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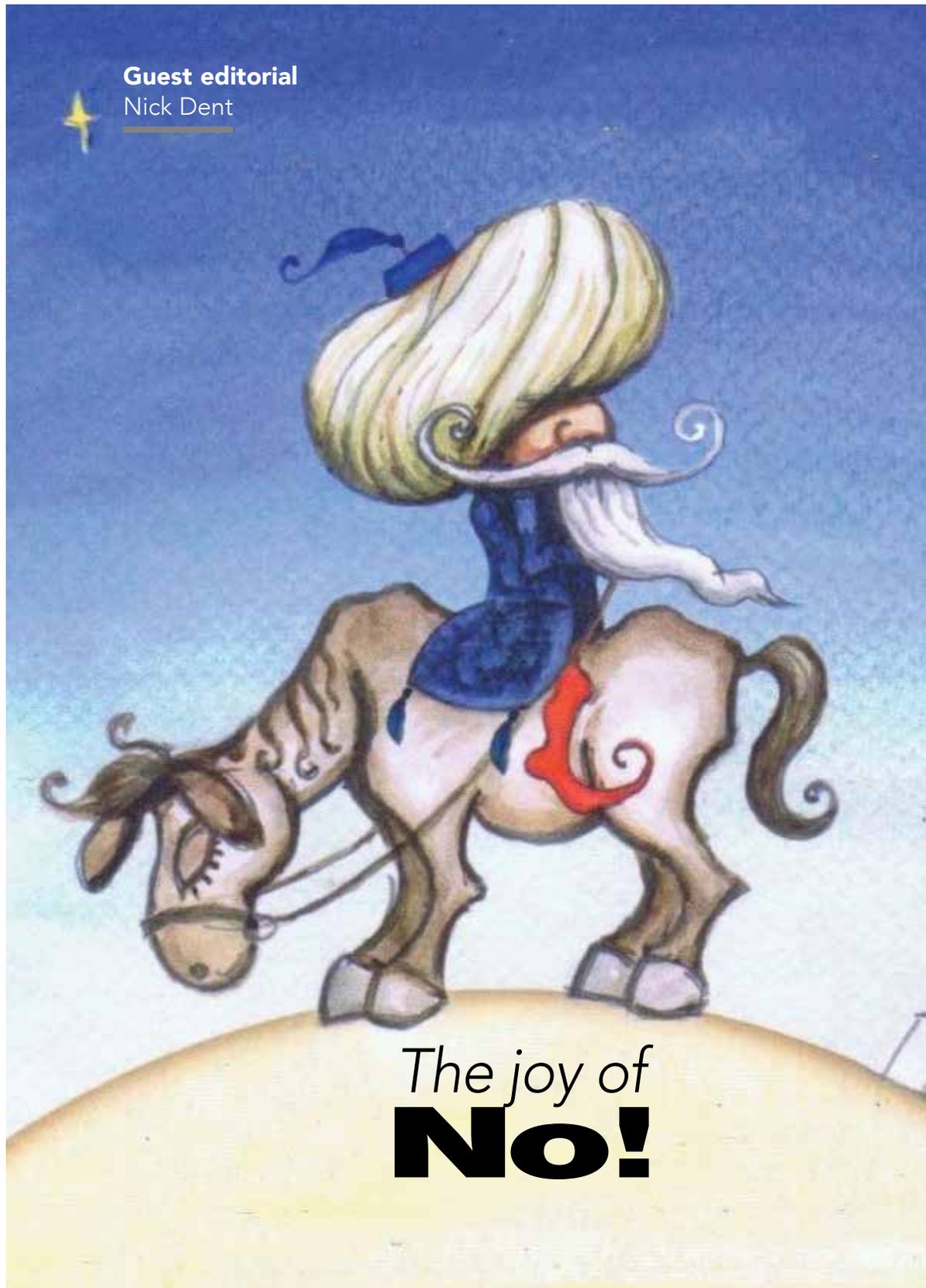
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Guest editorial
Nick Dent



The joy of
No!



The Lantern is a journal of Chinese medicine and its related fields with an emphasis on the traditional view and its relevance to clinic. Our aim is to encourage access to the vast resources in this tradition of preserving and restoring health, whether via translations of works of past centuries or observations from our own generation working with these techniques. The techniques are many, but the traditional perspective of the human as an integral part, indeed a reflection, of the social, meteorological and cosmic matrix remains one. We wish to foster that view.



A monk said to Nasrudin:

"I am so detached that I never think of myself, only of others."

Nasrudin answered:

"I am so objective that I can look at myself as if I **were** another person; so I can afford to think of myself."

—*The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin*
by Idries Shah

IT'S ALWAYS THE nice ones. You can see it in their eyes, the exhausted look, the attempt to live up to your expectations of them, even if it drains them. And it does. When you ask, they'll tell you that they are always willing to help, and would never think of saying no.

In fact, they are unable to say no.

They need help. They need weapons to fend off those who would live and prosper from draining their life's blood.

"You need to learn the Joy of No!" I say to them. Then I explain. It takes several steps.

Step one

The first step, I say, is to be aware. Your ears should prick up in alertness when you hear the words "But you are so good at this!" or "But you are just the right person for the job!" or "No-one else could do it like you could!" and these words are accompanied by others such as "it won't be much work" or "it won't take long" or "it would be easy for you."

This is the trap. In the next few minutes, I tell them, you will learn how to avoid it.

Step two

The second step is practice. You should pick some small thing, a job or task you are being approached to do that really and truly would not be hard for you, that really would not take very long.

And then, you say No.

At this point, when the patient is a true sufferer from this condition, they wince. They cringe; and you can see how truly difficult it is for them to voice this simple word.

I go on, inexorably: "You must be careful, here. Do not make an excuse, do not say "because I am too busy" or "I really can't afford the time." If they ask you "Why do you say no?" then you must give them the only reply for which there is no argument:

"I don't want to."

Every other excuse has an answer: "No, no, it won't take much time." "No, no, it is easy! Especially for you, because you are so smart, and clever and good at doing this thing."

Step three

The next step is to look at their eyes. Suddenly you will see a respect that was never present before. Of course they will try to make it look like disappointment, but suddenly you are not a known quantity: "Oh, just ask Mary Sue. She'll do it. She never says no."

Subsequent to this, watch how long it takes them to find some other sucker who can't say no to do this job that supposedly only you could do. It won't be long, guaranteed. They are good at this.

Step four

Now revel in the time you have to do what is important to you, time that is *not* being spent doing someone else's thing, not wasted in the endless running around tying up someone else's loose ends.

It might just be the time that you need to recover and heal after decades of time abuse by those who have learned to prey upon the vulnerable.

Step five

This step is their first practice. As the patient gets up to go, just as they reach the door, you say casually "Say, Mary-Sue, can you give me a hand with something?"

Ninety out of 100 will automatically reply "Sure! What would you like?" Then their faces change. This is when it hits them how the whole thing works, how easily they have become trapped again and again.

I say "I would like you to practise before I see you again. Even if it is just one little thing, say No! to someone."

Sometimes, they do.