



NON-DUALITY PRESS

JOHN WHEELER

Clear in Your Heart

The Radiant Mirror of Self-Shining Awareness



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John Wheeler

With editorial assistance from John Strydom

Non-Duality Press

CLEAR IN YOUR HEART

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Preface – Game Over

When John asked if I would write a preface for his new book, I agreed in a twinkling. He promptly e-mailed a copy of the draft, saying—in that quiet, off-hand manner of his—that it was ‘the same old, same old’. I was thrilled to hear that, given that it is a format which has worked beautifully for him in his five previous works. And here, John proffers a plethora of illuminating dialogues and a whopping ninety-plus pages of incisive, pause-potent pointers.

In addition to its familiar layout, the book’s focus is blessedly the same: Our natural state and the ease with which it can be overlooked (not to mention the ease with which it can be recognized). Whether John is speaking about concepts, suffering, the ego, do-ership, awareness or consciousness (I love his definition of it being just another ‘conditioned appearance’), his explorations glisten with depth and clarity. His books—like those of ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson (John’s teacher) and Nisargadatta Maharaj (Bob’s teacher)—can be picked up again and again with no loss of captivation and richness.

Also, John’s works have been instrumental in getting people to recognize their own non-conceptual reality. Some of the aforementioned now have prominent websites and blogs, and they include Annette Nibley, Charlie Hayes, Randall Friend, Brian Lake, Mary McGovern, Stephen Wingate, Felipe Oliveira, Roy Townsend, and the writer of this preface himself.

A frustrated spiritual seeker for over twenty years, I had tried everything from self-help books and lucid dreaming to Catholicism and Transcendental Meditation. There were dozens of experiences (a few of which were quite stunning). But none of them led to self-knowledge, which was my primary focus. Then I bought a copy of John’s first book, *Awakening to the Natural State*, which was published in 2004 and is already a non-dual classic. That purchase came about after I happened upon his sterling website while searching for contemporary non-duality writers and teachers in the

United States. (Though I had been greatly moved by Nisargadatta's books, his translators were not always on the mark and ended up confusing things, including me.) But when I came across John's site and book, I was thoroughly impressed by the clearness of his expression. There was just this calm and immediate resonance with both his words and his manner.

I didn't come to any sudden understanding on the first perusal of the book. Yet, even after reading it well-over a dozen times, each exploration was completely okay. (Again, the 'same old, same old'.) I e-mailed John a trio of times with questions, and much to my delight, he always promptly responded. And each reply was just as detailed and accessible as the previous one. There was absolutely no hint of impatience or weariness on John's part. The weeks went by, but I still didn't find the answer.

Then, on one spring evening in 2007, with John's now tattered book in hand, I came across the following sentence on page 135: 'It is all about seeing what is fully present right now'. Suddenly, I was completely paused by that statement. There was no 'me' doing the pausing. There was just this simultaneous halting of all mental activity and a tremendous expansion of my ordinary, everyday awareness (though, in reality, its limitlessness was already there). Felt knowingness seem to inundate every millimeter of the living room. My body— along with my books, bookcase, computer, and television— were now objects with which I had little or no personal connection.

There it was: my natural, non-conceptual state, in all of its peace and simplicity. I had no words to detail it, which was quite a quandary for someone who primarily considers himself a writer. But the words gradually began to form: What was transparently before me and as me was—at once—sheer, hushed, beginningless, and so perfectly evident. And as I articulated later in a 2009 web article, there was 'a vastness all around'. I waited nearly a week before e-mailing John. I wanted to be sure about this—though I knew, by then, that this was the genuine thing. And John confirmed it.

Buddha called self-realization ‘the end of suffering’. A pertinent description, that. For though I had recognized my natural state, there was still some lingering identification with thoughts and feelings. Unless one is completely clear about one being awareness itself, a subtle subject-object duality remains. It was as if ‘I had awakened’, when there actually was no ‘me’. This happened to John, as well. There was this tiny clarification needed, one that required neither time nor stabilization. Because John had written so eloquently about how Bob Adamson had pointed this final truth out to him, I was able to perceive it in short order. And that was that. The ‘me’ and its games were over.

Your great good fortune is that there are pointers and declarations here that harbor the same clarity and power as the one that gave me pause in John’s first book. Indeed, this work is bursting with them. In a dialogue entitled ‘How Do I Recognize What is Prior to Consciousness?’, John keenly notes: ‘The point is not to think this out ... Pause the conceptualizing and get the immediate sense of the undeniable awake and aware presence itself’.

As for the pointers: ‘You have everything you need. You are what you are. All the ideas and experiences come up in natural presence-awareness ... and you are that fully and completely right now’. And witness this instructive gem: ‘Consciousness is the first manifestation or experience in duality...You are aware of being conscious, correct? Parse that out very carefully. You are aware of being conscious. Therefore, you are that which is aware of the coming and going of consciousness’. A careful pondering of these words is all you need to recognize your own living reality.

Because John speaks totally from the Source, his ‘same old, same old’ is ever-vital and ever-new. Indeed, what King Janaka uttered about his newly-discovered awareness in the *Ashtavakra Gita* can precisely be said about the book you are holding at this very moment: ‘Oh, how wonderful it is...!’

Rodney Stevens
Columbia, South Carolina

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 midst of it all—at least this is how it feels—a sort of core sense of a 'me' that feels more like a presence, a sort of observer if you like, that is untouched by the things of which it is aware. 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 at the core. It does require attention to notice it, though. Does any of this make any sense?*

John: This impersonal sense of being, presence or knowingness 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. 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. A powerful initial step in recognizing your true identity is to see yourself not as the body, mind and personality, but as the witness of those things, or the space of consciousness in which they appear.

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 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 as it presently is. You recognize not only the coming and going of objects—sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and so on—but also the consciousness in which they occur.

When you are not conscious—in deep sleep, under anaesthetic 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 itself 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 this limited field of vision is not you. What people often miss is that ‘consciousness’ or ‘presence’ is still an experience in the microscope. 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 limitation. Pure, non-conceptual awareness is utterly outside of duality, has no qualities and no ‘me’ sense at all. It cannot be grasped or experienced by the mind. 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. The state of being conscious will certainly pass, so it cannot be your most essential core reality. When consciousness goes, you remain as what you are and always have been. This is non-dual awareness that is not even aware of itself (as an object), as there is no second thing present ‘there’ of which to be aware. That is one without a second, or pure non-duality.

Bodily Needs and Oneness

Question: I shall frame the nagging question I have been struggling with, taking off from some of the pointers you provided on your website. I have no quarrel or difficulty with the following:

Non-conceptual awareness, which is the source of consciousness and all else, is clearly not a separate 'you'... 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.

Yes, that 'seeing' happens only in this limited body that can be alive only if it gets food. The hunger pangs rudely disturb and awaken the 'non-existing you' to take form, to look for the prey to devour and so on. The predator-prey violence, struggle, self-protection and escape, etc., the whole game of living, suffering, experiencing the pleasant/unpleasant world all come into play. Misery and grief for the prey—who is exploited—is guaranteed! All this is not happening at a 'mental' level. It is not a thought. It is not some amorphous mind seeking solutions. The hunger is for the physical body. You have to feed it or it is dead. The 'oneness' becomes more glaringly apparent when we see that one body eating does not satiate the hunger of another body, highlighting 'otherness' and not oneness.

Whatever truth one 'sees', the bodily needs jolt the person into ground-level realities. Even while 'being' in that 'oneness', one is not blessed with the same strengths and powers of that 'oneness' in which everything from a supernova explosion to DNA mutation takes place! Given all this, how does one remain in that 'awareness' which is prior to consciousness?

One already *is* that aware principle. The question 'How does one remain ...?' is inadmissible because it presumes you are some

separate entity apart from awareness. You are *that*. How does a chair remain as a chair? The question is fallacious. The question itself belies the fact that your identity as that non-conceptual awareness is not yet clear to yourself. The root of all questions and doubts must remain in play until this basic understanding is fully and finally addressed. Once your identity is clear, the questions you are raising will fall with no further analysis needed, because they are based on this basic misunderstanding. Still, it may be helpful to address them, in order to help clarify the basic points.

The activities of the body/mind do not contradict basic non-conceptual awareness under any circumstances whatsoever. Eating, bodily defenses or whatever else the action might be, do not create or necessitate the arising of a non-existent self. Remember: non-existent! How can any events create something that is not existent? As far as I know, all the Buddhas, Krishnas, Ramanas, Nisargadattas and so on did just fine functioning in the appearance of things, which included eating, sleeping, dealing with illness, relating with others and, eventually, facing the demise of the body. None of these actions require, demand or necessitate the belief in the limited sense of 'I'. It is the belief in that concept that sustains it. When investigated, the belief is contradicted due to it being seen as fictitious. Misery and grief are much different from basic organic pain and bodily suffering. When I speak of suffering, I am talking about conceptual suffering sustained in thought and based on an erroneous conception of self. When that is taken care of, it is finished, regardless of whatever apparently good or bad experiences the body/mind may go through. There is no guarantee that the events the body/mind then experience will be 'pleasant', but the sense of personal identification with those events and the suffering generated by that identification are resolved.

All this theoretical talk is itself only conceptual activity arising and setting in the clear and doubtless nature that you are. Forget all the hypothetical cases and get to know this non-conceptual awareness you already are. It is already untouched by thoughts, feelings and actions, being the basic space in which they appear. If you are looking into appearances, you are missing the point altogether.

Appearances come and go. That is the extent of it. You are not an appearance. You are the one to whom they appear. The real inquiry is when you look into your true nature. Everything you covered in your comments is still at the level of examining appearances and what goes on in the appearances. That is fine as far as it goes, but it is not acknowledging the basic fact that you are not a 'thing' in the appearance at all.

Let the physical body take care of itself. Part of the issue in the way you are framing your questions is a tacit identification of what you are with the body/mind organism. The body goes from birth to death in the presence of consciousness, which itself comes and goes in the ultimate non-conceptual awareness that you are. The events of the body/mind no more disturb that than clouds passing through the sky disturb the presence of space.

How Can Awareness See Itself?

Question: Once again, I am trapped in mind trying to see and solve the mystery! The thing I am trying to understand is how awareness can see and recognize itself. But my conclusion is that it cannot. The only thing is to stay with the seeing and just be, and see the false as false.

Awareness—or what you are—is. It is a fact. You cannot doubt that you are, that you are present. Being is. To try to know it, understand it, grasp it or express it is coming in at the mind level. It is a false game, because your very existence does not need to be known, understood or grasped. All of those activities are going on ‘downstream’, within the non-conceptual awareness that you are. Who is trying to know, understand and grasp? Only the assumed, fictitious ‘I’ itself.

You say, ‘The only thing is to stay with the seeing and just be, and see the false as false’. Who? The only thing—for whom? Who is to stay with seeing, when you are nothing but the seeing itself? Knock out any residual reference to some separate ‘me’ and where is the problem and who has it? Your statement is really a subtle reference to the old ghost of the ‘me’. You are not a ‘me’ with any task to do. You are non-conceptual existence-awareness itself now—and now—and now.

If the mind is looping, it is only doing so in the space of open awareness. No one is there, only this. You are that.

Who Is Deciding?

Question: How to communicate my question clearly? I just read Chapter 59, 'You Are Not a Something or Someone', in your book Shining in Plain View. The timing of this reading is right on, since there is quite a bit of 'decision-making' activity coming up these days. I am dealing with thoughts related to the best places to live on a limited income, responsibilities to others, etc. You say, 'There is nothing wrong with doing, thinking, acting or deciding. All of that goes on and will not stop till that body and mind give up the ghost'. You go on to say, 'As always, the issue arises from the relating of all these activities, which are perfectly fine in themselves, to an "I", a separate being who takes ownership of them. So the sticking point is the referencing of all these things to me'.

It seems that both of these statements are seen pretty clearly but, but, but ... What is this 'doing, thinking, acting or deciding' creature without some sort of center of reference? Who or what is doing this sorting and selecting, coming and going? And since there is no 'I', why not just not step back, stop, refuse to participate in the fake 'I' game and just let the river take its course? 'Whatever will be, will be ...'

Since there is no 'I' to make any decisions about anything anyway, why not just sit on a bench, blow smoke rings towards the sun and talk to the birds? It seems confusing. There are decisions but no decider, doing but no doer, acting but no actor, thinking but no thinker.

Presence-awareness is all that is. I am that. Yes! Home! The beauty of that realization is beyond words. It is as if the 'weight of the world' just got flushed. A laugh, a tear and a sigh. But there is also this body/mind organism called Mike that looks around and sees that it is apparently participating in some kind of Earth Dance. He has grown accustomed to three square meals a day and a roof over his

head. He appears to have a simple choice: navigate or die. Surely you did not just wake up one morning where you live and say, 'Seems nice. Guess I'll hang here for a while'. Didn't some thought, planning and decision-making result in your living where you do now? How did those decisions get made without some kind of a reference point? Is it a case of being in the illusion, but not of it? It appears we are on kind of tricky turf here.

Thinking, seeing, living, breathing and so on all are going on just fine. The limited 'I' notion comes in as a subsequent concept. Just because you are not a limited, isolated, defective person, why should any of the natural functioning stop? Life goes on just as before but without any reference to the assumed self-center.

You say, 'Who or what is doing this sorting and selecting, coming and going? And since there is no "I", why not just not step back, stop, refuse to participate in the fake "I" game, and just let the river take its course?'

Who is there to step back? Who is present to refuse to participate? Who is there to let the river take its course? All appears in awareness and functions. The separate person *is not*. Your question implies that without a self-concept, no functioning is possible. That is not true. Which self-center is beating your heart? None! When you say 'Why not just step back?', you are bringing in a tacit reference to an entity with the capacity to do that. There is no one there to step back or refuse to play the game. The fake 'I' game, as you call it, is a fake game. When seen, it is all over. All your questions are really hanging on the assumed reality of the conceptual 'I': that it is either necessary for functioning, which is false, or that it is present to step back, refuse, not decide or whatever.

You say, 'There are decisions but no decider, doing but no doer, acting but no actor, thinking but no thinker'. This is it exactly. All these things are going on and will continue to do so. There is just no 'I' doing any of it. This is a description of your own experience, even now. Seeing is happening. Thinking is happening. Later the mind comes in and posits an 'I' doing those things, but that 'I' is only a concept. The 'I' concept cannot see, think or do anything. Are 'you'

beating your heart or growing your hair? Yet there is no problem with any of that functioning. It is the same with thoughts also. It is an illusion to think there is a 'you' manufacturing thought. Do you know what the next thought is going to be before it appears? No! Then how can you say 'you' created it? You cannot! And yet it happens just fine.

You ask, 'Why not just sit on a bench, blow smoke rings towards the sun and talk to the birds?' Yes, if there is any entity present to do that! If it happens it will happen; if not, not. Planning, deciding and functional activity do not imply or require a separate self concept. In fact, things flow better without that erroneous notion mucking up the works.

You say, 'How did those decisions get made without some kind of a reference point?' That is just it. It is a reference point, not who you are. Until people look into this, they are apt to confuse the reference point, which is a conceptual construct, with their actual identity. With the basic identity clear, you can use the reference point, if necessary, but not be used by it.

In all of this, have you left your true being at any time?

How Can an Illusion Persist?

Question: It seems that there is a bit of a hide-and-seek game being played out these days. As always, events appear to happen. Sometimes an 'I' response is triggered and sometimes not. But even when the knee jerk 'I' appears, frequently the 'I' is seen to be empty and dissolves. But, it seems that the 'I' habit or illusion can be both very subtle and persistent. It is a master of disguise that does not want to completely surrender without a fight!

Realization of, or 'at-one-ment' with, the presence-awareness that I am—words to try to describe 'it' fall so short—is often in the foreground of awareness. Then it seems that sooner or later I trip over a lingering misidentification that temporarily seems to block contact with the light that I am. Then there is the frustration of being 'back in the land of searching and questioning' until some slippery aspect of the 'I' illusion is seen and is then gone. Is there a 'roto-rooter' device that will clean the drain once and for all?

These are all concepts floating in undeniable aware-presence. All thoughts and appearances manifest in awareness. Nothing blocks that at any time. You say the 'I' is seen and dissolves. This is still granting too much reality to the 'I'. The 'I' is the presumed separate self standing separate and apart from reality. Did you ever find such a beast? The roto-rooter device is simply making a penetrating search for the 'I' entity and finding once and for all that there is no such thing. We only believe in something if we think it is there.

Practically speaking, all these thoughts are just pure imagination and utterly useless because—have you actually left the presence of awareness, your natural state? Yes or no? You are still granting some possibility of being out of that. See a thought as a thought passing in awareness. Then there are no more problems. That state is now—unless you look away from the obvious and believe a thought about a 'me' that never existed.

You say, 'But, it seems that the 'I' habit or illusion can be both very subtle and persistent, a master of disguise that does not want to completely surrender without a fight'. How can an illusion (meaning what is not present) be subtle and persistent? How can something that is not there not want to surrender without a fight? I suggest you drop the continued dance around this mythical creature and instead try to find it. When you find that the separate person cannot be found, then you can go back and look at the comments you are making and see if they hold any water. What pulls the plug on the whole production is noticing a simple fact—you have never been a separate person apart from awareness. That is it in a nutshell; nothing more or less.

Can Abiding as Who I Am Cause Illness?

Question: I seem to be going around in circles on a point and wonder if I could run it by you?

You will have to nail down exactly who is this person you are referring to that is going around in circles! Awareness, your natural state, is. That is the extent of it. Your natural being is not going anywhere!

Q: Perhaps it is just coincidence but it appears here that the abiding as the presence-awareness that 'I' am has also brought with it physical illness and health challenges, not just now but in the past also.

This is highly unlikely and outright preposterous! The entire statement is dualistic in its assumptions. There is no need for 'you' to abide as presence-awareness at all. This is a flawed interpretation of what is being said. You are that. There is nothing to abide in. If you conceive of this as some state or special focus, you may be getting all wrapped up in needless concepts and stressing out the mind unnecessarily. That may be the root of your problem—going round and round in conceptual thoughts!

Q: For example, after we spoke there was peace in the abiding as the presence that I truly am, and a couple of days later there was a lot of physical pain in the form of back pain.

What makes you assume a causal relationship here? You are still framing this very dualistically. There is no 'abiding as presence'. I am not sure 'who' would be doing such a thing.

Q: This has persisted and resulted in all kinds of mental turmoil and, in a sense, pulled me right out of that abiding as the natural state. Although I do know in real terms this is not possible!

Well, be consistent with your own understanding. It is not possible. Full stop. Again, the belief in the 'me' entity is driving the concepts here.

Q: Please forgive my terminology. It is very dualistic, I know. But this is the only way I can really explain what is happening at the moment.

There is a lot of focusing on the content. Tell me about you. How is simple being and its aware nature doing in all of this? And have you left that or become anything other than that? What appears to be happening is that the root 'me' concept is thriving and generating a lot of additional conceptualizing, which is being given quite a bit of attention and belief. What is happening is the very definition of suffering.

Q: Well, this physical pain has catapulted me back into the Eckhart Tolle teachings, which I have really enjoyed for many years. There seems to be a renewed vigor in immersing myself in Eckhart Tolle's teachings and books. This at times brings about a sense of profound peace and depth within me, which I have to admit is very satisfying.

For a time. There are many interesting teachings available, no doubt, but they all too often tend to leave you back in a dualistic position. Why is the supreme reality beyond time, space, life and death—which is what you are—looking for teachings at this point? The reason is that the 'me' concept is being assumed to be who you are.

Q: It seems to me teachings like those I have been looking into are about bringing presence into day-to-day living (if that is possible!), whereas the non-duality pointers are about recognizing and abiding as the presence you are and letting life flow from that.

The teaching you mention leaves the concepts of the seeker, the absolute and the world intact. Who would ever find anything but a temporary reprieve from suffering in such terms? The root is not being addressed at all. I am not advocating 'non-duality'. I am only pointing out simple facts.

Q: Despite the recognition that some teachings in a sense can solidify the sense of an individual, they seem to provide relief from the pain.

Only temporarily, just like other self-help methods. They work for a time, then run dry. That is why you were not satisfied with those teachings before. If you are not convinced, then give them another spin just to be sure! (By the way, be sure you are not dealing with an actual physical or psychological issue. Self-knowledge is not necessarily a replacement for relative health support, when called for.)

Q: Abiding as the realization of the presence-awareness seems frightening and somewhat chaotic.

This is because you are not fully understanding the basic point, and you are trying to appropriate the pointers from the position of being a separate person. Presence-awareness is not to be realized or abided as, which are entirely dualistic notions based on the assumed reality of the separate self.

Q: The more I think about it, the more I have been going around in circles on this for quite some time! If you have any thoughts on this, I would be very interested to hear them.

You are simply looping around and around in conceptual thought and stressing yourself out. That, I would venture, is the source of your difficulties. To see your true nature as presence-awareness, or whatever you want to call it, brings no pain, suffering or stress whatsoever. Stress (suffering) is generated in the mind and based on the assumed reality of the 'I' notion. That generates other thoughts of and about that 'I', and the mind loops endlessly in such concepts. Even the attempts to understand the basic points are then run through the perspective of the imaginary 'me' and that conceptual activity itself becomes just more suffering. Then the mind runs around looking for antidotes and teachings to 'fix' the problem, instead of seeing the real cause.

Knowing Who You Are and Who You Are Not

Question: I have been into the spiritual search, primarily non-duality, for well over thirty years. I had one main non-duality teacher, Jean Klein, who passed away ten years ago. I have read numerous books and practiced self-inquiry ever since first hearing about it.

