

The Light Behind Consciousness

Radical Self-Knowledge
and the End of Seeking

John Wheeler

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Preface

‘Will this suffering ever end? One way or another, my seeking and suffering must end! I am at the end of my rope—I simply cannot take it anymore!’

That was my state of mind in mid November, 2004. In twenty-five years I had read hundreds of books on subjects ranging from psychology, philosophy and mind-control, to Zen Buddhism, Christian Mysticism, Taoism and Advaita-Vedanta. Yet, still I found myself seeking, suffering and searching for the answer to end all questions, and to bring an end to this deeply painful and nagging sense that something is drastically wrong—something is wrong with me, and something is wrong with the world.

You cannot possibly say that you are what you think yourself to be! Your ideas about yourself change from day to day, and moment to moment. Your self-image is the most changeful thing you have. It is utterly vulnerable, at the mercy of a passer-by. To know what you are, you must first investigate and know what you are not. The clearer you understand that on the level of mind you can be described in negative terms only, the quicker you will come to the end of your search and realize your limitless being.

Nisargadatta Maharaj

These words struck me to the core. It came in the mail like several dozen others I devoured in 1998, but this odd-looking, black and gold book, whose title exclaimed ‘I AM THAT’ in bold, capital letters, marked the beginning of the end of seeking and suffering—the beginning of the end of the ‘me’ I took myself to be.

Over the next five years, I read and re-read the book slowly several times. Nisargadatta's potent words were sinking in, and I was starting to know in my own direct experience what he was pointing to—I am not the person I believed myself to be, I am consciousness, I am that which is aware. I could feel it, sense it—I knew it directly. What a change in perspective, what a new way of experiencing life! My world was literally being turned inside-out. I was no longer in the world, the world was in me! He was right! Amazing!

Waking up in the morning, showering, eating breakfast and driving to work—all happening to no one, and by no one! The universe is alive! The universe is functioning, and I am that functioning. I am that life. There is no separate person in the body. There is only universal life functioning beautifully and naturally on its own. And I am That!

And then—*slam!*—I came crashing right back to my own little world of me and mine. And the suffering continued. What happened! Where is my peace! God help me, please! There was always something to pull me back into the pain—a failed marriage, broken relationships, a lack of purpose, parents and family falling sick and dying. It was always something.

But I knew it was possible to be free of seeking and suffering. I had seen it, I knew it and experienced the truth of who I was—this simple presence of awareness that is the very essence of all life. But it seemed to be eluding me and I was suffering terribly. I needed help. I felt that I needed to meet someone who knew the truth that Nisargadatta was pointing to and could help me get clear once and for all—that was my hope.

The sense of presence expressing through the mind as the thought 'I am' is pure intelligence energy. It is the knowing that you are. The same intelligence-energy is functioning this universe. That innate intelligence is the essence of everything that appears and disappears. Realize that you are aware of presence right now. You know that you are. It spontaneously arises. The vibration, pulsation or throb of that intelligence

is happening spontaneously. There is nothing to start it; nothing to stop it. Realize there is no one to do it, and nothing to do, and it will settle down of its own accord.

‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson

In 2004 I learned of a man called ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson from Australia who had been sharing the same message as Nisargadatta Maharaj for decades. Bob suggested I contact John Wheeler as John lives in the U.S. as I do.

So the belief in the existence of a separate self and our identity with that is the root of the problem. But eventually you come round to asking if the limited self that we have been taking ourselves to be is real or even present. If it is real, then we should be able to find it. So where is it? What is it actually? You come to see that all suffering is based on a cause which, upon investigation is found to be completely non-existent. Seeing this, all possible doubts and questions are undermined and cannot survive. Simultaneously, you come to see that you are inseparable from that natural state of presence-awareness which is inherently free, whole and complete. Nothing or no one can shake you from this understanding. It is the fact of your being, and you are that.

John Wheeler

Wow! Is this Nisargadatta come back to life? Amazing! The quote above is from one of my many dialogues and phone conversations with John over a period of six months. In November of 2004 I flew to California to attend John’s meetings and meet with him personally. Some of the dialogues between he and I are recorded in his book ‘Shining in Plain View’.

What a difference it made to have John personally point out to me what Nisargadatta and ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson had pointed out to him and many others. John’s consistent and

clear pointing was exactly what I needed. I am extremely grateful. It is my hope that you find the same benefit.

Stephen Wingate
Boston, MA
March 2008

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Reality Beyond Consciousness

Reality is beyond all characteristics, even of being, consciousness, emptiness or any other designation. To 'awaken' to your identity as being, consciousness, oneness, presence, emptiness or what have you is still moving in the realm of phenomena as an imagined entity. Your essential nature is prior to the sense of consciousness and being. There is something in you that knows the sense of being conscious and present. That is your real nature. It is forever unknowable as an object. It is beyond being and non-being, consciousness and unconsciousness. There is a temptation to take reality to be the sense of being, presence, consciousness, aliveness or even something more objective, such as stillness or a peaceful state. But all those things are objective. You know them. What you are is evidently beyond them all.

At some point, there may arise a resonance with the pointer that there is something prior to consciousness, prior to being, prior to peace, prior to oneness, prior to emptiness. Why? Because all of those, however subtle, are conditioned states. They are experiences that can be grasped, understood or recognized. Even the sense of 'I am' is an appearance. It has appeared upon your true nature. It is the primary concept or

experience, which is the basis of all other experiences. Without the sense of 'I am', there can be no other experiences. You are beyond all experience, even the experience of 'I am'.

At the core of the mind is an empty space, a void through which the primordial, non-conceptual reality shines forth as consciousness. The whole world appears in the light of consciousness. Consciousness itself is a time-bound, phenomenal state, an appearance on that unconditioned source which is prior to consciousness. Reality is non-conceptual awareness that does not even know that it is. Simply put, you are the one who is aware of being and of being conscious. That 'you' is entirely beyond the body, senses, mind, consciousness and anything else that can be perceived or conceived. It cannot be grasped or even be understood, because it is what you are.

Prior to Consciousness

When you awake in the morning, consciousness dawns. In this state of being conscious, you perceive a body, mind and world. These are appearances only, not what you are in essence. To identify oneself with any of these appearances gives rise to the notion of being a separate person, self or individual entity. This is the cause of all seeking, suffering and doubts. Consciousness is a state that comes and goes. In sleep, unconsciousness or under anesthesia, the experience of being conscious subsides. So it is clearly a transitory state. However, before you awoke and became conscious of anything else, including the fact of being conscious, you existed. Consciousness happened to you who were there to experience it.

Your fundamental position is prior to consciousness. From this non-conceptual source, which is what you are, arises initially the sense of conscious presence. This is also the sense of being, the experience that 'I am', or the bare fact of knowing that you are. This is the first appearance upon your original state. Little can be said about your essential nature because it is clearly beyond all concepts and even prior to consciousness. Some pointers that have been used are: non-conceptual awareness, awareness unaware of itself, pure being (beyond being and non-being), the absolute, the unmanifest, noumenon, cognizing emptiness, no-thing-ness—to name a few.

This non-conceptual essence is pure non-duality or unicity in which the notions of both subject and object are merged. Just as the sun does not know light because it is light, so you do not know your original nature (as an object) because you are that. It is forever beyond the grasp of concepts and subject-object knowledge. Yet it is entirely evident and inescapable as that which allows you to say with utter certitude 'I am' and 'I know that I am'. Even when those words subside, you *are*. Even when the consciousness that knows those words

subsides, you *are*. Consciousness is the light of creation. But you are the primordial non-conceptual awareness, being or 'no-thing-ness' in which consciousness and all subsequent appearances come and go.

The Analogy of the Sun

To understand your true nature, consider the sun. Imagine you are the sun shining in space with no other objects present. You are present and shining, and yet you see nothing—neither light, other objects, nor yourself. Why? Because you are singular and there are no objects available to reflect your light and confirm your presence objectively. Should an object appear, you perceive your light reflected in that object and become conscious of something that appears as other or apart. In truth, you are only perceiving your own light, nothing else. The object is the means for you to perceive yourself indirectly. The reflected light takes the apparent form and location of the object. The reflected light may in turn light up other objects. The perception of light is time bound because it lasts only so long as the objects are present. Without any object, you (as the sun) revert back to your unmanifested, original condition (that is, the shining sun that sees nothing at all, including its own light).

This analogy is parallel to your own original state or true nature. Your essence is pure non-duality, one without a second, which we might point to as non-conceptual awareness or pure being that is unaware of its awareness and without a sense of its own existence. When the mind, body and objects appear, they are perceived as objects in consciousness, which is the objective manifestation of your innate, aware presence. Consciousness is like the reflected sunlight. The state of being conscious arises along with the body-mind and appears limited to the time, place and presence of the body-mind. The body-mind ‘gives birth’ to consciousness. When the body-mind subsides, the consciousness of objects also subsides. Consciousness appears as a transient state on your original condition. It is intimately tied to the presence of the body-mind, which reflects the light of awareness, allowing consciousness to manifest in a tangible way. With the rising

of the body-mind in our experience, you have the instruments to say, 'I am', 'I am present', 'I know', 'I am conscious'.

So the presence of the body-mind is a necessary requirement for consciousness to manifest and for awareness to become aware that it is. Just as sunlight and reflected sunlight are really not two separate things, neither are non-dual awareness and manifested consciousness actually different. With the appearance of the body-mind, we become conscious, we know 'we are'. And with the rise of the sense of being conscious, all other objects are then known. Consciousness itself is really an object or experience, since it is a state that appears *to* you. With the subsidence of the experience of the body-mind, consciousness also departs. It 'returns' to its source of non-dual awareness or being. But nothing happens to you at all. In none of this have you ever left your original condition. You were, are and ever must be the timeless, unconditioned, non-dual being-awareness beyond body, mind and consciousness.

Back to the Sperm and the Egg

Take it back to the sperm and the egg. When they came together, life-energy infused the fetus and consciousness began to manifest in that body. Following birth, the sense of consciousness gradually matured. The world of experience appeared within consciousness, when you came to know 'I am'. Without consciousness, there is no world. Clearly, all things appearing in the field of consciousness, including the body-mind and everything perceivable and conceivable, depend on consciousness. They are impermanent and cannot be the abiding essence of what you are.

What is often missed is that consciousness itself, the basis of the appearance, is also time-bound. You are that which was present *before* consciousness appeared on you. Before consciousness appeared, you were, but you did not know yourself or have any sense of existence. That is the absolute, non-dual or perfect state. You often hear that you are consciousness, presence, the witness or the stillness beyond thought. This is only an initial pointer that is useful to free you from a grosser identification with the body, mind and personality. But to stop there and identify yourself as consciousness, presence or stillness is an error. Consciousness is not what you are ultimately. In fact, consciousness is the initial movement upon the unmanifest that gives rise to duality. Consciousness is duality itself. You are prior to consciousness, prior to being, prior to presence, prior to the knower, prior to stillness. Spirituality takes place in the domain of consciousness and is in duality. You are offered things to do, achieve and attain, because reality is being viewed through the lens of becoming and time. The overt or subtle message is that there is some state that you will get in the future. Abandon all such dubious concepts and be what you already are—the timeless, inconceivable absolute that is prior to the body, mind and personality—even prior to consciousness and being.

Non-Conceptual Awareness

Your true nature is non-conceptual awareness. This is the necessary ground of all experiences, even the presence and absence of being conscious (as in waking and dreaming) or unconscious (as in deep sleep). You are not the appearances or even the states of consciousness that come and go. You are to whom they appear. Seeing this, you can drop all the labels and just be what you are. The term 'presence-awareness' is another pointer to your natural state prior to consciousness. Consciousness is sometimes referred to as the 'I am' or witness. Presence-awareness equates with non-conceptual awareness itself, the absolute, which is what you are. This is the basis of all appearances, including the sense of 'I am'. After all, you do not have the sense or thought of 'I am' in sleep. So the sense of 'I am' comes and goes. But you are there in sleep and all states as the basic aware-presence itself. 'I am' and the ego are not the same. Ego is the notion of being a separate person, which is based on identifying oneself as the body, mind and/or personality. When you see that you are not that concept (the separate person), you see yourself as the impersonal consciousness or witness in which all experiences rise and set. But actually, your fundamental identity lies beyond (or prior to) this. You are the non-conceptual presence-awareness in which even the witness and the world of experiences come and go. That is the absolute or ultimate state. That is your natural condition even now, for you are aware not only of appearances, but the fact of being conscious or witnessing also. So you must be the awareness beyond all states, experiences and concepts.

Consciousness Is in Duality

At the level of discussion, a distinction can be made between consciousness and awareness. Consciousness is in duality and requires an object, even if that object is a total absence of any content. That absence is still an experience. Examples are deep sleep, yogic absorption (samadhi), being under sedation and so on. What is pointed to as awareness is beyond consciousness. Awareness is that in you which recognizes the fact of being conscious. It also recognizes the fact of being unconscious. That is your ultimate nature and is there whether you are conscious or unconscious. After all, it is you who are there to experience being conscious or unconscious, being awake or asleep. To summarize:

- Objects (mind, body, experiences, states and so on) appear in consciousness.
- Consciousness is always aware of something, even if that something is an experience of complete absence.
- Consciousness itself is a state that comes and goes (sometimes you are conscious, sometimes not).
- Awareness is that which cognizes the coming and going of consciousness.

To clarify this, ask yourself if you recognize the fact of being conscious. The fact of being conscious is an experience recognized by you. Therefore, you are prior to it. That prior-to-consciousness presence does not depend on objects or even consciousness to be. That which is prior to consciousness is what you truly are. The same goes for recognizing the sense of existence. The sense of existing is an experience recognized by you. Therefore, you are prior to that. That prior-to-being

state does not depend on objects or even the knowledge of existing to be. So in the final analysis, the experiences of being and consciousness are experiences in duality. They may be useful as pointers to your true state, but your real nature is beyond them.

The Absolute, Unconditioned Reality

The world of our everyday experience consists of the various things we sense and interact with, including external objects and our own bodies. We also experience an internal world of thoughts and feelings. To experience any of these things requires the presence of consciousness. How many thoughts, feelings or experiences could we have apart from consciousness? This is a simple point that is usually overlooked. In non-duality, primacy is given to consciousness as the basic fact of experience. In fact, at the level of appearances, consciousness is what you are, because it is the only continuously present factor in our experience. The world, mind and body appear as objects within consciousness. They have no independent existence apart from being perceived in consciousness. To overlook one's real position as the conscious knowing presence and identify oneself with the body is due to a basic misunderstanding, a conceptual error. The body is an object that appears in consciousness. You are the one to whom it appears. Essentially, the body, mind and world are fleeting and insubstantial appearances coming and going within consciousness. Relatively speaking, consciousness is more enduring, more substantial and more 'real' than the appearances. Because most of us are ignorantly identified as the body and mind, a first step in clarifying our identity is to see our identity as consciousness rather than any of the objects of consciousness.

Because objects only exist in consciousness and have no independent reality, we can view them as manifestations or appearances of consciousness, much as waves have no independent reality but are only appearances of the underlying water which is their substratum. In the wave analogy, all that is present is water. The wave is just a label for something that appears but has no independent existence as a thing apart from its source. In terms of consciousness, this means that

the objects (body, mind and world) do not exist as independent realities as such. It is consciousness alone that exists. This means that there has never been an actual independent body, mind or world at all. All of those things are only appearances of consciousness. All that is truly present in and through all experiencing is consciousness alone.

Consciousness itself is not a continuous or unchanging experience in and of itself. In waking and dreaming, consciousness is present, but in deep sleep we do not experience the fact of being conscious. It is not that we disappear, for some presence or essence continues as the backdrop of sleep, and that something subsequently experiences the re-emergence of consciousness and its objects. From this perspective, we can view consciousness itself as an experience that comes and goes. It is only after the appearance of consciousness that we experience the body, mind and world. These are experienced within consciousness.

Who or what experiences the arising and setting of consciousness? Consider the moment before consciousness emerges. No objects are present. There is no time, space or duality at all. It is entirely unconditioned, non-dual, without distinctions. There is no separation, no lack, no suffering. And yet that state is, because it is what consciousness arises from. Consciousness is a momentary flicker that arises out of the timeless, absolute source. The body, mind and world appear within that flicker of consciousness. Consciousness is like a light flashing on and off within the unconditioned absolute state. In a certain sense, we might say that the absolute is what cognizes the coming and going of consciousness. Just as the world is registered in consciousness, so is consciousness itself registered in the primal space of reality. That is why the absolute is sometimes referred to as the pure awareness that knows consciousness. It is the light behind consciousness. It is the source from which consciousness derives its substance and energy. This source is what the most radical and penetrating presentations of spirituality are pointing to as our fundamental and essential nature. It is not a state or experience, because states and experiences only occur after consciousness

appears. Our fundamental identity is prior to consciousness. That underlying and ever-present reality is the source which enables consciousness to be conscious and for being to be, so to speak.

What is the relationship of consciousness to that prior source, the absolute? When we looked at the relationship of consciousness to its objects, we saw that there really were no separate objects, only consciousness. We can also see that consciousness cannot stand apart from its source as a separate independent reality. This means that consciousness is an expression or modification of the absolute, whatever we may choose to call that. Consciousness, which contains all that appears in dualistic experience, is itself a ripple arising and setting on the timeless, unconditioned, non-dual state, which is our true reality. If consciousness is only a modification of the absolute, non-dual reality, then consciousness as such does not truly exist, since it has no actual independent nature. Consciousness appears but it has never truly existed as an independent reality. All there is, is the unconditioned, absolute, non-dual source. That absolute reality is all there is, and it is all that we have ever been. There has never been anything else except this.

To speak poetically, consciousness is a fleeting ripple on the fathomless ocean of the unconditioned, absolute reality. Consciousness simply arises and sets as a vibration or pulsation of the uncreated and eternal non-dual awareness. In that apparent ripple of consciousness appear universes, worlds, living beings and everything within the domain of time and space. Yet no thing has ever really come to be, because objects have never existed apart from consciousness and consciousness has never existed apart from the absolute. That absolute is beyond time, space, body, mind, world, being and consciousness. This is what your true nature is at this very moment—the absolute, unconditioned reality prior to consciousness.

Clarify What You Are

The focus in non-duality is to clarify what you are. It is not an inquiry into the world appearance (cosmology), the creator (theology) or the apparent person and its motives, actions and experiences (psychology). The cosmos, God and the person are subsequent appearances upon your fundamental nature. They are ephemeral appearances with no substance or independent nature whatsoever. For anything to be, consciousness must be present. So non-duality is really the inquiry into the nature of consciousness and your relationship to consciousness. The root cause of suffering and problems in life is identifying oneself with an appearance in consciousness, such as the body, mind, person or assumed separate self. You are not a thing which is perceived, but the conscious presence or witness of what is perceived. Continuing the inquiry, you find that you are not even the conscious presence, which is a time-bound state, but that to which the conscious presence occurs. Therefore, what you actually are is the source or ground from which consciousness and all subsequent appearances emerge. That is the absolute or ultimate state, which is your timeless, original condition. First, see yourself as the witness or conscious presence. From that vantage point, you will realize that what you truly are is that which is prior to consciousness. No word will cover that, but it might be pointed to as 'non-conceptual awareness' or 'cognizing emptiness'. You are that.

My Experience

Through conversations with ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson and the pointers he shared, I came to see that I was not the person I took myself to be. In fact, the person I assumed that I was did not even exist, except as an assumption. The entity at the center of my world, the very self around which my mind and all of its problems, questions, doubts and issues revolved, was not and never had been present. All of those conceptual difficulties simply evaporated due to having no central point of reference any longer.

One of the first recognitions was a very clear knowing that the spiritual search that had lasted several decades was over. This was not because any particular goal had been attained, but because the seeker had disappeared. With the dissolution of the ‘I am’ as a valid concept, any other concept which I habitually attached to that concept, such as ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’ was rendered null and void. ‘I’ no longer existed as the person I assumed I was. This did not mean that I disappeared. Relatively speaking, nothing changed at all. Perceiving, thinking, feeling, experiencing—all of these things went on as before. The difference was that things were no longer referred to a self-center, because there was no self-center. This made all the difference, for as ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson once told me, suffering is nothing more than self-centered thinking. Suffering is a result of the belief in the reality of the separate self. And without the cause, can you have the effects?

With the self-center out of the picture, what was left? What was I? Clearly I was still there, but not as anything I had previously taken myself to be. I existed, but not as some ‘thing’. A better statement would be that I was no thing, meaning nothing in particular. I was aware, yet not confined to any particular state of consciousness. In this non-conceptual recognition, my being was vast, empty, clear, present, aware, utterly untouched by appearances, yet intimately connected

to them all, naturally and effortlessly present, inescapable, beyond doubt, fearless and free. The personal suffering that had gripped my mind for years, even during the years of being a spiritual 'person', simply could not reformulate any longer. And, most incredibly, this turned out to be the natural state that had been present from the start, only unrecognized until Bob Adamson pointed this out and encouraged me to see the obvious.

Do Not Follow the Questions

The most direct way of handling questions is not to follow the questions but notice that the very questions arise presently to you. Your being is clearly evident as that knowing presence that is aware of each and every question. Is your being here or not? Is there any separation from that, even now? Seeing this undermines the doubts immediately and leaves you clearly present and aware. That present awareness is your true nature. You can doubt many things, but you cannot doubt that you are.

Just get acquainted with what you are. Any strategy or approach is another movement of thought which, ultimately, leads away from the fact that what you are seeking you already are. The simple fact of our already-present identity as that wavers due to interest in thoughts. Then we look for special techniques to eradicate interest in the mind or simply to still it. But that is not conclusive. Simply understand very clearly what is happening. Have a good look and see the mechanism of suffering. Understanding is the key, rather than some technique or strategy.

It is the interest in self-centered thoughts that sustains suffering. It can be helpful to look at why the interest is there. Why are we interested in such thoughts, especially when such interest moves us away from the immediate clarity of what is true? I cannot offer a technique, because to do so would be speaking to you as a person, which is ultimately an imaginary concept. I would rather say just have a look and see where you are right now (and at every moment). If suffering or doubt arises, I suggest thoroughly understanding the mechanism of that. Understanding unwinds the conceptual bondage, because it is all based on a misconception or misunderstanding. Trying to exert an act of will to 'become free' would not work. Who is exercising it? Such an act of will, even if it could be accomplished, would be a mental event. Understanding is

more penetrating because awareness naturally stands beyond the mind's grasp.

If you observe a grasping onto passing thoughts, then there is that remainder of belief that such thoughts are true. Ferret out the beliefs driving the interest in thoughts. See if they are true. Typically, there is some statement being asserted in thought about who we are that we are still assuming as true. As long as that is not seen, the belief continues to arise. My main advice is to confirm and doubly confirm your true nature as the being-awareness beyond perceptions, feelings and thoughts, because it is only with that firm understanding that the false beliefs stand out very clearly. From there you can see the underlying mechanism of suffering and, in that understanding, be free of it.

Fear and Anxiety

Feelings of fear and anxiety are driven by assumptions and beliefs about our identity that are taken as true. Take a look at the beliefs and concepts. In my view there is no real adequate response to fears and anxieties per se (assuming they are conceptual in origin), because they are just effects of underlying causes. Following them, being with them, allowing them, transcending them and so forth are all unworkable as conclusive responses because those approaches fail to get to the root cause(s). I also do not feel that remaining present to the feelings as feelings is particularly effective in providing a resolution. It is a start. At least one is not then fighting the feelings, which is a clear dualism. But you can dig a bit deeper and probe into what I call the 'mechanism' of suffering. Notice that all suffering is driven by thoughts, more precisely, thoughts that are taken as true (that are believed). Suffering drops when those thoughts are exposed and questioned. However, you can continue the inquiry even deeper by investigating what is the root cause and source of all suffering thoughts. Here is my short course.

Suffering is only a product of thought. Not all thoughts cause suffering. In fact, most do not. Suffering thoughts are related to our sense of identity. In other words, suffering is self-centered thoughts. Self-centered thought revolves around the idea of a separate self, which we take to be what we are. This self is an image, a creation in thought. It is not who we truly are. From this 'mechanism' arises confusion and contradiction (that is, suffering). For a conclusive resolution of suffering, the root belief in the central 'I' notion needs to be questioned. Otherwise, the root of all suffering and doubt thrives. The separate 'I' is assumed to be real and present, but is it? Where is it? What is it? And what is the relationship between this assumed 'I' and what we truly are? When the 'I' is examined, it is found to be non-existent, except as a notion. In this seeing, the suffering, doubt and problems are resolved.

Thoughts and Awareness

There are different ways of using terms, and they can be used in contradictory ways. You need to look past the words to what is being pointed to. As I see it, there are thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions which appear or are known. Even this labeling is somewhat arbitrary. These experiences are objective, observable phenomena that appear before us as 'things' or observable events. Then there is the knowing presence, the one who knows those things. All you can say about this knowing presence is that it is and it is aware. There are no phenomenal characteristics that can be assigned to it, because it is not an object.

I use the term 'mind' very loosely to refer to the object side of things. It is only a makeshift label, as there really is no such thing as a mind, independent of the thoughts, feelings, sensations and perceptions that appear. Mind (used as a collective term referring to the objects) comes and goes. It arises and disappears. Awareness, which is the knowing presence itself, is quite different. That is why I feel it is an error to equate mind and awareness at this level of discussion. Take a thought. It appears and disappears in awareness. When it leaves, awareness does not disappear. Clearly they are not the same thing. Now a thought appears from and subsides into awareness, so in essence it is that awareness. But in the appearance as thought, you cannot say that the appearance as such is awareness. It is very important at this level to have a clear recognition of the difference between thought as such and awareness as such, because the whole problem ultimately boils down to overlooking the presence of awareness and mistaking the mind to be that which is conscious.

Getting back to the issue of thought and awareness, it might be summarized by the following statement: 'Thought is nothing but awareness, but awareness is not a thought'. This may appear cryptic, but it becomes clear if you look at

some analogies. A wave is nothing but water. But water, as such, is not a wave. The water can exist independently of the wave. But the wave cannot stand independent of water. A gold ornament is nothing but gold. But gold, as such, is not an ornament. The gold can exist independently of the ornament. But the ornament cannot stand independent of gold. So, a thought is nothing but awareness (that is, its substance is awareness), but awareness can exist independently from a particular thought. When a thought is present, you know it. When the thought is not present, you know that the thought is not present. Evidently, you as the conscious presence exist independently from that given thought.

When I talk about awareness, I am not referring to the mind (or functioning of thought) at all or even states of consciousness. I am referring to that knowing presence in you that is aware of thoughts, experiences and states of consciousness. The principle of awareness is quite independent of the mind, just as water is quite independent of its temporary manifestation as a wave.

Activity and Understanding

The main thing with all this is to clarify your identity. You are something after all! As I see it, all the paths and traditions are simply trying to clarify what we are. Some approaches of pointing to this tend to do it positively: 'You are this'. Some approaches do it negatively: 'You are not this'. In my view, they are all saying the same thing in different ways.

All the doing, studying and practicing tend to be distracting in the end. Why? All that really needs to happen is a correction of our view or understanding. Suffering arises from a misunderstanding, primarily a misunderstanding of who or what we are. No amount of activity addresses this necessarily. Also self-knowledge is really a clear understanding or insight. Basically, what you are, as you eventually come to see, is non-objective, non-conceptual being-awareness. It is totally, clearly present now. Being is. Awareness is cognizing right now. The interesting thing is that you actually know this and always have. There is an undeniable sense of being present and aware. It is totally, intuitively clear.

Something happens I would say (hopefully without getting too mystical) when you hear about this directly. Why? Because the one pointing to it knows it already. Words are just trying to point, but there is something being pointed to. That is in you, but you just do not 'see' it yet. This being, awareness or true nature is non-objective and pre or non-conceptual. In other words, before the next thought appears, being is and awareness is functioning. The conceptual mind is an instrument in non-conceptual awareness. There is a very basic point here, not to be missed or glossed over. The thinking mind is a tool or appearance that arises subsequent to your true nature. You are and what you are is aware or cognizant. The conceptual mind appears to this knowing presence. It is extremely critical to see this point. Make sure it is clear.

All questions are mental phenomena or thoughts. Being is not a thought. The mind is oriented to objectivity—things, thoughts and activities. That is why the thinking mind is not the proper tool for recognizing one's being. It cannot be done. It is like looking for wine in an empty wine bottle. It simply is not there! That is why only reading about this will never 'work'. Nor will practicing, in the sense of pursuing objective states.

Self-knowledge 'arises' from the non-conceptual recognition of your identity as aware-being. Every being is this presently. Only they may not have recognized what this is and are imagining themselves to be something they are not. This is the fundamental ignorance, the initial link in the chain of suffering. All hell breaks loose from there!

How to understand all this? There is no practice per se. Mere activity is not opposed to ignorance, only right knowledge can cancel ignorance. That is why the emphasis is on knowledge or understanding. The best way and most successful approach to understand this for most of us is to have discussions on this with someone who can speak from their own first-hand experience.

The Path of Becoming Versus Being

The notion that spirituality involves an awakening followed by a period of integration resulting in final liberation is entirely fallacious. Many non-discriminating seekers are misled by such patently dualistic and erroneous concepts. These notions are attractive primarily because they tally with the seeker's own unexamined beliefs, namely that he or she is a separate person and that freedom lies in the future at the end of a process. This is the path of becoming, rather than being, of duality, rather than non-duality.

Many who hold to this conceptual framework are convinced that they have 'awakened' and have understood the basic points of non-duality, but a little self-examination shows that the seeking, doubts, suffering and bondage to the conceptual mind are often still in full force. The continuing interest in so-called 'enlightened' teachers, spiritual fads, books, seminars, satsangs, retreats, self-improvement techniques and so on is a clear sign that the core matter is not settled and the basic message of non-duality is not clear.

Many working within this framework believe that lasting freedom will dawn after some period of time, such as five or ten years. They fail to see that freedom is not the result of time, which is only an imaginary concept. Freedom is the ever-present natural condition, which is only seemingly obscured by limiting beliefs and concepts that are being believed presently. The dualistic model elevates and glorifies the special, 'enlightened' teacher, who is assumed to have achieved the goal, and attracts those who view themselves as seekers who are on the inside track to their own eventual 'liberation' also.

Again, this model is popular not because it is true, but because it matches the seeker's own dualistic beliefs. The issue is often clouded by residual interest in fame, wealth, popularity, special status and so on. But eventually, through experience, discrimination and honest self-evaluation, the light dawns and

one begins to question the conceptual frameworks that one has assumed as true. Then the clear pointers of genuine non-duality may find an opening through which to strike.

The Utter Simplicity of This

Questions and doubts are thoughts arising and setting before you. They come and go, but you remain as what you are. You clearly exist and you are clearly aware. Everything else is an object that comes and goes. Everything you can sense, perceive or know is a thing, an object, an appearance. This includes the apparent body, mind, personality and all else.

