

The Boy Who Named Himself

This the story of the happiest baby who came home to himself as a happy man. He was the happiest baby anyone had ever seen. His parents, his brothers and sisters, his relatives, the neighbors, and many others, even those who only saw him on the street, remarked, "What a happy baby!" and then they asked, "What is his name?"

His mother and his father had agreed. "We will name him whatever he says with his first words. He will name himself." They were proud of their happy baby, and they wanted him to have the honor of picking his own name. His father called him Little Man. He thought, if the baby were to say Little Man, then he, his father, would be Big Man. His mother called him Mother's Joy, thinking her fame would spread far and wide, to have such a happy baby called Mother's Joy.

And so it began. Everyone wanted to be the one to coax the first words from such a happy baby. Many people tried to influence him to say their name, as his first words. "Say my name," said one. "Say Yabba Yabba," said another. "I'm Archie Brown," said yet another. On and on it went. But the happy baby didn't say a word. Not a single word.

The people who had a favorite cause tried their luck with the little one. "Our Country First," said one. "May the Righteous Prevail," said another. "Work Hard and Do Your Best," said another.

Then the ones who believed in virtues of one kind or another tried to get him to speak. "Patience, Honor, Strength and Wisdom" were suggested to the puzzled little boy. The categories continued until nearly every word, phrase, belief, idea, and name had been tried and failed.

But the happy baby was silent, and he was not as happy as before. He looked in amazement at all the faces who looked so eagerly into his face. He could not, and therefore he did not, understand what all the fuss was

about. He was just a happy baby. Everything had come to him as a simple joy, long before he had any idea what it was all about. Gradually, all the people who were attempting to persuade him to speak their favorite name became too much for him.

One day, he cried. He didn't even know why he was crying. He wasn't hungry. He wasn't tired. He wasn't in pain, and he certainly wasn't lonely. It began all over again. Now everybody tried to cheer him up, thinking that the right words would do it. And not only that, they thought that if the once happy baby cheered up and smiled, he might say their words, and they would have the double satisfaction of making the happiest baby happy again and also be the one whose words he chose for his name.

"Be Happy" and "Smile," many people said. A lot of people used nonsense words, like "Ogga Pogga" and "Noom Skoom Woo." One man tried a flapping noise with the lips. Some whistled. Others grunted. People tried making faces, in the hope that he might laugh and say something about them, like, "You're funny, Mrs. Plunk." Nothing. It didn't work.

After a while, he stopped crying. He didn't smile anymore, either. He began to sit in his little chair with only a worried look on his face. There had been so many people, so much talking, so many words. People began to pass by him, without so much as a sidelong glance. Occasionally, a person who thought one more try might do it, would give it a weak effort. All finally gave up. Even his parents gave up. Their fame was fleeting. People were talking. No longer were they talking to the baby, they were talking about him.

The rumors started. It was whispered that he was backward, odd, strange, not too bright, an idiot, a curse on the town, an evil child, an alien from another planet, abandoned by strangers. Some people were bold enough to tell him to his face that he was a 'Bad Seed', that he was 'No

Good', and that he was 'Stupid Pudding'. He kind of liked that last one. It had a certain ring to it.

In his first few years, he became witness to a long parade of opinions and judgments, hopes and desires, fears and dreams, demands and accusations. For one so young, he'd seen a lot. He hardly had one spare moment to himself. He seemed to be the center of attention, but it was his attention on them that everyone had sought. Everyone around him tried to become the center of his attention. He became a very confused little boy. After a while, he didn't even know how to be himself. He never seemed to be alone, and it never seemed to be quiet, even when all the others turned away in disgust.

One day, while he was sitting alone in his chair, with his father and mother close by, with his brothers and sisters near, and with all the others passing at a distance, a crack opened in his mind, and all the voices stopped for a second. For the first time in his life, there was silence. Complete silence. In that blessed moment, he spoke. Who am I? he said.

"What did you say?" his father asked his mother, looking up from his newspaper. "I didn't say anything," said his mother, looking up from her book. "Who am I?" said the little boy, in an even stronger voice. And that became his name. It was a popular name. Everyone loved to tell the story of the little boy named WhoAmI. He became a source of happy conversation, once again. However, he didn't become a happy boy, once again. But, it didn't matter. The town was happy. The neighbors were happy. His relatives were happy. His brothers and sisters were happy. His parents were extremely happy. The little boy had a name, at last. Who-am-I.

An enterprising and unoccupied citizen of the town suggested a game, to see who could answer WhoAmI's question. It became a popular pastime. "What's your name?" one would ask another. "Who am I?" the other would answer. Then the first would have to tell the second who he was.

What's your name?

WhoAmI.

You're a fool.

What's your name?

WhoAmI.

You're the smartest man in an empty room.

What's your name?

WhoAmI.

I don't know. Who am I?

You can see how entertaining such simple games can be. But what about the boy? Even those who sincerely tried to answer his question gave him no happiness. There were many who seriously offered their help. They said, "You're a human being." "You're a good person." "You're a future leader." "You're a friend." And, "You're the child of your parents." Even the statements that were true did not help him go back to being the happiest boy.