Our backgrounds are very similar. I also practiced self-inquiry for many years, but was not satisfied. Certainly the seeking, suffering and doubt were not resolved, which is what eventually motivated me to talk to Bob Adamson, who had his doubts resolved with Nisargadatta Maharaj. Then everything directly fell into place. Looking back, my conception of self-inquiry was flawed. The basic issue is a misunderstanding of our identity. The so-called self-inquiry is supposed to help resolve that. Usually, through a misunderstanding, the mistaken concepts of who and what we are, are carried into the self-inquiry and render it impotent. The notion of practicing self-inquiry—which I know well from years of trying that!—is already flawed and belies certain assumptions that are part and parcel of the problem. This boils down to the notion that I am a separate someone apart from reality. This is the fundamental notion or concept driving all of the doubts, suffering and seeking. The end game, so to speak, is clarifying your real identity, coupled with a penetrating understanding of the falsity of the ‘I’ concept. That is why I always talk of these two key points. If either of those recognitions are not present, it is impossible for the sense of seeking—or dissatisfaction, as you call it—to end. Basically, the false identity is still being believed at some level.

Even the notion that we are practicing self-inquiry is a concession or admission to the belief in the separate self. Reality needs no practice. Whatever word you use to point to what is ultimately real (being, awareness, Self and so on), that is already established and

does not need to be achieved. Who or what is practicing, attaining or achieving? Only the assumed person who feels apart from reality. But that conceptual entity cannot attain anything, because it is a false assumption. It is basically non-existent. This is the catch. The notion of the person, which is an assumed real presence or entity, is taken as true. It is taken to be what we are. Any movement within that conceptual framework is destined to fail, because it is based on a false premise. The 'real' inquiry is a straight look at the reality of that concept. The net result to be aimed for, so to speak, is the ending of the belief in our identity as that concept. Because suffering is ultimately belief in self-centered concepts of the 'me', the ending of the belief in the 'me' is the ending of the root cause of such suffering. Self-inquiry is not a practice per se. If it is conceived as such, it is bound to be ineffective. Who would practice it? It is more in the nature of a deep understanding of the nature of the problem. This understanding yields the realization that the 'I' has never existed and that all belief in it was unfounded. This is not an intellectual assertion or agreement but a non-conceptual and direct knowing. This knowing undercuts any further possibility of belief in the concept of being a separate self apart from the deeper reality.

Q: I read Bob Adamson's books and I just got your books. I am halfway through your first one. I like how you have pared it down to the essentials, the seeing of ever-present awareness and seeing that there is no separate person.

These are the basic points. They are more than enough to end the search conclusively.

Q: I have one question at the moment. In a way it would be true to say that I do not really have any questions at all. I often feel like I get it and could even explain it all fairly well, maybe even as well as some of the teachers out on the satsang circuit.

The only issue is—do you know beyond any doubt whatsoever what you are? Also, is there any tendency to believe in yourself as a separate self apart from reality? If either of these points is not clear, the suffering and doubts will go on, no matter what else is

understood and how clearly the pointers are expressed or understood at a verbal level.

Q: But it is equally true to say that I feel that I do not get it at all, because there is a subtle—sometimes not so subtle—dissatisfaction with the fact that awareness seems to come and go. I tell myself that awareness has been here all along, that I just have not been noticing it lately—for the last few seconds, minutes, hours or days. Yet it feels like there is some self-deception involved here, that the ego is just trying to reassure itself that everything is OK.

I see two problems here. The word 'awareness' is just a pointer to your innate being or true nature. The assertion that that comes and goes cannot just be agreed with or disagreed with at a mental level. This is taking things too superficially. I would say go back to basics and be very clear about what you are. Forget the labels and spiritual concepts. You obviously are. You exist at some fundamental level. That cannot be denied. What is it that you are? You need to pin this down. You cannot just give it a label, such as 'awareness', and assume this is knowing who you are. You are not a word or label. You need to dig in and be very clear as to what you are. Are you a thought? An experience? A perception? A person? A thing? Looking deeply into this in your own direct experience will clear the brush so that you can have the first-hand, *non-conceptual* recognition of what you *are*. That must be clear first. Once you have a clear sense of this, you can start to look at questions, such as does that come and go and so on. I give some in-depth examples of this approach at the beginning of the book *You Were Never Born*. It may be worth reviewing that material.

Next, you make reference to the 'ego'. Once you start talking about the proverbial ego, you are on a slippery slope because, essentially, there is no such thing. The only real justified action with regard to the ego notion is to examine it and see if it truly exists. In practical terms, all the suffering, questions and doubts are based on the assumed presence of the ego. What is the 'ego'? It is the notion that you exist as a separate person apart from reality. What is 'reality'? That is what you found out when you discovered your true

nature. Any attempt to understand or examine the ego notion is not going to be fruitful if your basic identity is not clear first. The ego can also be looked at as an incorrect concept about your identity. How can you question that notion, if your identity is not clear in the first place? That is why I give precedence to clear self-knowledge as the first and most important part of the equation. The examination of the ego notion is simply a means to understand and resolve the conceptually-based doubts that may crop up *after* your true nature is clear and established. If we try to use self-inquiry to get to, attain or realize who we are, we have already fallen into the trap of believing in a false identity. The real self is already present. It may not be clearly known or we may be in doubt about what that is. If so, then the clarification of who we are is needed.

Q: The energy behind all of my long-time seeking, reading and self-inquiry seems to be driven by a desire to reach a final understanding, to 'get it over with'.

The purpose of non-duality in all of its variations is to encourage us to know who we are. It is nothing more or less than this. If this is clear, no additional seeking is needed. If there is a sense of seeking, suffering or doubt, who you are is not yet clear. You do not need to 'get anything over with', but you may well need to be clear on who you are. However the mind frames this issue is largely irrelevant because the whole structure of the conceptual mind is based on entirely fallacious premises about our essential identity. To put it simply: either we know ourselves or we do not. If not, we need to resolve this.

Q: So many people have said there is such a final understanding (for example, you, Bob, Nisargadatta, Ramana, Jean Klein) that I believe it must be true.

To talk of 'final understanding' plays into the ego's concept of a future state when 'I' will get something I do not have. It is all misconceived. You do not need a final understanding because you are already one with the reality. The real question is 'who' needs or wants that? It can only be the one who conceives of himself as

separate and apart from reality, in other words, the ego notion. So, seeing that the whole issue is based on the assumed presence of that entity, the real response is to verify if it is real or not. This is the essence of self-inquiry, which is really the examination of the nature of the 'I' concept. Where is this presumed separate self? The very question you raise is predicated on the assumption of the separate self. If you look for it—the ego—and cannot find it, how can you believe in it? Then how can the questions that depend on it be taken seriously? They cannot. Therefore, the suffering ends conclusively.

As a concession, 'final understanding' may be conceived as the ending of the possibility of belief in the separate self concept. The direct investigation of this notion does end the possibility of believing in an entity which was only assumed to be present. It is not a final understanding as an achievement for an entity, but the loss of a belief in an erroneous concept that was only assumed as present.

Q: I also encounter statements like: enlightenment is a myth, you are already there, there is nothing to achieve, the ordinary awareness that you are experiencing right now is it. These statements seem to be arguing against a sudden, final insight or realization.

No realization is needed because you are already what you are seeking. If this is not clear, then you need to verify this, in other words, understand who you are. Nothing is gained, of course, because you already are what you are. But if you are being misled by an erroneous concept, you are living under false pretenses. That needs to be addressed. The clarification of what you already are certainly can happen. That is what this is about. And in that seeing, the belief in the false identity falls away. Hence, the seeking, suffering and doubt is resolved. Absolutely nothing is attained, but the false and needless concepts are contradicted.

Q: I guess I need to accept or somehow deal with the fact that dissatisfaction arises, followed by awareness, followed by dissatisfaction or other appearances, and not concern myself with getting it all resolved. Perhaps I just need to keep telling myself, 'Stop seeking—this is it!'

No. This is wrong! It indicates that the false identity is still being given belief. Who and what are you are talking about? It is clear from your statements that the basic issue of who you are is not yet clear. It is not a problem, because there is nothing difficult about it at all. But you are granting a lot of reality to these concepts, which are arising from a false notion of a separate, limited self. Quit following all the thoughts and find the nature of the one who is having them!

Q: Is there really an end to all of this? Or when people like you say 'I reached the end of my spiritual search' do they simply mean they gave up and accepted their situation?

Absolutely not! They looked and found beyond any doubt who they are and uprooted once and for all the core concept driving all the conceptual bondage. If this were not possible, why talk about this stuff?

Q: I really want all of this to come to an end, but I do not want to deceive myself by saying that this mediocrity I am experiencing is not really mediocrity, that it is actually something fantastic and wonderful.

I suggest dropping all these half-examined notions! You need to know who you are and expose the cause of suffering. Both are possible and easily done with a bit of clear understanding.

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 is how effortless the knowing is. It is 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. Question: 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?

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 in the most profound sense. It is the ‘everyday’ or ‘ordinary’ sense of awareness that 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 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 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.

How Can We Know What Is Before Consciousness?

Question: If consciousness appears in non-dual awareness and does not know itself, how are we ever aware of it? We perceive the world through consciousness. If who we are is before consciousness, have not we made it impossible to know? It seems that we are taking on faith that without a body it exists because without a body we cannot know it exists!

Awareness and your nature as that are self-evident. This cannot—and need not—be known or proved in terms of subject/object knowledge. Keep in mind that all the pointers to what is ultimately real are simply descriptions of you, what you presently are. You are present now and aware of the fact of being conscious. This is self-evident. You cannot grasp ‘yourself’ or your innate being as some ‘thing’ ‘out there’. Yet who would be foolish enough to deny themselves, their own existence? This non-conceptual being-awareness is entirely evident, but cannot be grasped objectively in dualistic experience. The point is that non-dual awareness does not know itself as some object or experience, which would turn it into an experience in duality (that is, ‘I’ *and* awareness). The ‘I’ and awareness are not two things, one to be the object of the other. On the other hand, awareness is not unknown either. Your presumption is that it is currently unknown and must be known somehow. This is wrong. Awareness cannot be known objectively because it is not an object, but neither can it be unknown—for the same reason. It is the very presence enlivening and making possible all knowing. It is you, your natural state.

How Can I Go Beyond the 'I Am' Sense?

Question: How can I go beyond the 'I am' sense in practice?

Who is going to go beyond? This is still talk in relation to the notion of a person. You are still giving credit to that. All the questions come from that. Who is this 'I' that needs to understand, go beyond the 'I am' and so on? Your nature is that which is prior to consciousness. It already is that. You are getting misdirected by granting reality to the individuality. You are not a person in need of something in the future. You are reality itself. Why is reality asking for understanding and applications? Do not ask 'How do I ...?' Instead see what you already are. How can I give guidance or methods to an 'I' that is a total fiction? I see you as the supreme reality itself. The notion that you are not that needs to go. See that all your questions are in relation to a person that never existed.

Looking at the Subtle Presence of Suffering

Question: I would like to give you a little bit of background. I worked for several years with a teacher whom I found to be very clear. I did not do especially well with the teachings, but when I was with this teacher I could hear beyond the words and that was enough. The longing to know freedom was so intense through those years that there were times when I was nearly brought to my knees. I twice began working through a long series of exercises on mindfulness with my teacher but dropped them because they simply did not speak to me. I asked him if I could begin working on the exercises a third time and he said I should give up my efforts in that direction and wait until a particular retreat that was coming up at which he would introduce the non-dual teachings. He said he felt they would resonate with me better than mindfulness. That turned out to be an understatement. But understanding did not come immediately. My sense is that because of the continuing combination of non-dual teachings with mindfulness, there would be glimpses and then the mind would return to making an intense effort.

About two years ago my teacher conducted a teacher training in which non-duality was emphasized. There was a point during that training at which the seeking fell away effortlessly, like a tiny, tiny puff of air. It was very funny to see it happen like that after those years of a longing so intense that it seemed unbearable. I laughed at how simple and obvious it was. I did not make a decision not to meditate anymore, but meditation simply no longer happened. I arranged to sit at one more retreat but could see absolutely clearly a few minutes into it that there was no reason to sit at a retreat of any kind. Everything is available here, now. Nothing is required.

A little over a year ago I began leading a group, the stated purpose of which is the examination of reality from the perspective of non-duality. It is a wonderful group. I sent my teacher some of my

talks, and while he was encouraging in some ways, he was for the first time critical in others. He felt that encouraging immediate direct seeing was irresponsible, that it is necessary to first build bridges through practice and contemplation. He suggested I was engaging in 'spiritual bypassing' by not continuing to meditate and practice. His comments were insistent, and we finally agreed formally to give up the teacher-student relationship. Since then he has been respectful and accepting of the way I present the understanding that has arisen, but it was a painful transition.

I continue to read spiritual books from time to time because they have been useful to me in finding new ways to present what I am trying to convey in my group. I was especially happy I had continued to read when I came upon your book You Were Never Born. I felt what I presented was bare bones understanding, but your expression was utterly simple and clear and stripped away remaining concepts that I had not previously recognized.

I will cut to the chase. One thing I read in You Were Never Born and another I read this morning when I began Awakening to the Natural State struck a chord. I came upon this paragraph first:

In my experience of this, what happened was that the true nature was pointed out and recognized very clearly. But then my doubts, fears and beliefs from the past would arise in the middle of this clear knowing of my identity as awareness. This was distracting and triggered suffering. But then I started to see what was happening. Erroneous concepts based on the view of a limited self, which the mind had picked up from the past, were appearing, and the energy of belief was going into them. I was assuming those thoughts to be valid statements of myself and taking them seriously. The clear and simple truth of who I am was being overlooked. It was nothing more complicated than this, but in all the years of seeking I had missed the basic point.

When I read that paragraph I thought, yes, this is what is happening. Suffering still arises, the interaction with my teacher being a clear case in point. But it always seems very clear that the suffering

comes from the conceptual overlay, that there is a sense of being defined as a separate self by these thoughts, and that awareness is unaffected by the thoughts or suffering. When I look at the thoughts through which suffering arises, I am able to see that I, too, am assuming these to be valid statements of myself. But the suffering continues. Until I read that paragraph there would be a recognition that the suffering was just thoughts, and upon seeing that yet again, the suffering would temporarily fall away. But when I read this paragraph it struck me that if there were clear seeing the suffering would not continue to arise again and again. Thoughts might or might not arise, but there would be no suffering from them. For some time I have thought of it as conditioning playing itself out but this does not fit your description of all doubts and confusion falling away. And it was at that point yesterday I wrote to you about a consultation.

This morning I came across this paragraph in Awakening to the Natural State:

In actual practice, while this understanding is sinking in, the seeker is often plagued by vestigial doubts, questions and concerns, in spite of however advanced the intellectual understanding may be. I have seen many (including myself) able to converse on all this with the most incredible precision and verbal acumen. The only test is in day-to-day direct experience at the gut, emotional level. Is there any sense of suffering, separation, anxiety or fear? Am I feeling doubt or metaphysical uncertainty? Is the knowledge of my true nature unshakeable? If not, the understanding is not complete.

It is clear that the understanding is not complete here. I suspect I am one who can converse on this with incredible precision and verbal acumen. The understanding that arose with the falling away of the seeking was not intellectual, but the test of the day-to-day direct experience at the gut, emotional level makes it clear the understanding is not complete. There is still suffering, separation, anxiety and fear. There is far, far less than before the seeking fell away, but it is still there. I would greatly appreciate your help.

You write of your experiences and understanding with clarity and precision. At this stage, so to speak, in my own experience, I found that what turned the corner was a very clear and penetrating understanding of the root of suffering: how it works and what is its root cause. In that understanding the last bit of interest and belief in the concepts sustaining the suffering unraveled.

Suffering is sustained by a belief in the reality of the separate, independent, limited self. This concept is the root of all the other self-centered thoughts and beliefs. We picked these up in the 'years of ignorance' when our natural and innate identity was unclear. This lack of clarity led us to assume that the conceptual 'I' or self-image was true, that this mind-created person and all of its identifications was who we are. The arising of the self-centered thoughts and belief in the reality of the 'I' thought as our actual identity is itself what suffering is. As long as the 'I' is assumed to be present and true and, most importantly, to be what we are, the root of suffering is alive and we will fall victim to belief and interest in the self-centered concepts.

It is not a matter of waiting for 'conditioning' to fall away. This is a common but misguided view. It is not the thoughts per se that constitute the suffering. It is the belief in them. It is the continued tendency to look into the mind and take its images to be valid definitions of ourselves that sustains the suffering. Often, this basic mechanism is not clearly understood, in spite of whatever other understanding we may have. This leads us to misperceive the cause of suffering and fail to understand it. But once this is clear, the ability to believe in the concepts falls away and the basis of the suffering is removed.

I would like to mention that this understanding of the nature of suffering is *not* the most important factor. The clear and direct recognition of the truth of your being as ever-present, non-conceptual awareness here and now is very crucial. It is from that living and direct realization of the positive truth of who we are that the seeing through, and freedom from, any residual suffering happens naturally, easily and effortlessly. Innate and natural awareness is always free of suffering, and this is what you already are. With this point clear, a little bit of looking unwinds any residual

tendency to believe in concepts revolving around the imagined separate self.

One of the most powerful ways to end all possible belief in the separate self is simply to look for it. Where is this presumed defective person, the belief in which is driving all suffering, seeking and doubt? In truth, all there is in this and any moment is undeniable awareness and a few thoughts, feelings and perceptions arising and setting. It is all perfect clarity, ease and peace. The root cause of suffering is not present and has never existed, except as an assumed presence. One of my favorite pointers is—suffering has a cause, but when you look for the cause, you find the cause does not exist. It is this insight which unwinds all the suffering once and for all. Nothing is gained actually, for you already are what you are seeking. Then you see that what is present now is what the ancients pointed to so beautifully in the following words: 'All there is is self-shining, non-conceptual, ever-fresh presence-awareness, just this and nothing else. There is nothing other than this'. And, to cross traditions, 'You are That'. Here and now this non-conceptual awareness is all there is and it is what you are. In truth, no preparation or approach is needed because this natural presence is already evident and there is no entity here capable of preparing for or approaching this.

Am I Off Track?

Question: I have been reading a lot recently and, as you said, it is remarkable how many of the writers on both Buddhism and Advaita who I once thought were all saying very different things, now appear to be saying the exact same thing, with just slightly different emphases. In fact, in the light of reading your books and talking to you, some writers whom I had not liked previously I am now starting to appreciate. The later stuff by Douglas Harding in particular, which I always found a bit labored and eccentric, I now realize is pointing to the exact same everyday awareness you so clearly describe.

However, in my own personal experience, I continue to find myself in what appears to be some sort of 'bedding down' or stabilization process, even though I know such a process does not exist. This leads me to believe I must not be quite as clear in my understanding of your pointers as I thought I was.

This was brought home to me this afternoon when I suddenly became aware of a wave of anxiety rising (my own particular flavor of psychological suffering). As it did I switched into that sense of simply seeing it (the anxiety) as another object among many arising in awareness and therefore not identifying with it. But the anxiety kept building. As it did, I suddenly got the feeling I was trying to engage in what felt like an awful lot of mind stuff in trying to head it off at the pass. Thoughts fighting thoughts, as you once put it. As this happened I became aware of something else: this mass of panic coming from a much deeper but more subtly ingrained sense of a self that was terrified of the anxiety was trying to apply the everyday awareness to fight it off. This recognition immediately expanded the sense of that everyday awareness to include this terrified self as another object arising in awareness. Suddenly there was so much more space and much less panic.

Does this all sound horribly off track to you? I would be fascinated to hear your thoughts. My apologies for banging on in such self-absorbed detail.

Do not turn in this into a test or get yourself back in the game as a person who is not quite there or whatever. Appearances come and go in awareness. You are that awareness. Everything arises from and falls back into awareness. Nothing is separate from the essence of things. In all of your experiences, did you stop being, did the fact of awareness depart, did you ever become other than that simple and clear being-awareness? Always keep that at the forefront of consideration. If your basic nature did not depart, then no major issue has arisen.

All that may happen is a bit of focus goes into the mind at times. In other words, the mechanism of suffering plays out a bit. Before even getting into looking into that, I would like to stress keeping a sense of the fact of your being and its aware nature. What is all that experiencing arising in anyway? You will find that in looking in this way, no loss of your true self has occurred. Then you can see that all that happens is that some thoughts, feelings or perceptions arise in this clear awareness that you are.

Then it can be useful to understand very clearly the nature of suffering, how the mind creates images and definitions of a seeming person and attaches all types of labels to that concept (such as 'I am not there' or whatever the case may be). When the sense of belief goes into those images, the mind begins to spin and the consideration goes into the conceptual process. We think it is a real 'issue' for ourselves, when in fact it is a swirl of thoughts and feelings arising and setting in awareness and all is actually fine. A bit of looking shows that the supposed entity is not really present, except as an assumption. When this 'I' thought is exposed and you see that it is not you, then the belief drains out of it and the root of the suffering is resolved.

There is nothing wrong with this residual activity coming up. Who is choosing it anyway? But it is a good opportunity to understand this mechanism of suffering more clearly. This understanding is what

really resolves the root of it. It is not an attainment, because in fact you are already free and beyond the appearances as the one to whom they appear. But it is certainly good to understand the nature of suffering. Why put up with needless suffering when it can be resolved with a bit of understanding?

You say, 'I must not be quite as clear in my understanding of your pointers as I thought I was'. Who? Do not let this flurry of thoughts be an excuse to introduce a fictitious 'I' into the mix. You are ever and always that aware presence itself. No 'I'—separation from that—has actually happened.