All you can say about yourself is 'I am' and 'I know' and 'I am nothing perceivable or conceivable'. Awareness or being are not things 'out there' that you see apart from yourself. You *are* that which is present and aware. You are that pure knowing presence itself. This is so simple and intuitively obvious that we overlook the point that this is completely self-evident. Instead of simply pausing at this point, we are apt to jump back into the questions and doubts of the mind granting them a sense of reality. Suddenly, we are talking about 'I' and 'awareness' and trying to piece it all together at a conceptual level, and of course we come up empty handed. That is why the answer can never be found in the mind. The mind, as such, has no capacity to know your real nature. The mind is simply a label for a collection of inert thoughts rising and setting before your knowing presence. That is why all the questions and doubts fail to lead us to the direct knowing of who we are.

Before the next thought appears, you are. This presence, the sheer fact of being and knowing, does not need any confirmation by thought. It is clear and certain knowledge that does not need any mind activity to confirm. Everyone knows he or she is. That knowing does not engage the conceptual mind at all. It is evident. It is more than evident. It is beyond doubt, even now. You cannot say 'I am not' or 'I am not aware'. Try it and see if you can convince yourself otherwise! That is what is very interesting about this. The clear and certain self-knowledge is already established. Our trouble is that we give undue emphasis to the mind. 'What about this? What about

that?’ But can those thoughts even be there without your own existence?

The mind creates the notion of a limited ‘I’, a person, a being standing apart from pure awareness, then we identify as that seeming entity. But that itself is just a concept that comes and goes, leaving us totally untouched and unchanged. Taking that separation as real, we look for techniques to gain reality, we wonder how we will achieve knowledge of who we are and so on. But these are all founded on the notion that we are a separate ‘I’ apart from reality. We take this thought to be who we are, imagine a duality and seek understanding, as if we do not have it. But it is all conceptual, because we have never left reality. Reality is simple being, which is present and aware. You are that even now. The notion of separation, the ‘I’ thought, which is the basis of all concepts, is simply a notion that comes and goes as an image in the pure untouched awareness that you are.

Pause thought and know that you are already that which you have been seeking. All the doubts and questions are based on the presumption that you are separate from being-awareness. But that separation never happened. You are that knowing presence, even now. Words are apt to over-complicate the utter simplicity of this.

Perception, Dreams and Awareness

When perception arises, it always appears as connected with a perceiving instrument, which is at a particular location in space and time. Perception comes from an apparent center. The same happens in dreams, too. Perception appears to be localized. But awareness stands beyond, illuminating all thoughts, feelings, perceptions and states, including the state of being awake or conscious. When you dream, awareness appears to be 'in' the dream and coming from a certain location. But it really stands outside and beyond the dream, because when the dream is over, being and awareness are not lost.

Awareness was never 'in' the dream or confined to the dream subject. The dreamer and his perceptions were appearing from a center within the dream, but awareness as such was never in the dream at all. Things in the dream affected the dreamed subject and his experiences in the dream state, but your fundamental presence, your being-awareness, was utterly untouched by any dream experiences. Since this innate awareness was never in the dream at all, how can it be located in a particular place or center in the dream? It really cannot. All you can say is that perception within the confines of a state, such as dreaming or waking, appears to happen from a particular location, usually the body functioning in that state. (However, even this is not always, the case. People speak of floating above the body and perceiving the body below themselves in near-death experiences, for example.)

The basic point is that perception appears within a state and appears as from a particular center or point of reference. Awareness enables perception but is not confined within a state or limited by perception. Since it is non-objective, it is not a thing to appear in a state. All states appear within it. Time and space are mental concepts imagined in thought, which itself appears in awareness. Awareness, which you fundamentally are, is timeless, spaceless, locationless and stateless. In fact, it

is prior to consciousness itself, which comes and goes as an experience in non-conceptual awareness.

Bodies in dreams and waking appear to be born and die. In truth, they are simply appearances that arise and set in awareness. But awareness, being 'no thing', neither appears nor disappears. It was never born and never became embodied. There has never been an embodied being standing apart from pure being-awareness itself. When we falsely imagine being-awareness to be confined to an apparent body, the notions of birth and death arise, as if being-awareness had appeared with the rise of the body and will terminate when it disappears. Forms arise and set, but being-awareness is not born nor does it die, because it is not confined to the body. You are aware of the body. Therefore, you are that timeless, spaceless, birthless and deathless awareness itself.

This Is Not About 'Moments' of Seeing

Do not fall into the trap that this is about 'moments' of seeing. That is just turning this into some objective experience. Then the mind goes back to searching for a practice to get back to that experience. But this is missing the mark entirely. All those thoughts, practices and evaluations are presently arising thoughts, mere mind stuff. In what are all those thoughts being registered? Who knows them? In and through all those thoughts and concepts, have you gone anywhere? Have you stopped being and being aware? Recognize that being is literally ever present. Once you start to see the stark, basic truth of this, you will see how everything the mind thinks about 'the spiritual understanding' is based on a misconception.

All the mind's beliefs and concepts are based on the assumption that 'it' (reality) is not here, that reality comes and goes, that you are a person apart from this, or that being is an experience in the flow of time. But that is a complete reversal of the facts. Thoughts, time, experiences, concepts, feelings arise and set with within your own aware presence. Your being is the necessary precondition for those to be perceived.

There are not people who 'got it' or will 'get it'. That whole construct gets tossed overboard. You are what you are seeking. Even the notion that dropping of concepts must happen before you 'get there' is a concession to the dualistic, conceptual mind. There is no entity. There has never been a separation from being. It is all an illusion, a false assumption. All the talk about entities, getting it, seeing and so on is just concepts—and erroneous ones at that. Pause those thoughts. Set them aside. Where are you right now? What actually needs to be attained if you cease to follow those concepts? Can you be outside of present being? If you think so, see if you can do it!

All the paths and approaches based on gradual arrival are false. Even the approach of 'many moments of returning to that' is faulty in my view. It is still predicated on the

assumption that you are not that. I suggest that you challenge those beliefs and assumptions. Turn away from thoughts and mental constructions completely. The answer is not in the mind. The net of the mind's concepts about this stuff is a trap. Fortunately, you can step free of it. You are free of it because your true nature, your being itself, is not in the mind. The mind comes and goes in being itself.

I keep telling you that you are already free. The answer does not come through what 'you' do, because that 'you' is a fiction. A resonance simply arises with the pointer that you are already free—because that freedom is what you are. Before the next thought, feeling, experience or emotion appears—you are. That is it. And you are that.

You Are This, Here and Now

Right now, just look and see that you are aware of thoughts, you are aware of perceptions, you are aware of feelings, experiences and any other phenomena. You are even aware that you are conscious. You are clearly and vividly aware of all of these things. You are certainly there, or in other words, you *are*. This undeniable presence of knowing and being is here right now. You cannot say you are not, nor can you say that you are not aware. Since everything objective appears and disappears before you, your essential nature must by default be the knowing presence itself. You are this, here and now. You also know this fact in all of its immediacy and beyond any doubt. Here you are, face to face with the fact of your own being, right from the start.

You are not a thing or an object that can be grasped by the senses or understood by the mind. You are no thing within the domain of consciousness. You cannot be perceived or conceived, yet you are vividly present and beyond doubt. Other words used to point to your true nature are—non-conceptual awareness, non-objective being, space-like awareness, cognizing emptiness, pure consciousness, being, the true Self, no thing and so on. If the terms ‘consciousness’ or ‘being’ refer to ‘conscious of objects’ or ‘presence in the world’, what you are is prior to consciousness, prior to being and prior to experience. From this angle, your ultimate nature could be termed as the state of non-knowing, non-being or non-experience. Words are only concepts. You are not a concept, so no words can describe you. Whatever term you use, it is only a pointer to the fact of your very self, which cannot be denied. If you say ‘I am not’, you must be present to make the statement. If you say consciousness comes and goes, there must be a prior awareness that registers that. Thus there is an absolute being and awareness that cannot be denied or negated. You are that.

You already are what you are seeking. Just see, know and be what you already are. You are that non-conceptual knowing presence that registers all that appears and disappears. Even everything perceivable and conceivable disappears, including the concept of the 'I', you still remain as that non-conceptual awareness. That is 'no thing', yet is undeniably present as that pure awareness or pure being that cannot be denied, for it is what you are.

Everything Appears Spontaneously

Thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences appear spontaneously. You remain untouched and free always. From here, they can all be left unmodified, uncorrected, unaltered. They have to be anyway, because there is no entity present who can manipulate them. The desire to avoid certain experiences does not arise from your real being, but from a reference point in the mind. This viewpoint itself is what creates and sustains conceptual suffering and bondage. Otherwise, sensations, be they pleasant, painful or neutral, simply appear and pass through with no real mental reaction. The labeling or resistance from the mind itself is the suffering, not the bare event. See this clearly, and any energy going into this just collapses. Seeing that everything appears spontaneously, it is hard to sustain any concept such as 'it would be better if this were not happening'. Why would that notion be there when the experience is happening? It is a redundancy and creates a dualism between what is happening and what the mind (based on past experiences and conditioning) feels *should be* happening.

Usually, such conceptualizing falls under the category of self-centered thoughts that are attempting to preserve or fix the imagined separate self. If thoughts, feelings and perceptions are not related to a 'me', there is very little basis for any preference or partiality toward experiences. They just are. Sensations or fears are just appearing. They are not personalized or owned as belonging to 'me', so there is not too much concern or interest in them. They are as they are. You are as you are. If something can be done about them at a relative level, fine. If not, fine also. Either way you are fine as is.

The good news is they are all transient appearances. You are not controlling them. If you could change them, who would ever choose an unhappy thought or a fear? I would say just let the concern and interest fall away from them and they

will resolve however they are meant to resolve. Remember, awareness is not a principle 'out there'. You are that. You are forever free and untouched by appearances. There need not be any concern or fear about appearances.

You Are and You Know That You Are

The thoughts such as 'I am awareness' or 'I am' appear as images or words in the mind. You are aware of the thoughts. Before they are there, you are. When they are there, you are present. When they subside, you are present. You are aware of thoughts. Therefore, you are not the thoughts. The same thing goes for perceptions, sensations, feelings or anything else of an objective nature.

Set all those aside and realize that whether those things appear or disappear, you are. You must be there as the knowing presence aware of those things. This is not some logical assertion or difficult point to figure out in the mind. It is intuitively obvious and clear beyond any doubt whatsoever. You *are* and you *know* that you are. These are facts and have nothing at all to do with the mind or any other objects or states. This is immediate and irrefutable experience. You cannot say 'I am not'. Nor can you say that there is no awareness. That is all there is to it. You are, and what you are is that which is knowing the mind and all else. See this much and your 'work' is done. Pause with this knowledge and just be, instead of constantly returning to the mind trying to figure things out conceptually.

Awareness (which is your nature) never becomes an object. The thought 'awareness' is an object, but he who knows the thought is not an object. You will run into trouble if you try to grasp all this mentally and pin it down into a specific state or experience. Of course, you come up empty handed because what you are is totally non-objective. Yet it is not vague or distant. It is so clear and present that we tend to overlook the obviousness of it.

Clear Self-Knowledge Is the End of Suffering

Take time to linger over the richness and impact of the revelation of your essential being. Nothing new will be brought in. But something that has been ever-present but not fully appreciated emerges in greater clarity as it is recognized and seen for what it truly is. This is your own self. All troubles come from not fully or clearly seeing this. All separation, suffering, doubt, worry, anxiety and so on arise from this. In fact, the clarity on this is really synonymous with the resolution of all those things. The urge to get rid of suffering as some task unto itself is a misunderstanding. Lack of self-knowledge is the root of suffering. Clear self-knowledge is the end of suffering.

Your true being is one with the real; it is free; it is untouched by suffering. The full, clear and direct knowledge of your essential self is the direct means to the resolution of those things. This is because your real being is already free of those things by its very nature.

With this clear, not merely as verbal assertion but in direct immediate knowing, any residual beliefs, concepts or tendencies are easily dismantled and seen through by relying on the touchstone of what you already know as true. If the truth of who you are is not fully clear, then any attempt at seeing through erroneous concepts is done while still retaining some of the unexamined false identifications—and so the seeing is not usually penetrating or conclusive. The ‘thief’ slips in the back door so to speak and gums up the works. For example, take the notion ‘At last, I have it and I am free’. This is clearly an ‘I’ wanting to claim some new state. This would never be asserted by one who has looked deeply into his or her real nature. This notion is based on the notion that freedom and your being are separate. But deep looking shows that you have never stood apart from awareness at any time. That freedom is not a state that is attained, much less is there any separate one to achieve it.

All of these points are an outgrowth of an emphatic and deep knowing of your actual nature. That is why all the mileage is gained by nailing this down with no doubts. Everything else is just frosting on the gingerbread. The purpose of non-duality is to clarify your real identity. That is it in a nutshell.

The Mechanism of Suffering

The basic truth is your identity as non-conceptual awareness or non-objective being itself. In the last analysis, all that appears is non-different from this aware presence. Thus, non-duality. This is the main aspect, but there is more to the pointers than just this. There is what I call the ‘mechanism’ of suffering. It is the notion of the presence of a limited sense of self or ‘I’. Once this notion kicked in, we went looking to define that ‘I’ in the images and identifications created in the mind. The problem is that you are not in the mind. In fact, there is no ‘I’ at all. It is a false assumption. However, as long as it is operative, the energy of belief propels us back into the mind, searching for reality, identity and happiness—for the assumed separate self.

This is the mechanism that keeps us in apparent bondage to the mind. It needs to be seen and understood. The binding thoughts are images in the mind that revolve around the sense of ‘me’. The belief in that ‘me’ keeps the whole network in motion. If the ‘I’ notion is examined, you find that you are not a separate ‘I’ at all. In fact, there is no separate ‘I’ present. It is only assumed. When you see this, you can no longer give this concept any belief, and, by extension, all belief and concern in the self-centered mental concepts is removed. A little bit of looking is all it takes to confirm this in your own experience.

Of course, all the while you are standing as the undeniable presence of awareness, so nothing is lost or gained ultimately. However, once the ‘I’ is recognized as a non-existent phantom, the plug is pulled on the mechanism of suffering. It is an important adjunct to the seeing of what you are. You could call it the discarding of what you are not. You are not and never have been a separate self or person apart from awareness.

Consciousness and Sleep

You do not have a sense of consciousness or existence in deep sleep. Why? Because there is no instrument present to articulate that experience. It is sometimes said that the sense of consciousness and beingness subside in deep sleep. But your actual being and its aware capacity do not cease in deep sleep. So your real nature must be present in waking and sleep—these being passing phenomena. In fact, you are the pure awareness that knows coming and going of all the states of consciousness. There is some principle in you (which is you) that is there in thought, no thought, waking, dreaming and deep sleep. No word will cover it.

I use the terms 'being' and 'awareness' as pointers to the absolute irrefutable being that you are and skip all the conceptual verbiage. All words are only pointers, so in the end it does not matter what terms are used because they must be discarded anyway. You are not a term or a word. The idea is to get past the words and conceptual distinctions to know yourself. Call it anything. The term is irrelevant. Being, no-being, consciousness, prior to consciousness—all the words are conceptual.

Before the next thought appears, you are. What you are is present and aware. This is irrefutable. That awareness is not a transitory state. If there is any knowledge of states of beingness and no-beingness or consciousness and prior to consciousness, it is only because such states are registered in some absolute knowing principle. That ultimate knowingness is not a product of the body. It was there before the body was even there and will be there long after the body returns to the elements. My best term for your essential nature is non-objective, non-conceptual awareness. Another try: pure being beyond being and non-being. Another: pure awareness beyond consciousness and no-consciousness.

Basically, though, it is just you, your natural condition prior to conceptual thought. All the language distinctions are in thought only. Before the next thought appears, you are there. And what you are is beyond all conceptual distinctions. It is vividly cognizant, solidly present and radiant with non-conceptual peace and clarity, absolutely undisturbed by thought. Call it anything—but you are that.

A Closer Look at the 'I' Thought

The 'I' thought or notion of being a separate person can be very subtle. If there is any belief going into such notions as 'I have seen it' or 'I do not exist' or 'I am enlightened' or 'I have it' or 'I am a teacher'—that is still the 'I' sense. Any reference at all to any shred of a separate or special 'I' is just another reference point. Many have a desire to proclaim 'I am now free', but you can never really say that when you see that the 'I' is a total concept. There is no one present to be free or to be a teacher or have any position at all, positive or negative. Even any subtle sense of becoming, purifying or approaching a goal is just another subtle reference to an assumed separate person or 'I'. Even well-known teachers almost invariably fall into dualism by proclaiming themselves a specially awakened one or implying that this is a process of becoming. For example, some say that first you become awakened and then later become liberated. Hogwash! Who is to do such a thing if there is no one to do it?

Here and now you are the truth. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it. Separation from immediate being, awareness, peace has never happened. Right now, you are what is being pointed to. There is no teacher, student or path at all, just a simple pointing to what is undeniable, your own being. That is all. The 'I' notion is the assumption that you were some kind of entity apart from reality, from existence-awareness itself.

Teachers and students invariably talk in reference to the reality of the 'I' concept. Both are playing in a conceptual illusion. Once you see this, you cannot play that game. It is so obvious when seen. But when it is not seen, whatever is said or believed, however noble it sounds, even if it be the highest non-dual verbiage, only perpetuates the false concept of separation. I was in non-duality circles for years and overlooked that everyone, including myself, was still functioning in reference to that subtle sense of self. Bob Adamson pointed

this out to me immediately when I met him and I then realized what had been missed. Even the so-called enlightened teachers I had met, even the ones who proclaimed they had no 'me' or whatever, actually were still functioning in reference to that self-center and completely unconscious of it. I call it the 'enlightened ego', the self that thinks it has vanished. What I found was that in such cases the arrogance and lack of genuine humility were usually incredibly tangible and present around such people. In seeing there is no 'I', there is no one left to claim anything, even understanding anything. There is just what is.

Who Is In Bondage to Beliefs?

Who is the entity in bondage to beliefs, you ask? No one. That is the point! It is just a conceptual dust devil swirling in the clear, bright, open non-conceptual awareness that you are and which is entirely free right now. Step back a moment and see that you are already what you are seeking. Here and now, you are that awareness. Do not dig around in the dust bin of the mind looking for answers and reasons for a problem that never existed! You have been falsely enamored of the mind and were giving it too much weight. Just see the thoughts as thoughts and let them be. Who even cares about the activity of the mind? Does the sky care if a few clouds blow through? Is it caught in the clouds? You have seen what needs to be seen. So just pause and be what you are. Besides, what are thoughts anyhow? Only vibrations of awareness itself. Nothing is ever appearing except awareness! You are that awareness. The thoughts are only awareness. Nothing is happening at all! If you think you are bound, stuck or limited, look for that supposed limited entity and you will find nothing except pure, ever-present freedom itself. Look like this and any interest in the apparent mind is over with. You have been boxing with a shadow. There was no opponent present. And who would want to put the brakes on the mind activity (if such a thing were possible)? Who owns that concept? That is just another self-centered story for a self that never was! A bit of clear seeing burns through these flimsy concepts like a blow torch pointed at a few stray pieces of lint. You are not bound. Nothing is wrong. It is all a concept, an illusion. Step out of the mind entirely and reclaim the ever-present freedom that you have never lost. You are freedom itself. Everything else is a concept that has no reality whatsoever.

You Are the Answer

You are the answer. Your own natural state is what is being pointed to. As such, you are already home. Whenever the mind settles down and lets go of its self-created questions, doubts and issues, all there is, is simple clarity and peace. You do not need any techniques or pointers to be yourself. That is why they run dry. The menu is not the food. So do not try to eat the menu. Knowing that you are already the peace and freedom you seek, you can call off the search, retire from the seeker game and let go of the pointers about who you are. You are who you are.

Pause right here in the space of being what you already are and you need nothing else. It is so simple that we overshoot the point of it all. In the pausing and being what you already are, it is all clear and evident. Once your real identity is clear, there may be a tendency to jump back into the mind and ignore the self-evident freedom that is already present. We go back into the mind for another spin, looking for answers, nursing questions, attending to doubts, seeking for happiness or trying to define ourselves in terms of concepts and identifications. These are thoughts and beliefs that the mind presents to us about who and what we are. None of them are true, because your true nature has nothing to do with thoughts. But the interest in thought seems compelling. We begin to focus on the mind and get wrapped up in the concepts and images, even though we are standing as the pure being-awareness that is already totally free.

This mechanism needs to be understood clearly and deeply; otherwise, we are forever at the mercy of every passing thought and image tossed up by the mind. Each and every conceptual story in thought traces back to the notion that you are a limited, separate self standing apart from the deeper source or reality. This assumption, commonly called the ego or 'I'-thought, needs to be examined and 'smoked

out', so to speak. As long as this notion is assumed as true, the identification with thought will continue. However, once the notion is examined and found to be false, all interest and belief in the self-centered concepts snaps entirely. This leaves you right where you started, as what you are and always have been—non-conceptual being-awareness with no duality whatsoever, in other words, perfect peace.

Dialogues

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Thoughts Are Not the Problem

Question: After I leave your meetings, thoughts do not seem to have the juice they usually have.

John: That is because what I am pointing to and what you are resonating with is your natural state, which is inherently free of thought. It is not hard to recognize at all, but it can be helpful to be reminded of it.

Q: After a few hours the thoughts again start to take hold.

John: Thoughts are also going on at the meetings, but you are just not taking notice or delivery of them. Thoughts are powerless. They are lifeless images floating through undeniable awareness. They do not 'take hold'. The energy of belief and interest drifts back into them. Do not blame inert, lifeless thoughts!

Q: You say thoughts cannot take hold if the understanding is clear. Well, I guess it is not clear then!

John: Do not turn this into some grand attainment called 'the understanding' (when everything falls into place and 'you' are finally free and so on). That is a bunch of self-centered conceptual imagery. It is just another storyline in the mind that is being given some belief. Thoughts do not 'take hold' if you stop believing in them and giving them any interest. The thoughts are not a problem in and of themselves. How can they be when they are arising and passing right within your true nature?

You never leave your true nature. Thoughts coming and going do not touch you. If you are not interested in thoughts, how can they bother you? Consider why you are so interested in thought anyway. What makes it so captivating and fascinating?

Q: There still seems to be a fundamental belief in thought that just will not give up!

John: Because it is taken as true and valid. It is all concepts about a person we take as real. As long as the separate person is believed to be present, the interest in the thoughts continues. Once you see that you are not a person, not an entity at all, all the stories and attributes of that person wither away due to lack of interest.

Q: Anything I do only seems to reinforce a belief in an 'I'.

John: Correct, because the one that feels compelled to do something is the assumed 'I' itself. Investigate the reality of the 'I'. Go back to the basic question of 'Who am I?' and clarify your actual present identity.

Q: There is nothing more important to me than this understanding, yet it still seems elusive.

John: It seems elusive when it is conceived as an attainment.

It is just being yourself. You are here—and aware. Everything appears and disappears in awareness. Give up the concepts of understanding and attaining. Just see what is present now. There is only natural, effortless non-conceptual awareness and a few thoughts, feelings and perceptions floating through. There is no separate person. All the concepts and beliefs in the mind are baseless. You are not a bound entity. There is no entity. Question the thoughts about who you are. They are all false because they are based on an invalid premise.

The Mind Appears and Disappears in Awareness

Question: I came across the following quote somewhere: 'More advanced students can be taken directly to the experience of their true self by hearing the truth from the lips of the guru or through his silent presence. This is called the direct path'. When I read this I wonder: You already told me the truth, and I was taken to an experience. But certainly the 'me' comes and goes, and I am not in a state that is illuminated.

John: You say that the 'me' comes and goes. The 'me' is a thought. It is the concept 'I' and various beliefs and identities attached to that central idea. It is all ideas that come and go. But you are aware of them coming and going. You are that awareness in which all thoughts arise and set. That awareness is what you are right now. That is your true nature. Disregard the content of the mind. What is the nature of the awareness that you already are? That awareness is the real 'guru'. It is here and now, and you are already that. Teachers, students, the separate self and so on are all ideas generated in thought. Cease to follow thoughts and instead recognize present awareness. That is the answer—nothing else.

Q: Thanks very much for this. This is becoming very clear, and the natural state is interrupted less and less by the mind.

John: See that the mind appears and disappears in the natural state of ever-present awareness. Thoughts come and go, but your natural state remains constant and untouched. Look into this until it is clear. That is all that you need to do. Everything else is only an elaboration of this basic point. Nothing is gained. Wrong assumptions of who we are, are seen as false and no longer believed as true. What remains is what is already here, call it being, awareness, oneness or what you will.

Why Would Freedom Ask How to Be Free?

Question: Okay, so here is the \$64,000 question. How do you stop identifying with the mind?

John: There is no 'you' to do such a thing, so it is a false question. It is just one more thought based on the premise that 'you' are not 'there'. Where are you right now? What is wrong with present being-awareness? Are you separate from that? Look at it head on like this and the whole conceptual house of cards collapses immediately.

If you turn this into a process, a technique, a 'how to', you are back into concepts again. But practically speaking, we identify with the mind because we are not clear on our identity. Self-knowledge, which equates with a clear recognition of our identity, eradicates the basis of the wrong identification. Once that is clear, it is tremendously helpful to see the mechanism of bondage and suffering very clearly. Other than that, what is left that would need to be done? Clear seeing of what you are shows that you are not a separate, suffering being in need of something. Understanding the root of suffering shows that it is mind stuff based on unexamined conceptual thoughts. Suffering has a cause. When investigated, the cause is discovered to be absent.

Look straight at that question you asked me and see the false premises hidden in the question. Remember, even apparently cogent spiritual questions are usually based on erroneous assumptions. That question arises and passes as a thought. We move toward the thought, which means, we give it some sense of reality. But your true nature is here, clearly present and available and absolutely unaffected by the thought. Why would freedom ask how to be free?

There Is No Need for Realization

Question: I wish to share some questions. When we are awake, we are aware of our world, but we do not see 'freshness' or 'newness' around us. Everything is familiar to our mind.

John: It is all an appearance in awareness. Everything is registered in your knowing presence. That is the point of it.

Q: But you speak about the clarity of mind, the aliveness of present reality.

John: This is pointing out the nature of your present awareness. You are alive, present, aware. There is nothing inert or unconscious about you, even now.

Q: What is blocking me from seeing the present moment clearly, as it really is?

John: Nothing. Awareness is present constantly. It is that which is seeing, functioning and knowing constantly. It is the light in all thoughts, perceptions and feelings. There is some presence in you that is aware, correct? That is all it is.

Q: Perhaps my lack of clarity is due to ego. Is it possible to see the reality without the presence of the ego-self?

John: The idea that you are not seeing clearly is false. Clarity is that in you which is seeing right now. It has nothing to do with the presence or absence of an 'ego'. Can you deny your being? Can you deny your own present awareness? If not, then you have no problem seeing, knowing or being what you are.

Q: What is the stuff of which one's ego-self is made?

John: The ego is the belief that there is a separate entity standing apart from the deeper reality and that you are that separate one. Is it true? Are you apart? Where is the separate self? There is not one. The ego is a false belief. It is not a reality. It is just an unexamined assumption.

Q: When I look through my eyes, I see the world. When I am aware of the world outside there is only seeing. But the teaching says there is no one there to 'see' the world.

John: Yes, there is seeing happening. There is no 'one' seeing, only seeing. Later you say 'I am seeing', but that 'I' is not present in the seeing. It only comes later. That thought 'I' does not see anything. So, even now, there is seeing but no 'one' that is seeing.

Q: When I ask, 'Who am I?' I feel only I am. Is it a person or my identity inside me as pure awareness?

John: What you are is pure, non-conceptual awareness. That is not a person. A person is a concept, a mental image of a 'me' and all the beliefs and definitions that go along with that. But you are not an idea or a belief. You are that awareness that knows the ideas.

Q: During meditation I am aware of awareness, but I am also aware of thoughts.

John: You are not aware *of* awareness. You *are* awareness. Thoughts appear in awareness. They come and go, but you remain as you are.

Q: Some teachings say that to realize self, the 'no mind' state is necessary. Is it true?

John: There is no need for realization. Your being is already here and clearly known. It is simple being-awareness that is undeniable even now. There are no conditions to fulfill and

nothing that needs to be achieved to be what you are. 'No mind' means that you are ever free of the mind. Pause the doubt and see that your natural being remains, clearly present, shining as unchanging aware-presence. 'No mind' means pure awareness that has never been touched by thought. It is here and now, and you are that.

What You Are Seeking, You Already Are

Question: I have looked into these things for a while now. I am ready to end the search.

John: Search implies that there is something to get and that you are apart from that. But are you? The issue is to clarify your true identity, and then the concept of search falls away as a mistaken notion.

Q: I understand that what I am is not an object and that it is not something to achieve or aspire towards because I am it already.

John: Correct.

Q: Nor does it matter whether I understand this or not.

John: Ultimately, yes. From the practical level, it means the difference between a life of suffering and doubt and one free of those. Why would that not matter?

Q: It seems important for the assumed person to understand this.

John: The assumed person does not understand anything. However, the conceptual bondage can be exposed and the needless suffering removed. There is no need to bring in the concept of a person.

Q: Also, I wonder how I can continue to be even when the body dies.

John: The body is only an appearance. It has no substance or independent nature. It can not even appear without awareness, can it? Being-awareness is primary. The body comes and goes in that, like all else.

Q: Existence seems to be for a body-mind and not awareness itself.

John: This is the complete reversal of the facts. The body is an appearance in awareness and derives its seeming existence from the presence of awareness.

Q: What do I need to understand to end the search?

John: Just be clear on your identity and see that what you are seeking is what you already are. Then do not pick up any concepts based on the notion that you are a separate, limited being apart from awareness.

Life Goes On, But Without the Self-Center

Question: It has been a funny trail since a couple of weeks ago when I saw all this so clearly. I had some spacey days—but felt quite content—and occasional spikes of fear. I found I was less hungry and less likely to buy stuff, so maybe my emotions were better fed! The sense of the experience did fade, though.

John: But did your being fade?

Q: I got that awareness is it, and everything else is bells and whistles. But I had not yet adequately examined the bells and whistles. I am doing that now.

John: What is the need to go back and reexamine that stuff? It is just going back to the mind and re-engaging the notion that there is more to do. Why not remain as what you are and see what reveals naturally from there? If you are searching for the North Pole and you reach it, you do not need to keep searching!

Q: I ran into a kind of brick wall.

John: Yes, but see what is happening. You are moving back into conceptual thought and (seemingly) away from the immediate clarity and ease of your natural state.

Q: Questions are hard to formulate. Your answers always seem to come back to ‘just know that you are awareness’ or ‘who is this happening to?’ or ‘keep it simple’. However, I have found that a few important questions have come up, and I cannot really find answers in my rapidly-growing non-duality library. The questions are rather philosophical, and it feels funny to ask them. I suppose I should put on hip boots before wading into them!

