

From “The Reason I Jump” by Naoki Higashida (trans. by David Mitchell)

Q25. What’s the reason you jump?

What do you think I’m feeling when I’m jumping up and down clapping my hands? I bet you think I’m not really feeling anything much beyond the manic glee all over my face.

But when I’m jumping, it’s as if my feelings are going upward to the sky. Really, my urge to be swallowed up by the sky is enough to make my heart quiver. When I’m jumping, I can feel my body parts really well, too- my bounding legs and my clapping hands- and that makes me feel so, so good.

So that’s one reason why I jump, and recently I’ve noticed another reason. People with autism react physically to feelings of happiness and sadness. So when something happens that affects me emotionally, my body seizes up as if struck by lightning.

“Seizing up” doesn't mean that my muscles literally get stiff and immobile- rather, it means that I’m not free to move the way I want. So by jumping up and down, it’s as if I’m shaking loose the ropes that are tying up my body. When I jump, I feel lighter, and I think the reason my body is drawn skyward is that the motion makes me want to change into a bird and fly off to some faraway place.

But constrained both by ourselves and by the people around us, all we can do is tweet-tweet, flap our wings and hop around in a cage. Ah, if only I could just flap my wings and soar away, into the big blue yonder, over the hills and far away!