I Do Not Have the 'Blissed Out' Feeling

Question: I basically get that 'I am awareness' and that in this all-encompassing awareness there are myriad manifestations. However, I do not have the 'blissed out' feeling that I have heard goes along with this sort of understanding. In general, I am very happy, have fun a lot and am positive and loving. But I have heard of bliss and unconditional love, and I cannot say I have that experience. I am OK with this. I am not striving to find bliss by any means, but I am curious about it.

Could you respond to how this feeling or presence of love—maybe even bliss—relates to living as awareness? For example, you signed your letter 'Love, John', and I would be hard pressed to do that, since love is not so present for me as I am typing this.

To be brief, if it is not present right now, it is not the eternal and ever-present natural state. The bliss and love states are simply ideas. But you and your nature are not ideas. They are present facts. I would say drop all the spiritual concepts and get to know yourself. You are present and aware. That is what you are. Do not leave that as a concept or interesting idea at the mental level. When people talk about peace or oneness it is a description of you. The concepts take us away from really looking at what is present here and now. Drop all of the ideas and see what you are. Be willing to explore and get familiar with this nature that you are. We overlook what is present because we are used to looking for sensations, states, experiences and concepts. But you are not any of those things. What is being pointed to is not a feeling, state or experience, which is why we tend to miss it.

Pause all thought and just be. What is this being? You cannot put a label on it, since labels are only words in thought. But your being is not a thought. You will have to drop the looking in the mind and go by immediate and non-conceptual experience. Try to see what is the

sense or feeling, for lack of better words, of being itself. It is not an emotional high, bliss or some other 'fireworks'. It is more like an ever-present sense that all is OK, nothing is wrong, peace. You are expecting some special state or objective experience, which is looking one-hundred percent in the wrong direction. Get more curious about what is already present. It may seem like nothing to the mind, because non-objective being cannot be grasped or recognized by the mind. But being is present. Awareness is present. The direct recognition of the fact of your being is what is being pointed to. Do not worry about the labels. Just get to know yourself, your real nature, as it is.

Is Space the Absolute?

Question: John, often in reading about Advaita and Buddhism, I find the writers referring to the non-dual ground of being as a space that allows the seeming manifestation of form. I read of the emptiness of ultimate being as being space. It seems that the words 'emptiness' and 'space' are used as synonyms. In some other writings I find that the writers regard 'space' not as absolute but as part of the illusion, being no more real than the illusory belief in a personal, separate, individual being. So, let me ask you, is space absolute, as the former writers seem to suggest, or is space ultimately found to be illusory? I realize the former writers may be using the word 'space' metaphorically, but I am confused. Is space, the three-dimensional space most people mean by the word 'space', absolutely real, or does the non-dual ground of all being utterly transcend space and time? Is the non-dual reality—the only reality in the strictest sense—transcendent of all time and space dimension? Or is space as we understand it in ordinary life eternal and absolute?

The actual and complete pointer, usually coming from Tibetan Buddhism in its Dzogchen variety, is 'space-like awareness'. Space is the adjective. What that means is 'analogous to' or 'similar to' space. It is a metaphor, an analogy. The key term is 'awareness'. You seem to be overlooking that part of the equation, which appears to be leading you off on a tangent.

The nature of what is inherently real is non-conceptual awareness. Space and time are experiences or concepts that appear in this non-conceptual reality. The absolute reality is prior to the concepts of space, time, causation, duality and any other mental categories. Ordinary space is not absolute, though it is sometimes used as a pointer to reality. In relation to the other four elements (in traditional cosmology), space is relatively permanent and unchanging. The analogy is limited because space is not aware. It has no sentience.

That is why another key pointer to your fundamental nature is 'emptiness with the capacity of knowing', or 'cognizing emptiness'. In the hierarchy of manifestation, so to speak, the first appearance on the non-dual awareness is consciousness (that is, the relative state of awareness in duality). Within consciousness appear space and the other elements in space. What you are is prior to the body/mind, prior to space and even prior to consciousness itself. You are that which knows the coming and going of consciousness.

A Dialogue on Ego Death

Question: Although I am not quite sure why, I felt like I was supposed to contact you. I suppose it has something to do with the fact that I deeply feel that my purpose in this life is the death of my ego and realization of my true nature, and I felt that I should finally hear from someone who might clearly know what it is about.

I have looked into this issue very deeply over several years. Perhaps I can offer some pointers based on my experience. First of all, 'death of the ego' is a very misleading way to frame this issue. That is more of a concept about this than what it really is. The ego is a concept, an assumption. It is merely an idea. What is that idea? It is the notion that you stand apart from the deeper reality of things as an independent and autonomous self, a limited being. As you look into this matter, you find that this assumption proves to be entirely false. As a result, the ego simply evaporates due to discovering its non-existence. There is no 'ego death', because there is no ego present to die. It is better to square one's terms and really understand things, rather than latch onto some grand concept, such as 'ego death' and then have the mind spin in circles around it. Instead of granting the reality of the ego and then assuming there is some death of it needed, I would rather say to try to find it in the first place. The finding that the ego was never present is its death. But this is like saying that Santa Claus died when you grew up and found that he was fictional. Whole books have been written and movements have come into being detailing the process of ego death, when in fact the ego is entirely mythical. How can something die that was never present?

Q: I understand it intellectually, as many people do. But I recently saw what would be missing if the ego were to die, and it felt and appeared very much like physical death.

Not at all. It is total freedom, because all seeking, suffering and doubt stem from belief in that notion. The body, mind and all else go on naturally, but things are no longer filtered through the belief in the separate, limited self.

Q: Although I had always assumed I was seeking an 'egoless' state, I realized at that moment something deep within me greatly fears what will become if the ego is lost. I feel that it is the fear of what will become of me if the ego dies that is keeping me from dropping the ego altogether.

As you may guess from what I have said, this is entirely misconceived, in my view. Holding to the ego concept is creating all the turmoil and fear in the first place. Seeing through that concept as a concept is pure joy and peace.

Q: I have been seeking for a long time, and I feel that it is finally time for the search to come to an end.

It sounds like your approach has been influenced by a good amount of reading and absorbing of popular and mythical notions that are often based on either incorrect or partial views, usually coming from those who did not have the good fortune to meet with a legitimate teacher in a non-dual tradition who could speak from direct experience. Such is the lot for most of us. However, somewhere along the line we may hear the direct news afresh and re-examine our assumptions.

Take the idea of search. This notion itself depends on the notion of being a separate someone apart from reality. This is why the ego notion is the root of all other concepts. If I do not have the notion that I am a separate self apart from reality, then how can the notion of a search or ending the search arise in the first place? Rather than deal with notions such as overcoming the ego, ending the search and so on, the best and most direct approach is to go back to the fundamental issue of 'who am I?' In that, the basic misconception is tackled head on. The ego, which never existed except as an assumption, is seen for what it is—an erroneous concept with no substance. Belief in that notion withers because it has no

justification. Naturally, all the other notions that are spawned by that belief must die on the vine. What remains, which is also here and now, is the natural, concept-free state, which some have pointed to as being-awareness-peace. That pointer is an attempt to describe your inherent and natural being. But you are not the pointer. You are what is being pointed to.

It Is Not Even 'Not This, Not This'

Question: I have been studying non-duality for seven years. I know I am nothing, that there is no 'me', no self, no individual. My reason for contacting you is that my mind is not at peace, even though I accept and understand the teachings and feel them to be true. That is to say, they make sense to me. My mind is never satisfied, never at peace. I resisted this stuff for a long time and held onto old beliefs, concepts and thoughts. I assumed that when I finally accepted that I am 'not this, not this', the search would be over and the mind would relax. What am I still not getting or understanding?

The 'not this, not this' approach is helpful to clear the brush, but the ultimate aim is to know what you are. You cannot expect to get to the bottom of this by mere negation alone. You can say 'I am not this or this' but still remain in some doubt on your identity. Do you have a sense of what you are, as opposed to what you are not? Take the case of a thirsty man. He can say that water is not a stone, a patch of earth, the sky, sunlight and so on. All of this is very clear, but still he may not have found a single drop of water and be as thirsty as ever. The real purpose of negation is to arrive at self-knowledge. So, the question could be put, have you realized your true nature in all of its fullness and clarity? After all, you are not a mere void or negation, are you? If your real nature is not clear, the search will go on, in spite of whatever other knowledge you have. A thirsty man will continue in his thirst, even after negating everything that is not water—until he finds actual water. More important than negation is positive knowledge of your true nature. Even though that is not an object and cannot be captured in words, it still is and can be known or experienced directly.

Who or What Decides?

Question: I read somewhere that once one begins to explore non-duality, one's head is in the tiger's mouth. Never has a saying rung so true! I understand that awareness is the space for thoughts and everything else. I understand that even 'me' is a concept. These are things that I have read, and they make sense. One can rest in the present moment, and thoughts dissolve. I get that. One could say thoughts are kind of like rocks that a kid is throwing through space. They go by. One just needs to remember not to go chasing after those rocks. I can see through the thought problem. I can see through the 'me' concept. But what about physical reality?

As I was reading and jotting down notes this morning, I realized also that I can do things in the world. For example, I can pick up a pen for no reason. This idea kind of blew the whole realization I was talking about. If thoughts come and go beyond our control, how can I at the same time have a will to do something? Again, I pick up a pen. This was not a random, uncontrollable thought. I decided to do it. And though an illusion, the activity became real in the physical universe. This makes me different from a tree or an animal. A tree can grow towards the light, but it cannot decide to make a leaf fall. A cat cannot decide to put on a hat. A star cannot decide to shoot off a flare. My point is, if this body is just an expression of consciousness, and consciousness is just aware, and 'I' is just a concept, then how can I decide to pick up a pen or decide to write to you? I cannot decide to be born, but I can have thoughts that become actions, that have an effect on the universe, if ever so slightly.

So it seems there is more to reality than awareness observing. I can do things for no reason. Is this 'I' that can express itself with art and music just the blob in my head called a brain? Or is it awareness using my brain to learn to play guitar to write a pretty song in order to amuse itself? We cannot stop thoughts, but I can control them to

some degree. I am deciding now, for no reason, to think of a pink elephant. I do not think a cat or dog can do that! Who or what decided to think of the pink elephant? Who or what decided to send you an email? Who or what decided to seek enlightenment or learn to play the guitar? These things are beyond survival needs and technically 'unnecessary'. If consciousness is just observing, then there must be something else acting, something extraordinary that can do these things that trees and animals cannot do.

If 'I' is a concept, then why go back into the concept that 'I' am thinking, doing, deciding, etc.? Isn't that bringing in something that was seen as purely a concept? Certainly doing, thinking, acting, etc., go on in the appearance of things. What of it? Your positing the conceptual 'I' as the initiator of that activity is the error. If you look closely at thoughts moment by moment, you will see that the thoughts are not generated by the conceptual 'I' at all. 'You' actually do not create the next thought. It appears, and the mind steps in and erroneously interprets that the thought was generated by the phantom entity called 'I'. There is no such entity present. Thoughts are not created by any entity at all. If you think they are, the best thing to do, instead of speculating about all this, is to find the entity. You will not be able to, because there is nothing there, except the notion of the 'I'. Where is this 'I'? You presuppose it exists, but you are not actually showing or demonstrating its presence. No 'I' is necessary for functioning. For example, your heart is beating, your blood is flowing, your cells are functioning, but 'you' are not 'doing' any of that, are you? So, thoughts, feelings and perceptions are happening. Why is an 'I' needed? Even if you posit such a 'ghost in the machine', the onus is on you to find it and prove its existence.

In truth, all this is marginally relevant because the real issue is—what are you? Are you a concept or are you the one aware of the concept? The whole universe arises and sets spontaneously in awareness and has no separate existence apart from awareness. This awareness is not some aloof principle, but the very life, energy, substance and reality supporting and informing the appearances.

Keep in mind that everything goes on quite well in the appearance of things. There is the appearance of thoughts, decisions, choices,

will, etc. What you discover is that the separate 'I' is a concept, a construct of language. You say, regarding a thought, 'I decided to do it'. This is the crux of the issue. Set aside the thought and try to pin down the 'I' itself. What and where is it? Can you actually find such an entity, or is it only posited? I think you will see in short order that you cannot actually find such a thing in direct experience. If you cannot find it, how can such a thing—which is not really present—be doing anything? This will clarify what is meant by the statements that there are thoughts but no thinker of them, deeds but no doer of them, etc.

Question: My blood flows, my heart beats. I do not 'do' any of that. It just happens. Yes. That even happens while I sleep, so that is easy to see. But the pen will not pick itself up while I am asleep. That seems different to me. Thoughts but no thinker. I get it (I think!). Deeds but no doer. Ouch! Even if I look and find no entity, who just typed this email? Should I liken reality to a dream? If I look at it that way, then I can apply these things to the physical world. Your conviction on these matters motivates me to keep looking.

You keep going back to an entity, even though you have not actually found one. Who is beating the heart, breathing, digesting the food, keeping the planets in orbit, blowing the wind, shining the sun? Do 'you' actually create the next thought? Where does it come from and who creates it? Yes, a thought may appear and initiate an action. Of course. This is not being disputed. Like I said, the onus is on you to find the 'I' that did it. Did you? A thought appears. Did you create it? Did you, on direct evidence, know what the thought would be before it appeared? If you are controlling the thoughts, why would you ever choose an unhappy thought? All suffering is thought-created. If you are controlling thought, you should be able instantly to abolish all suffering and unwanted thoughts. Can you? If not, this really weakens the claim that 'you' are running the show.

Like I said, this is not that relevant, however. Thoughts, feelings, perceptions and actions all come up and pass through. Where is the problem with any of it? Make sure you that you understand two things: who you are and what is the nature and cause of suffering. In

this understanding, all the seeking, suffering and doubts are resolved.

Suffering – Thought or Sensation?

Question: My indisputable observation is that suffering is not experienced as thought but as sensation.

It depends on what you mean by the words. I do not think this is indisputable at all. In fact, there is no suffering at all—ever—in pure sensation, at least as I am defining the term suffering. Suffering is the mental conflict added onto the sensation based on the concept of a separate 'I'. The suffering is born and is sustained purely in conceptual thought. Sensation, even painful sensation, contains no psychological suffering. That is why Buddha could 'overcome' suffering, even though the body was still subject to all the normal effects of disease, old age and death.

Q: I had hoped to find some 'consensual validation' for my observation!

Why? What is the motive here? The only real issue is clarifying your identity, that is, who are you? Looking for validation of insights is looking in the wrong direction. Your being does not need to be validated. It is an indisputable fact, to use your words. All else is provisional and conceptual knowledge. To be clear, on the particular point you bring up, my view is one-hundred percent contrary to your observation. But that is just my view!

Q: Your unfaltering message has been that the emphasis just needs to shift to the awareness in which it all arises.

Yes and no. It is just a pointing to the fact of the presence of awareness. Content comes and goes, but you as the aware presence remain. This is just the fact of things. No shifting is involved.

Q: Maybe understanding the mechanics of the whole thing is just another thought binding the organism in its pattern of dis-ease.

Maybe, maybe not. Who knows? The main point of this is to know yourself, to clarify your identity. My advice is to drop all other questions and go for that one.

Q: Maybe anything that needs understanding will be better seen once the shift in understanding is made ...

What shift of understanding? This is mere guesswork based on some popular pseudo-spiritual concepts. Forget shifts and nebulous 'understandings'. Basically, either we know ourselves or not. Get down to the core matter. Do you know your identity? All other issues are taken care of when this is clear.

The Understanding Seems Unshakeable, But...

Question: It has been about nine days since we spoke on the phone, and all is still going very well here. I feel solid in the understanding of what I am and what I am not, and it seems pretty unshakeable.

Just confirm—is the fact of your being and its aware nature doubtful? Is that clear or only ‘pretty unshakeable’? Stay with what has no doubts whatsoever. You are. It is not subject to being shaky. The experience of something being shaky appears in what we are talking about—your own presence.

Q: What I am seems to always remain in the background, so to speak, while the mind rambles on loudly and fairly incessantly. It does not pull me back into negativity for the most part, and if it does, it is generally very short-lived. But at times it does feel annoying, kind of like a swarm of flies that will not go away. They do not really hurt you, but it is a bit of a pain in the ass to have them swarming around your face!

This is all well and good, but make sure you understand the nature of the negativity, what it is, what it is made of and, most importantly, the relationship of what you are to all of this. Then you will see that the presence or absence of thoughts makes no difference to what you are. Even the sense of annoyance and the entity who appears to be annoyed are only additional concepts. These concepts are, in fact, no more capable of bothering you than passing clouds affect the sky. Even the concern about the thoughts is showing too much interest in them! It is looking in wrong direction. Keep in focus what you are. You are nothing objective. Nothing can disturb no thing. Even the annoyance is coming from taking oneself to be what one is not. The mind does not ‘pull you back into negativity’. We need to be honest and see that the interest and attention goes to mind out of

sheer fascination with the content, because we feel it may say something relevant about who we are. The mind, as such, has no binding power at all.

Q: The pull back into negativity seems to come mostly in the form of feelings that seem to spontaneously arise without provocation. The negativity or discomfort seems to remain until I fully acknowledge and accept that it is there, at which time it then generally moves through rather quickly.

This is a decent half-step. But there is still a bit of unclarity and a lack of full understanding in what you are saying. Do not settle for trying to perform some technique to get free of suffering. It is better to fully understand it, and also fully understand yourself. Then there is no more interest in either getting rid of or retaining thoughts. In truth, they have no substance or power and make no impact on your being at all. The interest in them is still coming from the sense of reality and identity being put on them. Why not look at yourself instead and see that your being is ever-present and ever-free of the mind? Remember, this is not about manipulating mind content. This is about finding ever-present freedom, completely independent of what is happening in the mind.

Q: I do feel a pull towards a deeper immersion as, or a deeper experiencing of, this that I am in essence, if that makes sense.

This is entirely conceptual. If you pick up this thought, you may go searching for imagined deepenings for years, until you see the falsity of the concept. The 'I' thought, the imaginary self, is fully present in this type of notion. Only a separate 'I' imagines deepening experiences, immersions and what not. Who? Deepening into what? Non-duality means you *are* the reality, one without a second. Such concepts are based on duality, pure and simple.

Q: The feeling is that I barely know what this presence-awareness is. Perhaps, even though I know this to be what I really am, I do not yet know it with absolute and complete confidence? Or perhaps this

knowing naturally deepens over time as the thoughts based on the illusory self fall away?

Another concept! The 'I' notion is dominating the field here. You are chasing thoughts based on the 'I' that is only conceptual. You do not need to 'know' presence-awareness. You are that. Pause the concepts, and it is here in all of its glory and simplicity now.

Q: I know that I cannot know it in a mind-based sort of way, but after reading Nisargadatta's writings and your writings and looking to my own recent past experiencing of this incredible love that is inside of me, I find that this seems to yearn to express itself.

Pause all this conceptualizing and just be what you are. It is not an experience. There is no 'me' present. Even the word 'love' is only a pointer. Presence-awareness is expressing itself now—as the entire universe, including your body and mind. Let it do its thing without jumping in as some imagined 'I' in the mix. It is this concept that diverts us from seeing the immense glory, depth and magnitude of each moment. Nothing needs to be added by way of a story about some person created in the imagination of concepts.

Q: In one recent experience a couple of months ago, I went through some deep fears in relation to my wife possibly leaving me alone. I allowed myself to fully feel those feelings and fears associated with being alone, which took an hour or two. When I opened my eyes, the first thing that I saw was my two dogs, and as I looked at them, there was this absolutely incredible love flowing through me for them. My mind came in and tried to understand this love but before long, a voice appeared from outside of the mind and said, 'Let stillness answer the question'. This was the second time in recent months that this voice came, with the same suggestion, to which I immediately agreed. Then the answer came: 'You are that love; there is nothing more to understand about it'.

This all right as far as it goes. But who are you? Is any of this anything but a nice tale appearing in the majestic presence that you truly are? There is a lot of duality and separation being spun up in

these concepts. You have 'you', the mind, voices, things appearing from outside of the mind, an 'I' agreeing to the outside voices, etc. However, the answer is fair enough! You are that love; there is nothing more to understand about it. So, full stop. Apparently, you are not heeding your own inner counsel, but still willing to jump back into the concepts. Give the counsel a fair trial!

Q: I guess the feeling is that I can live from this love or as this love, or that this love can somehow flow through more consistently. Is this your experience?

Not at all. You are positing a split between what you are and this imagined love, and then looking for solutions and future experiences. You need to see the trap you are falling into. Essentially, it is looking back to the concepts and beliefs in the mind, which are all based on the assumed presence of a limited, separate self. This must be seen, or else you will be chasing your tail for years on the wheel of becoming. You are overlooking your actual presence and believing yourself to be what the mind is saying about you. Look more deeply into the nature and workings of the conceptual mind. In doing so you will lose the tendency to seek for your identity in its ideas and concepts. But it is all about a person that never was. Here and now you are that clear and unshakeable presence of being-awareness-love without limits and divisions.

The Beloved

Question: I know that what you write is true. My issue seems to be how to be present in that.

Even a simple statement such as this can be misleading. What is being pointed to is what you are. It is not about some state or attainment for you, as if you need to get to that. It is about what you are. You might as well ask, 'How do I be what I am?' which is a bit redundant. Instead of granting attention to such notions, keep clearly focused on the key matter of understanding what you actually are. The question is not 'How to be present in that?' but rather 'What am I?' or 'What in this, my present experience, is real?'

Q: I am 'big brained' and can intellectualize any concept!