John: Your self is not in a book! Collecting books and looking for answers in them is not going to have much to do with self-knowledge. It will be collecting information, but it is still at the mind level.

Question: I listened to a discussion on free will on Stephen Wingate's web site and came away with a newly assembled perspective on the issue of no 'me', no doer, no one to exercise free will, that thoughts and emotions do not matter.

John: You are misinterpreting the point of the message. Thoughts, feelings and decisions all go on just as before. They all have their relevance in life at a practical level. But they are not referenced to a fictitious self-center any longer.

Q: It struck me that this type of talk sure seems to define being a puppet. It seems like nihilism. Yet, we are told that this state is freedom, and that it gives rise to joy.

John: To see that you are not a limited, defective self, but only pure awareness is very freeing, because life is no longer being lived through an erroneous concept. It does not have to do with actions and appearances at the practical level.

Q: I have actually experienced the uncaused joy that arises when I do not believe my thoughts. I would be curious to know your take on this puppet-versus-freedom paradox.

John: Freedom and predetermination are concepts. They imply an entity that is either free or determined. There is no entity, so the question is moot. Thoughts happen. But no entity creates them. That is all. It is not a commentary on things done, but on the referencing of them to a fictitious entity. That is the only point of the discussion.

Question: What about the physical world? If everything is appearing in consciousness, does the world exist? Information in books seems contradictory. 'Sailor' Bob Adamson talks about energy

vibrating. I kind of like that. Do I have a body to occupy for the time being, or is that part of the dream? Do my relationships in the physical world—my marriage, my lifelong friends—mean anything or do they just arise in awareness, too?

John: Everything, quite naturally appears in awareness. It all means what it means at the level at which it appears. Meaning is something created by the mind, based on some conceptualized scale of values. Everything goes on quite well and naturally, independent of the mind's preconceptions.

Question: Is there good and bad? (I am leaving aside the notion of evil.) Is there any sort of global (universal) preference for good? Do loving kindness, decency and compassion enter into the picture? How about humor? If it is all just appearing in consciousness and there is no preference for good, then why recycle, give blood or help little old ladies across the street? If there is no good and bad, then why do you teach?

John: Good and bad are clearly human concepts. They are local, conditional and changeable. What is good for one may be bad for another. There is no universal standard. A good working definition from a spiritual perspective is whatever accentuates the self-center concept is 'good' and whatever tends to diminish it is 'bad'. In other words, self-knowledge is the ultimate good and self-confusion is 'bad'. All so-called evil acts tend to spring from belief in the conceptual self-center. What are generally called 'good' actions are those that diminish the separate self concept. This might be used as a universal 'morality yardstick', if one is inclined to have one.

Question: Is there a role for the things that lift us out of ourselves or give us feelings of awe? Does it say anything that we can be dumbstruck by the beauty of a symphony? By seeing a bobcat in the wild? What happens if we are, say, throwing a clay pot on a wheel and we are so involved that we become what we are doing, we become the doing itself?

John: Everything and anything can be a pointer back to what we are. As such, it all has a value.

Question: I have an inkling based on some things I have assembled from various sources. That inkling is that awareness, truth and love are all the same. The sense is so completely non-intellectual that I have no way to explain it. It just feels right.

John: Yes, I agree. Our nature is awareness, being, love, peace, reality or whatever you choose to call it. It is all words pointing to what is real and what we are.

Q: These all seem like strange questions to ask someone I barely know! Maybe they are just thoughts and therefore something to ignore as they pass by. Or maybe I do not fully appreciate the explanations. But it feels to me like there is some kind of depth, of soul, in human life. Some concepts in non-duality seem to negate this.

John: Non-duality is not concepts. It is only a pointer to the true life or reality within us. That is the soul or essence of life itself, so I cannot see how such pointers contradict that, as their purpose is to turn us toward recognizing that and seeing our identity as that.

Cease to Follow Concepts

Question: I am fifty-one years old. My search for truth has been since about my senior year of high school into college and afterwards. I was raised in the Christian faith, and I have been in and out of it over the years. I have some of your books and have been reading 'Shining in Plain View'. I do understand the concept of non-duality on a cerebral level, and catch glimpses of awareness.

John: There is a principle in you that is aware of each thought, feeling and experience. You are and you know you are. That is what this is pointing to. It is not about glimpses, but noticing something so simple and present that we have overlooked it. It is just that sense of presence that allows you to say 'I am'. How could you say 'I am' if you were not?

Q: Where I am hung-up is—who is John Wheeler or James (that is, me)?

John: They are just conceptual labels, verbal conventions, names, images in the mind, nothing more than that.

Q: Who are we when we eat, sleep, use the bathroom, drive and so on?

John: It is just the appearance of a body-mind functioning. All goes on quite easily and without problem or effort.

Q: Certainly John Wheeler and James are concepts, but functioning concepts, if that makes sense.

John: No it does not! The labels do not do anything. The body-mind functions. It is given a label for naming purposes. But it is not the essence of you. It is not who you are. You are that awareness in which the body and mind appear—and disappear.

Q: Still, I do all of those things!

John: Seeing happens. Later we say 'I see'. That 'I' thought was not present in the functioning. 'You' do nothing. Functioning happens.

Q: I will say that I do have a much calmer demeanor since realizing non-duality, but I cannot quite grasp the 'person'.

John: The pointers of non-duality tell us that there is no person. So, no wonder you are having a hard time grasping it!

Q: I realize I am complete and do not need anything.

John: That is all you need. Cease to follow concepts and your natural state is whole and complete now and ever. That is all this is pointing to.

The Answer Is Not in the Mind

Question: This investigation seems to leave 'me' nowhere to be found.

John: Yes, the image of 'you' is—poof!—gone.

Q: What does that mean? It seems an unanswerable question. Is this just more tail-chasing?

John: There is no need to answer it! That would be more conceptualizing.

Q: I do not really know what to make of it!

John: The mind does not know, but then, it never did anyway. Now you see this clearly.

Q: It seems like the mind is petering out. It does not know where to go next, but it seems like there may be nowhere to go anyway.

John: Without stepping back into mind (which creates past and future, here and there, and the notion of the 'I' itself), where is there to go? Who? Why? The whole point is self-knowledge. You are already that true nature itself.

Q: There is some confusion and there also seems to be some resignation to the confusion.

John: But you are that bright and clear presence that is aware of that momentary confusion. Let the thought go. The answer is not in the mind.

Q: I am present and aware. That is certain.

John: That is it. There is no confusion with that. That is what your natural state is—undeniable being-awareness, whatever you want to call it. Get to know that. You are that, of course. There is lightness, clarity, joy and peace in this natural presence that you are. Everything we were searching for in the name of peace and happiness is here.

Q: I know you say that this is it. The mind still seems to want a little more. I know you have heard this a million times, and I can pretty much anticipate how you will respond.

John: See what that thought gets you! The certainty of being-awareness and that natural, spontaneous clarity and peace gets traded in for mind-created doubts and problems! You have the basic points. Your being has nothing to do with the mind and thoughts. They are fine for relative functioning. But thought is useless for knowing your real being, because before the next thought arises, you already are. That being is certain. Take your stand there.

It Has Nothing to Do with Words

Question: Thank you for your wonderful pointers and books. You really have a way with words, but then it is not about those bloody words to begin with!

John: Good! If you see it has nothing to do with words, then the words have done their job.

Q: All of this really rings a bell, but I really have a hard time just listening to the bell and not trying to understand it! I am pretty new to non-duality. Over the last ten months, I have read over fifty books (and have bought twice as many).

John: Before you try to understand anything, you are. You exist and that existence is aware. That is what you are. Looking beyond this is mental and moves you away from the direct knowing and being of your true nature.

Q: To me it appears like there has been some kind of deepening or maybe a better understanding along the way. In the beginning it was all pretty conceptual, and now it seems a bit clearer. I can take a stand in and as this awareness (which I know I can never leave) and then, for a brief moment, just be aware.

John: Keep it simple. You *are* awareness. You are here. You are aware. There is no separation from that. The separation is only conceptual. In truth, you are what you are seeking.

Q: It is so hard to experience my body as just an appearance in awareness. I mean, it is there all the time (at least while I am awake).

John: It is there all the time—in awareness. Awareness is primary. Body and mind come and go in awareness. It is that simple.

Q: On a conceptual level, I do understand that the body is just made up of the elements, but it really stays in mind.

John: Not constantly. 'Body' is just a word for a collection of transitory perceptions, which are constantly coming and going. There is nothing permanent or substantial about those things. The body, as such, is not a thing. It is only a label for a series of events, which are labeled as 'the body' for communication purposes.

Q: My second troublesome problem is about the questioning of all these false beliefs. It seems impossible to stick to the inquiring. Even if I really want to question a concept, I find my mind wandering. It feels like it cannot go there. It can do it for a brief moment and then it has gone to something totally irrelevant. And, in a way, it makes sense. If there is no one to do or choose the thinking, then the inquiry has got to be random. But how do I then clear things out if my uncontrollable mind keeps wandering here and there?

John: Why worry about the mind? This is all just more thoughts. The purpose is to recognize your fundamental nature. The mind comes and goes before you. You are that aware presence that is registering the mind and all else. Concentration and or lack of it come and go. This is not about the mind at all. This is only about clarifying your present and constant identity.

Your Being Is Not in the Future

Question: You cleared up my confusion enormously when you said we are ‘by default the aware presence itself’. Yes, we are already that here and now! Awareness is just a pointer to our true self, not something to cultivate or attempt to sense or feel—all of which would make it an object.

John: Exactly true.

Q: As you noted, we could just as easily substitute awareness, existence, consciousness, presence, and self for awareness. And we are already each of these! We do not have to do a thing in that regard. Well, that was easy!

John: Again, true.

Q: Now all I have to do is allow the pointers in your book to bring me to a direct and non-conceptual knowing of my true nature.

John: A slight miscalculation here! This assumes that you are not in direct contact with awareness. Is this true? When asked, ‘Are you present?’ you know. When asked is ‘Is awareness here?’ you know. These are not objects, as you have seen, but they are known now. The non-conceptual knowing is already happening. This is it. Do not push it out into the future and imagine it is not present. That is a concept, not immediate experience. See that what you are seeking is here and that the direct, immediate, non-conceptual knowing of this is already the case. Then—full stop. You are what you are seeking. Many will overlook the immense implications of this. The knowing of your true nature has already occurred. If the subtlety of this is missed, then you go back into the mind seeking what you have never lost. But there is no answer in the mind because you are prior to the mind.

Q: Given that there is already an intellectual understanding here, that is, that the mind and the ego do not exist, this part of the puzzle should be even easier!

John: The recognition of present being-awareness is never intellectual. It cannot be, because it is not in the mind. It is already beyond the mind by nature. Just appreciate this. There is no understanding in the future because you are not in the future. You are here and now.

Awareness and Painful Sensations

Question: Clear, non-personal awareness seems deeply affected when the sensations are painful or very unpleasant. There is still fear based on past experiences of pain and discomfort of the inevitable experiences that might appear within this awareness in the future, particularly when this body starts to disintegrate.

John: Awareness is not ‘deeply affected by sensations’—any more than the sky is deeply affected by clouds passing through it. Death itself is not an issue because death has not happened yet, so anything coming up around that notion is imaginary. Even the fear is of sensations that ‘might’ appear at death. They also have not happened, so that is also imaginary. There must be some concept in play that triggers the imagination and generates fear. The interesting thing to see is that such experiences are happening now, when neither the pain nor death is actually present. Neither pain nor death is the issue, because they are not actual. Yet the fear is arising—but only in thought.

Intense physical pain is usually a sign of a physical problem. It is usually a natural, organic bodily response. Of course, there is a reaction in the body, and no one is saying we should endure it unnecessarily, if there is any alternative. Usually, when real pain arises, you deal with it, and it is not usually as bad as imagination makes it out to be. I recommend that you look at pain as a natural, intelligent response of the body—and do not label it as anything else except a transient bodily reaction. As it comes, it goes. You remain as you are, either way. Pain and pleasure, even intense pain and pleasure, appear to you. It is important to see that your true nature is not affected, much less is it ‘deeply’ affected.

As usual with this kind of thing, the ‘problem’ is not the event in itself, but in the thoughts about it. The thoughts consist of labeling, evaluating and judging what is an impersonal

occurrence, creating (in this case) aversion, and also relating it to a 'me' who can be affected and injured. But there is no 'me' there to be affected. The problem arises because the experiences are related to a false sense of self, which is taken to be vulnerable and subject to circumstances.

Even judging a sensation as 'horrific' is a mental label. The mind creates these labels, then scares itself, like a child creating an illusory monster and getting frightened by its own imagined creation. Sensation is sensation. 'Horrific' is a label, conjuring up all types of associations, like 'this is bad', 'this should not be happening', 'this will affect me', 'I do not want this' and so on.

You are free and beyond sensation, even now. See more deeply into the true nature of awareness. It is like the sun. It illuminates the clouds, but the clouds can never, ever touch the sun. It has no need to worry about the shape and configuration of the clouds. In the same way, you have no need to worry about the number and quality of sensations.

Residual Doubts

Question: It has been a few months since our last contact. I was reading your book 'Awakening to the Natural State' this morning, and I read what seems to perfectly describe my situation right now: 'The seeker is plagued with vestigial doubts ...The only test is in day to day direct experience at the gut, emotional level'. Then you say that if there is any doubt, anxiety or fear the understanding is not complete.

John: First of all, do not believe everything you read in books (even mine!). You are already complete here and now. There is no other attainment or understanding apart from being what you are. Make sure that the positive knowledge of your identity as non-conceptual being-awareness is utterly clear and to your complete satisfaction. If you stand apart from being-awareness, then we can talk of practices and attainments. If you are not apart from it, then all the other notions become superfluous.

If you are plagued by identification with the mind, then my best advice is to have a clear understanding of the mechanism of suffering. Suffering is only thoughts. Those thoughts revolve around the 'me'. The 'me' is also a thought, which is taken to be what we are. But who or what does the 'me' idea refer to? Is there anything or anyone present as a separate, limited 'me'? Can you find it? Does it exist? The tacit belief in the 'me' and identification with that concept drives all belief in the mind content. Once this is examined thoroughly, the belief is no longer binding. In fact, the belief evaporates. You cannot any longer believe in what you clearly know to be non-existent, just like you do not search for water in a mirage once you know it is a mirage.

Q: There are fears and doubts still. I still feel like a person, although I know there isn't one. I have seen that there isn't one. It is not just

a nice idea for me.

John: Then that belief still has some residual 'reality value'. Be thoroughly convinced that there is no entity at all like the 'me' or 'I'. Then any concepts that appear about that 'I' are inapplicable. In practice, this experience results from a clear and thorough understanding of the mechanism of suffering.

Q: I have been talking to one of my best friends, who introduced me to non-duality. He has been to see a lot teachers, including you, and he has a very deep understanding of non-duality, as far as I can tell.

John: If he is still searching here, there and everywhere, then the point of all this is not completely clear. If his understanding is deep, then he knows that the point of it all is 'you are that'. Where do you go beyond being that? I was in his shoes for many years, so I can speak from experience on his 'plight'. But, like I say, if he is running around continuing to study, seek or what have you, he has missed the core of what I presented to him. It cannot be helped, though. When the notion of the separate 'I' is truly seen through, the whole game is over with.

Q: He is now deeply into Ramana Maharshi and the Upanishads. The reason why he is doing that is because he feels that he has not reached 'liberation', or whatever you want to call it, yet, and that there is a practice required for it. Because I trust him and respect him a lot, this has brought a lot of confusion back for me.

John: What he is doing and saying is still granting a residual belief to the 'me' notion. The feeling 'I have not reached liberation' is an indicator of this. There is no 'I' and no liberation to reach, much less is there a practice to be what you are. I myself looked into the same sources he is exploring. Years later, the basics were not clear. What broke me out of this dead-end loop was talking with Bob Adamson, a direct student of Nisargadatta Maharaj. After that, all this came

into clear focus. The basic points that had been overlooked throughout all my years of seeking were pointed out, and I saw them for myself. All I can say is that it appears that your friend is still seeking, searching and suffering and looking for the answers. Clearly, the belief in being a separate someone apart from the real is operative.

Q: How do you get rid of the vestigial doubts, so that it becomes your day-to-day direct experience at the gut, emotional level?

John: Doubts, worries and problems are conceptual in nature. If they are believed to have a relation to your identity, happiness or reality, they cause grief, because by paying attention to them, we overlook our natural state. If there is no belief in them, they just sail through the clear, knowing awareness that you are, without leaving a mark.

Q: But is self-inquiry a practice after all? Thinking 'Who is aware of these fears and doubts?' seems to be a method or practice somehow, and a good one. If only I could keep it up! But it comes and goes, as any other practice, and therefore it has not been able to dissipate those fears and doubts for me.

John: Self-inquiry is a good idea in theory. But I have known hundreds of people who have attempted it and made no real headway at all, even after decades. In the end, it is because the purpose or intent is not understood. Self-inquiry means to look for the presumed 'I' at the root of all conceptual troubles. See if you can find it. If you cannot, then who has a problem? And what are you right now? You are present and aware. In this looking, the interest in thought just dissolves and you discover the simple fact of what you truly are. Who is there to practice when there is no one there?

Do not give the pointer about no 'I' a surface acknowledgement. Look a bit more deeply. Many people say they know there is no 'I' or separate self. But then they turn around and talk about themselves, their level of understanding, their achievements and understandings and so on. Who and what

are they talking about, if there is no 'I'? Really seeing that there is no 'I' means the root of all concepts and suffering is uprooted and dissolved. If you continue to suffer attachment to self-centered thought, then go ahead and search for the reality of the 'I'. If you cannot find the 'I', the bondage ends then and there.

But that is just the skin of the orange. More important is—what are you? In truth, you will make more headway looking into the truth of what you are. Right now, you are non-conceptual being-consciousness-peace absolute. This is not a practice, attainment or path, but a present fact of experience. Take the focus off of the mind and be what you are. Before the next thought appears, being-awareness and your identity as that cannot be denied. Abide there. There is nowhere to go beyond being that.

Q: I very much resonate with the idea that you just have to see it in the moment, rather than practicing anything. Thank you for offering to clarify my confusion.

There Is No Cause for the Ego

Question: What seems to be happening is that there is just this noticing of all these self-centered thoughts and seeing through them as not real, and thus they just go on their own way without being acted upon. It is sort of simple, really. Seeing how the mechanism works and refers back to the central fiction allows for a release from the thing. It is nice not to have to be this self, in fact! It is like witnessing the mind. But it is different, because of the knowing that the thoughts do not refer to someone. Those who witness as a practice are still thinking that there is a someone there—an all important distinction.

John: Exactly. Good catch! Most spiritual approaches make a tacit reference to the assumed person and therefore do not transcend the basic misconception.

Q: I have always felt that the separate self sense was manifested just to create identity and the quest for it.

John: This is trying to put a causal paradigm on something that is not ultimately present. Looking for the cause of the ego is a fool's errand. The ego is an erroneous belief. The assumed ego is not present on direct investigation. Is it reasonable to search for the cause of something that is not there? But at the level of appearances, your explanation is probably as good as any other.

Q: In a very simple sense this is the conclusion to that quest. That is, at each stage of the unfolding of a character's quest for a true self, there can be an expansion of self, until at last it is seen that there no self at all. Does this sound familiar?

John: This is a nice way to put it. Although, to be rigorous, I would qualify your statement by saying, 'there can be an

expansion of *the assumed sense* of self'. Always remember, the 'self' (as the assumed entity) is not real, only assumed.

The Model of a Guide and a Seeker Is a Makeshift

Question: While all of us can say some things to our friends, ultimately one needs a guide, someone who has and continues to live this truth. All of us, I believe, are at a gentle stage, where there are still questions and beliefs that keep on hanging on.

John: That is understandable. However, as you look directly and simply at this message, you see more and more clearly that you are the truth being pointed to. The model of the guide and seeker is a makeshift that ultimately dissolves in understanding the core message. A guide can take you somewhere that you do not know, but in non-duality the goal is your ever-present being. You are always standing at and as that goal—immediate awareness. It can certainly be helpful to have this pointed out, perhaps repeatedly, and to have a chance to resolve one's doubts and questions. In the words of Nisargadatta Maharaj: 'Your own self is your ultimate teacher. The outer teacher is merely a milestone. It is only your inner teacher that will walk with you to the goal, for he is the goal'.

Anyway, this is just an encouragement to avoid elevating anyone to a status above us or imagining ourselves to be a seeker apart from the highest goal. You are not a person, seeker or anything other than pure being-awareness-peace itself. That is the highest goal and always shining in your immediate experience at all times. Goals, stages and divisions are only concepts appearing in this awareness itself. You yourself can easily share this message of self-knowledge, awareness and peace because you are only sharing the truth of who you and your listener innately are. It is only pointing to something simple and undeniable in the listener's own experience. It is certainly within your ability to talk about this.

Awareness Is Already Free of Thought

Question: I was under the impression that recognizing consciousness or awareness meant that I would be free of thought or imagination. My question is, if my natural state is awareness, why is it that about ninety percent of most days is spent in imagination? Maybe my natural state is imagination! Have you reached a point where your thoughts or imagination are not so prevalent? Is that even possible?

John: You are awareness. Thoughts and experiences come and go in this that you are. Just as the sun is never touched by clouds, so are you never touched by thoughts. So let them be. They will float along and leave you untouched. You say 'I thought I would be free of thought'. Awareness, your real nature, is free of thought. This proposition is one of the notions that makes a subtle (or not so subtle!) reference to that seeming 'I'. As usual, once that 'I' is taken as real, it has problems, doubts and something to fix. This question is really a concept revolving around the assumed presence of the imagined 'I'. Following that, then a sense of reality is granted to the notions that spin from this assumption. All the while, your natural state is overlooked and all of the focus is put onto the thought.

Settle in with the ever-present and undeniable being-awareness that you are. That is never caught in thought at all and never has a problem. Our past problems with thought and imagination came from assuming our identity in thought and searching for our wholeness, completeness and happiness in the mind. That is what kept the focus and interest on it. Thought in itself is no problem at all. It is only the interest in the false mental image of a separate person (which only existed in imagination) that captivated our interest and sustained the identification with thought. So, again, settle in with a clear and direct recognition of the fact of your being, which

is beyond the mind, even now. Looking for reality, identity or happiness in the imagination of thought is what fuels the experience you are talking about. See what you truly are and there is no more energy of belief going into the mind.

Those old habits may present themselves for a time, but there is no real interest or concern, because you have seen the real position. The excessive interest and concern about imagination subsides naturally with the clear recognition of your true nature and seeing the falseness of the assumed separate person. The belief in the assumed separate person is the core concept that drives all the other self-centered thoughts. After all, what is this type of imagination but the mind's endless chattering of the trials and tribulations of the presumed 'I'?

Stick with the basic understanding of things and the bondage to the mind just evaporates. Imagination appears and disappears before you. How can it be you? What can a few passing clouds do to the sky?

Thought and No Thought

Question: You say ‘... Pause thought and know that you are already that which you have been seeking’. Bob Adamson too says ‘Pause a thought even for an instant and the natural state is fully evident. Stop and see. In the seeing, pure awareness gets used to itself’. However it also said that ‘...you are neither a state with thought nor a state without thoughts, but you are that which observes (is aware) both these states’. Is this a contradiction to what you and Bob say, because to ‘pause a thought’ would be a ‘thoughtless state’?

John: The basic point is just to notice what is present independent of the presence or absence of thought. There is a knowing presence in you that is aware of both thought and the absence of thought. That is what you are. The point about pausing thought is simply to take the exclusive focus off of the mind for a moment and see that your being has nothing at all to do with the mind. Awareness is the basis on which the mind appears. And you are that awareness itself.

Do not make this too complicated! Pause the question and notice that the fact of your being is already clear and beyond doubt with or without the question. This being itself is what is being pointed to. This is utterly beyond doubt and cannot be contradicted under any circumstances. For anything else to appear (even a question or doubt), you must be there first. Your being, which is present and aware, precedes everything else.

Looking into the Pointer of 'No Self'

Question: I have found that at times of intense challenge to the equilibrium of the body-mind, or when contemplating the extent of suffering generally, I turn to the Buddha's early teachings.

John: The various non-dual traditions are basically saying the identical things, just from different cultural and philosophical perspectives. Any amount of looking below the surface of language and labels shows this. However it is styled, the core of it is the pointer to your non-conceptual identity beyond the body-mind. At that point, the words are redundant, whether it be Buddha's 'noble silence' or the 'not this, not that' of Vedanta. That is what you are—invulnerable, deathless, blissful, beyond conditions and so on. The only 'sin', if one may say so, is ignorance of your natural condition and imagining your true nature to reside within the elements of the body and mind. As Buddha said, once you cross the river, you leave the raft behind. The pointers themselves are to be discarded. The moon does not depend on the finger pointing to it. The moon does not turn to the finger for further enlightenment about itself. Buddhism, Vedanta and all other verbal formulations are purely conceptual. Buddha spent forty-five years living as this non-dual reality and pointing to it in many expedient ways. For this reason, many saw it for themselves. The same is happening today through the teachings of Nisargadatta Maharaj, 'Sailor' Bob Adamson and others.

You say 'I have found that at times of intense challenge to the equilibrium of the body-mind, or when contemplating the extent of suffering generally, I turn to the Buddha's early teachings'. While I appreciate the sentiment you express here, there is a clear reference here to continued suffering and the presence of the presumed 'I'. There is no separate self present to turn to any teachings. I understand your position so well, because it was mine also for many years. I 'knew' twenty years

ago of the teachings of no-self, just as you do. But what I came to see eventually was that the suffering was not resolved, in spite of this understanding. I found later that the pointer was much more profound than I had assumed and that, in fact, I had not fully seen the depth of 'no self', in spite of being acquainted with the concept of it.

The deep seeing of no self is the complete end of suffering, questions, doubts and any possible notions of doer-ship. All those are conceptual in nature and can only survive through a tacit referencing of an entity to own them. From this perspective, no possible experiences in life or death could possibly touch you and no relative 'treatments' by way of body and mind practices would be needed. Again, this is not a prohibition on any and all actions that might arise naturally. Keep in mind that seeing no self is not enough, which is why most formal Buddhists are not finding the true freedom they seek, in my view. In truth, they are not necessarily even seeing no self, because if they did, the whole notion of being a Buddhist and practicing anything would crumble for lack of anyone to do those things. Buddha was very clear that he had no fixed teachings or theories and that even the Dharma was to be discarded ultimately.

Seeing no self must be coupled with the non-conceptual recognition of the reality behind and beyond the elements of the body and mind, as Buddha so eloquently talked about and lived. At any rate, I very much appreciate your earnestness and deep reflection on these matters. I sense you are onto this and will not settle for anything less than unconditional freedom. Words can be a bit clumsy and misleading. After all, this is all about your true nature and you are not a word!

Residual Suffering

Question: It has been now about one month since we met. I must say that there was a moment of clarity of my true essence. The separate entity was clearly seen as false. The 'me thoughts' were seen to be just that, thoughts only, not my true nature. Now, a month later, there is a struggle going on. As you say, we are apt to move into secondary issues and doubts. This is exactly what is going on now for me. The identification as a separate self is still believing in itself, and thus suffering occurs and the struggle continues. My true nature is awareness. The seeing of this is clearly seen. My question is—why is the struggle still there, and why do questions still arise? Can you help me out?

John: The most important basic understanding is the truth of who you are. You are that undeniable presence of being and awareness that cannot be denied. This is clear for you. What can still remain in operation at this point is the residual mechanism of suffering and doubt that seems to grab the focus and cause us to overlook our perpetual identity, which is clear freedom itself. What is needed at this point is a thorough investigation and understanding of the mechanism of suffering.

All suffering, doubts, questions, problems and so forth are thoughts (that is, mental phenomena). The issue is not the thoughts as such, but the focus on and belief in them. We believe in them because there is an assumption that they are saying something valid about me, my identity, my happiness or the reality of who I am. In other words, these notions are taken as valid statements of my identity. They are thoughts about 'me'. Of course, the 'me' in play here is not myself as pure, non-objective being-awareness, but 'me' as a separate self or limited person. The shadowy presence of this presumed sense of self and the belief in its reality keeps the whole production of suffering in operation—until it is exposed.

Therefore, all suffering and doubt is driven by the belief in the presence of the existence of an objective entity taken as my self or identity. This notion must be thoroughly investigated so that it is clearly and finally realized as nothing more than a figment. There is no such entity or presence as a limited self that is 'me'. When, through your own investigation, you see conclusively that there is no separate self, then the basis of all possible doubts, identifications, problems and sufferings related to that 'me' is removed. For example, there may be a thought such as 'I am not yet free'. But if there is no 'I', the label is meaningless and no reality or belief is given to it. Hence, there is no suffering. Because the 'I' thought is the center of suffering (self-centered thoughts), the dissolution of the belief in that thought is the end of it all.

You are not a limited self or entity, as you know. You are the pure presence of awareness that knows no limitation or suffering at all. Even the sense of struggle is just a mental or conceptual experience based on a notion of a 'me' that is not complete or whatever. That experience is itself another demonstration of the conceptual mechanism. Have a look and see if the separate person can be found. 'Who' is there to have a problem or doubt if there is no separate self present? This leaves your natural state of pure non-conceptual being-awareness as it is without any more overlaying of residual concepts and beliefs. Keep in mind that such residuals beliefs are only concepts appearing in the ever fresh, ever present being-awareness that you are. This is the present state of things, not a future attainment. Thoughts or no thoughts, you are what you are—and that is pure, immediate freedom itself.

Awareness and the Minds of Others

Question: Surely, if I were all encompassing awareness then I would be aware of all thoughts and all perceptions everywhere?

John: This is incorrect. Your assumption is due to mixing up perception and awareness. Strictly speaking, awareness is in fact perceiving everything everywhere, but you are asking from the perspective of the instrument of the mind, which only perceives from a limited location in space and time. This is confusing the mind with awareness and expecting the mind as such to be omniscient. In point of fact, the external world, other beings, other minds and so on are present notions appearing in the mind. They are not external realities. All perceptions, experiences, notions and states are, even now, registered in awareness. Another aspect of the problem is the assumption of an existing external world of things and beings outside of present awareness. This is assumed, not a given. It would be like assuming that characters in a dream exist independently and are thinking and aware independently of your dream identity. Then we might reasonably ask, 'Why am I not aware of all their thoughts, if I am awareness?' But we would never ask this because it is based on a fallacious assumption, namely, that characters exist independently, or outside, of awareness. But they are only appearances, not realities with independent existence. All you know right now is whatever thoughts, perceptions and feelings are arising in your awareness. All else is postulated and theoretical. Even now, for anything to be it must appear in awareness. Otherwise, there is no proof of its existence. In this sense, even now everything is directly known in awareness. In direct experience, there is nothing knowable outside of immediate awareness. You are that awareness.