After a few years, he shortened his name to Who. Since that sounded close to other names, like "Hugh or Hoot, or Hu," it was almost accepted as a normal name. The only problem was with people who considered themselves humorous. When he was asked his name, he would say, Who. And the funny ones would say, "You, that's Who," or "I don't know Who," or "Who to you, too," or any one of a variety of jokes that grew old in a hurry.

When WhoAmI was a young man, he decided his name was a sign. He decided to become a seeker of truth. He decided that Who am I? was a

good question to ask. He thought he should ask it of the wisest people he could find. He began his search in school, in books, in the minds and experiences of everyone he encountered, anyone who might be able to tell him who he truly was. "It couldn't hurt," he thought, because, so far, his experience had given him very little self-knowledge and only a cynical knowledge of others.

WhoAmI didn't want to be cynical. He loved people, in spite of the way he'd been treated. It was part of his nature, or so it seemed. After all, he he'd been the happiest baby. He began a diligent search for the true answer to his question. He began a journey of discovery. He read the great philosophers. He read the poets. He read the teachings of the great religions. He heard many answers to the age-old question, "Who am I?"

Still, an emptiness was always there, at the end of every answer. Every answer he found, even the ones he liked, failed to satisfy the feeling he had of not knowing who he was. WhoAmI thought the answer might be hidden somewhere in the back streets, country lanes, or mountain trails of distant lands. He decided to travel. Over the years that followed, he saw many lands, and he met many interesting people. Still, he felt weary and unfulfilled.

Along the way, he heard about an old man who lived in a small village in a country not far from his home. He heard, in a neighboring village, that a wise man lived there. He sought out the old man. He found him sitting on a wooden bench next to a simple house. WhoAmI's heart was pounding. He felt sure that this old man could answer his question. He walked up to the old man, respectfully, but eagerly.

A strange feeling of being in the right place came over him. He could barely contain himself. He felt overwhelmed with anticipation and relief. He was afraid he would either shout out his name, or it wouldn't come out at all.

Grandfather, he said. The old man looked up from his silent sitting and said, "Yes, who is this?"

"WhoAmI," said the young man who had once been the happiest baby.

The old man laughed and said, "Yes, very good."

"What?" said Whoami.

"This is a very good question," said the old man, smiling. WhoAmI's heart seemed to fill his chest. His eyes were wide. His breathing was slow and deep.

"Yes," said WhoAmI, "but what is the answer?"

"You must ask the right one this question," said the old man, and he grinned.

"I thought you were the right one," said WhoAmI, feeling frustrated.

"Who is this 'I' who asks this question?" said the old man, leaning forward with curiosity.

"I am," said Whoami. "My name is Whoami, and I have been searching for the answer to my name."

"This is a good name for someone who is searching, but you are searching for something you've never lost," said the old man.

"I have lost myself," said Whoami. He was feeling lost, and he was feeling found, at the same time.

"How can you lose your self?" said the old man. "Your self is always here, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," said WhoAmI. Especially right now." He was feeling better, despite his confusion.

"When your search is finished, there is no need to question further. Isn't this so?"

"Yes, this is so," said WhoAmI, not knowing what was so, but trusting what the old man was saying.

“Good. Now. Your name is Whoami. First, you must ask yourself this question. You have spent many years asking everyone else, and they have all failed to give you the right answer. Isn’t that so?”

“Yes, but how do I ask myself?” said Whoami.

“Go inside. Turn toward your self. Ask your self Who am I? OK?”

“OK, but....”

“No buts. Do it. Say Who am I? and then don’t think. Ask only, and see.”

“Who am I?” said WhoAmI.

“Silently, please,” said the old man. “No words. No thinking. You have had enough words. You have had enough thinking. Just ask. Keep still. Keep quiet”

“How will I know if there is an answer?”

“If a friend of yours is standing in the shadows, and you are looking for him, and he sees you looking for him, and your friend steps out into the light, you will know him without asking, won’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Then ask and keep quiet.”

WhoAmI sat quietly, for a moment, on the bench next to the old man, and he stopped searching. He stopped thinking. He felt a deep silence open up within him. It felt like liquid light, and it filled him.

After a while, the old man said, So, who is this I you are being?

Whoami was smiling, like the first smile he’d ever smiled. He could not speak. He could only be. Something had dropped away, and there was no desire within him to speak.

The old man laughed. “This is a very good answer. This is your true nature. This is who you are.”

WhoAmI was peaceful, but he said, “I feel wonderful, but when I think about it, I’m confused.”

“Yes,” said the old man, “You must drop this thinking. Don’t think. Don’t do anything.”

“But what will I do if I don’t do anything?”

“In this moment, now, do you have this question, ‘What will I do?’”

“No. I just am,” said Whoami.

“Very good,” said the old man. “In this moment, no past, no future, just you are.”

“I came all this way, all these years, and I already am what I was searching for,” said WhoAmI.

“You are always everything you are looking for. No more search. Just be,” said the old man.

WhoAmI was grinning like the happiest baby who became the happiest man. He felt nameless love for the old man. That was inside him, outside him, all around him, within him, nowhere, everywhere.

“Not for a long time has such a happy man come to see me. From now on, just be still. Keep quiet. Don’t do anything. Be as you are. Be here, in this moment. No more questions? Excellent. I am very happy with you.”

And the two of them sat, at peace, in the sunlight, as nameless as the sun that shown down on them.