But this is not about concepts. It is about what you are. Are you a concept? Genuine self-knowing immediately moves you out of the realm of concepts. You are the one to whom concepts appear, correct? This present self that you are is what is being pointed to. There is a difference, as between night and day, between thinking about reality and recognizing it non-conceptually as your natural state prior to concepts.

Q: How do I move into the heart?

This is a similar issue as above. It is a conceptual and ultimately false issue that is based on a presumed separation between the 'I' and the 'heart'. What the word 'I' points to, which is what you are, is the heart. Cease to follow such notions, and see that what you are—effortlessly and naturally—is the reality being pointed to. The word 'heart' is only another pointer to this. The moment the mind conceptualizes a split between oneself and reality, this is duality. The real message is about non-duality. One way to see the simplicity of

this is to pause all thinking and notice what is present. You are simply present and aware, with no problems, issues, questions or doubts. There is not any duality until the mind presents some concept based on a presumed separate 'I' entity. But that entity is not what you are, in fact, because you are clearly present before the notion arises.

Q: I have had some interesting moments this week. I heard a teacher say, 'Fall in love with the beloved'. At first, I intellectualized that as another term for God, without all the baggage. As the week went on, I realized that 'I am' and 'the beloved' are one.

Exactly.

Q: I felt wonderful for a few days, and very connected to that.

But this is already a concept. If 'I am' and 'the beloved' are one, how can there a connection between them? Can you see this? The notions of separation are already emerging as such concepts are being formed. This needs to be seen.

Q: The past two days I have felt like I lost the beloved—though I know that this is not possible. I get migraines—I have had one the past two days—and this puts me in an overwhelmed state. That may be why I felt I lost the beloved.

The beloved can never be lost. Period. All seeming losses are only looking away from what is clear and present and granting reality to unfounded concepts in the mind. That is all. It sounds simple, but needs to be thoroughly understood. Otherwise, the interest will keep jumping to the conceptual images and overlooking what is actually present. The space of knowing and being in which the concepts appear is the beloved. It is what you truly are. It is the constant ground embracing and supporting all appearances. You are that.

Q: I feel like the beloved is awakening in me. This started in February and seems to be moving steadily forward. All that matters is allowing this process to unfold and being in love with the beloved.

This is a nice way to view this, but continue to dissolve notions of duality between yourself and the beloved. What you call 'you' is the mind's image of yourself as some separate person apart from the beloved. This is only an insubstantial notion, which is itself appearing in the endless and eternal presence of the beloved. If the beloved alone is what is real, how can 'you' stand apart? That 'you' is just a concept. Relinquish the concept of the 'me' and what is here is only that, the heart, the beloved or whatever name might be used. We only miss the truth, which is ever-present, through worshipping false idols of conceptual thought. We miss that it is the presence of the reality in which the mind arises and sets. Look away from the mind. In looking away from the mind, the conceptual sense of self dissolves, leaving the limitless radiance of the ever-present truth, in which there is no separation between what you are and that which you are calling the beloved.

Be Clear on What You Mean by Suffering

Question: There has been the experience of the absence of a 'me', but the body/mind is suffering.

You need to be clear on what you mean by suffering. If you mean aches and pains in the body and minor stresses and emotions playing through as part of everyday life in the appearance of things, that is par for the course. But if you are talking about seeking, suffering, doubts, worries, fears, self-centered psychological states that are being focused on, nursed and perpetuated, and a sense of things in the body/mind happening to a personal sense of self—well, that is what I am talking about as 'suffering'. I am not talking about an experience of an absence of 'me'. I am talking about a clear, penetrating and unshakeable understanding of your true nature, in all of its fullness and clarity.

Q: All the talk of acceptance only makes it worse because I can only wonder who is there to accept or not accept?

I have never, ever talked about 'acceptance'. This is some half-baked spiritual platitude. If you try to get into the 'there is no one here' view on things before your true nature is really clear, it ends up being an intellectual assertion. Remember, the point of all this is to know and realize your true nature. You did not mention this aspect anywhere in your statements. Until that is clear, all the pointers are only at a conceptual level, which is at the same level at which the suffering is being generated. So there is no real resolution. It is just one set of ideas being addressed to another set of ideas. As you can see, no real peace is forthcoming. Why? Because you still do not know who you are.

Q: Acceptance happens or not. There is no 'me' to do or bring about anything.

This is a total cop-out. It is also a complete misunderstanding of non-duality. Of course there is no 'me', but doing still happens, investigation happens, understanding happens, freedom from unnecessary suffering happens. You wrote to me, correct? I am answering you, correct? If your logic was correct, you would not have been able to write to me! Do not settle for these half-baked slogans. They are clearly ineffectual.

Q: There is a knowing that this is not me suffering, but the mind longs for peace even though no one is identifying it as his mind.

This is fine as far as it goes, but it is really not getting to the essence of things at all. You cannot assert some non-duality phrase and equate that with knowing who you are. As I said, the point is to know who you are. If that is not clear, then any amount of insights and catch-phrases are really not going to cut it. The lack of clear self-knowledge usually translates as the pointers being misunderstood, which is what is happening for you.

The first step is to get clear on what you are. You should know what your true nature is, what its characteristics are, and precisely what this is in your present, direct experience. If that is not clear, then all the so-called knowledge about other topics will be at a theoretical, conceptual level. Once you know who you are, then the pointers will be seen in true perspective. Even granting that your vision is clear and you see fully that the body/mind is not 'you', that would still leave you missing the most important factor—clear knowledge of your true nature.

The fact that you are sensing a seeming division between yourself and peace shows that the 'I' thought is still being given belief. The 'me' notion is still dominating the field to some extent. I would suggest a positive inquiry into the truth of your nature. You know you are. That much is certain. But exactly what you are needs to be brought into view. Your own experience shows that the mental assertion that 'no one is here' is not sufficient to end the seeking, suffering and doubts.

Consciousness Is Not What You Are

Question: Thank you for maintaining a wonderful website. I am wondering if I could ask a few questions. I have had some deep insights about non-duality. I understand the fleeting nature of thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc. It is very clear that all of that stuff comes and goes. There are great varieties of experience and it is fundamental to human experience that things go from good to bad to good again.

In general, yes. But even the evaluation of 'good' and 'bad' is being put onto the experiences based on concepts. What is good or bad is entirely variable and based on the momentary evaluation of the mind. Shakespeare's line is apt: 'There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so'.

Q: A lot of the suffering I once experienced is gone. Or it does not last very long. I do not hold onto things in the same way. There is a sense of equanimity, in general, although when the pressures of life build up, there are still explosive and unpleasant interpersonal reactions.

It sounds like the root cause of suffering and doubt is not being fully understood to its complete depth. If the trend of suffering, seeking and doubt has diminished considerably, this leads us to assume that suffering, seeking and doubt are causally determined. If so, we may be able to fully expose the root of the entire process and address it directly.

Q: More importantly, I still have a lot of nagging doubts that are impossible for me to ignore.

Doubts and questions are a subtle form of suffering. It is a good call to continue to probe into the nature of suffering and doubt. Because

suffering and doubts come and go in our experience, they must not be essential to our nature. They arise based on causes and conditions. It is worthwhile to probe into this to develop a comprehensive understanding of suffering. If that is determined, you can resolve suffering by addressing its root cause.

Q: What really trips me up is when we talk about the body and the nature of awareness. At the core, I have figured out that I have a strong fear of death.

Ultimately, this derives from identifying one's self—that is, one's being, identity, essence—with the body. Of course, the body is impermanent. If the body is taken as a definition of what one is, then the demise of the body is assumed to be the end of one's self. From this arises fear. It is important to see that the fear is not coming from the mere appearance and disappearance of the body, but the association of one's identity with this. The natural and important question that arises is—is the body what I am? If it turns out to be yes, then the fear is justified. If it turns out that the body is not my essence, then the fear would be unjustified, being based on a wrong assumption. As you can see, this is a vital issue that needs to be threshed out.

Q: There are a lot of physical fears that arise, but it basically comes down to the fact that I am constantly aware and afraid of the physical uncertainty of existence.

This is what I was just saying. The fear is not coming from the body and its fate, but rather from the assumption of identity with it. That assumption may or may not be warranted, but it needs to be investigated before we settle for a final answer.

Q: What confuses me is that it seems as though awareness requires a physical body as a vehicle.

Exactly true. The body is a vehicle for the manifestation of awareness. I prefer to use the term 'consciousness' for the manifestation of sentience in the body. The manifestation is impermanent and entirely limited by the body. When the body dies,

the consciousness is over with, in the manifestation. Keep in mind that the experience of consciousness as an experience is still registered as an experience to you. That 'you' is what I am talking about as non-conceptual awareness.

There are many ways to look at this. For example, in a dream, the dream body seems to be independently conscious. It thinks, feels and perceives in relation to a particular body in the dream. Consciousness appears to be localized in the dream body. The character experiences from a specific location in the dream. Other dream figures appear to have their own consciousness and experience. When the dream character vanishes from experience, all particular consciousness in the form vanishes also. But clearly, you, in the essence of what you are, are not limited by that. When the dream is over, you do not lose your fundamental existence. The source of consciousness remains. That will re-manifest as consciousness in some other form, such as the current body or some other.

Take the case of a light bulb and electricity. Electricity is a fact of nature, but it is unmanifest. If a light bulb is hooked up to the electrical source, the electrical energy manifests as light. Electricity is like awareness; light is like consciousness. Electricity (awareness) requires the vehicle of a bulb (body) to manifest (consciousness). Without a bulb, there is no light. Likewise, with no body, there is no consciousness. The question is—what is the source in both cases? The energy of light derives from a source. Consciousness also derives from a source.

Q: I am aware of all that is going on around me, and what I cannot help feeling is that this awareness is here, now. Nothing else exists right now and here. But it could end at any minute. The awareness can die, and the whole apparatus housing it can die. The life-force can disappear or at least abandon this present form. So how can awareness be undying, free and eternal? And how can I not be the body if the body seems a precursor to this experience, a perishable dwelling for the human experience?

Hopefully the above analogy makes this clear. If you make a distinction between consciousness in manifestation and its source, this may make things clear. Keep in mind that consciousness as consciousness is not what you are. Consciousness is still an experience that appears to you, like all other experiences. As odd as it may sound, you are aware of being conscious, as you are of any other experience.

Q: There seems to exist a focal point of awareness, maybe not a person made of words and images named Don, but a physical focal point, nonetheless, of experience. It is sitting in this chair and not on the other side of the room. Light and sound flow into this focal point. And this focal point, although constantly evolving, is finite and mortal. Experience is concentrated at a junction point where this experience is processed. I may not be able to find it, but neither have I ever seen my brain although it exists.

Consciousness has a locus; awareness does not. Look at the dream example. The consciousness in the dream has a location, a reference point. But where do 'you', your actual being, exist in the dream? Nowhere! Everywhere! It is at an entirely different level, and, in fact, not even in the dream at all. The entire dream is taking place in the 'space of your being', so to speak. The dream character can neither see this nor understand it, but you can, because what you are is not in the dream. The confusion comes in from identifying one's being with the appearance in the dream and/or the consciousness manifesting—temporarily—in the dream appearance.

Q: You once wrote 'First there came clear and doubtless recognition of my identity as non-conceptual awareness. This is already attained and never lost'. But how can that never be lost? At any moment the light can go out. When someone dies, that is it. The light is gone. We could say the awareness is ever-present and prior to the mind, but only so long as the vulnerable body is there. It is like a candle that lights the room. Sure the room depends on the light, but how frail the candlelight!

The manifestation of consciousness is entirely impermanent. But even that is not what I am. As Nisargadatta Maharaj was fond of saying, you are prior to consciousness. You need to understand that what non-duality is really pointing to is not 'consciousness', but that which is prior to consciousness. This is also what Buddhism is talking about. In that path, the consciousness in the body is—correctly—viewed as a material, conditioned phenomenon and 'not the I'. But what is the real 'I', or 'you', if it is beyond, prior to or transcendent of consciousness? That is the question.

Q: There is also the issue of a shared, common reality. What is being experienced here certainly has a perspective, a vantage point. How do we account for the unique perspective of a body/mind organism? Are we talking about the world as a projection, the brain in a vat dreaming the whole thing? Or is there a shared reality, the world, into which we all individually look with our varying experiences? Are there five billion human versions of the world?

Yes, this is all true within the domain of consciousness as manifested within individual body/minds.

Q: There have been stretches of time where thinking about this stuff has stopped and there was no doubt but only a deep peace.

This is a major clue. The answer is not in the mind. Why? Because your own being is the answer, and what you are is not in the mind at all.

Q: But then these unresolved questions about dying, our fleeting nature and the contradictions between a non-dual world and an ultimate subjectivity (solipsism) keep recurring. There is an insecurity that I have not resolved those issues once and for all. And that nags at me as unfinished business.

Only when you are thinking about it! Pause the mind, and there is perfect clarity and peace. In truth, the root of the issue is looking for reality and identity in the mind. It is really another case of mis-identification—taking your nature to be in or dependent upon the mind. The resolution is, as usual, to clarify your fundamental nature.

How?

Question: My mind keeps asking 'How?' How do I let go of the illusion and be?

The question 'How?' is misplaced. It is a conceptual position built on—as usual—the misunderstanding of what you actually are. Our mind, based on misunderstanding, assumes we are a separate person—the ego or separate self—apart from reality. In this framework, that is, taking the assumption as true, the mind wonders about the necessary path, means, goal, etc. The question 'How do I let go of the illusion and be?' is a classic example of this and contains the whole problem—and solution! Notice several points about this question:

- The question itself is created and sustained by thought. Without the thought, is there a problem?
- The basic illusion (false concept) on which all other troubling concepts is based is the notion of 'I'. Therefore, the question 'How do I let go of illusion?' is fallacious and tautological, really. The one asking (the 'I') is the illusion itself. Until this is seen, the questions cannot help but go on. How can an illusory character ('I') let go of an illusion which is, in fact, itself?
- Do you have any problem being, even now? Being is already present. Nothing needs to be dropped in order to be present. You already are present (and aware). This presence-awareness is what is being pointed to. Who is asking the question and why, when the answer is already ever-present and attained? The question itself is false, since what is being hoped for is already present as what

you are. The key is seeing the error in the question. The question drops because it is erroneous and misplaced.

- Pause the question and see what is present. Can you deny your very being and its aware capacity? Yes or no! Be clear on this.
- Without the concepts, you are nothing but presence-awareness (which is just a term pointing to your own being). So, again, the concepts are built on the notion of the existence of a separate 'I' and your identity as that. But is this notion anything more than an assumption? Where is this separate self? Where is this defective, limited 'I' in reality? Noticing that it is only a concept with no actual substance (that is, there is no actual separate 'I' present, except as a notion), how can we believe it any longer, much less take it to be ourselves? In seeing this, all the energy of belief falls out of the concepts of and about the 'I'. What is present is what is always here, your inescapable being, in all its clarity and vivid presence. This is what is being pointed to, and you are that.
- Every question and doubt is a variation on this same theme (some issue for the 'I' concept) and can be dismantled in the same way.

You are what you are seeking. No separation from source has ever happened.

I Need to Shed This 'Unenlightened' Self

Question: Now I have more clarity ... and also confusion. I know what you say and point to is true. It is the illusion that wants to keep the illusion going. It appears to have so much power! I am not even sure what to ask. I know that I am. I feel this. I experience this when I let go of illusion, when I let go of the idea of a separate self, a higher and lower self. I know this is not true, yet I continue to act as if I need to shed this 'unenlightened' self. Argh! Is knowing who you are and who you are not what allows who you are to rest in awareness? Is this just another game and puzzle I am creating?

Yes, you are continuing to create puzzles! Your question, 'Is knowing who you are and who you are not what allows who you are to rest in awareness?' can be deconstructed exactly as the previous statement. This is still making a split between 'you' and 'awareness'. Two key points need to be understood with this (and all the other concepts):

- The 'you' which is caught in the conceptual dilemma is itself a concept. Where is this 'you' that supposedly stands apart from awareness? Can you find it and show it? If not, how can you believe in it any longer?
- Where is the awareness right now? Is it here or not? How far away from that are you? Is there really a split between awareness and what you are?

Look into these issues for yourself and you will see the root of the problem. Essentially, the peace and clarity of so-called realization are already present and shining in plain view, but you are overlooking the obvious by focusing on concepts and putting all the interest in them. This is due to not seeing your actual identity and

assuming that the conceptual entity created in thought is what you are. Then the mind is creating the notions of attainment, getting something, etc., by which it assumes the 'answer' will arrive at some point in the future. But it will not! The whole conceptual structure is based on a false assumption. What is the false assumption? Believing yourself to be something you are not. What is the resolution? Clarifying what you are. Note well—what you are.

If you look simply and directly, you will see that here and now you are nothing but undeniable being-awareness itself. Note the tremendous implications of this statement. If you are that, what is the need of resting in or attaining what you already are? Clearly, all those notions and questions come from a belief in being a separate self apart from that. Until that is resolved and your identity is fully clear, as clear as an apple in the palm of your hand, the questions will go on. They cannot help but go on. Therefore, there is only one game left in the casino: what are you? I will give you a hint: anything that comes and goes is not what you are. Still you are present and undeniably so. What is this presence that is with you right now that is not an experience that comes and goes? This is precisely what non-duality is pointing to. It is shining in your experience now, and is what you are. Settle down here. See that each time you turn to the questions and doubts in the mind, you are looking away from yourself. Pause the interest in thought for even one instant and your natural being is here, shining in all its nakedness and glory. Do not turn this into some task or goal. That is purely imaginary. Is your being, your very presence a goal to reach or a task to achieve? You are what you are seeking.

If the thoughts and questions continue to draw your interest away from the obvious, you will need to get serious about the fact that such questions are entirely conceptual. They are all based on a fallacious premise about what you are. If that is not seen, then we will forever think the questions are relevant to who we are. Keep in mind that before a question arises, you are already present as the one to whom the question appears. Your actual being is already present and in view before the question dawns.

There are a lot of pointers and suggestions here, so make sure to chew on these points and really see what I am driving at. Doing so pulls the plug on the doubts. Before getting bogged down in a notion such as 'shedding the unenlightened self', make sure you can find it first!

The Ego, 'I', or Self

Question: The concept of 'God' and my relationship to it might serve as a useful analogy to what is pointed out in the non-dual teachings. For much of my life, I 'believed' in 'God'. There came a point when that belief dissolved. I cannot pinpoint a precise time this occurred. Considering the idea of God now, I realize a couple of things. One, God has ceased ever to have existed. Two, the concept 'God' is empty. It points to nothing. There is truly nothing to which it refers. Is this a useful analogy?

Could the same be said of the ego, 'I' or self? When you say it is not there, do you mean it in the same way? That it is simply and literally not there, just as God is not there, just as fairies are not there? I struggle with that because in other teachings you see this presented differently. For example, I have read that the I 'lacks inherent existence' but does exist 'contingently'. That seems to be saying something other than what the non-dual teachings say. Or are these two ways of saying the same thing?

If the 'I' is simply not there at all, is this one concept truly the only thing propping up the illusion of separateness? Wow, that would seem hard to accept. My individuality or separateness, whatever you want to call it, seems as obvious and non-conceptual as the color red.

Remember the real point of this is to know your true identity. You certainly are present. We are not talking of a vacuum or void. We are talking about clarifying what you are. That is primary. Your presence is not a speculation. It is not a philosophical proposition.

Regarding the 'I', it all depends on what your premise and point of view is on the concept. 'I' as a concept is merely one thought among others. Since what you are is not a thought, you are clearly not that 'I' thought. That is certain. If by 'I' you are referring to yourself as the

factors, separately or together, of the body/mind complex, none of them are I-myself. If none of them are 'me', then where is this elusive entity? Other than the body/mind complex, there is no other 'thing' present, in fact (objectively speaking). From this perspective, the 'I' is *not* (that is, not present at all). If you want to identify the constituents of the body/mind as 'I' and 'mine', then you need to go back and do your basic homework. I do not want to spend too much time rehashing the point that what is perceived to appear and disappear cannot be what I am. (How could it be so, when such things are seen to disappear while I do not?)

If all of the objective appearances are discarded as not 'I', then what would be left that could be a candidate for the 'I'? This is where the point is then made that the 'I', as some real objective entity, is entirely absent. As I mentioned, even the notion 'I' is only a thought. That, too, is not what you are. If this is not convincing enough, then try to find out and demonstrate that which you are prepared to call 'I myself'. Which thought, feeling, perception or sensation will you be prepared to lay hold of as your very self? The point is that none of them will do. You are left with the insight that nothing perceivable or conceivable can be what you are.

Still, you are present. That is where this turns to a positive recognition of what you are, as opposed to a discarding of what you are not. To discard the elements of the body/mind as 'not me' is only a means to discover what you are in truth. When everything perceivable and conceivable is set aside as 'not me', what remains is what this is really about.

What Will Stop the Suffering?

Question: It has been about a week and a half since I talked to you on the phone. I know it is an illusion, but I seem to float in and out of clarity. I know there is just presence-awareness. I know my mind creates a separate 'I' that causes suffering. What is the piece (peace) that I am missing that will stop the suffering? I am so tired of suffering. Can you help? Thanks for your time.

It is not so useful simply to say 'It is an illusion', 'I know this', 'I know that', etc. That is fine at a conceptual level. It is not a bad thing, but clearly is not the essential understanding of things.

See a basic point very directly. There is no coming and going from what you are. Be very clear on what I am pointing to when I say 'you'. I am talking about your existence, your being itself. You may call it being, awareness, your presence or natural state. Let this emerge in all its undeniable presence and clarity. Have no doubt about this. This is what most people miss. You simply cannot 'float in and out of' what is being pointed to. If you think you can, then look again until you see that it is impossible ever to be anything other than what you are. Even the confusion and doubts are appearances to you, who are there, all the same. You, as simple being/awareness, have not moved one iota! See this point.