The Natural State Does Not Come and Go

Question: I have seen through this waking dream of dualism on a number of startling occasions beginning in the late Sixties, with various incidents all the way to the present. However, the awareness of my natural state leaves me somewhat quickly, and I am once again identified with my body, mind and so on. My longest abiding in that state occurred when I was seventeen and that lasted for about fourteen hours of 'earth time'. This radically changed the direction of my life, but alas again I identified as a human being and became infected with the searching disease. Nisargadatta Maharaj describes his awakening as an explosion and says in a few places that once it happens there is no going back. You seem to point to something milder or perhaps you are less expressive about it. Did you experience such an explosion? Do you reside continuously in the natural state? Any suggestions for me about this?

John: From what you say, there appears to be a bit of a dualism surviving between 'you' and 'the absolute', which is simply non-conceptual awareness. There are no explosions needed, only a clear recognition of what you already are. You are, to some extent, projecting the natural state as an event or an occurrence, which is not the case. It is not a state which comes and goes to an entity (yourself). You are that. Looking for special states in the future obscures the immediacy of what is being pointed out. There is no enlightenment in the future. Time is a mental concept. Do not be pulled around by the continued belief in being a person standing apart from reality, who then projects a state of resolution in the future. This is about dropping all concepts and seeing what you are now. You are what you are seeking, which is non-conceptual awareness or non-objective being. That is already the case and perfectly accessible but for the wrong focus of attention on the imagined self and its identifications.

You ask, 'Do you reside continuously in the natural state? Any suggestions for me about this?' This question comes from a two-fold misunderstanding. First, that there is an entity or person. Second, that the 'natural state' comes and goes or is some kind of conditional state. Both are false. Unconditioned being-awareness (or the absolute, as Nisargadatta Maharaj calls it) is the constant and necessary substratum of every experience. It does not come and go and, in fact, is not a state. This is only said for communication purposes. Everything else is a state which comes and goes on the unconditioned absolute that you are. Get that part sorted out first. Otherwise, you will be chasing shadows endlessly.

The 'you' that you take yourself to be is a fiction. There is no person. You are not an individual. The individual is purely imaginary. Nisargadatta says, 'All your problems are for the person, but the person does not exist'. All other concepts and erroneous beliefs hinge on the assumed presence of the imagined person. Until you see this basic point, you are dragged around in the hall of mirrors of conceptual thought trying to 'fix' the person. The answer is to find that you have never been a person, but that you are nothing but the unconditioned absolute.

There is no attainment in this at all. It is a simple yet profound seeing of what is the case, not a special moment that you will experience. The special moment is the recognition that you, as a separate person never existed at all. Even now, there is no person, but it is believed to exist. This belief alone is the root of your imagined troubles.

You say that the natural state leaves you. This is impossible, for the natural state is your very being itself. Once you look deeply to understand what the natural state actually is, this type of experience will leave you! The key thing to do is to clarify your understanding of what the natural state is. If you feel it comes and goes—that is not the natural state. Throw those ideas overboard and look again.

The Non-existent 'I'

Question: You say that the key to dis-identification from suffering is to understand it. Well, I did some thorough investigation of the mechanism of suffering and I must say that I think I understand it. But I am still in bondage to it. The seeing is clear that suffering was born in thoughts. It is also clear that it is all just thoughts but the belief in them as real is still there. I also investigated who is this 'I' that believes in these thoughts as real. The answer I got was that there is no 'I' to be found as real except as a thought. It is all thoughts, but the clinging to some thoughts is still keeping me in bondage. As I am writing this to you a thought appeared, 'Who is this me that is making this claim?' Even though the false is seen as false, yet the false continues to reign and run the show. In other words, what is going on here? Do you know what I mean? This is definitely mind blowing. Is it possible that this separate entity that I take as real may remain due to years of habit and conditioning and all that needs to be done is just watch it go by? But how can this be done if the belief in the false self is still there?

It is bizarre! It appears that the freedom from suffering comes from 'nobody is home' and the bondage goes to 'somebody is home'. To summarize, the seeing (true self, awareness) sees instead of I (entity, false self) sees. But even though this is seen, the (false self) is still running the show. This is very frustrating, indeed. Thank you, John, for your pointers and staying with me as I continue to struggle with all this.

John: How can a false self be running the show if it is not there? Continue to probe into this matter of 'nobody is home'. You have taken a look and started to dissolve the belief in the 'I', but your language still makes it clear that the belief is still operative at times. There is no problem. Just see this. How can you believe in something that is seen as not there?

We are focused on thoughts because we assume they say something real about who we are, that they are a definition of

our identity, that their outcome may yield happiness. In other words, we are interested in thoughts because we think they provided reality, identity and happiness. Otherwise, it is just some energy passing through awareness and nothing is wrong at all. We are interested in thoughts because we believe they are about us. All thoughts are about someone that you are starting to find is not even there. Continue to probe into this. Be utterly convinced that the 'I' notion is totally empty.

If you claim there is no person and continue to talk about 'your' problems, you need to take the seeing a bit deeper. No person means no problems. You are pure non-conceptual awareness that is synonymous with pure being, knowing and peace. No thoughts ever disturb this, any more than clouds disturb the sky. How can a false 'I' run the show if it is not there? If you speak of it 'running the show', that is still making reference to its presence. The belief is coming in the back door. Knock that out and do not waffle on it. Do not say it is not there and then turn around and complain that it is running the show! That is like saying the man-in-the-moon does not exist, but then complaining that he is disturbing you. Yes, the belief in 'I' has been there, based on not knowing any better. How do you overcome a belief? By a deep and thorough recognition that it is false. Then no belief in it is possible. Even if the notion appears, it is powerless. This you must see.

What are the ramifications of being pure knowing itself, coupled with the recognition of the non-existence of a separate 'I'? That is your homework! By the way, I suggest dropping the notion of struggling with all this. That is going to hamstring you. This is not about struggling with anything. You *are*, effortlessly. Being and awareness are naturally present. There is no struggle in knowing what you are. You do not get free from the mind by struggling with it. That is granting it too much reality. A few insubstantial thoughts passing through awareness and you want to fight them? You would not box with your shadow. You see it as a shadow and see that there is no problem. Understand—do not struggle with the mind.

How Do I Dissolve the Concept of a Person?

Question: I earnestly continue to read and make significant recognitions. But I now appear to be at an impasse. I see that awareness is what I am and that there is no mind or ego. All of those things are pretty clear, thanks mainly to the clarity and specifics in your writings. Yet, my functioning as awareness is not apparent to me. And it should be by now! I am intuiting that there is some latent or actual assumption on my part that I am still a separate person and not awareness itself, strange as that may sound. How do I dissolve this concept of a person once and for all? I think this point was instrumental in your awakening.

John: Yes, you can see that your view of things is wavering between seeing your identity as awareness itself and at times continuing to give credence to the presumed separate person. You hit the nail on the head when you said, 'I am intuiting that there is some latent or actual assumption on my part that I am still a separate person and not awareness itself'. You can tackle this from either angle—the confirmation of your identity as being-awareness until that is beyond any doubt or the elimination in the existence of the separate self. In fact, both together are the most comprehensive approach in my view. Looking in this way will undermine things at the foundation.

Confirm and doubly confirm your identity as being-awareness until there is no wavering or doubt. How? By looking and examining your direct experience, repeatedly if necessary, until that is as clear as the palm of your hand. The person or separate self continues to survive as a concept as long as it is presumed to exist. Look for it and try to pin it down. If it exists, you should be able to find it, point it out and prove its presence. Can you? Again, look into this repeatedly if necessary. Is there (or are you) a separate self? This also should be as clear as the palm of your hand. Penetrate these

basic insights until there is no doubt at all. This will pull any lingering belief out of the contrary notions that surface out of past momentum. The radical point is that you are already free. You are only awareness and nothing else. Everything else is a concept appearing in this that you are.

Awareness and the Brain

Question: How can I be sure that the awareness is not just a basic function of my brain, an underlying synaptic wave or something? Perhaps when the body dies, awareness is gone. The point that I must be the underlying awareness gets a little shaky when these questions pop in.

John: A basic point to see is that the entire universe of all possible experiences (not just the body or brain) is an occurrence in consciousness. To put this into a body versus awareness context is too limiting. Thoughts, feelings and perceptions are appearing and disappearing all day long without the slightest mark or change in being or awareness. This is actual fact.

The question you raise hangs on a host of presuppositions and is ultimately a doubt not based on first-hand evidence. It is a 'what if' issue. The very doubt can only exist in awareness. We are worried about the doubtfulness of our presence, when it is the only thing that is certain. The very question will come and go in a few seconds. We are worried that the awareness will disappear in the future, when it is the question that, on direct evidence, disappears, without any change happening to awareness at all.

You talk about the issue of the brain possibly producing awareness, but you have no cognizance of a brain. The brain is a notion appearing in awareness, not the other way around. Even the body is a notion, a label in language to categorize a continuous stream of ever-changing perceptions, each of which arises and then becomes entirely non-existent, moment by moment. What you are is not a concept, a linguistic label. Much less are you disappearing moment by moment! Awareness is not an object. It is not a thing. The apparent body is an object. It comes and goes in the aware presence that you are. Even now the body is not perceived as a thing, but only as a

concept, as mentioned above. Whether or not such a concept appears makes no difference to your actual being. The notion that the brain or body will not exist in the future is not a fact at all, but another imaginary idea. That idea comes and goes presently in awareness.

Take the case of a dream body. The dream body is infused with awareness, like everything else in the dream. When the dream body is completely destroyed upon waking, no change to the fact of awareness is perceived at all. You have 'incarnated' thousands of times in such dream bodies, without any change or loss of your being or awareness. What else is this waking body but another temporary vehicle of consciousness in a fleeting state, as insubstantial as a dream? When the dream body vanished, what happened to consciousness? Nothing!

Furthermore, there is a supposition that awareness and the brain or body are separate, the one being cause of the other. But this is not right. There is no body or brain existing outside of awareness. Neither of these exists apart from awareness. How can something that is not really separate (not divided) from awareness produce awareness? The body or brain do not produce awareness, because in essence they are only awareness, just like a dream appearance is not apart from awareness but only an appearance of awareness. The dream body does not produce awareness, nor does the waking body. (On the other hand, if we want to grant that consciousness is a bodily product that comes and goes, there is still a cognition of the coming and going of consciousness. If we speak this way, then I would say that awareness knows the coming and going of consciousness. This is another way of looking at it.)

The mind is being tempted by a conceptual, imaginary problem and the attention is wandering into this doubt. But the very doubt only exists in awareness. You cannot understand or recognize awareness in and by thought. All thinking or cogitating about awareness is like a blind man trying to see the sun. Why? Because awareness is not in the mind. The mind is in awareness. Drop conceptualizing and recognize the undeniable fact of present awareness. There is nothing speculative or future-based about this. The existence of awareness

and the profound peace of this non-conceptual presence is completely evident, not theoretical. Recognizing this, you understand that all thoughts, concepts, doubts, worries and concerns are momentary, ephemeral appearances in the awareness that you are.

Your Being Is Not Dead, Dull or Inert

Question: I have been going back to my being any time I get wrapped up in thoughts or feelings, as you recommended. It takes some effort at first to not indulge in the chain reaction of thought patterns, but it is becoming more and more effortless. Sometimes a feeling like anger or old depressive feelings that I have not felt in years blind-side me. It is a little strange. Perhaps it is just a loosening of suppressed feelings before they fall away. I do not give the feelings any energy. I just watch them and they seem to deflate and wither within a few seconds. There is a temptation to analyze them and ask 'Why am I feeling this?' But I know from experience that this just reinforces the feeling.

When I go back to my being, there is just the watching of thoughts and feelings arising and dropping away. But there seems to be this dead zone, for lack of a better phrase, all around. It is as if there is awareness and then there is this fog surrounding the awareness. The fog is awareness too, but it is unclear awareness. Does this make any sense? I know awareness is clarity and that what I am writing here is a contradiction in terms. But I do not know any other way to describe it. Can you offer any pointers?

John: The fog comes and goes in awareness. Ultimately, it is awareness, but this is really experientially clear if awareness as such is recognized. Be willing to see, know and deeply cognize what this present awareness that you are really is. It is not dead, dull or inert at all. It is vibrant, alive, crackling with conscious presence and infused with a wordless peace or deep serenity. This is what you are and it is already fully present, but often unrecognized. We are used to looking at the mind and gross sensations and usually miss the subtlety of what is contained in this 'every day, ordinary awareness'.

As far as feelings and states, just see that they come and go and do not define you. They are momentary appearances. You are the pure, knowing presence that remains unmodified. You

know the presence of thoughts and feelings, and you know the absence of them, too. How can they be the essence of what you are, if they do not remain for more than a flash? The Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Zen saw the point of all this when he heard the following line from the Diamond Sutra: 'Develop a mind which alights upon no thing whatsoever'. Such was the pointer. You are seeing this already in your experience. The feelings and thoughts just come and go naturally. There is no need to analyze thoughts and feelings because they are just impermanent mind stuff passing through the vivid, clear presence of your natural being.

There Is No 'I', Nor any Enlightenment

Question: I can see that I am that. Why is this not liberating? Why do I feel like the search is still on? I know there is no one to be liberated and nothing to search for, yet there is no sense of completion or fulfillment here either. There is no 'I', yet no joy. All the pointers make sense. I am consciousness. But I am also unenlightened. How can this be?

John: You say that there is no 'I', and yet you turn right around and say that 'I am not enlightened'. This is an obvious contradiction. If there is no 'I', how can 'I' be not enlightened? Not only are you giving credence to the 'I' but also to the notion of enlightenment. Both are conceptual. There is no 'I', nor any enlightenment. You are getting hamstrung by unexamined concepts that you are taking as valid and the energy of belief is going into them. This will cause you to overlook the simple and obvious truth that is already present.

Your statement that you see there is no 'I' is not emphatic at this point. If you truly see the depth of that, you will realize that all self-centered concepts, including enlightenment, fulfillment and completion hinge on the notion that there is an 'I' to be unenlightened, unfulfilled and incomplete. So the 'I' notion is coming in the backdoor and you are not catching that. You are inadvertently falling back into the belief in the 'I' without realizing it. See this and be done with mucking around in ephemeral self-centered thoughts based on the assumed presence of an 'I'. You can assert there is no 'I' all day long, but it is useless if you still give credence to beliefs and concepts that depend on the assumed 'I'. Take your looking deeper and be consistent.

Drop all the conceptualizing and know that clearly vivid awareness and existence are here right now in all their immediacy. You are that. Pause there, in that immediate non-conceptual knowing-being that you are. Do not turn back

to the mind and grasp at ephemeral thoughts and images in the mind looking for something more, even if it be the glorious 'enlightenment', which is actually totally illusion from this perspective. Your present awareness does not need any enlightenment whatsoever, as it is already the light of knowing in all thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Awareness is already awake, and the one who would desire 'enlightenment' (that is, the presumed defective self) does not even exist.

You have some good insights, but take them all the way to the roots. Your real being has no problems or lack at all. It is only your unexamined assumptions that are creating the assumed problem. See the immense implications of already being that, along with the complete non-existence of the separate 'I'. If you look this way, the steam will go out of the conceptualizing entirely, and you will be left with the clear and undeniable recognition of naked aware presence, which you already are.

Full Stop!

Question: I have consumed a lot of non-duality books over the years, especially the ones containing the talks of Nisargadatta Maharaj. I think I understand what is being pointed at. There is nothing that can be described as me. And that all there is, is the awareness upon which everything, including thoughts, registers.

John: Full stop there. As 'Sailor' Bob often says, 'What is wrong with right now if you are not thinking about it?' This means that if you are the non-objective awareness itself, is there a problem? If you do not pick up a conceptual thought and go back into mind, taking yourself to be something you are not, what can be wrong? Looking in this way, you will find that you are already that pure being, awareness, peace absolute. In other words, you are that. Where do you need to go from there?

Q: However ...

John: Now you are going to go back into the mind and away from the clear recognition of your true nature as the non-dual presence itself!

Q: One particular teacher says that understanding and clarity are not it, because there is still a person who understands and is clear.

John: What I am talking about has nothing to do with understanding in any subject-object dualistic sense. Is your very being or awareness an object to be understood? Looking at yourself directly, you are what you know and you know what you are. It is non-duality itself. When you acknowledge the fact of your being, it is not a person doing that, but pure, immediate, non-conceptual recognition. It has nothing to do with the mind or a person. Being-awareness is non-conceptual.

The person is a construct of thought.

Q: He goes on to say that liberation is an energetic shift, from which there is an entirely different perspective.

John: Your true nature has nothing to do with energetic shifts, which would just be ephemeral states in objectivity and time and, thus, back in dualism. Perspectives may come and go, but there must be a prior awareness which registers that. You are that. There is no liberation, because your true nature is ever free and ever one with what is real. Liberation is the final concept for the 'ego' looking for something that it feels it is missing. See what you are and the concept of liberation will be laughable. Why does the supreme reality need to be liberated? Just drop the false idea that you are in bondage.

Q: Words fail because of the need to use a 'how to' question, but how does one go from an intellectual understanding to being it, to completely losing the 'I'?

John: Is your being, your aware presence a matter of intellectual understanding? Simple being-awareness is who or what you are. That can never be known by the mind, because it (your real being) is not a thought. It is there before thought appears, as the basis and substance of all manifestation. You are that even now. Furthermore, it is clearly in view and present as your very self. Can you deny your own existence and its aware nature? Stop there and realize that you already are what you are seeking. We miss this because it is so simple.

The ego or 'I' is the assumption that you stand apart from reality as a separate self. Reality is being-awareness itself. Do you stand apart from that? Looking in this way shows the 'I' as total fiction. It is just an assumption. See this and any lingering belief in the 'I' falls immediately.

Being Is, Life Goes On

Question: There is the 'I am' or the self as a concept, and there is the 'I am' as pure being. Awareness can exist as pure and without content, which it seems you are trying to promote.

John: Being is aware, and awareness is. So they are really the same thing, just different words.

Q: What meaning or purpose is there for awareness to exist eternally without being aware of some form of content, such as thought, feeling sensation?

John: No meaning or purpose! Being is. It is just a basic fact. Meaning and purpose are conceived by the human mind, which arises upon or subsequent to the fact of being. This is not something that is 'promoted', only pointed to as a basic fact of experience.

Q: Does this bring one to realize one's immortality and oneness with all of existence?

John: Yes, not a small achievement!

Q: But is it wise to endorse a total withdrawal from the qualities of experience such as thought, feeling and sensation?

John: This is an absolute misinterpretation of what I am saying. But why not live with a recognition of your real being while living in the appearance? Otherwise, your view and experience is partial and leads to needless ignorance and suffering.

Q: What is awareness without its contents? Pure spirit of the absolute? Eternal existence bereft of content is not very stimulating.

John: This is a concept, an assumption. First of all, the content and awareness are not two. So to divide them is an artificial concept. Reality is more than being and awareness. It is the energy, dynamism and life of the universe. It is also the source of joy and timeless peace beyond the mind. Rather than being not stimulating, it is the most interesting thing there is, because it is all there is. Everything that appears is only an appearance of that. The issue of content or no content is irrelevant, because, as I say, the content is ultimately non-different from its source.

Q: Are we so afraid to pay the price of suffering, of facing fear in return for pure joy?

John: Knowing your real identity is the end of suffering, which is born of the imagined separation from the source. This has never happened so the suffering is only due to a false perception. It is nothing to be afraid of. It is there as long as the imagined duality is believed.

Q: This should not be a problem especially if we do realize our immortality. Awareness is at play with itself eternally.

John: Fair enough!

Q: Why stop playing, especially at the point of realization of its invulnerability, of its permanent nature within all of existence?

John: Who said to stop? Life goes on as an expression of the awareness, energy and life that you are.

Q: Thank you for your response. It is indeed truly appreciated.

John: Your insights are good. Hopefully, my points clarified some things, at least in terms of my intended meaning.

It Is Done

Question: It is done.

John: The quest that never needed has been made, and the attainment that was never lost has been attained! It is the end of the separate self that never was. If by saying 'it is done', you mean that the seeking, doubt and suffering that was based on wrong belief has ended by seeing that the basis of it all was groundless, then all is truly done.

Q: I have reached the end of my rope and finally, finally let go of the rope.

John: And most importantly let go of the 'I' who was holding the rope!

Q: There is no more hanging on, no more seeking. The seeking is endless when searching for your true self by a separate self. It just never ends.

John: Yes, because the basis is false and never able to be fulfilled.

Q: I have found the truth of who I am by being ruthlessly honest and truthful with myself and, yes, the truth shall set you free. The problem was that somehow I thought that I will get it, that the answer will get revealed to a 'me'. I was fooling myself. The 'me' simply cannot get this because it does not exist.

John: Yes, this is a core insight in resolving the seeking.

Q: In the giving up and surrendering to 'not knowing', the knowing was revealed to no one, which is who I truly am.

John: When the false notion of who you are is relinquished, you still remain as what you always have been.

Q: The bottom line is that the 'I' that I thought I was, simply does not exist.

John: This is the end game. That belief is what sustains the whole network of conceptual problems and dilemmas.

Q: This must be seen. Otherwise you are back in the game and the search by a separate self continues, and it is endless.

John: Well said.

Q: Who I truly am is beyond all that arises. Being stuck in the mind was where all the suffering and frustration occurred. I am not my thoughts, but believing in thoughts is what causes the suffering to continue. It is now clear. I am not my thoughts. Who I truly am is beyond all thoughts.

John: Again, well said.

Q: Still, because of many years of habitual conditioning, there may still be repressed thoughts that may appear from time to time, that may still have a hold on me.

John: If there is a 'me' to have a hold upon! Just make sure to be consistent with what you have already seen. Thoughts may appear or not, but no one is present to own them. Let them be or not be. They are not yours nor do they define you. Bondage is referring thoughts to a 'me'. If there is no 'me', then there is no bondage, whether thoughts appear or not. To me, that is true freedom, utterly independent of what appears or not.

Q: The thought may appear as real, though.

John: The key word is 'appear'. But they can never be real.

With the core belief in the 'I' cut at the root, the whole mechanism naturally settles down.

Q: The difference now is that upon investigation and meeting these suffering thoughts head on without judging or changing or denying them but by allowing them to be and getting to the core of it, they are now seen as only thoughts believed (not real). They lose their power by self inquiry.

John: Yes, a little mopping up action may occur naturally. But it is done by no one and for no one. It is just intelligence in action.

Q: There are many so-called non-duality teachers that I came across who do not meet the sufferer in their suffering. It is true that suffering is not who they are, but tell that to the sufferer who believes their suffering is real! Just telling them that this is false (which is true) will not do it. If their repressed suffering thoughts appear, they must be seen as false by the one who believes in them. There is no way out but through them. Nothing needs to get fixed, but standing in the thoughts that are believed and seeing through them is necessary. These so-called non-duality teachers lack compassion in their speaking. Perhaps the seeing of their true nature is not complete.

John: Just saying the suffering is false is not enough. It has to be understood and seen to the roots. Otherwise, in spite of intellectual assertions, the suffering is still active.

Q: In the seeing, nothing is excluded. All is included. I am no one appearing as everyone. All arises in me (awareness), including the 'I' that I think I am. But it is now clearly seen that this 'I' (who I believed I was) is also a player in this game of life.

John: Apparently! If you can say that a person that never was, was a player. There was the appearance of one, but, as you say, upon investigation, the imagined person is not. If he is not now, then he never was or ever will be, except as an assumption. The ego does not need to be overcome, only recognized

to have never been present in the first place.

Q: It is truly a fabulous game that oneness plays on itself to find its way back home.

John: That is certainly one way to express it.

Q: Thank you, John, once again for playing a big part in the search of who I am. Your comments have been most appreciated.

John: All sounds good. Your looking and investigation has brought its own reward.

The First Step Is to See What You Are

Question: I do not know where to begin. I have been a spiritual seeker for some time now. I started with the 'Power of Now' a couple of years ago. My search has never really been to find the ultimate truth or enlightenment or whatever. I just want to be released from suffering.

John: Well, if that worked as a motivation for Buddha and many others, it can work for you too.

Q: I am tired of insane thinking and self-hatred. I just really do not want to waste my life with fear and unhappiness. I know life can be so good.

John: This is your direct intuition that a life of suffering is not natural or necessary, which is what all the great sages who have looked into this have confirmed. So follow your intuition.

Q: I know that I see things as I am and not as they are. No matter what my life circumstances are, I have come to see that there is always this dis-ease.

John: If you look closely at this, you will see that it is not continuous. It arises due to specific causes and conditions. When you understand the mechanism of it, you are in a position to resolve it.

Q: Whenever I manage to solve all my problems, my mind just comes up with a fresh bunch of new ones.

John: This is because you have not fully gotten to the root of things. The cause is still in operation. You may have found some temporary cures, but not the final resolve—yet. But

you will if you are earnest and interested to do so.

Q: I am so clear now that my mind cannot fix anything or grasp 'the truth' or acquire peace, not even on a summer day on a beach in Hawaii. At the end of the day, something in me does not really even want to get better. I cannot fight for my personal self anymore.

John: You will see the assumption of the existence of the personal self is the root cause of all the problems. The feeling that you cannot fight for it anymore is the dawning of the insight that you cannot fight for it because it is ultimately not real.

Q: I saw a quote by you online today and it really resonated with me: 'The belief that you are a separate person is the cause of all ignorance, suffering, anxiety, doubt and fear'. I have heard this concept many times in many ways. This is the first time that I have taken it seriously as fundamental to experiencing my true self and ending this cycle of searching and confusion. But I am wondering if it really is as simple as you say.

John: It is not about being simple or easy, but of seeing the truth of it for yourself.

Q: I will be honest in saying that it seems like a lot to ask that we stop seeing ourselves as separate. How am I supposed to do this? It seems as clear as day that I am separate. Of course, if this is the only thing I have to do, then I will meditate on this for as long as it takes to realise that I am not separate. But how did you realise this? Is this a tangible experience or a belief?

John: The first step is to see what you actually are. Then you can dispose of your false identities. If you do not have a clear sense of your actual true nature, then whatever you discard will be replaced with some other mind-created identity and you will be back where you started. You are. Are you clear about what you are? Here is a hint. You are neither a body, mind, person or any thing at all. But you most certainly are,

so what are you? This is the main thing to see now. If you try to discard what you are not first, it will still be against a basic confusion of your identity, and you will only get so far with that.

Q: I am worried about this. I am not sure that I will ever be able to see myself as 'not separate', and if I cannot do this one thing, then will I be trapped forever. Can everyone see this? Once you see it, does that knowledge ever fade away, or is that just it? What conditions do I need to have this realisation?

John: The purpose of non-duality is to clarify your identity. Discarding the false beliefs is only one piece of this, not even the most important part. We suffer because we are confused about who and what we are. The main question to reflect on is 'What am I?' We have taken ourselves to be many things that we are not. And this mistaken identity has been the root of our problems. Start with the basic fact that you are. You are undoubtedly present and aware. Hang on to this insight and penetrate to find out what you are. In this, you find what you are and also what you are not. Then all your problems and mistaken identities will be resolved. If it worked for Nisargadatta Maharaj, 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, me and many others, it will work for you. Have faith in yourself and your ability to understand. It is not difficult. It just takes a willingness to look and see for yourself.

Functioning Happens Without a Person

Question: So if someone is frustrated and experiencing psychological suffering, there is not anything they can do about it, and there will never be a time when he does not feel that way.

John: I totally disagree with this. Both points are absolutely erroneous.

Q: If he does not exist as a separate, controlling entity, who can exercise control over his experience. Then how will he ever extricate himself from that state?

John: Functioning happens, just not with any reference to a false person. Thinking, seeing, feeling and doing are happening. Only they are not happening by or for a separate 'I'.

Q: It kind of reminds me of a psychosomatic illness. The doctor says you do not hurt. It is all in your mind. Well it might be, but you still feel the pain. We may not exist as a separate entity, but the experience we are having is that we do exist whether we do or not.

John: You exist as non-conceptual awareness upstream of the mind, but not an entity in the appearance.

Q: Ramesh Balsekar says that there is an aspect of the personal that is not involved with the divine hypnosis. In order to point to this Ramesh developed a concept he called the 'working mind' and 'thinking mind'. He said the working mind is self-referencing. It knows its name. It knows when it is watching TV. It knows when it is writing a book. It can make airline reservations for itself. It knows where to put the food when 'I' am hungry. It knows the food needs to go in my mouth, rather than in the flowerpot. It knows all these things because there is separation and personalization. All of that functioning is identification with the name and form as a

separate entity. It must exist and must operate if the organism is to function in duality.

John: This is misunderstanding things in my view. The presence of a body-mind has nothing to do with the notion of a separate self.

Q: If suffering can actually end, then there is a contradiction in what you are saying. You would be going from suffering to not suffering, which in my mind is awakening, enlightenment or whatever you want to call it. It might not be enlightenment but it is a state, going from something to something.

John: Of course there is an end to suffering. It is the result of seeing that you, as a person, have never existed. Seeing this, you cannot talk about some one 'attaining' anything—if there is no one. The false concept falls away, and perfect peace prevails.

Q: Is there grace as Wayne Liquorman describes when he speaks about his transition to sobriety?

John: I have no idea what he describes.

Q: We are psychosomatic entities....

John: Not at all. This is the basic error. There are body-minds, but they are not what you are ultimately. If you think so, go back to 'Spirituality 101' and do your homework.

Q: That is what we all experience, even if we do not exist.

John: You do exist, but not as what you imagine yourself to be.

Q: Even if you tell us we do not exist that is not what we are experiencing. If there is ever a time when we do not feel that way it contradicts what you are saying. Going from a state of mind that

is suffering to a state of mind that is not suffering might not be enlightenment but it is something. You are trying to get people to understand that in your writings. So if somebody all of a sudden gets the point you are trying to make, what do you call that? You say there are no realized persons. Well, if they did not understand what you were telling them and then all of a sudden they do understand, what do you call that?

John: You keep talking of persons. That is the problem. You are, but you are not a person. This is one of the key insights.

Q: If there is nothing that this psychosomatic entity or awareness can do to merit grace or stop the suffering and the absence of grace or extricating oneself out of the suffering, the situation becomes intolerable.

John: Yes, there is something to be done. You are voicing some erroneous and incorrect concepts about this. Fatalism and destiny are misinterpretations and lead to passivity and resignation. Instead, have a look and verify what you are and what you are not. All problems are resolved. You will find that you are not and have never been a person. In spite of the protests of the conceptual mind, this works perfectly in practical application.

The Person Idea Is the Root of All Trouble

Question: I am about a third of the way through your book 'You Were Never Born'. In the last six months, I have been drawn as by a suction to non-duality materials. What I have seen is the continued weakening of my ego and story.

John: This is still a story! The point is to see if there is an ego at all! If not, there is nothing to weaken. Folks in spiritual circles go for years with the stories of enlightened teachers, awakenings, retreats, experiences, readings, losing conditioning, going deeper and so on, but it is all really a shell game because all those things are still a grand story of a person.

