellington Ashram (or Ashcan, as her disillusioned young husband Bruce later called it). We all met there regularly and gave each other Satsang, or sermons. I was by far the oldest of the new batch of Premies, as we were then called, and took pleasure in telling my captive audience how lucky they were to be told so young that it is better to give than to receive; that it is loving that gives joy, not being loved. They all listened to me with respect. And I meant it. Young people are usually self-centred, and I could see they were enjoying all this new "service" they were giving gratuitously and voluntarily. Everybody was permanently blissed out — the Premies' favourite expression.

I sat on the floor cross-legged every morning at 8 a.m., and meditated. At

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least, that is what I thought I was doing. I felt calm and rested, and found no reason to believe that I had not yet learned to do it properly. After about three weeks of this, something happened.

It was a Saturday morning. I was expecting my son Stephen to come at 9 o'clock for breakfast. At 8 o'clock I sat down as usual, thinking in terms of a meditation of about 20 minutes. I did all the drill things as usual. The next thing I knew was hearing the key in the door. It was ten past 9. I had been sitting on the floor for a whole hour, and it had vanished. It had seemed like three minutes.

This was amazing. From then on I could do the trick every time. It was like just having learned to ride a bicycle. If the telephone rang I heard it, got up to answer it, sat down again and went straight back into meditation. If I told myself to "come out" at a quarter to nine, that was what the clock said when I opened my eyes. And the result of this was very positive. I felt rested, entirely contented, entirely at one with the world, entirely, if you like, "loving". This astonishing feeling of wellbeing would last for a good hour or so.

At the time I was Reference Librarian at Victoria University's library, and our Department (indeed, all the library Departments) were constantly pestered by a lunatic middle-aged man, a chronic student, it seemed, on a sickness benefit. He had been taking odd subjects at University and Polytech for years, and he was not exactly stupid. But he was really nasty, a misogynist who particularly hated librarians. He seemed to think we had a conspiracy against him. He was paranoid, and more than a little mad. We used to call him "the shellshock case", because we could not think of anything beyond shellshock in Korea or Vietnam which would make him behave so belligerently.

We had to be nice to him, though one of my girls was really frightened of him. She thought he might have a knife behind his back.

He particularly hated me because when I saw him in our outer office I would sally forth from my own office to do battle and protect my staff. He was always full of threats, menaces and complaints. The latter usually concerned books we had borrowed for him from other libraries which he had lost, but claimed he had never had. I used to get angry with him for his lies and often outrageous behaviour and kept a special file of our letters — his to me all complaints and accusation, my furious protests in reply.

"I know your type!" he would shout at me in rage, brandishing my last communication. "You are trying to get between a poor man and his education! You're nothing but a snooty intellectual snob!"

We laughed at Mr. Williams behind his back, but actually he was a problem.

One morning, shortly after I had learned how to really meditate, I walked up

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the hill to the Library with the usual blissed-out smile on my face and entered our office, to find Mr. Williams there throwing his weight around in one of his usual rages. As usual I was accusing him, he said, of having a book he'd never had.

I started to laugh. I just stood beside him, Mr. Williams with his snarly face and his fists up, and I laughed. It was for real, I just couldn't help it. Poor old. stick, I thought, life is really too short for this utter nonsense. He looked at me with bewilderment,

"Oh, Mr. Williams," I cried, "you do tell such terrible lies." And I went off into gales of laughter.

Nobody had ever actually said that to him before. He was stunned. He glared at me, then turned and walked away. I was still laughing when I turned to the others in the office who had been watching, fascinated.

"You got the better of him, Mrs. Freed!" someone cried. "How did you do it?"

But more was to come.

A day or two later I found a grave-faced, calmed down Mr. Williams standing before me at my desk. I asked him how I could help him.

"I've lost my lunch!" he muttered. "Sandwiches and a bottle of milk. Someone must have stolen them."

"Oh, I hardly think so, Mr. Williams," I said. "I'll have a look around for you. You just wait here for a bit while I search the library."

I found his revolting lunch-bag with the half-consumed .milk bottle on one of the landings on the stairs, tucked into a corner — obviously by himself. Nobody else would have touched it without reeching.

"Here you are!" I said brightly. Mr. Williams took his lunch in silence. and departed.

Prom then on the dread Mr. Williams was a constant visitor to my office. I seemed to be his only friend. I ran his errands, did my best with his astounding questions ("What does Romanticism mean, Mrs. Freed?"), ignored his handfuls of paper clips or rubber bands filched from our desks, made no comment when he used our phones, our desks and our chairs if they were vacant, and told the others to do the same. He soon became a daily visitor and showed signs of actually enjoying being in the Reference Department.

The news soon spread around the Library of my original David and Goliath act and its outcome. "Send the old bastard to Reference," the other staff people

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would say. "Mrs. Freed can handle him!"