Now, as far as suffering goes. What is happening? Suffering must be understood to its roots. Without conceptual thoughts, there is no suffering. Can you see this, really see this? Suffering is looking into conceptual thoughts of, by and about the 'me' image. You are not that image, because you are the one aware of the image. See this. The 'in and out' feeling is due to the interest and identification with thoughts. Why? First, because the clarity of who we are is in some doubt. Second, there is some belief that what the mind is saying about 'me' is potentially true and real. Again, why? Because there is some sense that perhaps the 'me' being presented in thought is

possibly really who I am. Seeing through this 'mechanism' will deflate all the belief in and identification with the concepts, leaving you here and now as what you are and have always been, pure presence-awareness itself, which is also peace and freedom.

These points must be understood and applied, not merely asserted as propositions for agreement or mental assent. Understand the points by looking at your experience and confirming them, through repeated investigation and looking if necessary.

You are pure peace and freedom itself. Have faith in this, your very being. Non-dual traditions tell us that there is a reality, the nature of which is ever-present being-awareness-peace—and you are that. With this insight to support you, see what you are. Be willing to challenge the habitual tendency to follow thought. Instead, see what you are, here and now, prior to thought.

Seeing What You Are

Keep in mind that the desire to ‘overcome’ the problem of suffering can easily slip into a feeling that there is something wrong with us, something yet to attain in the future, etc. Then we are left right where we started—with the feeling of being a limited self with something wrong and hoping for a time in the future when ‘I’ will be okay. There is a subtle trap in this view, which is the notion that I am a limited ‘I’ who needs something more in order to be whole and complete. Note that all of these views and assumptions are created and sustained by the mind. And there is a basic assumption hidden in the thoughts.

It is useful to step back from that line of thinking for a moment and come back to look clearly to see what you actually are. This is counter-intuitive, because the mind wants to hold on to the viewpoint of something being wrong and work on fixing things. The intention is good, but the approach is faulty. The problem is that the point of view is based on and sustains the root erroneous concept generating the problem in the first place, the ‘I’ thought.

The real issue is not to ferret out the ‘I’ in hopes of gaining freedom. The issue is really to see what you are. What is this obvious and evident presence of your being that is here right now in all of its openness and availability? You are. The mind appears as an experience. It comes and goes before you. It may create images and pictures of what it thinks you are, but can any of that be you, in fact? How can it be when those very thoughts will come and go and leave you exactly as you were before they came? Therefore, what the mind is saying is patently untrue. You are not a thought. The mind and its images do not define you at all.

It is the same with all the experiences, feelings, thoughts, images and appearances. They all arise in the presence of consciousness. You are that presence of consciousness (disregarding for the time being any distinction between ‘awareness’ and ‘consciousness’,

which is notional anyhow). Before, during and after all appearances you remain as the light of pure consciousness and being. That is without limits, without loss, utterly free and untouched. It is intimately connected with all and simultaneously free and unburdened. This positive presence of what you are is the key point to recognize. If this is glossed over, then all the other pointers just become fodder for the intellect to play with. You are the light of consciousness in all thoughts, the presence of love in all feelings, the space of clarity and openness embracing all appearances. This is the grand vision of non-duality—reality is ever-present being-consciousness-love without limits and you are that.

With this clear, we can look at other issues, such as whether or not you are a separate 'I' standing outside of this reality and if you can find any such separate one. All of this falls into place very nicely and easily from the position of seeing what you are. It is good to be firm on that basic point.

Interest and Attention

Question: I was just reading the pointers on your website, as I often do at the start of my day, and I was struck by what you write about how one never moves in and out of reality.

Yes, you cannot say 'I am not'. Even in sleep, no one will deny their being. This being or presence is what is being pointed to as your abiding nature.

Q: What creates the impression that one moves—as you point out—is that the focus shifts into conceptual thoughts, and when it eventually shifts back, reality seems to 'reappear', though of course it never went anywhere.

Exactly. Who is aware of the shifts? That presence—you—not only exists but has the capacity to know and register all that appears. The shifting of attention does not alter that in the least.

Q: My question is, what is this focus, what is this ability to pay attention to different things? It seems so crucial to this whole process, at least in terms of what is experienced on the relative level. What makes it switch from one object to another?

At a practical level, it is just interest. At that level, we are talking more about psychology than self-knowledge. Awareness or being as such is not focusing or shifting. In terms of self-identity, the focus tends to go to whatever we are assuming provides reality, identity and happiness. When this shifts to objects or concepts, the attention is out of harmony with basic reality because such appearances are not your abiding identity or reality. Lasting happiness cannot be found in objects or appearances divorced from your actual being. Lack of clear self-knowledge causes us to look for our identity in the

'I' image created in thought, together with any other concepts that are associated with that identity.

Keep in mind that this is not a 'process' of getting the attention to move in a certain direction. It is not the attention that is the problem here. This is important to see. The attention is an innocent bystander. In a sense, you are barking up the wrong tree with the question. The attention naturally gravitates toward whatever we conceive to be our self. If this is viewed as being in the mind, of course the attention goes there. But our real self is not there. This experience gives the experience of looking away from, or not recognizing, our ever-present nature. But, as you have noted, nothing is actually missing, in fact. Our true being has not gone anywhere, and it is not dependent on the focus of attention.

The resolution of the seeming difficulty is a very clear and emphatic knowing of one's identity, which is always prior to the mind. On the flip side of this, it is very helpful to clearly understand that the 'I' concept and its associated notions are not who we are. Without these basic points being clear, the interest, attention and sense of reality tend to wander in and among the concepts of mind, such that we are distracted from the clear truth of who we really are.

Q: My (apparent) suffering seems to be so much a function of attention becoming absorbed by conceptual thinking. This gives birth to the sense of a separate 'I' and sends everything spinning away.

This is getting the cart before the horse. It is putting the effect before the cause. Conceptual thinking (as I define it—that is, erroneous notions of the self) springs from and depends on the 'I' notion. It is the lack of clarity about who we are that allows the mind to conceive the notion of being a separate 'I'. This is the root notion to which the other self-referring concepts relate, such as 'I am not enlightened', 'I am stuck', 'I do not understand', 'I am not good enough', etc. The 'I' is the central and common thought. The lack of clarity about who I am allows this notion of 'I' to be believed as my identity. That belief is the driver of the interest. The interest flows through that 'I' thought, so to speak, and onward to the other concepts and images the mind has added to the root 'I' notion. If you notice, you can see that

thoughts that do not relate to the 'me' image rarely attract interest or attention. This is a confirmation that the 'I' is the cause of the fixation on concepts.

However you look at it, the cause of focus on thought (aside from purely practical causes) is seeking for our reality, identity and happiness in the mind due to overlooking our actual being. You are not a thought! The image of 'I' in the mind is not, and has never been, your actual self.

The key is to confirm and doubly confirm your true nature. With that clear, the issues of attention and interest in the mind naturally resolve. If you turn this into an issue of trying to manipulate the attention as a means to reach freedom, you will likely find it a false enterprise. Let the attention wander naturally and freely—unaltered, unmodified, uncorrected. Know yourself as the ever-present space of being and knowing in which it moves. Does the sky care which way the wind blows?

It Is a Matter of Understanding Who You Are

Question: Dear John... (This is my first ever dear John letter! Ha ha!)

Dear Claude. (This is my first dear Claude response!)

Q: I have been reading your latest book You Were Never Born. A couple of questions come up. I have been at this search for about ten years and ended up really screwing myself. I thought there was somewhere to go and, especially, some place in which to disappear. Such was my great escape plan!

It is very easy to miss the key points when merely reading about this. The problem is that we bring our own sense of identity and pet concepts into the reading. We tend to interpret what we read in terms of those preconceptions. It is like trying to get out of a self-enclosed bubble that we do not even realize we are in.

Q: The first question pertains to time. No time is needed to realize the truth, and yet if you do not see it, you do not see it!

Just about everything you are saying here I see as completely false. No offence intended. But essentially the whole discussion is framed in assumptions that are purely conceptual—time, realization as an event and the ‘me’ concept. All of these are creations of thought and have no bearing on what you actually are. The key is to not to leave the mind’s concepts intact and then try to find freedom within them. Rather, it is to see the falseness of the concepts and realize what you already are, which is entirely non-conceptual. Your present nature of being and knowing is not a concept and does not fall into the categories within which you asking the question. That is the point to see. Basically, bondage is a total illusion based on an erroneous view of who you are. The key is to clarify what you are. There is no

need to bring this matter into the framework of time, realization or the 'me'. In fact, to do so, will be a sure means of *not* seeing what is present, because you will be looking at the issue through the filter of concepts, rather than by seeing what is really true.

Q: In the case of Nisargadatta Maharaj, after seeing his guru it still took him three years to attain whatever it is he attained. So my question is: what were the three years for if access to the truth is as simple and direct as you claim it to be (and which I do not dispute)?

It is best to drop all the secondary topics and focus on what he says he understood. Since we can only know about it at second-hand, this is hard to do by reading. For example, it was much better for me to talk to Bob Adamson in person, rather than try to 'figure out' whatever it was that happened to Nisargadatta. That would be mere guesswork at this point. Basically, what anyone does who looks into this is clarify their identity and discard any false concepts about it. Since that is the gist of it, it is better to focus on this clarification than speculate about the experiences of others.

Q: Related to this first question regarding Nisargadatta, is it possible to see the truth regarding my true nature and to continue to identify with the body/mind as being self? In other words, does identification with the body/mind simply disappear upon realization, or is there a process of consciously choosing to no longer identify with it? It seems that some effort is required for the change of identity to be fully integrated.

No, it is not about choosing anything. It is about understanding what you *are*, but also what you are *not*. They go together. It is really a matter of understanding. We are living under a false notion or set of notions about who and what we are. This needs to be corrected through a direct understanding. The notion of effort is problematic because it can bring back in the unexamined and assumed notions of 'me', a future time and attainment. Understanding means seeing what is the case here and now. Such understanding undercuts the concepts rather than building them up.

The Natural State Is Not a State

Question: In the moment of becoming unaware of myself, I became aware of my stillness. I know I do not need to explain to you about the stillness. I am finding it a bit strange outside the natural state. I am trying to understand the experience of living in the state of meditation all the time, as opposed to descending into the conceptual mind.

Who exactly is it that would be living from the state of meditation all the time? And who would be coming into the conceptual mind? All there is, is present being-awareness all the time, without break or end. It is not a state. It is what they call the stateless state. Consider yourself as the basic space or ground in which, or upon which, all appears. And what appears is not ultimately different from its source. There is no duality at any time. The question is really a subtle reference to some entity or person who would be living in meditation or entering the conceptual mind. Who is such a one? If you take yourself to be such a thing, then you will be left wondering how to do this and that. If you are the ever-present basic ground of all appearances, not some separate entity, the questions, such as 'How do I ...?' slip away as non-issues.

At a practical level, the eyes are seeing; the heart is beating; life is living. It is all happening quite spontaneously and effortlessly. There is no problem, only natural functioning—because there is no concept of 'I' present. All of life flows like this. Also, the distinction between meditation and mind functioning is artificial. It all appears in your changeless presence. From the perspective of what is real, there is no difference between the states. Even stillness is a passing state in what is being pointed to. How could one ever be outside the natural state, since that is one's self? The natural state is not a state experienced by a person. The belief in the reality of the person is a false reference point and gives the appearance of various states and

experiences for that illusory person. But the person is mythical, a fabrication of thought. You are not that! Let that final root concept dissolve and do not identify with it as yourself. You are the non-conceptual reality itself.

You Are, With or Without the 'I' Concept

Question: I can see that if I see or know the mind, then it cannot be what I am. Otherwise, what is knowing it? However, I seem to be a separate person. This is not just my experience, but seems to be the same for everyone else that I know. There is a body that has traits and tendencies, and others see me as something discrete and separate from what they are. I have a name and history. I have the experience of living, of feelings and of sensations that are particular to me. When I have a headache, only I feel it, etc. It is also true that without thoughts, I am not what I think I am. But there are thoughts! Whether or not I choose them or influence them, they are there and are particular to me. Other bodies have other thoughts. Or so they say! So how can I not be a person when what is experienced is as this person? Perhaps you will say ask what is it that experiences all this? I keep asking and looking, but all that comes back is me! I experience this. I know or witness my thoughts. I feel and know my feelings. I experience my experiences. God, I wish I had never encountered any of this!

You are over-complicating things and trying to grasp the pointers at a conceptual level. There is nothing wrong with thoughts, bodies, personalities or anything else. Just see them for what they are—appearances. They are fine as is and nothing special needs to be done with them. Let them fulfill their natural functioning. On the other hand, you can also recognize the natural sense of being and knowing in which all the appearances arise. The appearances are appearances of or within that. Nothing is outside of your natural state of being and knowing. It is all part and parcel of that. Sure there is an appearance of a 'me', just like there was an appearance of a 'me' in last night's dream. But it is only an expression or appearance, not the abiding depth of things. See the 'me' as an appearance and then forget it. Why get so worked up over a mere appearance?

There is no person experiencing. The person itself is one of the experiences. What is experiencing is the non-conceptual presence of being and knowing itself. It is utterly natural and non-problematic. You say, 'I see', 'I feel', 'I know', etc. This is the crux of it. All of those things happen, but not in reference to an 'I'. The 'I' is entirely conceptual, a mind-created reference point that gets a tagged onto the natural seeing. There is not a limited entity in the mix. That is why Buddha said, 'In the seeing, let there be just seeing'. It is just awareness and functioning. The 'I' as some fixed entity is a concept posited in thought. The young child does not say 'I see'; it simply sees. The notion of a personal entity is added later.

You are, with or without the 'I' concept. How can that thought be what you are? It is only an appearance. But who is aware of that or any other concept? What is aware of a concept is not a concept! What is aware of the notion of 'I' is not an I. It is pure, natural, impersonal, awareness or presence itself. That is not a person. It is the space in which the person and all other persons and objects, including the universe as a whole, appears. Witnessing of thoughts happens, no doubt. But that is not being done by an 'I' concept. Do not label it with a pre-judgment, but be curious and explore what is the nature of the space in which thoughts appear. You will find that is it not 'you', because what you call 'you' is only another appearance in this. Pause all thoughts and get to know what is here before the next thought appears. If you say 'I', then try again! What is there before that thought 'I' appears?

Do not over-conceptualize this. It is not to be figured out as some tricky topic to understand by the mind. What is that in which the mind comes and goes and which gives rise to the mind and all else? Ultimately, the mind is only a display of that anyhow. All that appears is only an appearance of that.

What You Are Is Not an Experience

Question: You say that reality is not reducible to some special experience or event.

Yes, for what you are is not an experience. Experiences come and go, but what you are cannot be discussed in terms of objects or experiences. It would be closer to say that you are the subject of experiences. But remember that all pointers are provisional and have their limits. What is being pointed out is ever-present, ever-clear and needs no proof or defense. It is your natural being and presence, which is always in plain view and readily available for everyone at all times. What you are does not even depend on being recognized or not, as such recognition makes no difference at all to that. In the end, you just acknowledge the self-evident and inescapable fact that you are fully, finally and completely that, now and ever. The mind just settles down in the recognition that what you have been seeking is what you are, have been and always will be. Then all pointers, buts, what ifs, proofs and counterproofs simply lose their importance. Does a lump of gold need to prove or defend that it is gold? Is it something to be attained, or is it a present fact? Such is the meaning of the great sayings such as 'I am that'. It is not about an experience or recognition, but a statement of fact.

Q: You also say that a clear and direct sharing of the essential message of non-duality results in the immediate recognition of one's own true being as always present and ever-attained. Isn't this 'immediate recognition' an event, albeit a different kind of event?

The sharing is an event no doubt, but just be clear that what is being pointed to—your own innate being—is *not* an event. Be entirely clear on this. You are emphasizing the pointer rather than what is being pointed to. The term 'immediate recognition' tries to convey a difference between an ordinary recognition of something in time and

the presence of a self-evident fact. Clearly, the pointer is limited and liable to some confusion. But I would say follow the pointer and then drop it. See what is being pointed to. Then there is no need for discussion of when, how or who is recognizing this. In fact, it is not a recognition at all, but the source in which recognition and even non-recognition is happening.

Q: Getting things pointed out did not happen to a body/mind called John Wheeler till he met Bob Adamson in Australia.

It is not an event happening to a body/mind. It is the necessary and present ground in which all bodies and minds are appearing. How can there be the perception of a body without the presence of awareness or being? Again, you can make the case, which is self-evident, that an event occurred for a body/mind, in space and time. Fair enough. But before 'I' (to concede for practical purposes the identity with the body, which is actually not the true position at all) went to Australia, whatever I was, was already the case. Bob told me before I traveled to see him that I needed nothing and would get absolutely nothing, as I already had everything I needed. How right he was!

Be clear. What is being pointed to does not *happen*. Being is not an event. The awareness that registers even the seeking, confusion or belief in being a separate person—which generates all suffering—is already present. That essential presence *cannot* be framed as an event, experience or recognition. That is just the truth of it.

Q: Isn't 'immediate recognition' a different kind of event?

It feels more like this: what was ever-present, undeniable and inescapable was overlooked. It was not that it was not present, for the true self is ever-present. The basic position was pointed out and the erroneous notion corrected. Nothing was experienced or gained at all in terms of the basic truth of what is present.

You can make a case that the ignorant notion that *that* is not present was contradicted, perhaps even at a moment of apparent time. That is fair enough. But if the emphasis is then on an event, for

a person, in time, etc., it completely misses the point of it all. Forget the event, the body, the mind, the teacher, the recognition, etc. All of that is in the appearance, the illusion, the false. To focus on that is to subtly emphasize the primacy of the appearance and miss the self-evident and eternal fact that 'you are that'. From that perspective, the world, time, body, events and circumstances are only ephemeral concepts with no actual reality at all. Once people get hold of the notion of 'an event', 'a special moment', 'the recognition', 'the final understanding' etc., then all the focus goes into the desire and interest to 'get' that imaginary state, when the truth of it is that the reality of who we are is self-evident and already attained.

I strongly recommend putting the focus on the positive truth of what you already are. Then you see that all the questions and theoretical concepts are based on the subtle assumption that 'I am *not* that'. But the real position is that you already are what you are seeking. And what you are does not depend on being recognized. The recognition, if there is one, depends on your self-evident and doubtless presence, which is shining fully and in plain view right now.

The Limits of Concepts

Question: I was analyzing the existence of a separate 'I'. I understand that I am not the body nor the mind. After those, the most real thing I have is that deep sense of existence, that 'I am'. That I cannot disprove. But I do not understand why that 'I am' is not individual. Nor can I figure out if it is eternal or mortal. Can you explain it a bit? Thank you very much for your kindness, and God bless you for what you are doing to end humanity's suffering.

You bring up some interesting points. Keep in mind that the thoughts 'individual', 'eternal', 'mortal', etc. are notions appearing within the undeniable 'I am' sense. For the purpose of discussion, let us take this 'I am' sense to be what you are. (In the end, you will see even this 'sense' is not your essential being.) Any notions are clearly not what you are. They only appear at the mental level as thoughts, which arise and set *in* what you are. Notice that your presence is not a concept, but the space in which concepts appear. The key here is to see the difference between a concept and your own presence. Self-knowledge is about the non-conceptual recognition of your own true nature, not conceptualizing. Notice the difference between recognizing what you are and thinking about philosophical issues. One leads back to your non-conceptual presence, which is not speculative. The other leads you back into the mind. It is only within the mind where you deal with concepts, 'what ifs', doubts, etc.

For the purposes of what I am pointing to, any questions or responses that focus on parsing the concepts of 'individual', 'eternal', 'mortal', etc., will only have the effect of emphasizing the mind and leading to doubt, rather than clear recognition of what you actually are. So, let us not go down that blind alley. We can leave that to philosophers! Pause the labeling and analysis of the mind and have a straight look into what you are. You cannot deny yourself. Your being is a fact, not a concept. We know we are dealing with

something real, not speculative. The fruit is there for the picking, so to speak. Get to know this undeniable self that you are. That is non-conceptual, direct experience. The pointers of 'no person', 'eternal', etc. are just pointers to encourage us to look into this. They are not a reason to jump back into the mind! In truth, person/no person, eternal/mortal, etc. themselves are all purely limited concepts and not actually applicable to what you are. Strip away the labels and see what you are. Once that is clear, you can use whatever labels you choose to point to that, knowing full well that they all fall short. Such are the limits of concepts, when dealing with your non-conceptual nature.

Is Suffering a Necessary Habit?

Q: Striving, which is suffering, is unnecessary. But it appears to be a habit as long as we live. It is the way the body/mind appears to operate.

Yes, but there is an implied identification of what we are with the body/mind, which is precisely the point being questioned. Clearly, non-dual traditions point to the end of seeking, suffering and doubt. Without that, what is the use of the teachings? The notion that these go on just as before would be doubtful, and would only undermine the value of the teaching. If at the end of the pursuit of discovering our true nature, all the suffering and problems continued as before, the whole endeavor would be pointless, in my view. Various non-dualistic traditions clearly talk of the discovery of the deathless, birthless, suffering-free, pain-free nature of reality as direct experience and, in truth, our very nature. Clearly, reality—whatever we are in the deepest sense—is completely free of suffering, pain, doubt, fear, worry, etc. We should not overlook these points.

Q: Simultaneously suffering is absent; there is pure space, pure grace itself. Recognizing this throughout one's life is peace. Paradoxically, even apparent non-peace arises in and as peace. Striving melts (in no space or time) into its true self, or true reality.