Q: While I understand what you are saying, I also do see the fly in the ointment. 'My ego' is just an illusory concept. Seeing this brings in much more peace, less worry, more flowing with events, rather than trying to make things happen.

John: Yes, this is good. The person idea is the root of all troubles. With that knocked out through clear seeing, it is not *more* peace, but peace itself, here and now.

Q: Yet I do not grasp non-duality.

John: There is no need to. You are that. It is not to be grasped because it is already present.

Q: I can agree that I am awareness all of the time, but I cannot see yet why that makes form non-existent or an illusion.

John: You are misunderstanding one of the pointers here. Form appears. That is all. Awareness or your being abides; it does not appear. Do not make more out of this point than is intended.

Q: Just because something is temporary (like mind, thoughts, feelings) does not make it 'unreal'. It is not 'eternal' but cannot something that is not eternal be real within awareness?

John: It does not matter. Whatever appears is just an appearance in and on awareness. Labeling it as real or unreal is beside the point. The point is to know yourself. Forget about trying to label appearances. That is looking in the wrong direction and takes you back into concepts. That is cosmology not self-knowledge.

Q: I do not see myself and the ocean as one.

John: What self? The point is that the self, the person, is not. So there is nothing to see or figure out in relation to a figment of one's imagination. You are pure being-awareness itself. Now, nothing that appears is outside of awareness. Is there anything separate from awareness, in direct experience? All that appears is just a manifestation or appearance in awareness, like waves arising on the sea. All there is, is the ocean. Waves are not different or separate from the water. It is the same with appearances and awareness.

Q: I see myself showing up as a form within awareness.

John: This is the mistake. You are the awareness itself. Forms come and go within this. No form is yourself. Thinking so is the basic error.

Q: One teacher uses the phrase 'consciousness playing with form'.

John: This is a weak pointer because it 'anthropomorphosises' consciousness. Just see that form is non-separate from awareness and all these riddles dissolve.

Q: The idea of 'consciousness is playing with form' resonates here.

John: It is fine as a 'working concept', but not fully accurate.

It is like saying God is a man with a white beard. It is fine as far as it goes. Consciousness is not playing with anything. That is a relative conception. A deeper view is that awareness appears to pattern into various shapes and forms and yet all there is, is the one essence or substance. The real point is—what are you? Make sure that is clear and do not get lost in philosophy or cosmology.

Without Thoughts, You Still Are

Question: I understand that my true nature is awareness, although that is not my living experience.

John: Very remarkable! Is it not your direct experience that you are and are aware!? It is very strange that even though we are present and aware, we pretend that we are not and deny our own existence. In truth, you could not even say that sentence if you did not exist or you were not aware. Your mind is making an assertion which is in total contradiction to direct experience. This is the mechanism of bondage—favoring the conceptual mind over direct experience.

Q: I clearly see that thoughts arise without an identifiable thinker. Indeed, when I seek an identifiable 'me', I find nothing.

John: Then you have seen that the source of all psychological bondage, suffering, questions, seeking and doubts is non-existent. Without a cause (the assumed separate self) how can there be any effects, that is, self-centered thinking (which is the very definition of suffering)?

Q: But the skeptic within me rears its ugly head and whispers in my ear, 'You are the body/brain, no more and no less! That you cannot isolate a so called 'center' simply means that your being resides in the entire body/brain. Thoughts arise in your unconscious, usually as a response to present experience, and what you call 'awareness' is merely a feedback mechanism built into your vastly complex brain. You are the isolated being you have always taken yourself to be'.

John: This is a concept, a mere thought, arising in the undeniable awareness that you are. It is the mind trying to reframe or reassert the existence of the 'I' and then append some definition to that notion. Without those thoughts, you still

are (not as a separate, objective entity, but awareness itself). What you are does not depend on these thoughts. These thoughts are a theory, a concept, a 'what if' projected by the mind. As such, they are subject to doubt and not really verifiable in direct experience. Your being is the total reverse of this—doubtless, constant and totally verifiable in direct experience. This is why 'the answer' is not in thought. To move to the mind as the source of authority for who we are is to move into doubt, to move away from the direct knowing of what you are to concepts and theories.

Q: Do you have anything else to say to my materialistic skeptic?

John: Awareness not an object. It is not a material thing at all. It is, yet it is non-objective, prior to sensory perception and conceptual thought. It is like a dream figure trying to assert that awareness is confined to the dreamed body. Imagine him saying, 'When this body (in the dream) vanishes, awareness will disappear. This (dream) body produces awareness. In fact, the body is only a notion, a collective term for an ever-changing flow of processes and states. There really is no particular thing that is a body, as such.

Finally, bodies come and go constantly in the universe of appearances. Being remains, life remains. The body is only a temporary manifestation of life. Birth and death are complementary expressions of life in manifestation. Life, being, awareness all clearly survive the demise of any particular form.

The only difficulty comes from identifying oneself as the body. The real solution, which you started out with, is that there is no entity or self to be found. The follow up questions are really trying to reassert the existence of this self and grasping at some appearance as that entity. The so-called body is only an ephemeral appearance, an object, a material form. Awareness is not an appearance, not an object, not a material form. It is hard to think how things so dissimilar could be equated. You might make a case that the expression of awareness or consciousness through a particular bodily form

is time bound. Also, thought, perception or feeling could be seen as tied to the body. So it would be good to be clear on the difference between thought, perception and feeling and the principle of awareness in which they are registered. Moment by moment your thoughts come and go. Does awareness disappear?

Is There Any Difference When This Is Seen?

Question: I have some questions! Please put some light on this and tell me if bullshit is being said! So, I am not this body or this mind ...

John: Ultimately, this is the basic point, yes.

Q: ... and there is no 'I' ...

John: Meaning, you do not stand as a separate person apart from awareness. The assumed separation has never happened. That is what I mean by this.

Q: There is also no search for happiness because who would be happy ...

John: If the imagined separate self is taken as true, there will be a compulsory sense of searching for happiness. If you see you are already what you are seeking, there is no more external search for happiness.

Q: No one chooses what the mind says with the thoughts or what the body does. It just happens, and there is no one responsible ...

John: Things happen spontaneously without reference to a self center. To say 'no one' is responsible implies there are people there who are not responsible, which is incorrect. There is no one to be responsible or not, yet all actions go on, including decisions, choices and apparently responsible behaviors. Only there is no one doing any of it.

Q: Things just are happening, always now, and there is only the knowing of things happening ...

John: Ultimately, yes.

Q: Then what is the difference of knowing this or not? What is the difference if a mind knows this or not, or if there is a thought of a separate 'I' or not?

John: One way is life lived in needless conceptual suffering based on an erroneous assumption of being what you are not. The other is effortless living, flowing naturally.

Q: Is there anyone that suffers?

John: No, but when this is truly seen, the suffering is over.

Q: There can be pain, but is there anyone to feel it?

John: Pain happens in the body-mind. It is registered in consciousness. Pain and suffering are different.

Q: Is there anyone that is happy? There can be happiness, but is there anyone to feel it?

John: I have already covered this.

Q: The only thing that can happen by this 'teaching' is a change of a thought, of this 'I' thought. Instead of appearing as a thought of an 'I', the thoughts just appear. What is the difference?

John: Living in ignorance of what you are—or not. This is a huge difference. Otherwise, why talk about any of this?

Q: Instead of some thoughts, there will be others. Are there better thoughts?

John: Well, there are erroneous thoughts, for example, that you are a limited self. Why live under such a needless delusion?

Q: I do not like when there is a pain in the body, but these are just thoughts and feelings that appear. Are they better than others?

John: Who does not like them? If you see the 'I' is a fiction, there is no one there and things return to natural functioning.

Q: There is no free-will, so there are just things happening, a letter being written, some doubts appearing and so on.

John: It is not that there is or is not free will. The point is that there is no entity to have either.

Q: There is no one discovering that there is no one. There is no one to choose a better way to live or better things to happen. To whom would they happen?

John: There is intelligence and that intelligence can function. Ignorance can be pointed out and discarded by intelligence, not some non-existent entity.

Q: What is the difference of being a doer (or having a thought that there is an 'I') and being nobody, just being and seeing things happen impersonally? Is one better than the other, even if it can be said that one is truer than the other?

John: One approach leads to a life of unnecessary suffering; the other is life in natural freedom. Other than that, there is no real difference!

No More Thinking Is Needed

Question: After some deep looking, I now see that I am not the doer. Thoughts just arise. Actions follow. I am not controlling this. I never would have believed it before, but I have experiential knowledge of this now. After this revelation, I relaxed as I saw there was nothing to do. All there was to do was to 'be'. I must say that life has been flowing more smoothly. There has been joy arising, and even several instances of good luck and old friends contacting me out of the blue. I am not sure whether these are just coincidences or whether relaxing into being has some sort of impact on the apparent world. Because I have been doing so much 'being', rather than 'trying' (seeing as there was no other sane option, given that I am not doing anything anyway), I have been really immersed in the fullness of the present moment.

John: There you are! Natural, effortless being of what you are. Full stop!

Q: Things were going well until the thought popped up again.

John: This gets things back into the mind and concepts. You will see that any amount of thinking does not get you any closer to what is clear and obvious before that thought popped up. See this. Let go of the thought and remain with what you are.

Q: I did not understand the implication of the realisation that I am not the doer. More specifically, I do not understand how it relates to the idea that I am not a separate individual.

John: This is getting further away from non-conceptual awareness with each new question and doubt. All coming from the mind!

Q: Now that I am trying to understand what it all means, the initial relief that all I can 'do' is 'be', is having the effect of making me feel sort of empty, maybe because I only understand what I am not (the doer). But I do not yet understand what I am. I see that I am being and awareness, and that when I rest in these states I feel whole.

John: You do not rest in these states. You are that which is present and aware. See how you are picking up the notion of the 'I', and see how the conceptual web of concepts begins from there and we follow the trail of concepts back into the mind. Remember that the peace and simplicity were right there for you. So backtrack your way to the natural state prior to concepts and the 'I' notion, which is only an imaginary thought. As I always say, suffering is just self-centered thinking.

Q: I still feel that this being and awareness is confined to 'me'. There is still an identification with the 'me', but now with a sense of no control over the thing I am identified with.

John: What 'me' are you referring to? You need to see through this false and artificial concept. All there is, is awareness and a few thoughts, feelings or perceptions coming and going, nothing else. It is perfect openness, clarity and peace.

Q: Asking this question 'Who or what am I' over the past few weeks has been a very difficult experience.

John: Drop all this conceptual activity! It is not the way to peace. It is just more focus on concepts based on the false notion of being a separate being apart from awareness.

Q: I really want to know! I have been reading some of the pointers from other authors on your links page and at one point I felt an intense claustrophobia upon reading that everything I perceive is in my mind, not external. I can definitely comprehend then that I am not separate from that perspective, but it does not give me a sense of expansion. It gives me the sense of intense loneliness. Like I am all

alone in my head and cannot perceive anything outside of myself. Basically, I can grasp this conceptually, but it still seems to leave room for other separate entities trapped in their own minds to exist as well.

John: Way too much thought! I sincerely recommend that you lay off the searching, seeking and non-dual philosophizing. Also do not read about this stuff too much. If you must seek out pointers, see if you can talk to the authors in person. This stuff is so simple the words over complicate the intent of the pointers.

Realize that before the next thought appears, you are. What you are is naturally present and aware. Pause here and be. No more thinking is needed, because what is true and clear in you is non-conceptual and prior to the mind. There is no answer in the mind. If you are thinking about your nature, you are looking in the wrong direction! Life just flows naturally, effortlessly and beautifully as an expression in the simple, sweet and clear presence of life that you are. That is the simplicity of this. No more is needed.

Q: I have been able to see the possibility that there is not a separate individual here. I have been noticing a fear of being in the present moment on the part of the thoughts that make up my ego or sense of separateness, and I am sensing that it is because this ego does not exist in the present moment (meaning now), where 'I' am too absorbed in what is happening to have a personal story. If this personal story of a separate individual does not exist now, then it does not exist at all. Because now is all there is. I can see how it is possible that these thoughts are creating a credible story by keeping my awareness out of the now.

John: Awareness (you) can never be out of now. You are. All else appears, even the notion of 'me' or time. Again, try to avoid too much thinking about this. Self-knowledge is neither psychology nor philosophy. The mind is good for relative affairs, but lousy for the non-conceptual experience of being.

Q: The idea that there is no separate individual makes sense to me through this logic, but then still I have the question, who then believes the thought about a separate entity if there is no separate entity to believe this? Is my true self confused about who I am? There is definitely confusion, so who is confused?

John: No one. Just loops of thought spinning in bright, aware presence—and referring to an assumed self that never was.

Q: My brain is really spinning.

John: You have been one to give a lot of emphasis to thought. It is the wrong tool for this! Your own experience shows that the more you try to grasp this with the mind the more confusing it gets. It is up to you to see the point that the answer is not in the mind. That is a total dead end. Better to see this now than decades later! Your being has nothing to do with thinking. Keep it simple. You already are pure awareness-peace. No thinking is needed to be what you are.

Awareness and Consciousness

Question: You allude continually in your writings to the word 'awareness'. This appears (at least to me) very inconsistent with your otherwise very clear and concise wording. Since 'non-duality' is what is being conveyed, how can such a word as awareness even be considered? The implication is so dualistic it is distracting. Awareness implies not only someone or something who can be aware but also someone or something to be aware of. Throughout my reading of your work I have just inserted the word consciousness in its place, because what you have to say makes the subject so much clearer than most.

John: Do not get hung up on semantic issues. Awareness, consciousness, being, true nature—these are just words. You are not a word, are you? What word is what you are? What concept frames your very being?

Buddhists talk of consciousness as one of the impermanent constituents of the body-mind complex. Nisargadatta Maharaj talks about your real nature being prior to consciousness, and consciousness being a product of the body. He also talks about the pure awareness that observes the coming and going of consciousness. On the other hand, classical Vedanta talks of consciousness as reality itself. Dzogchen Buddhists talk of reality as intrinsic awareness and talk of consciousness as an appearance. Part of the problem is that these words are only rough translations of terms in other languages.

I happen to prefer awareness over consciousness—probably for the same reason you prefer the reverse. By awareness, I mean non-objective consciousness beyond the body and mind, not the mere physical sentience in the body. For example, when you are awake you say, 'I am conscious'; when asleep, you say, 'I was not conscious'. The principle I am talking about remains even when one is not conscious in this sense. This is the point about your real nature being prior to conscious

(that is, dualistic consciousness at the level of subject-object).

My use of the term 'awareness' does not imply someone or an object at all. I am not talking about dualistic, relative awareness here. I am talking about the non-objective source in which the body, mind and every object, including consciousness, appears and which remains when all perception ceases (as that which knows that there is no perception).

Pointers, Pointers, Pointers

Question: Things have been a lot clearer, meaning I know it is always there, but sometimes I cannot, or rather do not, see it as it is.

John: I am not sure what you mean by 'it'. Do not forget, it is only about *you*. Do not turn *you* into an *it*. Whatever comes and goes, you must be there to say it comes and goes.

Q: I have been reading 'Shining in Plain View', and it is nice to read about others that have gone through the same thing. There is something still that is not clear for me, or maybe it is.

John: All the pointers are relative and given to address certain issues. None of them are fixed or absolute. You are. There is nothing to be understood, really. Just to be what you are.

Q: Sometimes you write about not being the body, not being anything, but then you write about not being separate from anything. Tell me if this is right. I am not any one thing, like the body, but all is contained within awareness, which I am. Thus I am not separate from that. Is this why Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj says 'I am that'?

John: These are all correct, just different ways of talking about things. From the position of awareness, no transitory appearance is who you are. The objects are discarded to highlight the presence of awareness as a factor, which people often overlook. When you look at objects to find out what they are, they also turn out to be that awareness, also. The point is not to make some absolute distinction between objects and awareness, but to point out that awareness is the common support of all of it.

Most people naturally assume they are a body. The sense of identity is limited to the body alone. In other words, 'I am

the body'. But you are not the body. You are the consciousness or witness that knows the body. When the identification with the body is relinquished, you are no longer a body. Everything in consciousness becomes yourself, because everything that appears is at the same level. You can either say 'I am nothing' or 'I am everything', but there is no basis for selecting one appearance out of the totality and labeling it as 'me'. Consciousness and the manifestation are one. Only with consciousness arising is there a world. No consciousness—no world. However, even being conscious is a state that comes and goes upon the ultimate principle that you truly are. That is beyond any and all attributes. The first attribute or experience is 'I know I am'. All other experiences follow that. But you are present before the experience 'I know I am' appears.

Q: You also say that 'I' do not exist, but then write that 'I am', that I cannot deny my being. Let me try this: 'I' as a separate entity does not exist, but 'I am' as pure awareness, as pure being, does exist, just not apart from apparent others, of which ultimately there are none. There are no others, and there is no 'I', but the only 'I' that is, is pure presence awareness, and so it is for the seeming others.

John: Sounds good here! The 'I' that does not exist is the assumed separate person standing apart from awareness. But this does not mean that you in your essential being are not present.

Q: Please explain about 'nothing happening'. Sometimes you say nothing happens or ever happened, but then other times you say everything is happening as it is. What is meant by 'nothing happens or happened'?

John: When you wake up from a dream, did anything really happen? Did the water in a mirage really happen? Did the wave really become separate from the sea? These things appeared to be, but did not really exist in any ultimate sense.

Q: I know it is just the words getting in the way when trying to describe the wordless. The mind is still there trying to make sense out of it, basically trying to debunk it. It is grasping at anything to say 'you need me'. I guess the mind is fighting to maintain its place.

John: The mind cannot be without you. So what is real, ultimately, you or the mind? See this and the mind settles down.

Freedom Is Found First

Question: Please tell me if this is correctly understood. That 'ordinary everyday awareness' is the natural state and what our true nature is. No special state is needed.

John: All the labels can do is point to what you are. You are that essence that remains in and through all thoughts, feelings and experiences, even in waking and sleeping, that undeniable core being, which is ever present and aware. Basically, the natural state is you. It is not a state, but is the prerequisite condition for all states to appear. States appear to you. You are to whom states appear. The closest pointers I have are being and awareness. But even these are just words. This, your true self, is ever-present and need not be attained, for it is what you are. Nothing eclipses it or shrouds it at any time. Therefore, freedom is always attained and ever-present. Even the thought that you are not that is only a concept coming and going before you, who are freedom itself.

Q: When 'me' thoughts arise, we only need to see them for what they are, self-centered thoughts. We only need to see that there is no separate 'me' from which they come.

John: This set of pointers is only to understand where and how apparent bondage, seeking and suffering appears. However, it (the suffering and separation) is clearly imagined and conceptual, in the light of the points above.

Q: If these assumptions are correct, it is only the elimination of the belief in the 'I' thought that stands in the way of Freedom. We are already present and aware.

John: Fixation on an erroneous concept of an assumed separate self gives the impression that you are something other

than yourself, or that some separation has occurred. It is an illusion really. If the assumed separate self is looked at straight on, nothing is found. It is a false concept. All the belief drains out of the conceptual mechanism. This does not stand in the way of freedom, any more than clouds stand in the way of the sun—from the position of the sun. You are the sun of conscious-being that is perpetually shining upon thoughts and can never be bound. But if you apparently find your self attracted to the mind because of a feeling that your identity lies there, then look at it directly (to find the assumed self in the mind) and belief in such an entity just withers, leaving you as you were, are and ever will be—the ever-free, ever-present true nature.

Freedom is found first and is ever present. Looking into the nature of the 'I' is just to wind up any residual, unnecessary belief in self-centered thoughts. How can such thoughts be true or worthy of attention when no self can be found?

When Will I Know That I Have Gotten This?

Question: When will I know that I have finally 'gotten this'? When will I see once and for all that there is no 'me'? I ask this question because I perceive that you and the others who talk about this no longer ask yourselves, 'For whom is this suffering?' For whom is this question? Is there a "me" here, and if so where is it?' It seems to me that once one has realized what is being pointed at, the questioning should stop once and for all. Am I correct in this regard?

John: The very questions you are asking are arising in what? Your own natural being and awareness itself. The questions presuppose some division or some entity who stands apart from awareness. You want to know when 'you' will 'get this'? Who? What are you trying to get? And when will you arrive at it? Can you see the hitches in these very assumptions? There is no valid answer to the questions, because they are based on faulty premises.

Use a little bit of inquiry to dismantle these questions naturally here and now. Nothing is gained because—how far away are you from yourself right now? See the falseness of the question. Thoughts appear and disappear in your natural state. The presuppositions in the questions are false because: one, you are already what you have been seeking; two, there is no actual person or separate self as implied by the mind's assumptions; and three, there is no time or attainment involved. Let this seeing naturally dissolve such assumptions. The seeing naturally resolves itself since the concepts are no longer believed. If an old thought or reaction comes up, that seeing will naturally appear in the moment as needed. Do not create the notion of a goal or end state. Instead, enjoy the ever-present freedom that can never be covered by any thoughts. There is no attainment because what you are seeking you already are. So be what you are. Then is there a need to think of something in the future any longer?

Suffering Reappeared

Question: I hope this note finds you well. I am not sure if you remember me, but around two years back I had written to you a couple of times and received your clear, shining pointers in response. Ever since, by digging into the main culprit of the 'I' thought, I have been leading a life free of doubts, worries and suffering. Until now. A certain development in the 'dream world' seems to be pushing me back into the fictitious story of 'me' and suffering seems to be returning. On questioning it does disappear, only to 'seemingly' reappear.

John: Whatever did happen, did you lose your self? Did the basic existence or conscious presence illuminating all thoughts and experiences vanish? And did you ever stop being present and aware? So your essential self beyond thoughts and experiences is intact. No thoughts, sensations, perceptions, emotions, bodily states, events or actions of others have any power to alter the basic facts of your core identity. That is undisturbed and ever as it is. Make sure that your identity as the presence free of thought is clear and secure. This is the platform from which any and all suffering can be resolved.

Whatever suffering there is, is only due to conceptual thought about an assumed person that is apart from this essential reality. That assumed I-thought is the core of all the suffering thoughts. If the notion of the reality of that 'I' appears to be valid, then just have a straight look at it. Where is this assumed person, this entity that stands apart from the natural being-awareness that you already know that you are? Suffering is only concepts of and about the separate 'I'. These self-centered notions depend on the 'I' who owns them all, and who the mind assumes we are. So, have a look and see— when, where and how is this 'me'? Can you find it? Is it even present on direct evidence? You say that the story of the 'me' appeared. But can you find the 'me' itself? If you cannot, then who is the story about? Certainly not about you, the

real you, as that ever-present being-awareness that is not in the least disturbed by anything at all. Stories of the 'me' may arise, but they will not be believed if you are certain that there is no 'me', in fact. As long as this simple point is not fully clear, the stories and, more importantly, the belief in them, will be there as a potential to hang us up. But if you challenge the 'me' directly and lose all belief in it, then you cannot entertain such stories any longer, even if they arise as old reactions or habits in the mind. They may be interesting stories floating by, but they are not about you, because you are not a fictional character. You can see all this presently and step completely out of all suffering, seeking and doubt—now.

Resolving the Root of Suffering

Question: The apparent suffering continues to vex me on and off. I guess the mind has gone into an overdrive with its efforts to put a stop to the confusion, fear and sense of unease that rages on.

John: This is granting too much reality to what is essentially an imaginary problem. That is like people who want to overcome, destroy or curb the ego. The very intent is based on the assumption of the presence of such an entity. Who is trying to stop suffering? The best route is to look straight at the apparent cause. All of the confusion, fear, rage and so forth are nothing but thoughts. Apart from thoughts, those things have no substance or reality at all. Fighting with thoughts is like fighting with your own shadow—an exercise in futility! The thoughts all swirl around the sense of the presumed limited person that the mind is asserting is you. Do not follow the thoughts and take them as valid. Instead look right at this 'I' sense. Pierce into the nature of the 'I', and you will find that what the 'I' is, is not some limited defective self, but only the non-conceptual, space-like awareness itself. This looking undercuts the energy of belief going into the thoughts.

Q: I remember a sense of clarity happened when I had just started following your web site. This time, even though it had been clearly seen that the person is not there, the mind threw up an endless stream of questions and the trouble continued.

John: Only if your natural state is overlooked and more emphasis is given to the mind by believing the self-centered thoughts to be true. Other than that, nothing is happening!

Q: There comes a point after all of that apparent misery when the presence-awareness is seen in full view. It is seen to be accommodating every thought, idea, perception, physical sensation. In other

words, just about everything. That is when the vexation drops.

John: The belief in the mind drops and you see what actually is present.

Q: This happened after I woke up this morning and saw that not one thought belonged to anyone. No matter what the nature or content of the thoughts, they are universal, in the sense that not one thought belongs to anyone in particular. They are all equally irrelevant.

John: They are fine for relative functioning, but they do not apply to what you are—that presence of awareness which is beyond the thoughts.

Q: Why are there times when despite the ‘understanding’ being crystal clear, there is fear or suffering? I have no clue myself!

John: A bit of belief goes into the reference point of the separate self and the thoughts about that entity are assumed as true. In this, the natural state, which never departs, is overlooked. Nothing is wrong or lost at any time. You will see that with this basic insight, less and less energy is capable of going into the mind with any sustained belief. You are always the light of awareness illuminating whatever appears.

Look at this mechanism of suffering until it is clear for yourself. Otherwise, you will always fall victim to it. You cannot be free of something that is not understood. So make sure all this is clear. Then the root of suffering is resolved. Remember, essentially, suffering is believing in self-centered thoughts. The radical ‘cure’ is to remove, through clear seeing, the belief in the self center. All other beliefs hang on the belief of that core concept. All the pieces are in place for you to see this for yourself now.

Q: I will admit, one question does arise at those moments. Does this happen to someone like John, too? Most probably not!

John: It did happen for years, until Bob Adamson was able to

point out what I am trying to show you. He pointed it out, but I had to see it and understand it for myself.

Q: Many thanks for letting clarity shine.

You Are, With or Without Questions

Question: I have two questions, and am in need of input.

John: The cycling in questions can be endless because it puts all the accent on the mind. You are, with or without questions. Be very clear that your natural being is not in the mind. The mind appears to you. It comes and goes. The mind can never grasp what you are because it deals with objects. Your natural state is entirely outside the mind. To whom are the questions and thoughts appearing?

Q: Awareness is being overlooked here (by me). There is no direct non-conceptual recognition. All I am left with, it seems, are reminders (thoughts) that I am not this, I am not that, and so forth, in reference to various thoughts.

John: That in you which is present and aware of each perception, feeling or thought is so evident that it is overlooked. It is what is looking. Can you deny your presence and your aware nature? Highly implausible! And is there anything conceptual or theoretical about it? Stop there and pause. In that pause you are coming into direct knowing and being of non-conceptual being-awareness. We overlook it because it is so simple and obvious. Before the next thought appears, you are. That 'you are' is what I am pointing to.

Q: In reading 'Awakening to the Natural State,' I just came across the essay in which you discuss the problems of books, as opposed to direct contact with a real teacher. I have encountered this before and was not surprised. But hearing it from you really took the wind out of my sails, because your pointing is so simple, direct and clear. If I cannot see this from reading your books, I am screwed, in other words. What to do?

John: Words can only point. You already are what you are seeking. That is not in any book. You may read books if you wish, but you will never find yourself in any book. Embedded in your questions and assumptions is the belief in an entity or person who stands apart from reality. There is no end to these questions as long we do not see that the premises are erroneous. 'I cannot see', 'I am screwed', 'What to do?'—all such doubts imply the presence of some defective person apart from reality. What I am saying is that here and now you *are* that reality. You are not separate from being or awareness. You are that knowing presence itself. Everything arises and sets before you. You are not a person. Question that 'I thought' and see its falseness. Then the tendency to believe in such concepts that revolve around the assumed 'I' ends.

All these questions arise as long as your identity is not clear to you. So continue to look into that and make sure you understand what you are. Also be clear on the nature and cause of suffering.

I Am Happily Astonished

Question: A weight has lifted off since we talked yesterday. I appreciate your openness to sharing and I thought I would e-mail to you about what is opening in attention now. I am moving through the day (car oil change, volunteering as lunch monitor at my daughter's school, and the whole swirl of usual daily tasks) with the 'me' thought popping in and out. What is amazing is how much gets done without 'me'! It is much easier to work without 'me.'

I have a tendency to drag through my days with lead in my boots. Suddenly it was clear that the imaginary burden of a 'me' that 'always has a million things to do' can be seen through and—pop!—dropped. You said it has taken a long time to build up a mental sense of who we are, but it does not take a long time to see that this mental idea of who we are is only mind stuff. I am not 'in there'. I am not existing as a 'me' entity at the core of all this mind stuff of memories and personality traits. It is like taking your clothes off but a thousand times better. I was wearing a lot of very heavy clothes like 'you are not good enough; you should do more; things should be different.'

So doing stuff without me is turning out to be amazingly delightful. I do not need me to get things done. Without me it is much easier to do stuff. What wore me out and made life such a drag was this lump of mind movements that chanted all day long, 'This is too much, I am tired of dishes and bills and work and clutter.'

I am happily astonished to see that dishes and bills and work and clutter are not a problem in the least. Even when conditioned aversion arises to tasks, that is not a melodrama or problem. The heaviness came not from any circumstances in my life, but from the idea of 'I am this tired person trapped in an endless torture machine of chores and obligations.' So I have this wonderful sense of playing hooky at the very same time as I do the laundry and pick up the house! I am playing hooky because 'tired Jane' is not here (except when those thoughts appear), but this pure energy of openness is

here. It is hard to describe, but there is a spring in my step and a piece of empty, blue sky between my ears. Thank you!

John: This is nicely said and a beautiful expression in your direct experience of what we were talking about. See how naturally this perspective is there for you. All that striving and struggling we did over the years, and then ... this! Life flows along without the belief in the 'me', and there is an ease and freedom immediately present. Your direct experience is all the proof you need. The way you write about your experience is simple, clear and elegant. I enjoyed reading your words.

The Limits of Language

Question: I love your clear writing. It is full of great pointers. I do have a couple of observations. Most good writing on non-duality starts with a great case for demolishing the constricted self or the 'me', but then inadvertently allows it right back in! You can almost feel the space and freedom these pointers and clarity create. However, without fail a new version of the 'me' or the 'you' is allowed to creep back almost unnoticed. It seems to slip in through the back door, now reintroduced and disguised as the free unbounded awareness, presence, impersonal consciousness and so on. Is it our language? Why is it not sufficient to see through the 'me' and just stop there? What is wrong with 'all there is, is this', 'all there is, is what is' or 'there is only being which sometimes is me-ing or appearing as whatever—walling, chairing or treeing!'

Is it our addiction with our self that forces all writing to end up paying homage to the 'you' as in 'you are unbound impersonal awareness'? Is it not possible to just see through the 'me' and the 'you' and stop there, period? Is that too empty or disappointing for some? The description of your direct experience is often put forward as a prescription! Who is the 'you' that you are prescribing to?