He never made any more complaints to us. And he never told us any more lies.

So transcendental meditation was working. I could handle difficult people by smiling at them. And I soon discovered another skill I seemed to have acquired from it. I could sort out hitherto insoluble posers — if I meditated first.

A dramatic example of this for me came when I was at my wits end, the night before dead-line day, with a technical problem involving marrying words and music in a piece I was sending overseas for a competition. The words for two passages which I wanted to be musically similar would not allow this. I worried at the problem like a dog with a bone, but to no avail. Finally in despair I sat down to meditate before having the very last go at it there would be time to have. I snapped out of my 15 minute euphoria on time, and the answer to the problem just flew into my head as if spoken: "Change the words!" A simple idea, and perfectly viable, but it just had not occurred to me. The clearing of one's mind through meditation does indeed allow one to see an issue objectively, and it is that that does the trick, I think. A wonderful gift indeed. And if the Guru Maharaji gave it to me, good luck to him!

What the other Wellington Premies were experiencing I do not know, but they always seemed blissed out all the time. When I told them of my experiences others always seemed to have had similar ones. Jenny Mcleod herself was so excited by the whole philosophy that she rented out her home to the Premies to be Wellington's Ashcan, led a nomadic life in another suburb for a while, forgot she had a sweet and caring husband, gave up the Chair of Music at Victoria and took off to the States for a number of years to live like a gypsy on the Malibu estate of the Guru Maharaji himself.

After ten years of blissed-out euphoria, Jenny, for whatever reason, cooled down on the whole project. She never returned to the world of academia, but she did return to New Zealand, wrote lots more music again, and now pours her boundless and enviable energy into writing a weighty musicological treatise on a new approach to composing music.

As for me, I just cooled down slowly, but I will always be glad to know the things I was taught during the years of my interest in the movement.

How much did the Guru Maharaji himself contribute to all our experiences? That is indeed the 64,000 dollar question. I cannot answer it even to myself because of a mysterious happening when I first came face to face with him.

After the Wellington group of Premies had been going for about a year, and other groups in New Zealand had been formed, the Guru decided to visit the country with his beautiful American wife. Premies from all over the country flocked to

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Auckland for his one-only public appearance. It was not to be a Knowledge session. He would merely speak to the faithful.

The Auckland group arranged this meeting in the salon of a city hotel, and we all duly turned up, agog with excitement.

After about an hour of the usual Satsang “entertainment” — soothing songs of a folksy nature sung by all to guitar accompaniment — and the usual video showing the guru enchanting yet another large group in yet another country, his wife appeared to speak, and then he himself arrived. He spoke well, entertainingly and smoothly, obviously well assured by the happiness shining out of the faces of all of the converted. There was nothing mysterious about him, no special charisma, just a nice, pleasant-looking quite young man with an enthusiastic way of putting things across and a sparkle in the eye. I was impressed by his naturalness and modesty, and his sense of humour.

At the end of his hour-long Satsang he sat down, baring his feet, and we all formed a queue to walk past him slowly and touch his foot. This, we had been told, was part of the protocol everyone did when actually in the presence of "the master". I lined up with the others, and as I bent forward found myself closely and astutely inspected by a pair of lively, intelligent brown eyes. I returned calm and serene to my seat and was astonished to see others coming off the assembly line in various states of blissed-out euphoria. Many said they had got a buzz like an electric shock when they touched him. Nobody seemed to be unaffected by the experience, except me.

Longing for a cigarette at the end of the session I went outside into the hotel foyer. Several call boxes were there, and I was joined by another Premie, a girl holding in her arms a large, heavy-looking Downs Syndrome little boy of about 2. I had already met this mother and her child at the local Ashcan that afternoon. She told me she had an important phone call to make. Would I take the child?

To my shame I have to confess that I have a horror of such children. I hated the very idea of having to hold him, even though he seemed to be asleep, with his huge head lolling. But what could I do?

I took the child into an arm. He was heavy as lead. I hoped the phone call would be a short one.

In fact it was a very long one. But something most strange happened. At the moment I was first feeling the weight, Guru Maharaji and his wife walked out of the salon, past me. He turned round and gave me a quite penetrating look before they both moved on. And at that moment I went into a kind of euphoria. The weight of that child just wasn't there. I was carrying nothing.

It must have been ten minutes before his mother completed her second call.

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It passed like a few moments. When she put down the receiver and held out her arms for her child, I suddenly felt the weight again. And he really was heavy. I handed him over.

What to make of these strange happenings? Was it because I had made myself do something distasteful? Chance euphoria? Did the guru passing by have anything to do with it?

I had assured my library colleagues that when I returned from Auckland I would know for sure whether I was going to continue being a Premie or forget it. They asked me what my decision was.

"I don't know!" I wailed. "I just don't know!"

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