Then, according to your view, the striving and suffering, in fact, end. It need not continue as a habit.

Q: I think people interested in non-duality add a layer of apparent suffering when they assume their lives will be pain-free after they see that, in truth, they arise in and as pure grace. But pain and conflict still come up! Ouch! That happens to me all the time.

It is helpful to distinguish between pain and unnecessary psychological suffering based on (optional) ignorance. Perhaps you are lumping these together. Organic pain and normal bodily and mental sensations continue, but seeking, suffering and doubt caused by self-ignorance surely must end with the overcoming of that ignorance.

Q: Why would I pursue any teaching unless it seemed to hold out the promise that I would be on 'cloud nine' all the time? For years I abused alcohol out of that same impulse. Now, life hurts but I live anyway.

This is a subtle point. Do not use this perspective as an excuse to avoid resolving the unnecessary suffering! There is no need to tolerate what is not needed. You say, 'Life hurts but I live anyway'. It depends on how you mean this. Who is this 'I' you are referring to? Is it anything other than the non-existent ego-self, which is only a phantom? If so, the statement is pure ignorance! If 'I' refers to our fundamental nature, then how and why should that unconditioned reality experience any pain or suffering whatsoever? My advice is to see the 'I' as what it is: a conceptual phantom with no substance at all. In the collapse of that concept, all the conceptual suffering tied to it vanishes along with it. Then there is no 'I' present to experience 'life hurts'. It is no longer a personal experience. All unnecessary psychological suffering is, in fact, overcome, without or without the body and its inevitable experiences.

Non-Conceptual Being Has No Problems

Question: What you are talking about is the ground of being. Nothing can be said about this! Whatever can be conceptualized in any way whatsoever misses the mark. I am dumbfounded at this juncture. The sense of 'I am' is still a subtle object in the conceptual process. The ground lies behind or beneath any experience, gross or subtle, or any definition at all!

See the 'I am' for what it is and all is well. There is no 'I' left to be dumbfounded, nor any juncture—both of which are simply imagined concepts. These concepts are dependent on the 'I am' notion. Full stop! What is wrong with right now without the concepts? Even the notion of 'ground' is a concept. But you still have not denied your essential presence. Stop. Be as you are. All is well. That non-conceptual being has no problems or worries at all. At this point, you can only suffer by stepping back into the concepts and moving out of the 'full stop'. Remember the phrase which made such an impact on Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Zen Buddhism: 'Do not alight on any concept whatsoever'. That which is present without grasping any concepts is your real nature or true presence itself. It is what you are here and now. Pause between the concepts and be willing to see what this is, instead of immediately jumping back to the mind and trading in your natural state for a concept.

Intellectual Versus Emotional Understanding?

Question: I agree that all problems, difficulties, doubts and suffering presume an entity 'I' who thinks these things are relevant to him. I am very clear that if this point of reference were missing, all of these other consequences would also be absent. I have understood and seen this for years. Where my own experience seems to disagree with you is in your claim that once understood, the belief and sense of reality drains out of the mechanism of the conceptual or imagined bondage once and for all. An intellectual seeing in my case does not seem to drain out the mechanism.

This is my difficulty. I am not sure why this is so, but I can hazard a guess. It may be because the sense of self or 'I' is not merely an intellectual construct (as is usually made out to be the case), but also has an emotional component to it. Even if there is an intellectual seeing that all problems are caused by an assumed 'I', unless the emotions also let go with this seeing, one is still in bondage. In your own case and those of some others, an intellectual seeing may have been enough to set in motion the rapid dissolution of the false assumption. This may not be generally true, however. In a sense I think writers and teachers of non-duality who provide pointers oversimplify the matter by ignoring this. They have usually practiced for years in some form or another, even though the moment of insight takes only a fraction of a second. Is there something to this?

Your comments indicate that you are still giving belief to the notion of the separate 'I'. Do not create artificial distinctions, such as emotional and intellectual seeing. Why do you even talk of intellectual seeing? This is very artificial. It is just mind stuff, really. Your statements reveal your real position on the matter, which is the belief that some people have seen this and others have not. Can you not see the continued cherishing of and belief in the person concept at work here? If so, has the pointer of no-self really been seen

through? Dividing it into intellectual and emotional seeing is a smoke screen and diversion. The bald truth is that the mechanism of bondage and belief is still active. Thoughts, feelings, beliefs and spiritual opinions are still being referenced to a supposed identity. Otherwise, for whom is there any bondage or need for liberation? In a sense, you are right in that the notion of no-self has been assented to at a conceptual level. But in point of fact, the subtle belief in its presence is being maintained. I know this from direct experience, because it was precisely my experience also. I also 'knew' for many years that that ego was the cause of all problems and not existent. But when I actually looked in my experience, the simple truth is that everything was still being referenced to that subtle assumption of the 'me'—'my' thoughts, 'my' story, 'my' problems, 'my' seeing, 'my' understanding. In spite of whatever the intellect may superficially agree with, the fact is that the ego notion is in total blossom. It can be very subtle and very humorous also. Consider the person who says 'I am enlightened'. This is an entirely self-centered thought! The ever-present real self needs no enlightenment, and there is no 'I' in it to be enlightened.

Go back to fundamentals and check out that the clear truth of no-self is, in fact, really understood. If it is, all bondage falls, regardless of whatever appears or does not appear. Belief in the 'I' is necessary for all seeking, suffering and doubt, as you know now. If any of those symptoms are present, you can be sure that the 'I' notion is being given some continued belief. Those are just the mechanics of the situation. It has nothing to do with intellectual versus emotional seeing. It has to do with actual understanding. The division into types of seeing is an artificial, conceptual distinction in which the subtle belief in a 'me' concept continues to thrive rather than being exposed.

Am I the Dreamer?

Question: It is wonderful to know that I am not the person concept, that it is, like everything else, just part of a dream, and that, rather than being that dream character, I am the dreamer dreaming the dream. It is also great that in the dream everything is possible and nothing matters. However, I feel anything but clear on what to do with this dream character! I know you are saying there is nobody there to do anything. True, there is nobody, but what remains is the dreamer, and, since that is all there is, it is who I am. And I can influence the dream. I am not sure you agree with that, but I have no doubt about it, just like I know that I can influence the dreams at night via lucid dreaming.

One way to end a lucid dream, for example, is to go to bed and close the eyes of the dream character. Is that what I should make my character do in this waking dream? Or should I meditate or have him try something else to enjoy the dream even more? On the other hand I know that nothing matters. It sounds like you think that there is something left to do in the dream. Why else would you still be active? I also have a sense that the only thing that remains to do is help those who want to remember the natural state. But if nothing matters, why bother?

The only thing that seems to matter to me in the dream is that I can see my wife's suffering through ignorance. I am torn between trying to help her (which seems to be rather painful, most of the time) and leaving her so that I do not have to see it anymore. I am serious! If this were a lucid dream, I would have left a long time ago. It is just another dream character, and there is no point in prolonging the drama when the next adventure is just a thought away. Is or is not the lucid daydream any different, once I can get myself to not worry about other dream characters? Thanks in advance for your replies. You are a good dream character!

You are missing the point of all this. It has nothing to do with dreams, dreamers, what to do, what not to do, etc. Doing happens. That is not the issue at all. The key issue is: who are you in the deepest sense? At this point, your basic identity is not really clear, and you have come up with some interesting concepts, such as 'I am the dreamer dreaming the dream'. Unfortunately this just pushes the identity from being a person in the dream to being some mega-concept, some 'uber dreamer' principle. This is only another concept, so your real identity is not being recognized. To say 'I am the dreamer' is only another conceptual identity, albeit an expanded one. But the net result does not transcend the sense of being a limited self (in this case, an expanded limited self!). For this reason, the suffering, seeking and doubts are still present, as your comments indicate. In truth, you are not any concept at all. I would suggest throwing out all assumptions and starting afresh with a deep look into what it is that you are. At least you know you are. You can start with that. Everyone knows that they are, but few know what they are. I guarantee you one thing. The clear and final answer is not 'I am the dreamer'. If you think you have found the answer with that one, look again! The essence of this is to clarify your true identity and not get it mixed up with unexamined notions and concepts.

The problem with what you are saying is that you have questioned being the waking person character. But you have only expanded the 'I' sense to the concept of being 'the dreamer', which is really no progress at all. It is like a prisoner changing his clothes and claiming freedom! No chance! Anyway, I think you get the point. Return to the question 'Who and what am I?' Self-knowledge is synonymous with genuine freedom. Do not settle for concepts, even spiritual concepts. The dreamer comes and goes with the dream, but you are something entirely different.

Awareness, Suffering and Non-Duality

Q: It is easy now to see that awareness is prior to everything else and that it is our true nature. But what is presence?

Simply another pointer to the same. Awareness and presence both refer to your natural state prior to everything else.

Q: I do exist in this moment, but when I try to pinpoint this sense of existence I cannot!

Do not make a split between 'I' and this pure existence. That is bringing in a conceptual sense of self. Of course existence-awareness is not an object. If it is not an object, why seek it? You are what you are. Full stop. Seeking brings you back into concepts. This is the basis of the confusion.

Q: I cannot objectify awareness.

Yes, you are not an object. That is the point.

Q: There is a sense of 'I am' arising in the heart center but it passes away. What remains is presence of awareness. That means that the terms 'presence' or 'being' signify that awareness is. Like awareness, our being is timeless, spaceless and bodiless. What do you think?

Yes. Whatever arises and passes is not your natural, abiding self.

Q: So I am the presence of awareness.

Yes. So simple!

Q: But disturbing thoughts continue to arise in that.

How do you know they are disturbing? Disturbing for whom? Do they disturb presence-awareness? Not at all! The mind is judging them as disturbing based on some image of the self. But the real self is not actually disturbed.

Q: There is a recognition that these thoughts are followed by self-referenced thinking. There is still some identification with an imaginary identity, so the best policy must be to look and see that no one is there.

Exactly. If no one is there, then who is disturbed? Thoughts come and go, leaving you as you are.

Q: It is just unpleasant thoughts and feelings in the body.

Even judging them as unpleasant is just a concept based on some learned evaluation. They are just thoughts and feelings. Why put the label 'unpleasant' on them?

Q: One teacher talks about the pain-body as the source of accumulated repressed feelings.

This is highly dualistic and confusing. It is pseudo-psychology. It just gets you back into mental processing.

Q: Another teacher speaks about the body as full of tensions that cause consciousness to think obsessively. He says that we are awareness but that we have to include the body as well. By being aware of the body, it starts to relax into awareness.

This is dualistic, therapy work. The body is naturally included in awareness. Tensions in the body are not the source of suffering. Do not mix up body work and self-knowledge.

Q: In your approach it seems that no special attention is given to the body. Sensations are arising spontaneously in awareness and are simply being watched.

This is the way it is naturally. If you start looking for causes and solutions in the body/mind, you are right back looking for yourself

where it cannot be found. Psychology and body work are relative. Do not confuse them with self-knowledge or non-duality.

Q: Many people, if you ask them to feel different parts of their bodies, cannot do it. So do you think it is important to develop body awareness in order to be free of suffering?

Absolutely not. The suffering is not being caused on the body level. It is caused by views and concepts of who we are.

Q: The last two months have been the most clear time I remember in the last thirty years of seeking. Your books are so helpful. Thank you.

One last question is arising. The mind is still creating separation from others. Awareness experiences duality. Is it non-duality when the mind stops creating 'me' and 'mine' versus 'you' and 'yours'?

Non-duality is not a future state dependent on your mind! Non-duality is the ever-present natural state in which the mind and all else appear. You are that reality. All that appears is only a manifestation of that one primal awareness. You are not separate from that, nor are the appearances. That is ever-present non-duality. It is not in the future. It is the natural and present state.

Q: The awareness here is like Ramana's. But I presume that the body/mind is not as pure as was his? He was peaceful. Here, the neurotic mind is still in business!

You do not really know what Ramana was like! It is all fantasy based on reading. Let the mind be. Does the sky care about the clouds and say 'the clouds are me'? Even the interest and fascination with the body/mind is showing some identification with them. Let them be and they will take care of themselves naturally. Believing your identity to be the mind causes it to be neurotic. Abide as what you are and the mind will come to its natural balance. Also do not believe any teachers without applying some careful judgment! Being a teacher does not guarantee being clear on this stuff.

Who Is Supposed to Understand This?

Question: I'm reading You Were Never Born, and I think that sometimes I understand what you are talking about. But it really is a bit confusing!

Your natural being, presence or awareness is evident. It only becomes confusing when you try think about it. Why? Because what you are is prior to thought and cannot be grasped by means of a word or concept, which is how the mind operates. Pause the thought and your own presence is clear and evident. That is all!

Q: Who is it that is supposed to understand all this? Is it 'me', this individual person or mind, this basically non-existent object in awareness? Who else is there to understand? Anyway, since presence-awareness does not write books, it seems that somehow 'you' must have gotten the understanding.

There is no need to tie the mind up in knots trying to pin this down. Awareness is self-evident and easily known, even now. Not by a 'someone'. The 'someone' idea is a concept. Again, what you are is prior to concepts. The person comes afterwards as an appearance in awareness. Awareness is prior to the notion of the 'I'. Hearing is happening; no one is hearing. Later we say 'I' hear, but that 'I' thought is not present in the hearing, only in the subsequent labeling. All experience is 'I'-less or impersonal.

Q: You once said that awareness is not aware of itself. Does this mean that our true self is also basically non-existent?

Not at all! Are you denying your own self? That is impossible. However, what you are cannot be seen as a 'thing apart', because you cannot become an object to yourself. All the problems come

from trying to conceive of your being as something objective, which it is not.

Q: Then all there really is, is a seeing or experiencing by no one? If our true self is really a no-self, more of an absence than a presence, then maybe that is why we have a tendency to overlook it!

Exactly true. You are, no doubt. But being is not a thing, which is why we overlook it and identify with an object.

Q: And this natural state, this seeing or awareness, is it really always there, shining in plain view? Yes, I can see that logically awareness must always have been present, but you also say that love, joy, peace and happiness are other terms for being and awareness, and I most certainly have not noticed much of that!

Settle in with the awareness-presence and whatever its characteristics are naturally become evident. That is already present, but overlooked. Just as being and awareness are ever-present but often not acknowledged, so is the non-suffering and unchanging freedom of your ever-present true nature.

The Issue of Evil

Question: What do you think about the notion of evil?

'Good' and 'evil' are relative, human conceptions. One person's 'good' is another person's 'evil'. The standards vary from person to person, culture to culture, and even over time for the same individual. Looking outward at relative acts and trying to categorize them according to some absolute standard of morality is bound to fail. In the highest truth, all that is, is non-conceptual being-awareness itself, nothing else. What appears is only that—an appearance. In other words, it is only an appearance of that one abiding source. From that level, there is no further discussion, as the whole appearance is conceptual, including any evaluations or judgments about it. There are no self, no others, no appearances, no actions, no standards or conventions whatsoever.

At a relative level, granting the reality of appearances, things function based on apparent causes and conditions. Sentient beings act, think and function based on biology, conditioning and circumstances. As such, no actions can be judged 'right' or 'wrong' per se. In fact, the notion of being a 'do-er' is mythical, because the 'do-er' is itself a concept. One is not doing one's thinking, any more than one is beating one's heart, for example.

However—again granting the reality of appearances—it is important to see that people do things largely motivated by their views and assumptions about themselves and the nature of reality. These views and assumptions can be relatively accurate (wise) or else erroneous (ignorant). Action based on ignorant views is out of accord with the nature of things. Spiritually speaking, the basic ignorant view is that I am a separate, limited person, a separate self divorced from the deeper reality. This is the ego notion, or the idea of separate selfhood. This false view generates needless fear, insecurity, doubt, seeking, attachment and all types of ignorant

actions based on these emotions, beliefs and attitudes. These types of activities are what are generally deemed as immoral or evil in religious terms. It is not because these are inherently good or bad, but because they stem from a fundamentally flawed understanding of the nature of reality. To summarize this in a few words, the basic standard of morality is that all thoughts, words and deeds based on the notion of false identity are 'wrong', simply because they are a result of a profound lack of understanding of the nature of the self. A better term for this might be 'inadequate'. Another way this may be viewed is by looking at such activities as 'self-centered' or selfish (that is, functioning from the reference point of the false, limited, misconceived sense of self).

For those who are not inclined to go to the root of the problem, the exoteric religions have provided some encouragement to curb these self-centered, selfish and ignorant thoughts, words and deeds. Thus you get the ten commandments of Judaism/Christianity, the five lay precepts of Buddhism and so on. In essence, a 'good' life is a life not fixated on one's self (meaning a self-less and open-hearted orientation to life). Most people intuitively sense the value of this, even if they are not 'religious'. The reason is that such a life shows the diminution of the false ego or sense of 'me'. Another standard of morality could be: that which inflates the sense of the false 'me' is 'bad'; that which diminishes the false sense of 'me' is 'good', relatively speaking. This suggests the ultimate target or aim of morality or ethics as being the transcendence of the ego or 'I' notion. Because this 'I' is a false belief, it can be overcome through clear understanding. Then all belief, attachment and fixation on this false identity is contradicted. How can there be 'self-centered' activity if there is no belief in a separate self?

In the end, you can see that 'good' and 'evil' are relative conceptions that ultimately spring from the view one has of the nature of oneself. To see oneself as a separate, limited, defective person apart from reality is the ultimate 'sin' or 'evil', simply because it is an absolute falsehood or ignorance (ignoring) of the facts. Relinquishing that notion is the ultimate 'right' or 'good', because it

uproots the basic ignorance and restores the fundamental harmony of things.

It is important to see that none of this prescribes any specific action. That would be impossible. One man may kill to satisfy his selfish greed, while another may fight in selfless service and defense of his country. One may give to charity to enhance his self-image in the eyes of others; another may do so with no thought of self at all, out of genuine concern for the other. At a psychological level, you can see that most brutal, selfish and thoughtless acts perpetuated by human beings are done by people under the influence of ignorance, fear, egotism, anger, greed and insecurity.

Questions about Awareness and Consciousness

Question: Would you say that awareness is what animates consciousness (that is, manifestation and, specifically, the body/mind)? That is, would it be correct to say that consciousness has no sentience of its own or no independent nature?

As you can imagine, words get a bit slippery when talking about what precedes words! The following points may offer some clarification of how I look at this. Awareness is the non-dual, pure consciousness which infuses the witness. When objects appear, there is a witness of them. The witness is relative to the objects. The witness and objects rise and set in that which is the source of both, which is the pure, non-conceptual awareness that remains regardless of any dualistic appearances. Keep in mind that all these distinctions are purely verbal and conceptual. There can be no objects apart from the consciousness of them. There can be no consciousness without someone for whom the consciousness appears. That pure, non-conceptual source is there regardless. Just like a wave is nothing but water, so is consciousness or the witness non-different from the source from which it arises.

Q: In your way of putting it, I am aware and present. Though there is only one substance, for the purposes of discussion, can we say that presence refers to consciousness (physical presence) and awareness is what is aware?

Presence, sense of being, 'I am', consciousness, etc., all refer to the state of knowingness appearing in manifestation. You could say 'dualistic or subject-object consciousness'. Strip away the objects and you have the subject-consciousness or witness. However that still has a limitation, feature or boundary to it. Strip away the notion of being a 'witness' and you have the pure awareness or pure

consciousness not even defined as being a 'witness'. That is the pure awareness beyond consciousness. The words are very apt to mislead, but just see the basic point. That pure awareness-potential is the energy behind consciousness, which in turn lights up the senses and mind. It is still one power, one presence, one basic awareness right through. In fact, all that appears, too, is only an appearance of that, so there is really no separation or duality, except as a concept.

Q: I do not know if I read this in your materials specifically, but there is the idea that awareness is not actually experiencing consciousness but only observing (you do call it the 'silent camera'). But if that is so, what is experiencing manifestation? Or, do we simply say that experiencing is just happening (in consciousness) but to no one, no-thing?

Experiencing is happening in consciousness, not for any person or entity. When consciousness itself subsides, what remains is the non-dual reality. That is also present before and during the presence of consciousness. One way to look at this is to think of a wave with millions of bubbles and currents in it. The wave is consciousness. The bubbles and currents are objects. Such objects have no independent existence apart from the wave. The wave must be for the bubbles and currents to exist. Even without the bubbles and currents the wave is still there. But that wave itself arises and passes. It appears on a source, the ocean. The wave begins and ends, but the ocean does not (relatively speaking). Ultimately, both wave and ocean are made of water. Water as such has no form, no limit. It is neither a wave nor even all of the waves comprising the ocean. The wave is like consciousness. Consciousness comes and goes (waking/sleep, birth/death). A very simple fact that is often overlooked is that consciousness appears as an experience, just like other experiences. Sometimes you are conscious, sometimes not. What is the presence that remains before, during and after the state of being conscious? That is the pure, unconditioned awareness for which consciousness, the witness or the subject also appears. Both the objects and the subject appear in a prior reality, which is beyond

dualistic consciousness. That is your true state or the true state (being impersonal).

Two-Thirds Enlightened?

Question: Thirty-five or so years ago I read The Wisdom of Insecurity by Alan Watts. I became a seeker of the enlightenment I was convinced lay hidden within me. I practiced meditating on the natural koan 'What am I?' for about fifteen years, before becoming fed up with my lack of advancement. One day while meditating, in frustration, I threw out everything that was not 'enlightenment', which I took to be that which is permanent. The only permanent thing left was that which was doing the throwing. I had discovered the 'I am'! The ability to find the 'I am' at will never left me, though the sensation itself distressingly disappeared whenever I otherwise occupied my mind. Then I read the book I Am That by Nisargadatta Maharaj. This reassured me that I was, in fact, on the right track. I resolved to dwell in 'I am', with a faith that the rest would be done for me. That was twenty years ago.