I am sorry if any of the above may seem critical. I assure you it is not intended in anyway. My bet is that, as a teacher or writer about truth, you would rather read the straight version than the politically correct one. I would appreciate your response if you feel moved to offer one.

John: All language is dualistic and, by nature, introduces unintended dualisms. That is the nature of the beast. At best, language provides temporary pointers. So you just see the point of the pointers and drop it there.

When the conceptual 'me' is dismantled, it is not a lifeless blank that is left. So there is something surviving the non-existence of the 'me' concept. All one can do is point to that. The potential problem with not saying anything is the

mind is liable to create some other concept of that. So there is something of an art in offering less and less tangible concepts, but continuously undercutting them. You will see in my writing less and less of anything being referenced as that essential non-conceptual source. It is clearly beyond 'me' and 'you', and really cannot be described as being or consciousness or any 'thing' else either, if one wants to be precise in language. In practice, this approach consists in offering temporary concepts of a less and less dualistic nature until all concepts are transcended. You cannot really help this if you are going to make any attempt to speak of this.

Even when you say: 'all there is, is this', 'all there is, is what is' or 'there is only being which sometimes is me-ing ...'. Those are just more concepts, your own attempts to point to the inexpressible. If all there is, is this, why speak of 'all'? If all there is is being, then how can there be a 'me-ing' or 'tree-ing'? That is still a dualistic approximation in words. How can non-conceptual oneness beyond the mind and even beyond being and consciousness be framed in words at all? Your notion that all there is, is being, is a faulty concept actually. This is not about being. That is just another meta-concept to be discarded at the right time. What I am pointing to is beyond the concept of 'being'. Many people are clouding the waters here by oversimplifying and reifying 'being' as the ultimate reality. This is not accurate. 'Being' and 'consciousness' are still subtle concepts. There is 'something' prior to being and consciousness that is the real essence of this. If you start talking about 'being is reality', you will be doling out another concept.

'Being' is the most generic and formless concept of the mind. But reality lies beyond. What 'you are' (just a way of talking) is beyond being and non-being, beyond consciousness and no-consciousness. So do not get stuck with a catch phrase like 'being is all there is'. That is utterly conceptual! Drop the concept of 'being' and what can you say? Nothing! In that nothing (no thing) lies what I am talking about.

You seem to have a basic grasp of this. So I would say, find a way to use your words to point to this. You will find that everything you say is a total lie! That is the nature of language.

Language is useful, but it is not final. You can criticize 'me' if you like, but what you are really doing is highlighting the limits of language. Agreed!

'In and Out' Drama

Question: There are times when the 'me' ghost seems overwhelmingly real and the natural state is seemingly pushed to the background. All has been clearly seen as one. There is no separation anywhere. Yet this 'in and out' drama continues! I know there is no 'way' to resolve this. But I just wanted to ask you: when this first clicked for you after your meeting with 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, how did you find the resolution to this (the 'in and out' experience)? I mean, when you felt you were 'out' of awareness and back to being a person, what snapped you out of that? This question pertains especially to situations where seeming others are present and so on. The radical cure (of no person present) has 'happened' here over and over. Yet, why does the clarity seem to be missing sometimes?

John: The belief in the 'me' concept, that I exist as a separate person or entity, drives all the interest and belief in the mind content based around the identity of the person. This mechanism is suffering, nothing more or less. To be utterly convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that the 'me' does not exist, has never existed and will never exist is, in my view, the key to cutting the root of bondage to the self-centered concepts and hence suffering. You speak of the 'me' as a ghost. Even that is granting it too much substance. Where is the 'me'? Did you ever find it? If not, how can it appear as a ghost, if it is absent? There were several key insights for me in getting this resolved.

First, there came a clear and doubtless recognition of my identity as non-conceptual awareness. This is already attained and never lost. It has always been shining in plain view and was never absent, because it is the very light at the basis of any and all experiencing. With this recognition came a dissolution of all spiritual concepts, such as enlightenment, awakening, practice, attainment, time, paths, approaches, steps, stages, teachers and so on. All of those are conceptual—from the

position of ever-present awareness.

In spite of this recognition, suffering was still not resolved because it was not clearly understood. Bob Adamson shared the following points with me, which I was able to see. Suffering is only thoughts, nothing more. Without thoughts, there is no suffering. This was understood, but suffering continued. The next insight was seeing that the suffering thoughts themselves arise and set in awareness. Awareness is never lost at any time. At this point, suffering was exposed as an illusory appearance and I was convinced that awareness, my real innate being, was not lost in the midst of suffering. Still, suffering continued to some extent, but I now knew that it was not ultimately real.

Next, I saw that suffering was not just any thoughts, but thoughts about a self, a limited being. A deeper penetration of the nature of suffering clicked in. Suffering is thoughts about 'me'. Self-centered thoughts (which are suffering) are for and about the 'me'. The 'me' concept is the root and center of the suffering thoughts. Belief in the 'me' is the fundamental cause of suffering and keeps the mechanism in play.

Then, I saw that without the belief in the 'me' (the cause), can there be the effects (belief in self-centered thought)? No. The point was hammered at repeatedly that there is no 'me' at all. It is entirely fictional. Once this is seen, the game is over. You cannot believe in something that you know does not exist. Suffering continued, but a sense was arising that this was the end game. I noticed how all my problems and concerns were just demonstrating this basic mechanism over and over. It became clear that the direct investigation into the reality of the 'I' entity was imperative to get things resolved.

I started to look at my experience for any evidence of a limited, defective person, the one who was the owner of all the troubling thoughts and concepts. Looking within, what I found was non-conceptual presence-awareness (whatever you want to call it). I saw some transient thoughts, feelings and perceptions appearing and disappearing in non-objective, empty, space-like awareness itself. No such thing as a defective person, entity, 'me' or separate self was present on direct evidence. John Wheeler, as some person, did not exist, was not

present in my experience. He had only been assumed to be present. In that seeing, I lost the potential or ability to believe in a 'me' for which there was no evidence at all. Suddenly, the root of all the self-centered thoughts was exposed as a total fiction. I was not an 'I', but only the non-conceptual presence of awareness itself, constantly present and shining in view effortlessly. The 'I' was never born and had only been assumed. That unexamined belief eventually was looked at directly in the full light of awareness. The result was loss of all belief and reality in that concept. This, in my experience, was the final resolution of the root cause of the suffering mechanism.

So to answer your question, 'When you felt you were "out" of awareness and back to being a person, what snapped you out of that?' Whatever I am describing above totally resolved this type of problem, doubt or experience. Awareness is constant and ever present. You are that. There is no separation at any time. The doubt itself is a self-centered concept, based on a presumed separate 'me'. And that assumption is being granted some unwarranted belief, isn't it? Where is this separate 'me' who stands out of awareness, who needs to be snapped back? The concept itself is false. Examine that 'I' and expose its totally assumed existence. There is no 'I'. Who can stand apart and who needs to snap back? Nailing this issue of the 'I' answers all conceivable doubts and problems, because they hinge on the assumed reality of that entity.

The bottom line, which must thoroughly be seen and recognized, is that there is no separate self, and you are nothing but non-conceptual awareness. Confirm these facts to your satisfaction, and there is no more room for doubts or suffering. That is about the best I can point, based on my experience. If there is any doubt or fuzziness on these points, there will be the potential or tendency to grant some reality to whatever self-centered thoughts may arise out of the memory banks. Without that belief, no suffering generates, even if such old relics appear from time to time, because there is no belief in them. They only appear in the light of non-conceptual awareness, which you are and which is ever free of the mind. This is just my take on it, but I think the basic principles, however

formulated, are more or less the same for everyone. There may be some variations on the basic themes.

Is It Just This Simple?

Question: I have been on this road a long time, John, reading so many books, listening to CDs and so on. I even made a trip to see Ramesh Balsekar in the 1980s. Recently I have stumbled upon Bob Adamson's books and then your books. It is so direct, so simple and so obvious. No cryptic allusions to Sanskrit terminology or references to Vedanta and so on.

It is very clear that the same unalterable presence-consciousness that was there from my earliest sense of being is the only constant in which the rest comes and goes. It is the pervasive sameness of awareness that is common to all beings. So it is one only! Despite so many teachers talking about the great breakthrough that happens, the knowing that consciousness was and is always what I have always been and, obviously am, has not produced any fireworks here—and none are needed!

John: This is the point. No shifts, breakthroughs or fireworks are called for. Before the next thought appears, you are and you know that you are. That is given and undeniable. Your conscious being is what is being pointed to.

Q: At this point it seems there is a shifting identification from the mind-made image (memories, judgments in the mind, the individual) to the real, which sees and is aware of the mind stuff and the shifting.

John: Yes, this is a natural corollary when the simplicity of this is pointed out and recognized. We were bemused by the mind because we were overlooking our actual identity as that which is aware of the mind.

Q: The understanding is here, but the full shift in identity remains elusive. But elusive to whom!?

John: Exactly. The understanding is there. Full stop. That is the fact. You are. Period. Everything after that statement is an erroneous concept based on an imagined separation from your natural being. That original concept is false, so drop the rest. The separation from your true nature has never happened. That is the essence of it. All concepts fall away in seeing this basic point.

Q: I am not sure why I am writing, but is it just this simple?

John: Yes!

Q: Why the mystery and why the exclusivity of the awakened versus the unknowing?

John: I have no idea. It is all a useless smoke screen. Awareness is ever awake and the seeming separate self who would need to awaken does not exist. Awakening, enlightenment, liberation and so on are imaginary concepts. You already are what you are seeking. End of story.

Q: Each of us is just that always-present awareness in any case, so I guess it is simply a matter of recognizing that as what we are, which is just that universal awareness-presence.

John: Recognized or not, that presence cannot be denied even now. It has been that which is cognizing every thought, experience and activity from day one. Nothing more. Who needs to recognize it? It is ever doing the recognizing.

Q: I may or may not call you, but I am not sure there is any point!

John: Just stick with the simplicity of what you are seeing here. If you already are what you are seeking and have a natural recognition of your being and its aware nature, that is enough. That is the reality to be 'realized'. You are cognizant of that now, so the notions of a path and a special realization are redundant. Suffering is always conceptual in nature and

based on the idea of being a separate person standing outside of being-awareness. Can you ever? Is there ever a separation? So the basis of all suffering is annihilated. Just as a final point, the state of being conscious itself comes and goes in your presence. Sometimes awareness knows itself as being conscious (for example, in the waking state), sometimes not (for example, deep sleep). Either way, you are that non-conceptual awareness (call it what you will!) which registers both. However you slice it, you are that. And that is ... THAT. So, just be what you are.

Thinking About What You Are Is Conceptual

Question: I start with the question, ‘What is this “I”?’ What comes back when I pose this question are either synonyms of ‘I’ or nothing, that is, no thought, a blank mind. That leads to ‘What do I think this “I” is?’ What comes back from that is something along the lines of ‘I honestly do not know’. So, a conclusive answer never arrives. One thing I know you say repeatedly is ‘The answer is not found in the mind’. This certainly appears to be the case, at least for this question. I know I have to solve this for myself. I know that simply believing what you say will not do. All I know right now is that the non-answer I find has not satisfied my mind. It is certainly possible that my mind will not be satisfied. It seems that for the time being I have no choice other than to pursue this single question ‘What am I?’ I have tried in the past and given up, but I know this is not done until this question is done.

John: You are still overlooking the basic point that the answer is not in the mind and trying to go back in to mind—by God!—and heroically dig out an answer. Why unnecessarily burden yourself with all this activity? You are. That ‘knowledge’ is self-evident and requires no effort, no maintenance and no improvements. The mind appears later as an appearance to your natural presence. Even to ask ‘What am I?’ is returning to conceptual thought and causes a subtle moving away from immediate, non-conceptual being and knowing what you already are.

Notice that you do not think to recognize the fact of your being. It is clearly obvious before any thought activity happens (although you may articulate that knowing later in words). Being what you are is self-knowledge. As the traditions tell us, what you are is simple being, awareness and peace. This is always present and beyond doubt as that which enables you to know that you are. Thinking about what you are is conceptual and is actually beside the point. You do not think about water

when thirsty, you drink it. So also, you do not think about what you are. You are what are. If you can 'get' that you are already what you are seeking, that the simple being before conceptualization is what this is, and that is what you are, then the pointers about what you are have served their purpose. Do not over medicate and go back into trying to cogitate over pointers that are not necessary! You are. Full stop. Be willing to pause at this juncture and notice the attempt to return to the mind to 'figure it out' gains you nothing but useless mental activity. That activity is being generated on the platform of self-evident being-awareness, which is already present and shining and is not enhanced by the mind's activity.

At this point, no more self-knowledge or inquiry is needed. To do so is redundant and counter-productive. The pointer 'full stop' comes in handy at this point. All that ever happens is that thoughts, feelings and perceptions appear in your knowing presence. Nothing changes what you are. Nothing alters this, your abiding nature. All appears in the light of awareness and you are that awareness. That is all. Everything else is a concept.

From this position, the task at hand, if there even is one, is understanding and pulling the plug on the residual suffering and interest in the mind. Nothing new will be gained because your knowledge of who you are is clear and established.

You are 'done' with knowing what you are. At this point, your relationship with the pointers is actually playing into the sustenance of needless suffering. You say, 'It seems that for the time being I have no choice other than to pursue this single question "What am I?" I have tried in the past and given up but I know this is not done until this question is done.' This is too complicated! Who is this 'I' who has no choice, this 'I' who tried, who has given up, who 'knows' this is not done? This is a bunch of 'I'-based conceptualizing swirling in the light of present awareness that you are. Why all these thoughts for one who is reality itself? You must see that this is all conceptualizing in reference to an 'I' that is separate, apart, unrealized. As long as that assumption is believed, a sense of reality will be given to these empty concepts. They are all

empty, illusory concepts. You are already the reality. All these notions are based on the belief in the 'I', the assumed one who is separate from awareness or reality itself. Has this separation happened? Do you stand outside of being-awareness? Does this separated 'I' even exist? If you think it does, can you find such a thing? Nail this down and the whole production is over with here and now. This is the end game.

Looking Deeply into the 'Me' Concept

Question: Things are going well here. I have been able to see clearly that the engine driving thoughts is the core concept of a separate self.

John: This is accurate and very important to see. It is vital. But it is not the full experiential depth of it. It is a pointer as to where to look, but it is not the seeing. The seeing is the clear knowing beyond any doubt at all that—there is no separate self present, not now, then or in the future.

I would say first of all, that like all issues related to the sense of separate self and whatever conceptual problems flow from that—that the problem is delusive or unfounded. There is always some assumption or idea that something has gone 'wrong'. In point of fact, nothing objective has ever happened at all—ever—other than some thought or experience passing through awareness. Did awareness go anywhere? No! Did you cease to be? No! Did the experience compromise or obscure your presence? No! Did you ever separate or become a limited being in the process? No! Did an 'I' ever come into being? No! Was there anything more than an insubstantial ripple passing through the light of awareness? No! Is the mind anything other than an appearance before you, the timeless light and presence of non-conceptual being-consciousness-peace? No! Is there any possible doubt about the presence of your very being? No! In the words of King Lear, 'Never, never, never, never, never!'

All that ever appears to happen is a thought flits through your ever-present true nature and nothing in particular happens at all. What drives interest in the mind is ultimately the assumed presence of the 'I', the assumed person that the self-centered thoughts are about. And yet at no time or place is such a separate, limited 'me' ever found or observed. I would say that it is very vital that this point be utterly clear and sure.

Not as ‘sometimes I see it, sometimes I do not’. Rather, as an incontrovertible fact that—no separation from the source has ever happened at all. What drives the interest in the mind is the potential to believe that I am a defective entity apart from reality. All the concepts that attract the attention are attempts to define, defend, preserve or strengthen the ‘me’ concept. Without the belief in the separate ‘me’, the basis of the interest in the mind is removed. If the belief is present, some residual grasping to the concepts about the ‘me’ will likely arise. This is due to a lack of clarity on the basic point that no separation from reality occurs at any time.

As usual, there are two aspects to this. The first is the clear basic truth of what you are. The second is the relinquishment of any erroneous concept taken as one’s identity. From my perspective, the first point is the most important. To see yourself clearly as the non-conceptual presence of awareness or being beyond thought is the annihilation of the ability to believe in any other concept, just like if you set an ice cube out in the blazing sun, it must disappear. Make sure this part is very clear. Your presence as being-awareness is beyond doubt, and no amount of thought activity is going to change that. Also, the very conceptualizing is appearing in awareness. The thoughts prove the presence of non-conceptual awareness. Experiences and thoughts come and go as simply appearances in what you are. Nothing at all can knock you out of what you are, because for anything else to be, you must be present. And that presence is what this is about. From this rock-solid and unshakable platform, any other looking can happen, but always against a background of felt and thoroughly present freedom. This light of freedom naturally unwinds all residual grasping at feeble conceptual images, just like shadows flee before the rising sun.

Without this fundamental aspect being locked down, any other investigation can subtly get us back into the ‘now I am there, now I am not’ feeling, which is really a subtle concept about a someone who is not even present.

Q: There is still a tiny residue of a separate self that drives the engine

of thoughts in me.

John: To be more accurate, there is the residue of the *belief* in the separate self. It is the tendency to waver on this notion and give it some credence that keeps the wheel in spin. So the question is how to knock out the belief radically, such that it is not an experience that sometimes there is the belief and sometimes not.

Q: I can see at times that there is no such separate self—that it is an illusion— but like a tether ball, it persists and keeps coming back.

John: The ‘at times’ is the hook. It is like saying sometimes I see five fingers on my hand, sometimes I do not. The truth of things must be crisp and solid. Is there a separate self or not? Yes or no? If it is not there, how can it ‘come back’? If there is some doubt on this, the mind will waver when the notion re-presents itself. There needs to be a certain and bold conviction on this point. A thorough and penetrating looking is needed, I would say. The potential for believing in conceptual thought hinges on the lingering possibility of believing in the presence of a person in the machine. Where is it? Is there any evidence at all for it? Can we find it? Drive this investigation through with some vigor and energy. Make a concerted effort to find this ‘ghost’. Be completely convinced that no such entity is found. Be so convinced of this that it is not a matter of ‘maybe, maybe not’. You will convince yourself by your own direct knowing that the ego notion is entirely assumed and you cannot find any basis for the belief at all.

Q: Lately I have been looking into that and seeing that as St. Francis said, ‘...it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.’ There really does seem to be an element of letting go and dying to the false image of oneself as a separate being that is key to being free of illusion and illusory thoughts.

John: Yes, in a certain sense this may be true. But it may be more direct to simply look for the ego, rather than talking

about some set of characteristics that must happen first. That subtly puts it into time. And that may become a concept in itself. Who is letting go? Who is dying? Who is being free of the illusion?

Q: Also, I see that there is the element of trusting in life that enables one to let go.

John: I am not keen on the letting go idea. Again, who? What is being let go? You are non-conceptual freedom (being, awareness) now. A thought may be passing through, but no actual separation has happened. There is no one there, not even to trust or let go. It sounds 'good' but may be bringing the sense of self in the backdoor. All these thoughts themselves are additional concepts! You are already the non-conceptual presence!

Q: I want to be free of that merry-go-round and yet I see that there is no me that can be free—and when I see that, there is a full stop and a sense of wholeness happens.

John: Ah! This is the key. Full stop! It doesn't 'happen'. It is that natural condition when the attention drops off of imaginary conceptual positions. See this.

Q: But there is still some sort of snag that catches me, and I find myself having been lost in thoughts and being a 'separate self'.

John: But this is just thought emerging in 'wholeness'. Do not buy it. Let go of the thought and be what you are. Get used to the space of awareness that is here before any concept arises and starts to weave the story of the 'me' again.

Q: Is the key to just keep persisting in inner looking and inner inquiry?

John: Yes ... and no. As non-conceptual awareness, no key is needed. Before that thought just arose, you were nothing

but awareness itself. Why does reality need to ask a question, since that is the case? See this and all is resolved—now! If this is not seen, then who is asking the question? The question is a tacit reference to the imagined separation. The question is really ‘For me, who is standing apart from awareness as a separate self, is the key ... ?’ So have a look and see if this assumption is true. The moment you see that the first part of the sentence is false, the rest of the sentence collapses.

Consciousness and Awareness

Question: You say in one of your writings, 'A distinction can be made between consciousness and awareness', and then you go on to say what you think this distinction is. This is confusing to say the least. There is no distinction; they are the same. What one is aware of is the content of consciousness. This is not different from awareness. Consciousness and the content of consciousness are the same thing. All appear in the light of awareness.

John: You said exactly what I said: 'Consciousness and the content of consciousness are the same thing. All appear in the light of awareness.' As you mention, consciousness and the content of conscious appear in the light of awareness. This is the point being made. Consciousness and its contents are conditioned states. Beyond consciousness lies the unconditioned, primordial reality. I am simply using the word awareness as a synonym for the unconditioned nature of what is prior to dualistic consciousness. Consciousness is clearly a conditioned state. Reality, or your essential nature, lies entirely beyond this (and contains it all).

You mention that the content of consciousness and consciousness are not different. This is not quite accurate. Content comes and goes, but the basic consciousness remains independent of any specific content. A clearer statement of this would be that the content is an expression or appearance of consciousness, like a wave is a movement of water. The wave and water are not different, but water does not depend on the wave. So there is not a one-to-one equivalence. You can have water without a wave, but you cannot have a wave apart from water. In other words, a wave is nothing but water, but water is not a wave. As a short hand it is sometimes said that consciousness and its content are not different. This is true only to a point.

What I am pointing to as awareness is entirely beyond consciousness. Consciousness comes and goes. It is a conditioned state. When consciousness as a state is absent, what remains? What is the source or basis upon which consciousness comes and goes? That is what non-duality is really pointing to. Some words used to point to that are: the absolute, noumenon, the unconditioned, prior to consciousness and awareness beyond consciousness. If you look very carefully at your experience, you will see the point I am making is very straightforward. Objects arise and set in consciousness. Yet consciousness itself arises and sets on a prior background. There is no word for that. If you have not considered the idea that consciousness itself is an impermanent state in duality, this approach may be new.

All this is interesting as far as it goes. The main issue is whether or not the false concept of the separate self has been seen and dismantled such that suffering and doubts are entirely resolved. Other than that, the pointers are just pointers and of no particular value in themselves.

The Separate Self Idea is Ignorance

Question: I am seeing that the mythical separate self is held together by ignorance and fear. Eliminate ignorance and the separate self disappears. Eliminate fear and the same thing happens. I am seeing that the glue holding this illusion of a separate self together in me is the fear of letting go of it. And, I see that the fear is arising in my beingness in the present moment. I feel so close to resolving this. Is there anything I need to be aware of as I probe this matter?

John: You are hot on the trail of all this I see! Let's probe into your comments in some depth to bring to light any assumptions that might be lurking in them.

'I am seeing that the mythical separate self is held together by ignorance and fear. Eliminate ignorance and the separate self disappears. Eliminate fear and the same thing happens.'

This is getting the cart before the horse. The point is that it is the separate self idea that is the ignorance, meaning the ignorance of one's natural condition. And it is this notion of the separate self that generates the fear. You can eliminate some particular fear, but the belief in the self will not be exposed. It is better to deal with the cause rather than the effects. If the self notion is fully exposed, the effects (self-centered thoughts and feelings) will resolve themselves naturally.

'I am seeing that the glue holding this illusion of a separate self together in me is the fear of letting go of it.'

This statement is circular. What is holding 'it' (meaning the mythical 'I') together is the fear of letting go of 'it' (as if there is something present to let go of!). Keep in mind that there is no 'it' present to let go of! The 'it' is a phantom with no substance or reality. The way to cut through this is to see that

the fear is based on a non-existent phantom. Also if there is no 'I' present, there is nothing to let go of. The desire to let go of the ego is a bit misplaced because it assumes there is something to let go of. In that, there is a tacit assumption of the presence of the separate self. Just look afresh and realize that all that is present is clear, open and natural non-conceptual awareness and some discontinuous thoughts. There is no 'I' present. See this deeply and the circle is broken—now! You must have the confidence and courage to accept, based on your own direct experience that the egoless state is already present.

'And, I see that the fear is arising in my beingness in the present moment.'

Fair enough, but what is the fear based on? The idea of the 'I'. But where is this separate self? If it is not present, then the fear is only based on an assumption. The root of the fear is extinguished. How can there be a fear if the assumed cause is realized to be absent?

'I feel so close to resolving this.'

This sounds good, but it is actually an 'I-centered' concept arising in present non-conceptual awareness. Once the 'I' concept arises, there is always something to do, get, achieve or resolve! Present awareness does not need to resolve anything. It is. There is no question or doubt for your being. So see this notion as the mind's last gasp to try to hang onto some shred of belief in the 'I' and let it go. Without that notion is there an 'I' present that needs to resolve anything?

'Is there anything I need to be aware of as I probe this matter?'

See that the 'I' that is doing the probing is fictional. All of our words are coming and going in clear, simple and doubtless being-awareness-peace that is already settled and beyond any doubt. Before the next thought appears, your nature of

simple being and awareness is fully established. Be what you already are.

What Does It Matter If I Function from Pure Awareness?

Question: If there is no 'me', which I get, and no 'you' really, and no duality, why does it matter if I function from this place of 'pure awareness'?

John: Notice how the reference to the 'I' comes in the back-door in the second half of the question. If there is no 'I', there is no question of anything mattering or not for that fictional concept. Practically speaking, life lived through an erroneous self-image leads to needless suffering, doubt and confusion.

Q: If consciousness is neutral on these things, is it that from an egoic place, it is a way to further human existence?

John: It is just a matter of living according to reality instead of an erroneous view of things.

Q: What is the point? Will it eventually happen for all anyway, at least if we do not kill ourselves off?

John: This again makes reference to individual selves. What is the point? For whom? Who is the 'all'? What is supposed to eventually happen? All we are talking about is a basic clarity of identity, to not be living under a false sense of self.

Q: How can there be an 'all' if there is only one?

John: Yes, but 'one' is also a concept. The whole problem is getting lost in imaginary concepts of the mind. Pause all needless self definitions and it is pure clarity and peace immediately. That is why there is no awakening or liberation called for. What is, is the natural and ever-present state. Awakening and liberation are additional mind-created concepts, which is why the vast majority involved in such pursuits are not

seeing the simplicity of what is being pointed to.

Q: I used to think the pursuit had to do with increased joy and deep peace. These seem like worthy goals to me, but still I feel both the strain and curiosity and wonder of seeking—and still neurotic as ever.

John: Seeking is a concept based on the idea of being a separate person apart from the deeper reality. When that is looked into the false concept is exposed and the seeker/seeking ends. You gain nothing at all, except a clear recognition of your ever-present self and immediate freedom from needless psychological suffering based on a fictional identity.

Q: I think that it makes sense to just look in a slightly different way. I see this with my clients all of the time. There is just being present with no movement, and then they 'get it for themselves'. A new awareness emerges that translates into how they live. But I also know that it helps to have the ground prepared, but then it gets to be spiritual materialism. More duality!

John: You got it! You can do all of these things and leave the basic misconceptions intact.

Q: I have also been doing certain Buddhist practices that are very heart opening to me. But it also occurs to me that these may not be direct paths but rather ways to live in harmony with myself and others, to see that I am no different than others in the most kind and compassionate way.

John: All this is fine, but are you getting to the root of things? These are fine as far as they go, but the whole point is clear self-knowledge leading to the resolution of the false sense of self. Who is doing all the practices and why? Usually, the self image is left intact and the basic point of the teachings is missed. As I see it, the purpose of non-duality, which is the essence of all deeper spiritual traditions, is to clearly know who you are, nothing more or less. This can be done by going

straight into an investigation of what you are, or by discarding what you are not. Both are really the same movement of clarifying your abiding and natural identity. The net result is a life lived in natural clarity, free of needless suffering, seeking and doubt. That is its own reward and needs no justification or rationale from the doubting mind.

The Essence of the Inquiry

Question: I have read two of your books ('Right here, Right Now' and 'Awakening to the Natural State') and I am very grateful for your clear words. I especially like that you are coming from the Nisargadatta Maharaj tradition. You may not agree with that wording, but you know what I mean. I always felt very much drawn to him. I am on the 'spiritual path' for some twenty or so years. In the last year I have re-focused on pure non-duality (my 'path' actually started out with reading Ramana Maharshi). It is simply the clearest and most radical message there is and it resonates more strongly with me than anything else. Here is something I have difficulty with. When I try to find out who this 'I' actually is I find it to be elusive at best. There certainly is no tangible mind-object that can be associated with it.

John: This is the point—to look for the 'I' and find that it does not exist. This is the essence of the inquiry. I am not sure if you realize you are doing it perfectly!

Q: However, there is this movement of attention. When a sensation arises there is this movement of attention towards it. It is the same for thoughts and so on. That is what I would associate with the 'I'.

John: This is going back into the mind 'looking for more'. This is not needed and is overcomplicating things. Just pause when you find the absence of the 'I'. Notice what is there. You do not disappear. Being is present. Awareness is shining. This is the point to see. You are that non-conceptual being-awareness itself. No more conceptualizing is useful at that point. Just be what you are.

Q: Now, this movement is obviously not it, since there is awareness of the movement, so there must be something prior to it.

John: Yes, that is being-awareness itself, the natural state. You are that. Full stop.

Q: The problem is that I do not seem to be able to abide as that prior awareness or presence. This also seems elusive and not tangible enough to abide as it.

John: What 'I' is there? You just noticed there is no 'I'! Whenever any concept appears, look for whom it appears. You find no 'I', only simple being-awareness. Be willing to pause and be, without jumping back into the self-centered concepts. Since there is no self, the concepts are all empty and without basis.

Q: Is there maybe anything you can point to that might be of help?

John: Consider what I said above. I fell into that trap for years. Hopefully, I can save you taking the same wrong turn.

The 'I' Is an Afterthought

Question: There is not the same trap to false identification as 'once upon a time'. Talks with you contributed to this 'seeing'. Until then my seeing was pretty much intellectual. The 'I' (personality, ego) was always there. Now that there is the 'seeing', the ego would suggest that the 'seeing' is also intellectual. My footing, so to speak, is still uncertain. But now there is an awareness of the uncertain footing. It is not my imagination. There is more trust in what is being 'seen'. Your feedback has been essential to seeing with no 'I' seeing or no 'I' being aware. But there is just seeing and being aware now.

John: Awareness and even relative seeing are never intellectual. Before thought gets into the picture, there is a natural sense of being and non-conceptual awareness functioning. The 'I' always comes in as an afterthought. And it is literally, just a thought—*after* the seeing. The notion of 'me' is conceptual in nature. Awareness is there whether or not the 'me' notion appears. You are aware of the 'me', so your natural state is already totally free of the 'me'. When you say 'there is an awareness of the uncertain footing', notice that there is no uncertainty about awareness itself. That is clear and solid and beyond any doubt. The 'uncertain footing' part is being introduced by the mind.