Since then I have been able to live knowing that the compass of 'I am' was always available to me, to keep me from getting lost. But the compass was mostly obscured by the regular drama of life. And I knew, as a veteran of 'I am', that nothing could come prior to consciousness. But the 'rest' that I assumed would be done for me was not getting done! I never gave up searching, but I also stopped believing 'it' was really going to happen for me. Then, by the bizarre karma of the internet, I found your book.

Before sunrise on August 21, 2008, lying awake before getting up, I realized that the 'I am' is just a thought, like any other. It is not permanent either! So, there had to be something prior to consciousness after all. That something is the empty stage upon which 'I am' struts. The need to continue to search evaporated. I can no longer get the 'I am' thought in the same way as before, because it no longer seems to be what is true. My mind or spirit is at peace. It is open. I still brush my teeth and pay the bills. I can still get angry or

embarrassed. I work when I should, unless I don't. But, it is no longer the same.

It is a Zen tradition to write a satori poem. In truth, I plagiarized most of it, but I think it still counts! Here it is:

Ancient Science

We walk on the land.

The land floats on the water.

The water rests in the bowl of the earth.

The bowl of the earth floats on the ocean of the cosmos.

The ocean of the cosmos rests in the bowl of time.

The bowl of time rides on the back of the elephant of eternity.

The elephant of eternity stands on the back of the boundless turtle of being.

The boundless turtle of being stands on nothing.

I am that nothing.

Postscript:

After a few days of settling down, I have found that I do not have any special enlightenment. But what a miracle is this gift of nothing! There is just a kind of freedom to do things. Psychologically, difficult things seem effortless now. The ability to concentrate on what needs to be done is significantly stronger since I do not have to worry anymore about what does not have to be done.

I am enjoying looking back over my old spiritual concepts (Taoism, Zen, Christianity) and finding in them the truth that was always at their core. I probably reek of the 'stink of Zen', but I presume it will pass as my mind accustoms itself to the regime change (i.e., there is nobody in charge).

Post-postscript:

I am puzzled that nothing seems to have really changed. I am not a better person than before. I do not have any penetrating insight into the consciousness of others, any experience of the body dropping away, or any of the other 'merit badges' of enlightenment. I still know

that 'I am' is only a vivid dream on the amazing blue screen. But in rereading Nisargadatta's Prior to Consciousness, I suspect I have missed something vital. Of course, there is nowhere else to look.

Please pardon the arrogance of all the above. Do you have a special tip for this bonehead?

The point to all this is simple. All simply appears and disappears in consciousness. This consciousness is sometimes called the 'witness' or the 'I am'. But as all good Buddhists know, consciousness itself is impermanent. It is just another empty and conditioned appearance. So far so good! If the consciousness or 'I am' itself comes and goes, then what am I in the most fundamental sense? I must be that in which consciousness appears and disappears. Or as Nisargadatta Maharaj put it, 'You are the pure awareness that knows the coming and going of consciousness'. That is the unconditioned, unmanifest, uncreated, unborn, prior-to-consciousness reality, from which consciousness appears and into which it sets. That is your original face, prior to birth, meaning prior to the birth of 'I am'. That is not a state to be reached but the ever-present space of pure, non-objective presence or being in which consciousness manifests.

Within space there is both light and darkness, but space is neither light nor dark. It contains them both. Just so, consciousness (waking, dreaming, sensing, thinking, etc.) and non-consciousness (sleep, etc.) appear in a basic space of non-conceptual awareness that contains them both. Note that in order to recognize 'I am', you must be present as the one to whom that recognition dawns. When you wake up in the morning, consciousness happens to you. What you are in the deepest sense remains regardless of the presence or absence of consciousness.

This recognition unhinges the identification with the body, mind and consciousness. It uproots the belief in the 'I' as some real entity to be grasped as oneself. This terminates the cause of suffering and annihilates all seeking, suffering and doubt. No great awakening or attainment is needed at all. Any such thing would only be another experience in consciousness. Essentially, the needless

psychological bondage simply dissipates, leaving life to unfold as it will. It is helpful to understand the mechanism of suffering. Suffering is conceptual in nature and is driven by a belief in the separate 'me' and identification with that root concept (and all the other concepts that have been arbitrarily added to it). Clarifying one's real identity pulls the plug on the whole production. The ever-present clarity, peace or fullness that was never really lost is reclaimed as the natural condition of what is. By no means does all the suffering, seeking and doubt carry on as before, because all those things are sustained by the belief in the fictitious sense of self. How can the empty-clarity of the unborn prior-to-consciousness state be a limited, separate, defective person in the appearance of things? And how could any belief continue to go into that concept once it is seen through?

As you are aware, there are many ways and means to maneuver one to this basic self-knowledge. Nisargadatta's unique approach is to point out the ever-present nature of the 'I am' or consciousness as your identity and have you stabilize there, only to pull the rug out from underneath your feet by dismantling that experience or concept as well. What is left is what was always here but overlooked, the aware, space-like, 'no thing' of one's true nature, which is utterly unconditioned and un-patterned. Some call that 'non-conceptual awareness', but any word must fall short. How can there be an adequate word for that which precedes consciousness itself? Still, some pointers are offered. Huang Po said:

*This pure mind,
The source of everything,
Shines forever and on all
With the brilliance of its own perfection.*

Lin Chi said:

*Tao is the mind's innate purity;
Dharma is the mind's bright radiance;
Buddha is the pure light
Pervading everywhere without hindrance.*

These are all descriptions of your natural and ever-present state. You are the unconditioned, unborn and undying source from which consciousness and all else emerges. As such, there is no need to feel that you have missed something vital. Who? Your own mind is the Buddha. Everything else is simply an ephemeral concept passing in this clear light of the 'one mind'. You are that. So, full stop—and enjoy the view.

Q: Thank you so much for your penetrating answer. If I judge by my behavior, which is more certain than feelings, I have stopped needing to seek. I do not believe in the suffering that is arising, but I do have some doubt. So let us call it a two-thirds breakthrough.

My doubt is not a question of the truth of my realization, but only its depth or completeness. I think this needs to go into the crock-pot of daily life to burn for a while. For now, I am going to follow your final pointer: enjoy the view.

A two-thirds breakthrough for whom? 'Your' realization? Hogwash! Dispense with all these erroneous notions, which are no doubt holdovers from the 'stink of Zen' days! It is these very concepts that are the trouble at this point. Without grasping such notions, what is wrong with your present true nature? One's own mind being the Buddha is not good enough!? 'You are that' does not equal being two-thirds of that! The hang up is only giving some continued belief to the presence of a separate someone, the assumed self idea. Who is even present to be two-thirds realized or whatever? If there is no 'I', then who needs to, or can, be realized? The talk of realization is only a carrot for the ignorant. The wise drop all notions of bondage and liberation. As the *Diamond Sutra* says 'Develop a mind which alights on no concept whatsoever'. Without alighting on any notions at all, the clear, vivid presence of the true nature stands revealed in all its immediacy and glory —now. Doubts are only thoughts appearing in this ever-fresh, non-conceptual awareness. Doubts make a subtle reference to the 'me' whom they are about. Look for the 'me' and you will find it entirely absent. All there is, is this ever-fresh, non-conceptual awareness, here and now and ever.

Q: Wow! Brutal! And right on target. My first impulse was to compose something that would earn your approval. That would hurt me and insult you. So I spent much of today chewing. My mind has been conditioned by many years of enlightenment stories. It has a firm model of how it should work. Reality not matching the model naturally raises doubts. It should not surprise me that my mind, having lost its firm footing, is in a panic to regain its equilibrium. There are many doubts frantically rushing this way and that. They are just thoughts, as you say. Also, I have held to the identity of being a seeker for a long time. Without the doubt, this seeker has no more noble work to do!

Meanwhile all three-thirds (!) of my life are rolling forth out of nothing. It is not my accomplishment, not my responsibility, not my problem. What to do with it? Anything, it seems! No effort, no virtue required; no scorecard, no nobility. I will just have to wave the doubts through. Perhaps they will tire after a while. Thank you for the sledgehammer. Ouch (in a good way).

I was not meaning to be harsh, only challenging a few notions. Your being is perfect, whole and complete as is. The notion of some grand enlightenment is only that—a notion. Remember, Buddha said, ‘By complete unexcelled enlightenment I attained nothing’. This is literal truth. We have read this kind of thing of course, but usually fail to see that these are literal statements. It is very important to see that statements like ‘I am two-thirds realized’ or ‘I am working on my realization’ are nothing more than a conceptual fantasy for an entity—the assumed self—for whom this concept applies. That notion thrives by the continued treasuring of such notions. Who precisely is it who is two-thirds realized? Who is working on the realization? One of the key points of all this is that the self is completely mythical. This conceptual mechanism needs to be thoroughly exposed, because in truth this is what keeps the suffering, seeking and doubt in spin. Instead of following such thoughts and granting them any reality, it is better to turn them around and look right at the supposed person to whom the concept applies. Where is this entity? A little bit of looking shows it is nothing more than a vaporous assumption. There is no self present at all. If we think there is, we need to really look and

confirm its absence. Without this, the root of suffering is simply not being addressed.

If you look at a statement such as 'I am two-thirds realized', what it really means is that I am some being who is not yet whole and complete, in other words, a separate self. This is a complete contradiction to the basic message of non-duality (Your nature is the Buddha). Toss aside all concepts. One very important point to realize is that there is no enlightenment in the future because time is, strictly speaking, a mental concept. How can there be freedom in an imaginary place called the future? Drop the whole framework. Look into your present nature and see what this is now. You need not attain what you are, but it is necessary to be clear on what you are. What you are, even now, is not a body, mind, personality, 'I' concept or anything else that is perceivable or conceivable. This vivid, undeniable presence of empty, non-conceptual awareness that remains must be what you are right now. Therefore, drop all concepts, including—and perhaps most importantly—all spiritual concepts.

That is why Buddha said that the 'dharma' must ultimately be discarded. It is the proverbial raft that must be left behind when the other shore is reached. The other shore is your undeniable true self. The key now is to let go all self-defining concepts. This is the state in which 'the mind alights on no concept whatsoever'. That mind which alights on no concepts is your fundamental nature, not as a future attainment, but as a present fact. Without any grasping for concepts, what is revealed here and now as the natural condition is this radiant, empty, knowing presence of the non-conceptual true nature that you are. As one of the Zen masters said somewhere, 'It is a pure, silent joy'. You are this. So, full stop. Notice that any turning back to thought brings you no closer to being what you already are. My sword swipes were not aimed at you. They were only to sever any lingering tendency to grasp onto any conceptual positions at all. What you are is not a concept and needs no further attainment. Hear this message directly and deeply: You are already what you have been seeking. Once you have 'reached' this, any movement from here only takes you away from the natural state and apparently back

into the concepts. These are only based on the presence of a phantom self-entity that has never been present in the first place.

You Are Life Itself, Not an Aloof Witness

Question: I have been a spiritual seeker for a long time and have been reading a lot about non-duality. My understanding now is that in the present moment I see everything as an illusion on the background of the unknown. Things keep rolling by, and I have no choice. However, there is a subtle sadness that I am not able to participate in things I see around me. Other people are gossiping, talking and having fun! For me, it is a silent being that is quiet and embracing whatever is happening. The ego involvement is totally absent, but with it also a sense of sadness that I am not participating in life. I do not seem to be going after anything, which generally leaves me to myself. So there is a deep aloneness that is felt. I do not mind this at all, and in some sense I enjoy it. However, I find this position useless at my workplace, where a lot of interactions and noise are the norm. Could you please give your comments?

You have some basic understanding of things, yet doubts and confusions are still in play about your actual identity. You talk about 'the unknown', 'silent being', etc. But the real point is: do you know your true nature as it really is? Your comments go on to reference a sense of 'me' or 'I' ('I am sad', 'I am not going after anything', 'I am not participating', 'I have no choice', etc.) This is still giving a reality to the ego notion and your identity as that presumed person. Therefore, it is not fully accurate to say, 'The ego involvement is totally absent'. My sense is that, even though there is some intuition about 'silent being', etc., your true nature is not as precise and clear as it could be. Thus, the doubts and confusion continue. The lingering tendency to associate the doubts, feelings and actions with a sense of 'I' means that the 'I' thought is still being given some reality. Go back to the basic points. Who and what are you? What is the nature of this undeniable self that you are? This is first and foremost and must be completely clear.

The tendency to associate experiences with the reference point of a separate 'me' needs to be examined. Who or what is this 'I'? Is it real? Is it present as anything other than a notion? As long as this conceptual 'I' is given some belief, the root of suffering, seeking and doubt thrives. When the 'I' is examined and found as totally non-existent, then thoughts, feelings and experiences are no longer personalized. The natural state of your true being simply stands as it is—unveiled.

This natural self that you are is by no means a silent, aloof or distant witness that is disconnected from life and events. That is a pointer that may be used at some point, but needs to be discarded eventually, like all concepts. What you are is life itself, most intimately connected and unified with all that appears. Do not settle only for a spiritual concept about who and what you are. What you are is beyond activity and silence, or any other dualities. You transcend yet embrace them all.

Do-ership and Time

Question: To my understanding, consciousness is and does whatever it is going to do. The seeming 'I' perceives consciousness through the body's limited senses and claims authorship not a perceived event, thinking 'I did that'. Am I correct in this description of the illusion so far?

Yes, the seeming 'I' is the point. The 'I' does not really exist, except as a concept. Doing happens, but there is no doer of the deed, as Buddha and others have said.

Q: If correct, and I being not the 'doer' of the event but rather a plagiarist claiming doer-ship, how am I able to plan an action for Saturday that, in fact, occurs on Saturday?

It is not that the 'I' is not the doer. It is that the 'I' is only a concept and, ultimately, not present. There is no 'I' to be a doer or non-doeer. You are making the mistake of bringing back the concept into the equation. If there is no 'I', how can you say 'How am I able to plan?' Can you see the mix up? You are negating the 'I' concept but then referring to it again! This is the problem. Leave the 'I' concept off the table. Seeing is happening; thinking is happening; decisions are happening; planning is happening. It is all going on quite naturally and effortlessly, without any need for an 'I' concept. It is that simple.

Q: I understand the words at least, that there is no future and all is now, but I do not understand it enough to make sense of the seeming fact that planned events can actually occur later.

Time, like all else, is an appearance in consciousness. Time appears, but did you ever leave the 'now'? Time itself is a mental concept, but so is everything that appears. The main issue is to see the 'I' itself as a concept, a construct of thought. Like time or any

other appearance, it may have some relative merit in the appearance of things. But what you are is not an appearance. Your real being is the 'I'-less, timeless, ever-present radiance of non-conceptual being-awareness, completely evident and inescapable.

Awareness, Waking and Dream

Question: I can be aware of presence-awareness, or my natural self devoid of the 'me' character, in the waking state whenever there are no thoughts going on. But it is not possible in the dream state. In the dream state, I am completely identified with the dream and nothing else, even though that registering (consciousness) is present. What is that non-complaining registering in dream state? Is that also the same presence-awareness? It just registers without complaining or judging like I experience in the waking state. But it is not aware that it is sleeping and dreaming. I do not know that I am sleeping or dreaming. In the waking state, I know that I am dreaming. I consider this waking state to be another dream. Also, in dreamless sleep I am not aware of the presence-awareness either. But there is that bliss no doubt. I do not even know I exist. I am not aware that I am sleeping in deep sleep.

You are overcomplicating this by introducing a 'you' concept into the equation. Your natural being is present and aware, here and now. It is not that there is some 'you' and then this other thing (being or awareness). Even the notion that 'I am aware of it' is only a concept appearing in what you are. The 'I' is purely a concept. It is clear that you are present in waking, dream and sleep. There is no doubt or problem with that. That is signed, sealed and delivered. There is no change in that; no problem in that. It is not something of which 'you' become aware. That is entirely conceptual and based on conceiving yourself as something apart from your being. The whole 'problem' is conceptual and delusive, because it is granting some separation from the non-conceptual being-awareness. You are not a separate someone to be aware of being at some times and not others. You are the pure being itself. This being or awareness has no need to become aware of awareness. You are the awareness itself. It is that

clear, rock-solid presence here right now that cannot be denied or contradicted. You cannot say 'I am not'. So, full stop in this moment.

Notice that there is no problem with the fact of your being. The problem is only sustained by returning to the mind and its conceptual frameworks. If you look carefully, the assumption behind the mind's problems is that there is a 'you' and then there is this 'thing' called being-awareness. This initial assumption is what the rest of the doubts ride upon. Once you grant the assumption of the 'me' as a real, independent entity, then there arise other difficulties. But they are all delusive because the root assumption is false.

The 'I' notion merely appears in the undeniable presence that you are. So, instead of trying to solve the conceptual problems, examine the root notion driving them. Is it true that you are a separate someone apart from pure being and knowing itself? You say, 'I am not aware in sleep'. That is because the 'I' thought is not present, not to mention the mind and senses! Still, you are there to register that fact. That which knows that you are not aware in sleeping is the awareness! It is not a personal, dualistic experience and cannot be grasped by the mind at all, because there is no mind or sense of 'I' in that state. Still, you cannot deny your being in sleep. After all, you were there to have a sound sleep! In truth, waking, dream and deep sleep all rotate within the constant presence of non-conceptual awareness. You are that.

Two Presences?

Question: I have found your last book almost by chance, after having spent the last three years enquiring into the question 'Who am I?', as suggested by Ramana Maharshi. Your book resonated fully, to the point that the question dropped almost instantly.

Yes, there is something here that remains regardless of a question or lack of a question. In other words, whether thought appears or not, you are present. Your own being and the knowing of all that comes and goes cannot be denied. This is what is being pointed out as your actual self.

Q: What is left now is not easy to put into words, but I will try. I hope you might comment or evaluate.

Whatever the words, they can only be approximations and pointers. You are not a word!

Q: There is a kind of double presence here.

Whatever this might be that you are talking about, it is not you. If there is a double presence, you are still aware of that and transcend it.

Q: One presence is always here. It feels, physically speaking, perceived right in the back of my head. It is non-local.

What you are innately is not an object and has no dimension or location in space or time. How can something not objective be referenced in terms of space or time? When did you begin? Where did you begin? Such assertions can be made only if there is an association of what you are with the body or mind. This is not any particular commentary on the body and mind. They are fine as is and

function naturally according to circumstances. But they do not constitute your abiding essence.

Q: This presence is entirely disengaged (on the emotional level) from whatever happens. No matter what the content, the presence is felt as a vast background. It is rest and peace. It feels tender; it feels like home.

Yes, but do not treat this as some 'thing', some grand presence apart from you. You are only describing what you are. If you talk about it in terms of how 'it feels', then you are one thing and it is another and the subtle sense of separation is maintained. This is the notion of a separate individual, which can be looked into to see if it is really present at all.

Q: This presence I am speaking of is here, though only if I disengage myself from external activities. The impression is that 'that' is totally lost in the so-called activities.

Here is where you go astray. 'I' who? Is your own presence, your own consciousness nature only there when some mythical entity does or does not do something? How could that be? Broaden the view and re-examine the perspective. Being is. Being is present and aware. You are this. It is what all appears within. No activities alter this primordial fact of experience. If you take the separate 'I' notion as real, then it may give the (false) impression that what is real comes and goes. But realize that the assumption is false. You are not an 'I' apart from reality, but are the real itself.

Q: When 'that' is lost there is again someone doing things, acting out his persona in the very common way as everyone else.

So it seems! But did you ever find this 'someone'? Have a look. Seeing is happening; not someone seeing. Just seeing. It is all a manifestation of consciousness, which cannot be there without you. So you can see, nothing is ever wrong. You have never left your being. Only the false notion of the 'me' appeared and was assumed as true. However, even that 'me' notion arises and passes in the knowing-being of your actual nature.

Q: I suppose I am saying these things out of habit, from the times when I used the repetition of 'Who am I?' as a means to get back inside myself. I feel it is not enough just to do nothing and remain absorbed in the pure presence-awareness.

This is not about an 'I' getting absorbed in presence-awareness, but finding this undeniable presence-awareness to be your natural and ever-present state. Again, the trouble comes from introducing the separate 'I' notion into things.

Q: I feel lost in this sense of non-doing, as if something else should be done.

This only applies if there is someone present to do or not do. Again, the 'I' thought! See that you are not this thought, but the pure awareness itself. You have never been anything apart from this.

Q: I know this is only mind stuff. Everything is already perfect as it is, but it is not lived yet.

By whom? Again, the 'I' notion! All these concepts are always dependent on that assumption!

Q: Your work seems to me of immense value.

All I am doing is pointing to your ever-present natural state. See it, and you see everything that I know. There is no you or me there, only pure being-awareness. You are that, only that.

Ending the Search

Question: I have been studying Buddhism for some time now and am stuck. Through readings I have come to know many concepts and ideas about the self, but I feel like all of that is useless. I do not understand the point of reading books or practicing, as I feel that all of that is just in the mind. In order for suffering to dissolve, I must go beyond the mind. Everything I say and do when discussing this topic also points to the idea that I am searching for something, when in fact I know that it is this very searching for the end of suffering that will make it impossible to be free from it. Even with this knowledge, though, I find it difficult to end the search. Any words of wisdom?

You say, 'In order for suffering to dissolve I must go beyond the mind'.