Notice the phrasing 'my footing, so to speak, is still uncertain'. There is the subtle reference to the 'I' (*my* footing). That concept derives from the self-centered reference point. What is this 'me' or 'I' except an image floating through clear, open awareness itself? Where is this 'I', other than some assumed entity? Nowhere! So the 'I' that is on uncertain footing is a fiction. It is not present. This is what knocks any steam out of the mind's concepts—seeing that person who is the victim of the concepts is non-existent. Still, clear non-conceptual awareness shines out illuminating everything, even the fact of

being conscious. You are that. Or drop the 'you' reference, and know there is only that.

Why Does All This Appear?

Question: So far, I think I get much of non-duality writings. But I have not seen anyone answer why all this appears. Why am I apparently searching? Or apparently separate? Am I playing hide and seek with myself?

John: The purpose of non-duality, as I see it, is to encourage you to clearly recognize yourself, or find out who and what you are. The questions you are asking are intelligent, but they tend to divert away from the issue at hand. The basic idea is that by knowing yourself, you put an end to the seeking, suffering and doubt. You are no longer operating under a mistaken view and experience of who you are.

The ‘Why am I apparently searching?’ and ‘Why am I apparently separate?’ questions come from a mistaken or false identity. Once this is cleared up, the questions are not relevant because the apparent ‘I’ who is searching is only an assumption, not a reality. The separate self is mythical. The questions derive from the unfounded belief in the presence of the separate ‘I’. Once that is cleared up, the questions fall away, as they are founded on false premises. The question ‘Why does this appear?’ is disposed of in a similar fashion, as ultimately being a false question based on a faulty premise. ‘Why?’ implies causality, which, in turn, implies purpose in time and space. Purpose, time and space are concepts experienced in the appearance itself. In other words, they only arise within the appearance. Before the appearance apparently appeared, there were no concepts of time, space and causality. So the question presupposes that before the appearance appeared, time, space and causality existed. This is a false premise, and so the question is illogical and unsolvable. Another way to look at this is that the mind, which is only a fragment in the appearance, is trying to grasp the nature of the appearance and what existed before the appearance. It is also trying to

apply its self-created categories of time, space and causality (which are conceptual in nature) to a prior source from which the mind and all else emerged. It is like a camera trying to take a picture of something that happened before the camera was manufactured, which is an obvious impossibility. The conclusion must be that the questions are ill-founded and irresolvable by nature.

As I often say, you do not answer a false question, you discard it as unnecessary. As with many questions like this, they appear plausible to the mind, but they actually divert from the main purpose at hand which is clarifying who you are. You obviously exist. What you are can be clearly known, and the assumed definitions that we have believed can be understood and discarded. Through this, the basis of suffering, seeking and doubt can be resolved at a practical level. That is its own reward and needs no justification. So it is more practical and beneficial to put aside the theoretical issues and get down to the task at hand, which is clarifying who and what you are.

Examining One's 'Obvious' Identity

Question: I am obviously a man, sixty years old, of a certain height and weight. But in this body, I have the possibility of being, of being the great love, the stillness and depth, a little particle floating around in the great sea of the universe, less able to choose what way the sea will send me, more able to ride with the currents.

John: I would challenge some of the notions you are presenting here. You say, 'I am obviously a man, sixty years old, of a certain height and weight'. This one is a flat contradiction not only with the basic tenets of non-duality, but also direct experience. The body, world and all else appear as objects in consciousness. Those come and go before you, or in what you are. To claim the body as one's self is an invalid assumption. That is referred to as the 'I am the body' concept, which is something to be seen through. For practical purposes, there is a body, but it is not what you are. It is 'obviously' not what you are!

You say, 'I have the possibility of being, of being the great love, the stillness and depth'. Well, this sounds good, but it leaves your identity as a separate self intact. It also turns the reality (being, love and so on) into a future possibility, not a present reality. So as good as this sounds, it is the approach of 'becoming', not of being what you are. It is out of line with the pointer 'You are that'. The real point is that you *are* being, love and so on. Knock out the concept of the separate 'me' and it is pure being, love and so on, immediately, not as a possibility for some presumed person one assumes oneself to be.

You say, '... a little particle floating around in the great sea of the universe, less able to choose what way the sea will send me, more able to ride with the currents.' Who? Being a little particle is another concept of a presumed separate person. You are not a person at all, much less a little particle floating

in some current. Why not cut to the chase and see yourself as the awareness in which the universe arises and passes away? Then the universe is a small particle arising and passing in what you are. This is the point of it.

A Question on Morality

Question: It has been a while since I have talked to you, and everything has been going well, up to a point. I had a communication about morality with someone who teaches non-duality. This person said that from the perspective of awareness that everything was wonderful, that even children being tortured to death was as wonderful to awareness as the seeming good stuff. I thought I had finally reached a point to where I understood, but this does not ring well. Now saying that it is necessary that this happens as well as the other makes sense. It is as it is, but it is not necessary to say it is 'wonderful'. I respect what you say. Would you say it is 'wonderful' or just 'what is'?

John: That perspective is entirely misleading. It is a way that people often go astray with this. Non-duality is not about making moral or ethical judgments about activities in the appearance of things. At that level, the standard canons of common sense and reason apply. To call children being tortured to death 'wonderful' is bizarre from any normal standard of human ethics, morality or decency. Such acts by the perpetrators would most likely be driven by extreme ignorance, lack of compassion and self-centeredness—all outgrowths of the false self-center. As a result, such acts would be based on the complete reverse of the point of view being espoused by non-duality. Certainly such acts are part of 'what is', but that manifestation is likely based on fundamental ignorance, meaning an extreme lack of insight and compassion, which are outgrowths of an entrenched belief in the illusory sense of personal self. The purpose of morality is to curb or discourage the blatant expressions of the limited, personal self—such as greed, violence, selfishness and so on.

Non-duality is not something that is 'taught'. All that can happen is a pointing to a clear and present truth within your-

self. There are no teachers and students in non-duality. Those who pose as teachers or students generally miss the point of it all.

There Is No Question About Your Being and Its Aware Nature

Question: What do I ask? I see my questions keep changing every time. That is how it is with thoughts! There are also times, when I have no questions at all. However, right now, I do have and so here we go.

John: Questions are fine as far as they go, but what is really being pointed to is your real being. Is it helpful to see that there is no question about your very existence and its aware nature. Questions are concepts floating through awareness, which is illuminating and knowing even the questions. The recognition of the presence of non-conceptual awareness and your identity as that is the resolution of all questions and seeking. I am just pointing this out to set the 'base line'. Nevertheless, it can be useful to address questions. Why? So we can discard them and keep in view the real point of it all. You are what you are seeking. And there is no doubt of the fact of being. No matter how far we wander, it will always come back to this fundamental point.

Q: I find myself in a standard non-duality loop so to say. I have been cooked (if the mind may claim so!), overcooked even.

John: There is still a bit too much of the 'I' in play there. If there is no 'I', there is no one to be in a loop, cooked or overcooked! This needs to be noted. It is often these seemingly innocuous assumptions that muck up the works and become the basis of subsequent conceptual confusion.

Q: I have clearly seen several points. Perhaps you can comment on them. First, that 'Raj' (me) is but a fictional character made of thoughts and memories.

John: Fair enough.

Q: Second, the spacious awareness is not in the least affected by any thoughts, feelings or emotions that come up. This space is what I am, because it is all there is. I have felt the vastness of this space, not just known it conceptually or intellectually.

John: Fairly clear. But the last sentence brings back in the 'I'. 'You' do not feel the vastness of this space of awareness. You are that. The awareness is not conceptual, but the 'I' is. Notice this and it will knock the steam out of the concept. Things are much clearer when the duality of 'I' and awareness is not supported.

Q: Three, the unified nature of this space.

John: Good.

Q: Fourth, that it is futile to try and gauge this with the mind. For, after every mystical glimpse of the immensity of this space and its impersonal loving nature, comes so-called mundane experiences, and the mind feels it is 'out' of presence.

John: I am not sure what you mean by 'mystical glimpse'. We are not talking about glimpses of anything at all, just the basic 'ordinary, everyday, awareness' that is at the basis of all normal consciousness and perception. Everything takes place in consciousness (sense consciousness and mental consciousness). Consciousness is known by a light beyond it, which is non-conceptual awareness itself. It is ever-present. The mind cannot be 'out of presence', because it is only appearing in awareness, ultimately. This is the mind's basic ignorance, which is ignoring the fact that it cannot even be present save for the presence of awareness. 'There but for the grace of God, go I'! On the other hand, the mind can *never* know non-conceptual awareness because it is not an object or thought to be grasped objectively. It is best to see that the answer is not in the mind and can never be understood by the mind.

Yet, you can easily recognize your presence and its non-conceptual nature of awareness. In fact, it is certain and beyond doubt at all times.

Q: I still find the mind spinning in loops and loops of questions!

John: But questions are all being generated in the mind, which is trying to grasp things at a mental level.

Q: This obviously shows a hanging on to a sense of a separate 'me'.

John: Well, it just shows a willingness to continue to look for answers at a conceptual level. This will end when it strikes home that your nature is already fully present as the light in which the mind is appearing. You do not look for a needle in a haystack when you know before hand that there is no needle present in it! Return to the fact of your being and its presence and aware nature. There is no question of this. Also see that you are not separate from this. The separation from this never happened. Seeing this, all the looking in the mind and questions settles down. All is complete in being what you already are.

Q: It is not this way all the time. A lot of these questions are abstract in nature, and mostly pure crap (I know that is labeling, but the questions really are quite nonsensical). There are times when the effect of 'presence' is felt clearly, and all questioning, all boundaries, all dilemmas dissolve into a space of effortless ease. There is nothing very spectacular or mind blowing about this peace.

John: You need to get beyond these ideas of presence being here at times, being felt and so on. These are all subtle mistaken views about what this actually is. All those things are experiences in awareness. Do not subtly associate pure awareness with a state or experience. Even when 'you are not experiencing it', there is some cognizance of that very fact. So the cognizance itself has gone nowhere. That is what should be recognized.

Q: I do not understand why the mind gets so entangled with the questions and thoughts at times.

John: Basically, it is interest in the mind. Why? Because we assume that our identity, reality and happiness may lie there. But they do not lie there at all. Reality, identity and happiness lie in that which is prior to the appearance of the mind. Why does a man continue to run after water in a mirage? Because there is some residual notion of water being there. And, yes, ultimately, the mechanism is driven by a residual interest in the notion of the separate 'I', which is the root of all other self-centered concepts. From your statements above, there has been a bit of belief in this entity (for example, 'I experience awareness'). There is not an 'I' to experience awareness as some separate experience. So look into this remaining belief and find this supposed 'I'. When you look deeply and find its total absence, the plug is pulled on the whole thing.

Q: I will admit, over the past couple of months, my focus on work has been affected by all this. Although I am fighting thoughts less and less now and am realizing the need to be my own 'John Wheeler', this flip-flop of sorts is bugging me a bit, to say the least.

John: Do not make this too complicated. You are working too hard. We are just talking about every day, normal awareness that is naturally present and enabling all experiencing. Do not burden the mind with trying to figure this stuff out. Give space for the body and mind to do what they are made for—functioning on a day-to-day level in the world (career and so on). Non-duality is not to be turned into a mental pursuit. The point is to know your natural state as ever-present, non-conceptual being-awareness, already attained and effortlessly here. It is forever beyond the grasp of the mind. You must see this point so you can give up returning to mind to find self-knowledge in it. This is over-burdening the instrument of the mind with a task it can never fulfill. You are he to whom the mind appears. The mind comes and goes in your

presence. Your presence does not waver and is intuitively obvious at all times.

Q: Once it became utterly clear for you that the reference point is false and is the root cause of all woes, what happened when seemingly 'uncomfortable', 'confusing' thoughts arose, John?

John: Like everything else, they are just experiences appearing in doubtless presence-awareness. It is nothing more complicated than that. Uncomfortable and confusing for whom? Only the fictitious 'I' notion. Otherwise, it is only waves and ripples passing on the surface of the lake of awareness. There is no actual problem or separation at any time. There is nothing else present except, non-conceptual presence awareness. The 'I' had been investigated and seen as non-existent. That pulled the plug on the belief in separation from source.

Q: I deeply appreciate all your help. Every time I feel stuck, yours and Sailor Bob's pointers are what I turn to, simply because you are living this truth. And also because you do not come across as spiritual 'gurus', but people who are living the effects of this realization in normal, everyday life.

John: Nisargadatta Maharaj saw this stuff and he pointed things out to Bob Adamson. Bob pointed it out to me, and I am pointing it out to you. It is all the same. If they understood this, you can and will do so also. There is no doubt about it.

Consciousness, Presence and Your True Nature

Question: What I seem to find is that in the space between thoughts all there is, is a generalized sense of awareness. But when one looks a little closer at that, or feels one's way into it, there is somewhere in the middle of it all (at least this is how it feels) a sort of core sense of a 'me' that feels more like presence, a sort of observer if you like, that seems untouched by the things it is aware of. But this centre is clearly not the David Williams that I always took it for. In fact, it does not seem to have any qualities at all, apart from this sense of being there and at the core. It does require more attention to notice it though. Does any of this make any sense?

John: This impersonal sense of being, presence or consciousness is the space in which thoughts (and all else) appear and disappear. It is also often spoken of as 'consciousness' or the 'witness'. It is not a 'me' as such, meaning a limited, isolated person or entity. It is impersonal consciousness. At the level of appearances, this essential conscious presence is what you are. So in a sense, you could call it the real or essential 'you'. Keep in mind that the presence of consciousness is not a conceptual 'I', with its sense of limitations, problems, doubts and personal suffering.

The limited, personal 'me' is born of the identification of this conscious presence with the body, mind and/or personality. This ego sense is a conceptual construct that arises from the identification of consciousness with objects (body, senses and mind). That ego notion is a false 'I' because it is a product of conceptualization (which is itself an appearance in the conscious presence). So a powerful initial step in recognizing your true identity is to see yourself not as the body-mind-personality, but as the space of consciousness or the witness of those things.

When you look finely into this, you will see that consciousness, or the witness, is relative. That is to say, it is an

appearance also, a transient experience. Consciousness, or the witness, is not always present. It comes and goes in what I would call non-conceptual awareness, or the space that is prior to consciousness. You, as non-conceptual awareness, are aware of the fact of being conscious or being present. You are the basic space or pure awareness in which consciousness comes and goes. This sounds more complicated than it actually is, because we are only talking about your natural state or fundamental being. You recognize not only the coming and going of objects (sensations, perceptions, thought, feelings and so on) but also the consciousness in which they occur.

When you are not conscious (deep sleep, under anesthetics and so on), you still are. Later, you say, 'I was unconscious and did not know anything'. Clearly, you existed and there was some basic cognizance, even of the fact of being unconscious. That in you now, which I call non-conceptual awareness, is what recognizes what you are calling the 'core sense of me' or 'presence'. Keep in mind that that experience is being recognized *by* something, which is what you really are in the deepest sense. It is like looking into a microscope. Anything you can see in the field of vision is not you. What people often miss is that 'consciousness' or 'presence' is still an experience in the microscope (to continue the analogy). It is like the artificial light within the microscope that is illuminating the objects seen in it. That is why the sense of 'consciousness' or 'presence', still retains a subtle objective quality or sense of personalization. Pure, non-conceptual awareness is utterly outside of duality, has no qualities and zero 'me' sense. It cannot be grasped or experienced by the mind at all. It is simply what you are prior to any experience or conceptualization.

You are aware of objects but you are also aware of being conscious as well. The state of being conscious will certainly pass, so it cannot be your most essential core reality. When consciousness goes, you will remain as you what you are and always have been. This is non-dual awareness that is not even aware of itself, since there is no second thing present 'there' to be aware of. That is one without a second, or pure non-duality.

Simple, Ordinary Awareness

Question: The sense of knowing that I am alive, that I am aware and that I am present is prior to any object that comes and goes in this field of knowing (thoughts, feelings, the world, my body). What is remarkable about this still is how effortless the knowing is. It's just my simple, ordinary awareness. I have had this treasure my whole life! After years of struggle, being what I am is the most natural thing in the world. This defines the meaning of the word "relief" for me. How is that knowing presence that I am, not the same as the awareness that cognizes the coming and going of presence ('prior to consciousness')? Is this a matter of presence and awareness being localized in a human body?

John: There are different ways to look at this. One would be simply to drop all thoughts and realize that you are present with or without the question, and that what you are is perfectly whole and complete as is. What is wrong if you are not thinking about it? Then, full stop.

You can also notice that what you are is that presence of awareness that knows the coming and going of consciousness. Keep in mind that consciousness in this context is the state of relative consciousness, of knowing that you are present and conscious. Sometimes the state of being conscious is present (waking), and sometimes it is dormant (sleep, unconsciousness, before birth, after death). But still, all of that is taking place in a greater context, which is the basis upon which consciousness comes and goes. That is the absolute, ultimate or prior to consciousness 'state', for lack of a better word. It is sometimes called the 'stateless state'. That is what you are. It is the 'everyday' or 'ordinary' sense of awareness, which is entirely self-evident, non-conceptual and free of the dualism of subject and object. Without the arising of the relative sense of being conscious, which is largely dependent on the presence of the body as a matrix or vehicle for consciousness

to manifest, you do not know that you are. Without that presence of consciousness, you have no sense, feeling or knowledge of your existence. For example, you did not have a sense of being present and conscious before you were born or in the state of deep, dreamless sleep. That is why it is said that the absolute is awareness that is not aware of itself, or being that does not know that it is. Nor is there any need to be aware of 'it', since it is the non-dual state, with no relative consciousness or any entity present who would need to know it. It is only after consciousness dawns and the concept of a separate entity appears in conceptual thought that questions of knowing or attaining the absolute come into the picture. The absolute, which is really your own natural condition, is not some future state that you attain in the future when the mind is still or consciousness disappears. It is the basis of present experiencing and knowing, even now.

Pointers

The pointers are always specific to certain contexts and none of them are absolute. There is no fixed teaching at all. All the pointers are provisional and in response to a certain question. The point is to see what the pointers are pointing to, which is just what you are. Before the next thought appears, you are present and aware. That is all I am pointing to.



There is no absolute truth in pointers. They are all just words that come up in different contexts. For example, if someone is exclusively identified with appearances only, you can point to the non-objective reality of their fundamental nature, expediently pointed out as 'different' from the appearances. Of course, from the position of the source, all appearances are only appearances of that. They are not as such that, but in essence or substance they are only expressions of or from that source. If someone sees only waves and not the ocean, you can point to the water underneath the waves. Later, they see the evident fact that the waves are only water. All teachings and pointers are relative and temporary. There are no perfect words, because words can only point. When the truth of who you are is evident, you do not need to worry about

pointers any longer, and they can be dropped. All pointers are in the mind. You are prior to the mind, so how can they ever reveal you as you are?



The sole intent of the spirituality is to liquidate your identity. There is no teacher, no seeker, no goal, no attainment. You, as a person, have never existed. The dissolution of the seeker is the sole aim of the pointers.



In the end, you find that this is really about heart more than anything else. When the heart flowers in humility, sincerity, openness and resonance, all doubts are swept away in the flood tide of pure non-conceptual knowing beyond words.



If you are waiting for enlightenment in the future, you will wait forever. If you are expecting to attain or experience something in the future that you do not have right now, you are caught in the illusion of time. Time is not real. There is no time, except as a concept. When you wait for the future and assume you are 'not there', you are in the loop of conceptual thought. You are chasing an illusion.



The dropping of the 'I' is not an event. How could it be, when here and now there is no 'I', no separate entity at all? Look now and see the truth of this. If there is no 'I' now, then there never was one in the past nor will there ever be in the future. Seeing is only now. There has never been any entity at all. How can something that is not present drop away? How can there be any 'people for which this has occurred' if the essential insight is that the person is not?



By waiting for the 'I' to drop away in a 'final' seeing, you are taking it as a real entity. There is no 'I' at all. Right now, for you, there is no 'I'. If you think there is, find it, show it. You will not be able to.



Do not seek enlightenment. If the sense of being, that pure awareness registering thoughts and experiences right now, is what is real, then what do you need to get? Who is to get it? The concept of attaining enlightenment, like all other self-centered concepts, presumes an entity that exists apart from what is real. Examine your present experience. Is there a separate someone (a 'you') apart from awareness, your real being? What are you right now? Only that present, clear, open awareness in which all is appearing. Seeing this, the concept of attaining enlightenment drops away. The concept is false, but you are truth itself.



The purpose of the question 'Who am I?' is to discover that the individual entity is not present. All problems arise from the belief in the presence of that entity. Seeing that it is not present, everything resolves. If there is not a person present, who has a problem? There is only clear, present knowing and being.



In true spirituality, the assumed seeker disappears. What is left is just this undeniable, clear knowing presence. That is all.



You can never leave what you are. That true nature shines continuously and clearly, ever untouched and unaffected by phenomena. It does not matter what appears or arises. The sky does not care what clouds arise and pass through it. An empty sky is not better than one filled with clouds and thunder. The sky remains as it is. A better analogy is the ocean and waves. The waves do not disturb the ocean at all. You can also see that the ocean and the waves are only the water. The one substance of water appears as both ocean and apparently separate waves. In this analogy, the waves stand for phenomena, the ocean stands for consciousness, and water stands for pure non-conceptual awareness.



Once the seed is planted, the flower of knowing blossoms forth—not because you see it or I see it, but because we are dealing with undeniable facts. Your being and its presence as awareness are facts. Seeing that fact is what works, not what you or I do. The mind throws up a few doubts, but do these doubts change the fact of what is? Doubts come and go, but you as that presence of awareness *are*. This is beyond doubt. No doubts can change your being into non-being. No doubts can change awareness into non-awareness. No doubts can alter your identity as awareness here and now. You cannot even have doubts without those doubts being illuminated by your knowing presence. Understand that your nature of awareness is completely beyond any doubt, even now. Let the doubts go and be what you are. Everything is clarified in this basic understanding.



When the belief goes out of the false identity, appearances return to a sense of harmony and balance. The suffering created by the conceptual illusions subsides. Still, all the normal functioning arises in awareness, just without reference to separate, defective ‘me’ concept.



Your true nature is oneness. Oneness is unity, non-division. Some people call it 'love'. Whatever I am, you are. Whatever you are, I am. When you look inside to find what you are, you find being, which is present and aware. So do I. That has no objective characteristics to distinguish it. There is only one being. Beyond thought, there is no time or space or appearances. Whoever goes there disappears as a separate entity. Only that remains. There is no word for it, but it is.



In trying to search for it, we miss it—because any search must be objective and in the mind. We are looking off in the distance trying to find 'it'. But 'it' is not out there. It is what is looking! See that concept as false and in that seeing the energy going into that mental loop drops. Ask yourself 'Where am I right now? Is Being here now or not? Is its capacity of awareness functioning now or not?' If so, then know that you are face to face with this fact of being, or awareness or whatever you want to call it. The word is not important.



You cannot lose this understanding, because what is being understood or pointed to is your own natural being. You cannot lose your own being! That presence shines wherever you are, in all thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences. It is a great joy to share this understanding with friends who resonate with it themselves. In that sharing, which is really just the appreciation of that present being-awareness that is here and now, all the divisions, goals, levels and hierarchies are dissolved. They are seen as concepts appearing and disappearing in this undeniable presence that we all are. Everyone already is that. This is the great message of non-duality that has been passed along to us. Not only can we appreciate it

and benefit from the clear and simple message, but we can pass along the pointers ourselves as the circumstances arise.



Seeing that there is no individual does not mean that you disappear. What vanishes is the assumed reality of the person you imagined yourself to be. But awareness remains, being remains, you remain. That is no thing, but it is certainly not nothing. What remains is your true nature, which is the core of everyone and everything. You are that which is present and aware. It is not an abstract principle. It is the most intimate, warm, essential heart of things, the true life, the essential self.



It is inaccurate to equate appearances as such with being or awareness (the non-dual substratum). Appearances have no being. That is why they are called appearances!



When the central identity, the belief in the separate ‘me’, is examined clearly and seen as false, one’s suffering, doubts, problems and questions end. This is because those things are all dependent on the assumption that we are separate, limited and incomplete. To assert that suffering, doubts and problems continue on just as before, even after knowing one’s true nature, only shows that the basic point being made is not yet clear.



There is no answer to the question ‘How do I realize my true nature?’ The question presupposes you are not that and that you need some technique to be what you are. But you are what you are. So it makes no sense to ask ‘how?’



All the paths and approaches based on gradual arrival are false. Even the notion that one has awakened to the truth of one's being and is in the process of stabilizing in it is faulty. It is still predicated on the assumption that you are separate from that.



All suffering depends on the belief in time. But what is time except a concept appearing in present awareness? Looking this way dissolves time and suffering.



You cannot control thoughts. As 'Sailor' Bob Adamson says, 'If you could choose your thoughts, why would you ever choose an unhappy thought?' You do not have any say so over that. The key is whether or not you identify them as 'me'. If so, there is suffering. If not, they float through and are not owned. They are not yours and they say nothing about you. They float through with little attention or interest being given to them. Without interest and focus on them, they tend to subside naturally. Your real being of clarity or peace is always present. It is just overlooked and more attention is going onto thoughts. Once you see all this, you start to snap out of the dream of it all, so to speak. Believe me, we have all been through it!



It is not that you are not the 'I'. It is that the 'I' is not. Only the one power is. The belief in the presence or reality of the limited self is created in thought. Then with the belief that we are separate and incomplete we begin to look for wholeness through the mental concepts (beliefs about what will bring us happiness or make us secure or complete). The belief in

the reality of the 'I' (which is where the belief in separation begins) keeps the mechanism spinning. It is just a habit of thought, a false belief, an error of understanding. In knowing your true nature, everything comes into its proper balance. Abstain from the notion that you are separate or incomplete. Surrender the notion of the 'I' itself. Then what remains is perfectly whole and complete and the conceptual machinery is undermined at the root.



The basic points in a nutshell are as follows. Awareness is present. Thoughts, feelings, perceptions arise (spontaneously). Thinking, deciding, choosing happens. Suffering is generated in thought in reference to the idea of a separate 'me'. The 'me' is a concept. I am not that belief. The belief is untrue. Seeing a belief to be false, the energy drops out of it. With less energy going into conceptual, self-based thoughts, what is present is undeniable awareness, perfectly at ease.



Even letting go, relaxing and doing nothing are still too much work if these are in reference to a supposed 'I' who is doing them! That 'me' itself is just another belief. As that is seen, the energy of belief drops away. What is left is what is always there, which is the natural state of what is, free of conceptual thoughts based on the assumed separate self. It cannot be an attainment because it is never lost—and there is no one to attain it anyhow, because the separate one is a myth. It is simply a matter of understanding the facts due to them being pointed out and naturally understood, rather than anything 'we' do.



This is not about teachers, but about the message of freedom. Everyone is qualified to share this, because it is a pointing to

the truth that everyone is. No one is higher or lower in this. There is joy in sharing the basic message of freedom so that others learn how a life free of suffering is possible.



This is not about searching for or destroying the 'I' thought. It is only pointing out the falseness of the 'I' thought, which means the notion that I exist apart from being-awareness, as some kind of separate entity. How can you destroy something that is not even present? Again, this is simply a matter of understanding only. This may be frustrating to the mind, which is habituated to a path and do-er oriented. That approach leads to an interminable and frustrating search for something that is never really obtained. How many spiritual 'seekers' are at peace? None! Because the seeker is still under the concept of separation and on the hunt for an ever-elusive goal.



Why not start from the position that you are already free? Try that on for size and begin to look at your experiences from that perspective. All troubles, doubts and strife are conceptual in origin and based on the assumption that you are a limited being. But are you? Are you really anything different than present being-awareness itself? If so, what is the problem from that vantage point?



Your being does not disappear in sleep. The mind is quiet. But if a dream or thought appears it is registered. Awareness is there. The instruments of the mind and body are dormant. You can see this clearly in present experience. Thoughts come and go. As they pass and disappear, your being does not disappear. The mind and its contents appear and disappear before you. You know the presence of a thought as well as its

absence. But in truth, the whole issue of sleep is more theoretical than practical. The mind diverts off onto these topics and looks away from awareness which is vivid, clear and alive in our direct experience beyond any doubt here and now.



The 'I' is just a thought. Normally, we take it to refer to a someone, but in direct looking there is really no one there, only pure awareness itself. The person to whom the 'I' thought supposedly refers is not really there on direct evidence.



Regarding the 'I am' sense. The 'I am' is not the absolute state. It is not the real you. The 'I am' sense appears and disappears, but you are prior to that. For example, the 'I am' sense subsides in sleep. There is no one there (a subject) to see or know anything (an object). The 'I am' is a sign post or pointer to that ultimate state which is prior to all experiencing or knowledge (in the objective sense). Recognize that there is some deeper knowing in you that registers the 'I am' sense. The 'I am' is sometimes referred to as the thought or feeling that 'you are'. But you are still present prior to that, not as a person, but as that pure being or awareness prior to consciousness.



In truth, there is no practice at all. Practice is always in reference to an entity that feels it needs to get something it does not have, and feels it is separate from what is true and real. This approach is only a pointing to what is clear and obvious in you, or in other words, a clarification of your real being. This may be, if necessary, coupled with a deconstruction of false beliefs and identifications that are based on a wrong view of ourself. If you must cast it in terms of a practice or 'what do I do?' approach, I would say just get very clear on

your identity. With this clear recognition, all the false beliefs and concepts are naturally abandoned and you remain as what you are and always have been—pure awareness itself, the natural state.



Just pause thought. In that space, do you disappear? What is there in that space? Obviously you are there. You are quite present and aware. That is all. You are, and you know you are. There is both the sense of being or presence and a knowing capacity. Is that awareness ‘over there’ while you are ‘here’, or are you that which is aware? Realize that you must be the presence of awareness that remains in the gap between thoughts. It is so easy, effortless and simple that we miss it. It is not an attainment or goal. It is. It can only be pointed to as a present fact. It sounds simple, but this is all it is. Everything else is a passing appearance in your natural presence. That is not a body, mind, person or any other object. You are none of those things. Do not go back into the conceptual mind and pick up a thought. Just abide as you are.



Your natural being is pure clarity, peace and completion from the start. Simply cease following concepts. Of course, the most important thing is not to alight on the notions about the separate ‘I’. Doing that is the very definition of what suffering is—belief in self-centered thoughts. See straight through the mechanism of that. Then you see that what you are and always have been is the pure, lucid space of knowing or intrinsic awareness itself. It is not an attainment, but a recognition of something completely present and available.



Drop all conceptualizing and be what you are here and now—pure awareness. There is no goal, because you already

are what you are seeking. There is no ‘living the teaching’, because there is no person to do any such thing. Once you pick up that notion, you are back in dualism. What is wrong with right now if you are not thinking all this? Do not create unnecessary, imagined problems and then get stuck in them. There is no long, slow journey to liberation. That implies a distant goal, time and a person to do all that. It is purely conceptual. Your true nature does not need to return to the appearance to ensure that the body and mind are ‘expressing the understanding’. This is a dualistic notion that keeps the seeker pinned into the conceptual mind, believing that lasting freedom will arrive in the future. If you accept that judgment, you are bound to get a sentence of at least five to ten years of hard labor in the prison of conceptual thought! It is amusing that people willingly and eagerly sign up for such a doubtful proposition. Would a free man voluntarily give his time and money in order to go to jail? Question such dubious beliefs. Drop the concepts of awakening, liberation, embodiment, enlightened teachers, paths and techniques and—most importantly—your assumed identity as a limited self, and simply be what you are.



The notion that we control events is utterly false. If you do not even know your next thought, the concept of control goes out the window in about a millisecond.



Everything after the ‘I am’ is a lie. Cross that line and pick up any definition of the ‘I’ past the ‘I am’ and there is suffering. This is because it is an untruth. Suffering equals living a lie, a falsehood. Even the ‘I am’ is a thought or a pointer. You are even before that thought, sense or feeling ‘I am’ appears. You are to whom it appears. Beyond this the mind cannot go. ‘I am’ is like a gate. Passing through it you leave behind the identity of the body, mind, personality, beliefs and images.

Even the 'I am' is dropped. It was the last pointer, the last milestone to get you to the gate. It is the borderline between 'being' and 'non-being', between manifestation and non-manifestation. Beyond both being and non-being is what you always have been, pure non-objective, timeless awareness. Having shed the identity of body, mind and personality, all suffering and problems are left behind. The life in appearance unfolds in peace and nothing is wrong anymore.



Seeing the false as false is what cuts the belief in identification with what appears. If you try to suppress, modify or correct what appears, that is only from the position of 'someone' with an agenda. That is based on other conditioned concepts, so you are back in the belief being a limited, separated self or person. Without such belief or energy being invested in the thoughts and concepts, the natural functioning returns. It is natural living not dominated by self-centered images and assumptions. You remain free, like the sky or space, not attaching to anything. But you are not forcibly detaching either. That would be more mental stress and positioning. None of that is needed. Just be free and easy. See a thought or identity as an image with no substance and let it pass. You remain as you are.



Do not mix up levels of discourse. On the absolute level, there is no person. On the relative level of appearances, functioning happens. That functioning can be intelligent, purposeful and not run through limiting beliefs. There is no contradiction or problem. No person is implied. When Krishna advised Arjuna to fight, or when Nisargadatta Maharaj said to do your work and live your life with full zest, they were not speaking to a person.



The spiritual concepts and beliefs are just more thoughts. For a time, we think they are better or more noble. But in the end, it is just more conceptual images. The spiritual identity is just as much a false identity as the so-called worldly identity. Pure awareness is neither spiritual nor worldly. It is the doubtless presence in which all thoughts and images appear. In the end, spirituality as a conceptual system or framework falls away, because it is recognized to be just another thought construct. You are not a thought. You (your true nature) is what is being pointed to.



Things, which are objects, all have a beginning, a middle and an end. Can something that is not an object have a beginning, a middle or an end? Do you have any evidence that awareness ever began or started, other than as a speculation on your part? Some have called it 'no thing' or emptiness. But it is not an inert, lifeless void. It is emptiness that has the capacity of knowing.



All the 'penny dropping' talk is conceptual because your being is already present. Nothing needs to happen to be what you already are.



Ninety-nine percent of all popular spirituality is just playing spiritual roles and wall papering high-sounding statements over the unexamined identification with the body-mind while continuing to give belief to the notion of the separate self. There is often no real interest in self-examination or basic looking at all. Most are intoxicated with the 'great' teacher, the events, the progress, the story of insights and awakenings, hoping to be a teacher or whatever, but it is all beside the point. It is all talking in terms of that entity which appears to

be apart from the one awareness. But there is no such thing. The whole dance is based on a false assumption—and the false assumption is being vigorously defended as true! There is no enlightenment, no awake teacher, no path, nothing to do, nothing to embody, nobody present to do anything—just simple being-awareness, right here and now.



Things seemingly appear and disappear, but what has happened ultimately? Water appears in a mirage. Where did it come from, where does it go? Was it ever there? Seekers are pursuing water in a mirage and talking of all the wonderful experiences they have with the water. They are getting closer to it, bathing in it, studying about it, studying with those who have it and so on. But then the question must be asked: Is there anything really there at all? This is not a popular question! It is disrespectful, not tactful, crude, low brow, not fit for an appreciative student—so they say. Before the water seems to appear and after it seems to disappear, we are—not as a body-mind, but as that presence that is silently and effortless registering it all, completely untouched and self-complete, ‘no thing’. It is so simple and obvious that nearly everyone overlooks it.



When appearances are negated, what remains? Did you disappear? The notion ‘I’ is seen as a thought. But still you are there. Aren’t you present and aware? That awareness is your real abiding nature. You cannot negate that. It is the abiding essence. You do not have to try to identify as that. That would be conceptual. You are naturally and effortlessly that. You cannot deny your presence, your being and its aware nature. There is no subsequent process. After negating the appearances, you are still left. To try to ‘go forward’ from there would only be going back into thought. Just pause in that gap and notice that you are already what you are seeking.



Thoughts and feelings come up in the natural awareness that you are. It is that simple. You are already that natural and effortless awareness. What else can you be? Keep that in view and all the appearances find their proper perspective naturally.



You cannot become aware—because you are awareness. The ‘you’ and the awareness are the same. Do not conceive of awareness and your real nature as two different things. They are not. You are that.



Seeing is happening. Later, the mind says ‘I see’. That thought ‘I’ was not present in the actual seeing. The thought ‘I’ cannot see anything. Seeing is primary, the notion of an ‘I’ is a concept. That is why there is seeing but no entity seeing. It is the same with doing, thinking, perceiving, acting and so on.



You are not creating thoughts. They happen spontaneously. Then we say ‘I am thinking’, ‘I am deciding’, ‘I am remembering’. This is totally false. That ‘I’ is not present in those things. It is only assumed afterwards. This assumed ‘I’ is the ego, and it is the cause of our problems. There has never been an ego, except as an assumption.



Awareness is not blank or inert. It is alive, luminous, shining, rich with presence and depth. All thoughts, feelings and perceptions are momentary appearances in the light of life that you are. Give that a chance to reveal itself. It is much more profound than we are apt to assume.



Your being is present and entirely non-conceptual. Still, it is very vividly known and clearly recognized. This is immediate, non-objective knowing. This is the heart of it. Let that simple knowingness resonate. That is what non-duality has been pointing to.



Awareness is clearly present in sleep. Don't you dream? If the alarm clock rings, you wake up. In sleep the mind subsides temporarily. That is fine for what it is, but it is not anything permanent. Simply falling asleep does not yield self-knowledge or lasting peace. That is just the truth of it. Be clear on that. There is no self-knowledge involved with that, only temporary relief of symptoms.



Many people are so attached to being the 'spiritual person' that when they come face-to-face with the pointer of their present identity as the reality itself here and now, they run back to some framework such as 'now I am going to begin the process of getting stabilized in that' or whatever. Watch your thinking around this and see if the 'I' notion tries to get back into the picture in some form or another. The basis of all spiritual pursuits is false, because there has never been a separation from what is real.



You are and you know you are. Everything the mind may say is subsequent to this basic fact. In fact, there can be no thinking without your aware presence. You are before the next thought arises. That is why the mind is useless for knowing the fact of your being. Pause in this knowing of your present being and see what this is. It is not a thought, a perception or

a thing. Yet it most tangibly 'is'. Just appreciate that in this recognition, you are coming face to face with your 'original nature'.



This is a bit hard to put across in words, not because it is too complicated, but because it is so simple. It has nothing at all to do with words. That is why we generally miss it in reading and thinking about it.



Your being is not a thing or an object that can be grasped. The attempt to do so is an exercise in futility. Being-awareness (your true nature) is already fully present and known. Do you know 'you are'? Yes. Is awareness present now? Yes. This is all this is. This is about something so simple and clear that we are apt to overlook what is really being communicated. Once we start to look for 'it', we have already gone astray, so to speak, because there is an assumption that we do not see it or know it. This is completely fallacious.



You are completely, utterly and finally free at this moment. The nature of what is real is simple being-awareness. It is here and now. It cannot be denied. Your identity as that cannot be doubted or contradicted. Thoughts, feelings and perceptions in no way change this fundamental fact. Nothing can move you from your nature of being-awareness. There is absolutely nothing needed for this—no awakening, no embodiment, no liberation. There is no separation from source. Therefore, there is no person even present who needs any of those things. There is no time, space or separation in your nature of timeless being-awareness. There is absolutely no deepening, stabilization or processing involved at all. Even now, you are what you are seeking. Abide as you are, for all is complete.

Do not grant the energy of belief to imaginary spiritual and psychological stories of a separate 'I' that never existed.



All that you need is constantly with you. Your natural and undeniable being is here presently and clearly in view. We may have overlooked the simplicity of this, but when it is pointed out, something resonates and we can directly recognize this for ourselves.



This is not a 'top down' approach. It is a democratic model. The beauty of it is that anyone who sees the basics of this can certainly point others back to the fact of who they are. It is not a special attainment, and it is not about the so-called 'qualifications' of the one doing the pointing. Who is there to have 'qualifications' or 'be ready' to do so? Everyone is already that, so who is not able to point to the obvious and simple fact of being what we already are? It is about a simple pointing to the fact of one's present being and the non-separation from that. There is no need to talk about readiness. The pointing may be done seemingly well or crudely, but that is not particularly relevant because it is not about the pointing but what is being pointed to. It is like drinking water from a cup. It is not the cup that is the issue, but the water in the cup. In the same way, it is not about the one doing the pointing or even how well or what is said, as such. It is about the essence being pointed to. Because everyone is that, each one has all the qualifications he or she needs, right from the start.



You do not need to 'live' in awareness. You are awareness. To say you need to 'live in awareness' presupposes that you are some person or entity that stands apart from awareness in the first place. Drop all the gradual approaches, which are

based on the assumed separate individual, and look deeply into what you already are. Do you not exist, even now? Are you not present and aware? Are you not clearly cognizant of every thought, perception and feeling even now? What are you now? Do not turn this into some future attainment. It is a deep penetrating look into what you are now. There is absolutely no attainment in the future.



Non-duality is not about a 'feel good' lifestyle. It is the complete end of the person you have imagined yourself to be. As such, it is the removal of the very basis and root of all personal problems, doubts and suffering.



For a time, we try to find relief by keeping the person and its beliefs intact and trying to maneuver the appearance of things to suit the person, but this is a losing battle because it keeps the false image of who we are in place. The root is not addressed. The real resolution is dissolving the identity with the person as such. This is possible because the person is nothing more than an appearance, an image in awareness. You are the awareness that knows the coming and going of that image. That image is not you. When the energy of belief no longer goes into that false self image because you see who you are, then none of the mental concepts (identities, beliefs, preferences) apply to you any longer and the bondage is eliminated. All those notions belonged to the image of yourself, not your actual self. This is not a piece-meal approach but a thorough resolution of the very cause of all possible suffering, doubt and seeking.



The key point is to drop any and all ideas, concepts and beliefs. Right now, you are present and aware. This is non-

conceptual and immediate being and absolute awareness. This is what is being pointed out. Apart from this, nothing can be. This is what you are. It is not a state that comes and goes. Enlightenment is a needless concept. Liberation is understanding the fact that you have never been bound. Everything else is a concept, for you are already what you are seeking.



There is no need to understand all the pointers and statements. Who wants to anyway? You are already what you are. All you can say is 'I am' and 'I know that I am'. Just pause there and see that without any further understanding is peace and fullness. Call it what you will. Without going back to the mind, there are no problems.



In this approach, there is no path, no practices, no rules, no awakening, no liberation, no development, no stabilization, no goal, no teacher, no students, no 'dharma' transmitted, no retreats, no request for silence, no foreign terms or names used, no organization, no study groups, no office or staff, no spiritual products. In the end, all of these things are apt to become a diversion. They tend to obscure what is simple, clear and present in the heart of everyone. We often overlook that the essence is a simple, non-conceptual understanding. If the knowledge of your true nature is not clear, it is pointed out in a direct heart-to-heart communication. Then you are on your way, with no need of further help. This is how Nisargadatta Maharaj shared his message with those who came to him, such as Bob Adamson, and exactly how Bob shared it with me and many others. We overlook this, not because it is complicated but because it is so simple.



Knowing yourself is neither a matter of the head (mind) nor the heart (feelings). These are only instruments of experience in the realm of appearances. Those who perceive the world with the accent on the mind view spirituality as an intellectual endeavor and strive for clear thinking and knowledge. Those who live with the accent on feelings view spirituality as an affair of the heart and stress feelings such as love, harmony and oneness. But reality stands well beyond these categories and cannot be contained by any of them. It is nothing other than pure, non-conceptual being or awareness. When intellectuals hear this, they assume this is some form of irrationalism or sentimentalism and dismiss it as too simple. Those who live from the 'heart' assume that it is some dry intellectual understanding. Each side, being unable to grasp the essence through its favored mode of experience, assumes that the communication is deriving from the other camp and often dismisses it as 'incomplete'. However, reality is not an experience that can be grasped with any instrument at all, be it the head or the heart. Non-objective being or awareness is neither head centered nor heart centered, but reality centered. It is the ever-present source illuminating the thoughts and feelings. It is here and now in all its fullness as your very being, shining in plain view beyond head and heart yet containing them both.



There is no progress or deepening in understanding who you are, because you are already that pure being, awareness and peace itself. To speak of progress concedes the concept of individuality or separation between yourself and reality. It is more emphatic to drop all such notions and just be what you are. Everything else is simply an idea arising in awareness. One does not progress to awareness, for one already is this.



There is nothing to get, know or achieve. This is only about your being, which is here and now.



Interest in the mind comes from looking for our reality, identity and happiness in the ideas being proposed by the mind. That is why a deep understanding of who we are beyond the mind is key to getting beyond interest and attachment to the thoughts.



The experience of getting reinvested in the reality of the 'I' is resolved by simply looking for it. Did you ever find any such thing? In other words, the assumption is that the thought 'I' points to an actual entity, a defective self. But when you look for the separate self, you cannot find it. You can no longer believe in something that is not there, on direct evidence. Searching for the 'I', all you find is non-conceptual awareness. All troubles are over at that point.



The focus on 'special' beings is a diversion. To talk of beings as being awake misses the point entirely. It only clouds the issue of your own present true self. In fact, these things are purely conceptual and imaginary. Pause thought and they crumble into nothingness. Yet undeniable being-awareness-peace remains. You are that. There is nothing more to say beyond that. Talking about gurus and 'awake beings' takes one away from the utter simplicity of this.



This is absolutely not a process that takes time. Your being already is the case. You are not practicing or paying attention in order to be. This is only about clarifying your present

identity, not attaining anything.



No 'aha' moment is needed, because your present nature and identity is already fully clear and present. Just notice the utter and complete simplicity of this. You are already that presence that allows you to say 'I am' and 'I know'. If you, as that presence of awareness, were not there, how could you say those things?



Nisargadatta Maharaj used to talk of the absolute as prior to consciousness. Prior to consciousness can hardly be put into words, can it! When pressed, he referred to the stateless state as pure awareness beyond consciousness. Some word can be used—or none! I like the one Bob Adamson used: 'No thing'. But call it what you will: no thing, emptiness, prior to consciousness, pure consciousness, being, non-being, beyond being and non-being, everything, nothing, both, your true self, no self, neither. In the end what are all these but concepts? No word can touch the essence that is prior to words, to thoughts, to experience, to even the sense that 'I am'.



Everywhere you look, it is all awareness appearing in diverse forms, the one consciousness vibrating into innumerable shapes and forms, and yet nothing ever leaving the one substance. It is like the sea looking across the waves and currents upon its surface and realizing that all there is, is water. All there is awareness. Its nature is being-consciousness-peace, unfathomably rich. You are that.



Awareness is not a state, not even a state of silence. Clearly, activity and silence are a dualism. Awareness embraces and transcends both. In silence or activity, your being is fully present, clear, lucid and shining in plain view. It is the natural condition and ever-present reality. Silence of thought is not any closer to awareness than a temporary state of no thought.



All questions, doubts and problems about 'I' or 'me' are groundless, for the 'I' does not exist.



Awareness is already awake. The person who would desire to awaken does not exist. Therefore, the concepts of awakening, liberation and enlightenment are entirely fallacious. Awareness is already free. There is no entity present to be bound or liberated.



Non-duality is not the source of duality, as if there really were some existing thing called duality apart from non-duality. That would be a duality. Apparent duality does not stand apart from non-duality. It has no real substance or independent nature. So all that there is, is non-duality. Looking in this way, the assumed duality is merged or reduced, so to speak, into the non-dual presence. Not that there is an actual duality.



You say, 'I am fully cooked now'. That might be true if there were anyone to be cooked or not cooked. The funny thing is that there is no one to be liberated or not liberated, or cooked or not. In the end the spiritual jargon falls away as needless.

You are what you always were. You are not what you never were. Now you know. Those who talk of bondage, liberation, awakening and so on keep seekers in a trap because it makes them feel there is something more that they do not yet have. Now you know about natural and ever-present freedom utterly untouched by any person to claim it—or ever lose it.



The words are just attempts to help you to recognize what is present in yourself, as yourself. That is prior to sensing, prior to thinking, prior to the sense of ‘I am’. It is basically pointing to you, the one who is present and aware right now, even of the sense of being present and aware. You are and you know you are. Stop right there and know that what I am pointing to is you.



Regarding the ‘I am’ sense, the ‘I am’ is not the absolute state. It is not the real you. The ‘I am’ sense appears and disappears, but you are prior to that. For example, the ‘I am’ sense subsides in sleep. So there is no one there (a subject) to see or know anything (an object). The ‘I am’ is a sign post or pointer to that ultimate state which is prior to all experiencing or knowledge (in the objective sense). So recognize that there is some deeper knowing in you that registers the ‘I am’ sense. The ‘I am’ is sometimes referred to as the thought or feeling that ‘you are’. But you are still present prior to that, not as person, but at that pure being or awareness prior to consciousness.



Awareness cannot be aware of itself. Of course awareness is, but it is not an object. It is just what is.



Consciousness is a tool. It allows you to be aware of and investigate your own true nature. As long as the presence of consciousness is available, it may be worthwhile to see who is the one who has it! Remember, your being or natural state is not an attainment. It is what you are. It is so apparent that we tend to miss the simplicity of it.



When it comes to describing what you are, all words are false. All the pointers are provisional. That does not mean you cannot use them, but they are all limited. *You* are not a word, an idea or a pointer. You are, but what you are cannot be described or grasped, even though it is self-evident. Thoughts come and go before you. Even the state of consciousness comes and goes. Even the witness comes and goes. You are there at the root of it all, the inescapable one who cannot be denied. That is the point that is beyond all pointers!



All the questions, seeking, doubts and suffering are resolved by a clear and direct recognition of your real nature. Those problems are all conceptual. They reside in thought and are generated by an unexamined or partial view of who we are. This causes us to take ourselves to be something we are not—an apparent limited self apart from the source or reality. Your real nature of non-conceptual awareness or being has no questions, doubts or problems. It is life itself. Life has no questions or doubts about life. Life expresses for a time and then returns to its source. All is resolved and in harmony, like day and night, summer and winter. Your being and identity as that life itself is self-evident and cannot be doubted, for it is your undeniable existence, which is always present in all experiences and states. It is important to have a very clear and direct sense of this. Your being is not in the mind. You are that which is prior to and aware of the mind.



Basically, there are appearances (objects), the states of being conscious or unconscious (for example, waking and sleep), and then *you*—to whom all that appears. Sometimes that is called the pure awareness beyond consciousness. It is the ultimate principle behind waking, dreaming and sleep (that is, all states of consciousness). It is the one for whom all those appear. What you are cannot be a ‘person’, because a person is a conceptual construction appearing in the waking state. You are not a person, nor are you the consciousness which arises in the waking state and illuminates the person. You are beyond both, as the absolute reality underlying the person, the world and the consciousness in which they both appear.



At some point along the way, the seeing returns to its source. This is the presence of awareness that has been here all along. You know that, and you are what you know. Such was the pointer of the ancients who said the nature of reality is being-awareness and you are that. It is so simple and self-evident that we overlooked the obvious. How can there be anything without your presence and its aware nature? Everything appears in awareness. That is not a void. It is rich with life and love. So the ancient pointer was ‘sat-chit-ananda’, or being, awareness and happiness. You are that. It is wonderfully elegant. You are what you were seeking. In seeing this, all comes to rest.



Awareness is awareness is awareness. One does not develop awareness. No technique is required to be the knower. You are naturally present and aware of all that comes and goes. That is the natural condition, not a state or attainment. The conditioned mind wants a path or practice. Where are you going to go when you are that? What are you going to

practice when you already are what you are seeking? And who is going to do all that when there is no separate person to do any such thing? So—full stop. If you find yourself jumping back into the mind looking for more work to do, then have a good look at the mind and understand how it works. See that all such thoughts are based on an assumed separation from source. That assumption drives us back into the mind until this mechanism is seen clearly. Is the basic assumption that you are separate true? Who, what and where is this separate 'I' entity? The key is to see that all self-centered concepts relate to this central concept. Thoroughly examine the reality of this concept. Without the belief in the separate 'me', the thoughts, even if they arise, do not apply to anyone, especially to you. Interest in the mind dissolves because such interest is referring to a non-existent entity that you no longer believe in.



Before you can say 'I am' and 'I know', you already are. You are the one who recognizes the fact of being present and aware. Before consciousness appears and you have any knowledge or sense of your existence, you must be. In relation to the manifestation, you are the consciousness in which everything arises. In truth, you are that unnamable and indescribable source that knows the coming and going of consciousness and which remains ever undisturbed and at peace. That is neither conscious nor unconscious, neither existent nor non-existent. Your real nature includes and transcends all dualities. Start by seeing yourself as the conscious-presence in which all appearances arise. Then recognize that consciousness itself is a state that comes and goes upon your original nature.



It may be useful to make a distinction between the coming and going of consciousness as a state (for example, wak-

ing—‘I am conscious’, and sleep—‘I am not conscious’). The point is that there is still a reality behind and supporting such appearances, which is basically your essential self, however that is termed. If you look, you can naturally notice that the experience or sense of being present and aware is foundational to anything else. Yet that ‘sense of’ can be viewed as an appearance, although very subtle, upon your abiding nature, which is there whether sensed or not. That is why the absolute reality is sometimes referred to as prior to consciousness, the awareness beyond consciousness, or awareness unaware of itself.



Suffering has a cause, but when you look for the cause, you find the cause does not exist. That is the end of the line.



Questions do not need to be answered. The questioner dissolves, and it is perfect peace and simplicity.



Awareness is the source. Consciousness is the expression of awareness through the body and mind.



Awareness already is. It is not an attainment, because it is already present. Neither is it a practice or realization. So there you have it—awareness is. You are not apart from that. Before the next thought appears, that is there and you are that. Everything else arises as a concept within awareness. Even enlightenment, awakening, liberation or what have you are concepts. If those things have any meaning at all, they are only synonyms for the ever-present and already attained identity as that non-conceptual awareness itself. Seeing this,

all the concepts fall because the assumed separation from that is not present in direct experience.



The first expression of the unconditioned is the sense of being that is conscious of itself. This self-shining consciousness, or pure sense of 'I am', knows all else and also knows itself. It is the self-knowing light in which manifestation appears. The light of consciousness emerges from a source that cannot be described or named. Nothing at all can be said about that primordial reality. It cannot even be said to be or be conscious. It is the ultimate subjectivity, which cognizes even the sense of being, consciousness and peace.



Everything this is about is present in and as your own self. Thoughts, feelings and experiences come and go in your knowing presence. That knowing presence is what this is pointing to. Even that sense of knowing and being is an appearance to what you truly are. That 'you are' principle is what non-duality is pointing to as reality. That is what you already are. Look into this point until the simplicity of it is clear. All that appears comes and goes in consciousness. Consciousness itself arises and sets from a source. That source is what you are because you recognize the coming and going of consciousness. Therefore, you are the source of all that appears, including the consciousness that knows it all. Clarifying this basic point does not come from reading or traveling about, but simply from looking into your own experience and confirming who and what you already are. You are that now. Nothing is needed to be what you are.



'I' have not overcome suffering, because such a statement presumes there is an 'I' who has attained such a state. However,

a looking did happen to find the 'I'. No such thing was found to exist. All belief in it ended precisely then. Not for 'me'. The belief just ended. I make no claims about what 'I' have attained. When I find the 'I', I might be able to say something about it. Until then, all bets are off!



The pointers are only a reminder that you are not what you think you are. Before you think, you are. And that is perfect from the start.



The resolution of suffering through seeing there is no self is only a subsequent and optional investigation once your actual nature is clear. In all of this thinking and conceptualizing did your being disappear? And how can all of this thinking appear if there is no consciousness to witness it? Forget the body and mind; they are irrelevant to knowing who you are. What is aware of the body and mind? You! You are that which is present and aware of the body mind and all else. Deeply cognize this, your present identity. Do not be quick to dive back into the mind and doubts. That leads to confusion and uncertainty. Is the fact of your being confusing or uncertain? The answer is not in the mind, because what you are is not in the mind. Make sure this is clear. If not, you will be forever cycling in the thoughts and doubts. This is not about getting mental answers and working it out in thought. Before thought appears, you are. Get to know this doubtless self that you already are. You will find, if you give this half a chance, that your actual nature is being, awareness and peace. This is only overlooked by searching for reality in the mind. Start knowing very deeply and clearly that in you which is beyond any doubts whatsoever. This must be clear above all else.



There are certainly choices, thoughts and actions happening. That was never in dispute. The issue is whether or not referencing them to an 'I' is justified. 'I' am thinking. That is clearly not the experience. Thinking happens. But where is the 'I' as some fixed center that is doing that? It is not to be found. Thinking is happening. There is not any 'I' that is thinking. The conceptual reference point of the 'I' is under question, not the thinking itself.



A life free of attachment to the mind is possible through a direct understanding that the notion of being a separate self is purely conceptual.



Just remember that you are the one who is prior to consciousness. Consciousness in this context is just the experience of being awake and aware in the waking state. You are the one who is experiencing the fact of being awake. That state will pass, but you will not disappear. Therefore, you are prior to, behind and beyond consciousness. If that is too much to grasp, just see that there must be a prior awareness in which everything is experienced, even the fact of being consciousness. Awareness is what is prior to consciousness. Anyway, all are pointers to your present, natural state!



If you feel consciousness comes and goes as a state, the subsequent follow up is that you are that presence of awareness that knows or recognizes that. The objects of consciousness are not ultimately separate from consciousness. This is non-duality, after all! But a point can be made that the objects as objects are not exactly the same as consciousness. Why? Because objects are transitory, objective, insentient and so on. That would imply that consciousness is transitory,

objective, insentient and so on, which is evidently not the case. A clearer pointer on this is that objects are a manifestation or display of consciousness. In essence they are that, but not as they appear. Keep in mind that consciousness itself arises from and merges into a deeper or prior source.



You may have all types of insights, such as 'I am consciousness', 'I am presence', 'I am not my thoughts', 'I am awakened' and so on. But if there is still an 'I' who has all these attributes, then the sense of being a separate 'I' is still being believed. The false identity is in full swing. This is how beliefs, even those related to non-duality, can be taken on board and actually reinforce the personal identity, rather than expose its absence.



The main thing is having a clear knowledge of your real nature. Any other looking should come from this platform. The looking for the 'I' is just a way to understand and resolve needless suffering that may be in play after you have a clear sense of who you are. If who you are is not clear, then that basic confusion will likely color and distort any other looking or inquiry. Is your being and its nature crystal clear for you at this point? It is helpful to be solid on this.



Non-conceptual awareness, which is the source of consciousness and all else, is clearly not a separate 'you'. First, consciousness appears. At that level, there is no 'you' involved. It is just a space of knowing in which events are appearing. Later, the mind creates the 'you' notion and then tags it onto various parts of the appearance (body, mind, thoughts and so on). You are not that idea 'you'. Nor are you any of the appearances. Nor are you even the very consciousness itself that

rises up as a transient appearance. Before all that appeared, you *are*, not as an entity, but as the non-conceptual, non-dual source itself. There is no separation or duality there at all. It is no thing. That is what 'you' are prior to consciousness. That is the absolute, unconditioned state. Everything else comes after that as an appearance. See it this way and the notion of being a limited, separate 'you' will be completely undermined and seen for the concept that it is.



When it comes to non-duality, the basic and final question is, 'Who and what am I?' All other questions get subsumed into that one. When that is resolved, everything is resolved. Fortunately, you are already here, so whatever you are must be fully present and available, even now. Just make sure that what you are, which is fully present now, is clear. Even if this is told or pointed out, you must still do the looking yourself. You have everything you need right within yourself.



When you look for the 'me', it is nothing substantial or even present. The 'I' notion is the assumed existence of a 'me'. But looking shows no tangible entity that is the 'me'. With this belief exposed, the plug is pulled on the other 'I-related' beliefs as well. It is not so much that the 'me' falls away in a process of time, which is granting 'it' too much substance, but rather there is a direct recognition that the 'me' does not exist at all. See your inescapable nature of non-conceptual awareness and the utter absence of any kind of 'me' entity at all. From that platform, look at any and all concepts and they must crumble immediately.



Everything that appears comes and goes in awareness. Normally, we are fascinated by appearances and miss the

presence of our true nature. So some pointers are given to reduce our interest in the appearance so that we can notice what is aware of the appearance. The world is compared to a dream, shown to be impermanent, to have no lasting happiness and so on. Seeing these points, we might pause the fascination with appearances and start to see something else—the light of consciousness in which it appears. Later, we will see that consciousness itself is a passing appearance in a deeper reality that is prior to consciousness. Various words are used to point to that, such as non-conceptual awareness. Whatever it may be called, it is simply the abiding reality of what you truly are.



Some people talk about presence, consciousness, or ‘beingness’ as being your true nature. But what you really are is prior to those things, for they are all experiences also. This is generally overlooked.



The best ‘meditation’ is to do nothing at all! Experiences come and go. Let them be and do not do a thing! Everything passes. So, whatever it may be, just leave it alone. It will just disappear naturally!



Consciousness emerges from the non-dual awareness. It is a mere flickering image, an appearance. And yet the whole universe appears in that. Behind consciousness lies the immense infinity of the absolute, the dark source, utterly beyond conception, because it is non-dual. This is the pure awareness beyond consciousness. It is pure unmanifested radiance or potential energy. Consciousness appears as a speck or flickering appearance in the absolute. When consciousness appears and the worlds and bodies are projected within it, there is

no problem unless and until consciousness identifies with its objects. In this identification, the sense of individuality is born. At the core of the mind is the light of pure consciousness. At the core of consciousness is pure awareness, the non-dual absolute.



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