This contains the whole issue in a nutshell—both the problem and the solution. The statement implies you are an entity—a self or 'I'—at the level of the mind. This is a basic summary of the root cause of all suffering. The cause proposed in the statement does not hit on the clear and direct solution. Why? Because it keeps the conceptual 'I' and the identification with it in play. It also assumes this 'I' will find its freedom 'when' it goes beyond the mind. This is an exercise in futility because the 'I' concept, the assumption of being a separate self, is a product of the mind. It is like the pot saying it will go beyond the clay of which it is made.

You need to re-examine the fundamentals and identify the flaw in the assumptions. Instead of assuming you are a limited 'I' and then trying to do something from that position, have a good look at what you really are. Are you the mind? The body? A concept? Any 'thing' at all? Buddha already nailed this down long ago. None of the elements of the body/mind, up to and including consciousness, are my self. Still I am. I am, even though I am not any of the body/mind elements. The same case goes for you. You already are your true

nature, but you may only need to confirm this and have no doubts about it. What are you, if you are not the body/mind and its products? To cut to the chase, all of those things appear in an undeniable presence of awareness.

Buddha speaks of consciousness as being transitory. Yes, that is true. But that very consciousness generated by the senses and mind in their functioning is still experienced by you. This 'you' is what I call non-conceptual awareness itself. This is what you are. This is what all the sages and traditions are pointing to, each in their own way—you. What you presently are. Non-conceptual awareness is inherently free of the body/mind and all appearances in duality. A good analogy is the sun shining in the sky. It is inherently free and untouched by the clouds, the wind, the rain and all activities on earth. It does not have to attain this status, because this is its nature. Similarly, your nature is simply what it is—present and aware. In some traditions this is called space-like awareness, cognizing emptiness, the clear light, empty awareness and so on. Keep in mind that these are pointers to your present nature, not to a state to be attained. You are this right now. The real solution to any conceptual problem is to make sure your real identity is clear. The real question is not so much 'How do I?' but 'What am I?' Our only (apparent) bondage is taking ourselves to be something we are not (a separate, limited self in the appearance of things). The solution is having a look to see what we are—and always have been. Many pointers are used to point to this and many more can be created, but basically it is what you are prior to any concepts. I call it pure, non-conceptual awareness or being. It is so simple, evident and clear that we tend to dismiss it and overlook what is being pointed to.

How Do I Recognize What is Prior to Consciousness?

Question: If consciousness is an experience, then what do you call the cognizing of consciousness? Isn't that 'awareness' or 'consciousness' of consciousness? How does this even get cognized since consciousness is needed to 'be there' for it to happen? This is really hard! I have no 'consciousness' of the state prior to consciousness, which is logical as consciousness has not arisen yet. Yet you state there is a 'me' that exists prior to the arising of consciousness. How do I recognize this prior state and is it even possible, given that I need to be conscious to recognize (be conscious of) it, whereas you say consciousness occurs to it?

All that is perceivable or conceivable is an appearance in consciousness. That is fairly straightforward. Basically, only if you are conscious is there any other experience. Consciousness itself is a state. You are not 'conscious' in any ordinary sense in deep sleep or while sedated. Consciousness itself is an appearance to (or in) what you are. Sometimes you are conscious; sometimes you are not.

Let us drop consciousness as variable factor also. What this is pointing to is the 'you' part of it. Note one thing for sure. You are already whatever you are. There is no doubt about that. It gets hard to talk about that prior-to-consciousness nature, due to the limits of words. All you can really do is point. A lot of the pointers are negations—timeless, spaceless, formless, unborn, unconditioned. These pointers are useful because they have no content.

Now when it comes to the issue of consciousness, there is a consciousness of objects, but there is also an awareness of the fact of being conscious. This is a subtle point. When you become conscious of being conscious, you are taking your stand in the

source from which conscious emerges. To be conscious of consciousness, you must have some stand beyond it. I sometimes bring in the term 'non-conceptual awareness' as a—hopefully—clarifying pointer. Or I sometimes say that you are aware of the coming and going of consciousness. The language makes it sound complicated.

These are ways, approximate ways, to attempt to point to the real nature of what you are. It is not strictly necessary to parse all this out to the '*n*-th' degree, because clearly all of this is purely at the level of language. Just see that what you are is that undeniable presence beyond any of the mind's concepts, even the concepts of 'I am'. Before that notion of 'me' appears, you are there as the one to whom it appears.

The point is not to think this out (which would put the accent back on the concepts) but 'full stop'. Pause the conceptualizing and get the immediate sense of the undeniable awake and aware presence itself.

What Do I Do Now?

Question: I never in my wildest dreams imagined what could happen from listening to you. What do I do now? Self-enquiry? I admit that I was terrified when it happened. I guess it was like dying, although how can I say that unless I have lived through the act of dying? It is like I have spent thirty-eight years climbing a tall structure one floor at a time. I am on floor ninety now, and suddenly I see there is no structure. There is no building, no spars, no girders, nothing at all. How did I get here? What is keeping me up, and what comes next if there is nothing to climb?

It also became clear that your talking was orthogonal to this, like it was not causally related. I felt like you could have spoken in Greek for all that it mattered. What was happening was not precipitated by your words but something else, like an undercurrent. The words were leaves floating on the river, and the river was seen to be the thing happening, not the leaves (words).

It is like a moth to a flame. I feel like it will kill me somehow, but I still go for it. My questions about the lack of consciousness in deep sleep became meaningless. It is not even like I had an answer. The question itself was gone and became less relevant than a speck of dust. All questions were gone, annihilated. I do want to keep at this. I do not think there is a choice in this matter. I feel like it is an inevitability. What do I do now? Will I still be interested in playing guitar? That was my whole life until this point. Do you think I should practice self-enquiry? I am really at a loss in terms of what comes next.

The mind may come up with all types of interpretations and commentary about 'what next?' Let things settle a bit and be somewhat bland towards these initial reactions. You will find that this is pretty basic and ordinary after all. Essentially, life goes on just as before, but simply without the sense of personal seeking and

suffering. The questions like 'What do I do now?' are conceptual in nature. They are based on a reference that I am some independent 'I' in the appearance of things. You ask 'What should I do? Self-inquiry?' Well, first of all make sure which 'I' you are talking about! Notice that all these notions make reference to oneself as some separate independent 'I'. But this is the notion that has been exposed. This is not what you are at all. So who is asking? Who is doing? See through the concept. What do you do when you are already what you are seeking? In terms of everyday life, things come up to do or not do based on circumstances. Do what needs to be done naturally in the moment without bringing in the 'I'-focused labeling. Life goes on quite naturally, even effortlessly. The 'I' notion is a concept. See the concept as a concept, and life finds its expression through you. There may be a lot of activity and engagement. It makes no difference to your natural state.

This understanding removes the needless conceptual bondage. It is no ban on activities or natural interests. One still needs to eat, sleep and follow one's natural interests and activities. Why not? There is nothing wrong with any of it. It is no longer in reference to the fictitious, limited reference point of a defective 'me'. Life flows from the position that there is nothing wrong with you any longer. This does not render life's activities meaningless by any means. They still have whatever practical meaning they have at the level of appearances. A judgment such as 'Things are meaningless' is a mental concept added on by the mind. The events are neither meaningful nor meaningless in and of themselves. They appear to have whatever practical use they may have. Nothing of use, value or meaning is lost. The unnecessary suffering and limitation in the mind is removed. It is not so much about 'What do I do now?' as it is living life and enjoying things moment by moment without the burden of seeking, suffering and doubt. All of your native talents, interests and abilities are present. Life goes on, but it is no longer lived through the network of erroneous self-centered beliefs.

It Appeared and Disappeared

Question: I have a question for you. You have said that once the truth is seen, once it is known through non-conceptual, immediate experiencing that there is no separate 'I' or self, then it is over.

This is putting the accent on the negative side of the equation. I recommend emphasizing the positive truth of your being. That is what this is about, really. That does not begin or end, because it is ever-present and is beyond doubt. Turning this into some experience of overcoming the 'I' is putting the focus on the mind. That is turning this into another attainment, so it is back in duality. Look at and speak of the positive truth of what you are. Then the other pointers have their proper place in the picture. They are secondary points emphasizing your ever-present, natural and doubtless freedom—not yesterday or tomorrow, but now. What you are doing here is subtly keeping the focus on the concepts, not your natural state or real nature.

Q: From here it seems that there are no more questions, no more seeking, no more self-centered reference point in that which is appearing in the impersonal awareness that I am.

Where are the questions about the fact of your being? Where is the need for seeking that? Where is the self-centered concept in that which is not and has never been a concept or a separate being at all?

Q: The very fact that I am about to ask another question means that in this moment I find myself in a contracted state of self-centeredness, which of course is appearing in the impersonal being-awareness that I undeniably am.

Are you speaking from the position of awareness? Drop the question and what is present? See that the interest in the question is still putting the accent on the mind and overlooking the innate, ever free and doubtless being or knowing.

Q: Before I ask the question, let me give you some background.

Here follows an interesting tale spun up in the bright, clear, presence of the immaculate spacious awareness itself! How many thoughts or experiences can you have without your aware presence? Full stop in the immediate recognition that everything you are seeking for is here right now. We are not interested in thoughts and concepts, but the immediacy of non-conceptual presence-awareness that cannot be denied in this moment.

Q: A number of years ago, there was a spontaneous and unexpected dropping of the sense of a separate self. (This can only be said in retrospect based on what has been read, heard and remembered since that time.) This experiencing of pure presence, pure awareness lasted for about a month.

What!? Your being and your awareness only lasted a month? Pure awareness is not an experience and cannot be experienced. It is—timelessly.

Q: As mysteriously as it appeared, it disappeared!

Utterly impossible. You were not present between then and now? It must have been a strange life happening with no existence or awareness present! That which registered the thought 'It disappeared' is the timeless awareness, the real awareness I am talking about.

Q: Not until it seemed to be gone, did I start to wonder and question what 'that' was.

'I' who? You were still present as that doubtless knowing and being! Whatever you were conceiving as the pure presence, was not the actual presence. The mind got into the act and started to dominate

the proceedings. But the mind can never know presence-awareness because it is only an appearance in it.

Q: There have been several other such experiences since then, equally unexpected, equally spontaneous, equally unforgettable, although lasting for no more than a day.

This is a confusion of the real facts. How can unconditioned being and knowing go anywhere? Did you actually disappear at any time, based on direct experience—not what the mind was saying?

Q: It is completely clear that there was absolutely nothing that I did (or could do) to make any of that happen.

Awareness does not happen. It is timeless and always present as the necessary and inescapable ground of all things which happen or are experienced. Of course nothing you did played a part, because the 'you' is only a concept! Happening was happening, as always.

Q: After the experience happened, the sense of a separate self reappeared to try to analyze what just happened.

The separate self is a non-existent phantom. At best it is a dead thought construct. I am not sure how a phantom or dead image can do anything.

Q: What has been seen (in retrospect) is that during the experiences there was no one to question what was happening. Only when the sense of self was back, were there questions.

Exactly. But where is this self actually? The assumption of the 'I' appeared, one among other concepts. But did an actual separate self come into existence? In other words, did you actually become anything other than the being-knowing presence at all?

Q: Now I understand that an experience is merely an appearance arising in awareness and that I am not the appearances (in this case

the experiences). But instead I am the impersonal awareness in which appearances or experiences arise. This is clear.

Fair enough. But it is not 'I' which is the awareness. Awareness is. 'I' is a notion. Drop the 'I', which is only a thought anyhow. I am just underscoring the caution not to turn this into some attainment for the 'I' entity. For the record, experiencing is only the awareness itself. Each experience is only a pure moment, so to speak, of presence—without any notion of subject or object.

Q: What was apparent from those experiences is that the sense of a separate self spontaneously vanished and all that remained was this impersonal, impartial awareness of whatever was happening or unfolding with no boundaries, no constraints.

This is exactly how it is every moment. Why? Because the separation from the source has never happened.

Q: Clearly nothing was lacking. There was no one to lack anything. Everything was perfect exactly as it was; what was so utterly ordinary was extraordinary in its ordinariness; and what had been seen so many times before seemed as though it was being seen or experienced for the very first time.

This subtly turns it into an experience for someone in time. See this false concept. There is no 'I'. It never happened. Life is an unfolding in the awareness. Seeing this now is the end of the game.

Q: There was no ownership of or identity with anything including a body or mind (that is, there was no one to own or identify with anything).

Who is there present to do anything?

Q: Amazingly, everything carried on as normal (actions, conversations and so on), but there was no sense of anyone doing any of it.

How could there be, without any sense of a separate 'I'? This is the normal, natural and ever-present way it is, even now.

Q: My description of those experiences does not even begin to capture what was actually happening. Now for my real question!

Only if there is a 'my' will there be a question!

Q: Why does the sense of imaginary self, which clearly only exists in thought and arises in the very awareness that I am, keep coming back?

How can something non-existent come back? It is only an idea. If you are willing to play the game of believing in something that is not there, what can one say to that! The practical answer is that you are still giving some bit of belief to the notion. See the imaginary self as not present and how can such a thought bind, even if it appears?

Q: Why the fascination with the imaginary self or its imagined existence?

Lack of confidence in being what we are causes us to look for identity in concepts. Be clear on the positive truth of what you are. You are not a concept. Know this for certain.

Q: Having asked the questions, it now seems ridiculous to ask 'Why?' What comes to mind is 'Why not?'

Why not see what is going on and be done with the whole production—now?

Q: I am not really sure what my question is except to say that there continues to be a real fascination with the conceptual (and that too is an appearance arising in being-awareness).

It comes from looking for reality, identity and happiness in concepts due to doubt about who and what we are. That is why it is better to focus on your real nature at this point. Do not just glimpse it, but see it, taste it, enjoy it in all its fullness. You are the timeless, unconditioned, ever-present non-dual reality here and now.

Q: You say the answer lies in immediate non-conceptual recognition of being-awareness.

There is never a question or doubt about that, even now. The doubt only comes from looking away from the doubtless. This is not a recognition for someone, but only the straight out seeing that this is what is present.

Q: There is a strong resonance with this pointer, as long as it is not conceptualized.

Awareness can never be a concept. The word 'awareness' is not the awareness. Who is present to conceptualize, if awareness is all there is?

Q: Sooner or later, though, the fascination with trying to figure this out appears in awareness and the apparent suffering—also arising in awareness—ensues because it is always an endless pursuit, a bottomless pit resulting in frustration and agitation.

Now you are seeing it. That is the beginning of the end. You will never find water in a mirage; nor will you find your real nature in the mind. Seeing this, really seeing it, the game is up.

Q: There appears to be no argument here when you say 'The answer is not in the mind' or 'You cannot find or understand what you are. You can only be what you are'.

I am saying it, but you need to see it and know it beyond any doubt, not just resonate with it and agree with it. Stay with the positive truth of your being. Non-duality means there is reality and you are that. The interest in the mind's concepts is only from overlooking that point. See how you do with this. See what I am saying and the basis for all doubts is annihilated at the root.

(Follow-up)

Q: Thank you for the clarity of your response. While everything you wrote makes perfect sense, these pointers have really stuck. I was

very amused by the truth of your statement in response to my saying that the experiencing of pure presence-awareness lasted for only a month. The absurdity of erroneous thinking is hilarious when the truth is pointed out! Thank you!

You have all the basics you need at this point.

Q: Yes, I do have all the basics. In probing the 'doubtless', there has been much clarity about my real nature. Again, there is much gratitude for your shared insight and clarity.

It is nice to see you digging into this stuff and working through it for yourself. In doing this, the seeing becomes your own seeing, your own knowing, your own being. That is all it takes—simply a little bit of honest looking at the facts. You cannot escape the fundamentals of who and what you are if you are interested to look. You are doing this, and the confirmation is your own direct understanding of being what you are. If you are what you are seeking and the separation from source never happened, then the basis of all seeking, suffering and doubt is undermined. It was only sustained by the energy of belief going into the mind through that root concept, the thought 'I' or 'me'. Without that, you must remain as you are, which is effortless being-awareness-peace, ever-present and untouched by whatever appears. What appears is only a display in, on and of the one essence. Non-duality means you are not separate from the source or reality. It also means the appearances are not separate from the reality. 'All there is, is self-shining, ever-present, non-conceptual presence-awareness, just this and nothing else. There is nothing other than this'. That is a quote from one of the traditions, and it is a good one.

Q: Thank you for your extraordinarily clear yet simple pointers. There is a clear seeing that presence-awareness (existence or beingness) has never been found then lost. It has never appeared then disappeared (as I had previously thought). Being-awareness is the only constant that is always present (so only that can be my real nature). Instead, what appears and disappears, comes and goes is self-centered thinking. Therefore, the illusive separate self appearing

only in thought clearly cannot be my real nature. Otherwise, when self-centered thoughts are not present, beingness or existence would also not be present, which of course is simply not so. As can only be the case, self-centered thoughts are completely oblivious to non-conceptual awareness (since the imaginary self is itself a concept in thought). Yet the ever-present, impersonal and impartial being-awareness that is my real nature is fully aware of self-centered thinking (since all appearances including thinking are illuminated by awareness). Your generosity in sharing your insights about non-dual reality is so greatly appreciated.

This is clearly and concisely stated. I am in full agreement with it. See all functioning, activity and appearances in light of this basic knowledge or understanding and you cannot go wrong. Who can go wrong? And what can be wrong, since it is all a spontaneous functioning of the one intelligence-energy of non-conceptual awareness? And what is all appearance, if not an appearance of that? Natural abidance as that which alone is, is the fruit of this inquiry. In that, the inquiry resolves itself, like a river merging into the sea. Who is to inquire and into what, when you are that?

Pointers

Deconstruction, negation or transcendence of appearances is worthwhile at some stage as a stepping stone. But after everything is deconstructed, what remains? There is some positive essence left. Otherwise, it is pure nihilism. What is the deconstruction happening within? What is left after the deconstruction? Only innate, natural presence-awareness. It is emptiness that is full to the brim with the light of non-conceptual awareness. When you have deconstructed everything objective, you have not negated the empty presence cognizing everything. That is what you are innately. That is the whole point—to recognize your true, innate condition. The deconstruction is still at a mental level, for it is the mind doing all that. Innate, non-conceptual awareness is present before, during and after all conceptualizing. Before the next thought appears, that presence of clear, apparent, non-objective awareness is radiating or shining. If we miss that, we miss everything.



One approach to self-inquiry is investigating the 'I' thought. The point is that all suffering is self-referencing conceptualization that depends on the notion of a separate 'I'. When you look for that presumed 'I', you find no defective person present, but only immediate non-conceptual awareness itself. That is not attained by the inquiry, as it is ever-present. The ever-present, non-conceptual awareness is recognized naturally as a preliminary step, so to speak. The inquiry into the 'I' resolves the root of needless suffering by understanding that its basis is non-existent or unfounded. It is not a technique to attain realization or arrive at reality, for you are that already, with or without any inquiry.



Before the next thought appears, you are present and aware. And that non-conceptual presence-awareness is what you are, here and

now. Anything else is an appearance in this. The separate 'I' is a fiction because there is no separate 'I' standing apart from this innate awareness. If the 'I' concept, which is the basis of all subsequent self-centered conceptualizing—suffering—is really fictitious, then the root of all suffering, seeking and questioning is cut. This leaves you effortlessly and naturally as what you are—open, spacious, clear being-awareness-peace, completely untouched by any appearances. All appearances are only appearances of this. That is non-duality. There is no separation anywhere, any time.



Let your body and mind function freely without all the self-concern and identification. You did not create them, nor do you own them. You cannot even control the life or activities of a single cell or a single hair on your head! You are not breathing or beating the heart. You are not causing thoughts to appear. You have no input into the millions of transactions and chemical activities going on in the body and brain every second. Leave the body and mind be to do what they already know how to do much better than you do—living and functioning in the world. Without your meddling and false identification, they may have some chance of living out their days in relative peace and quiet!



If a concept revolving around a 'me' arises, do not follow it, but have a look and see that the 'me' to whom it refers is not present. You are 'non-conceptual, self-shining, ever-fresh presence-awareness, just this and nothing else. There is nothing other than this'.



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.



The great ego turns out to be a lifeless jack-in-the-box. When you look inside, Jack is missing! When you look into the mind, all you find are a few thoughts, feelings and perceptions. You do not find a defective, limited person—only the space of pure knowing and being. That non-conceptual, ever-fresh presence of awareness is what is being pointed to. Now you know you are that. That is the main point. All the suffering and seeking was only believing in a thought about someone who never existed.



The last concepts to fall away are often ‘awakening’ and ‘liberation’. These are simply additional concepts. Most people involved in the spiritual pursuit are entirely intoxicated with such notions. Professional teachers are generally reluctant to point this out because it undermines the whole basis on which their reputation, livelihood and function depend. Anyway, none of it has a whit to do with who we are and always have been. No awakening is needed to be what you are.



Whatever you do, do not turn this into a practice or attainment and leave the concept of the ‘me’ alive. You are not a ‘me’ apart from reality. You are reality itself. Every other assumption about your identity is an assumed concept. It is the belief in those concepts that is the root of all suffering and problems in life. But you are always beyond and free of all problems. There is no problem with the fact of your being and its aware nature.



The most amazing fact is being alive. Not much more would happen without that fact! That 'being alive' is a manifestation of your innate existence, whatever that may be named. That is what this is always getting back to. Activities, states and experiences all happen down the chain and have little relevance to your true nature. There is a tendency to get wrapped up in those things, but they are only appearances subsequent to your own presence. Even that sense of presence or consciousness—which equates with 'being alive'—is a state or appearance on that which does not come and go. That is your true condition, which is prior to consciousness.



All observations and comments by the mind are evanescent concepts with no substance, reality or independent nature. They are mere appearances. The deeper reality being pointed to is innate, non-conceptual awareness itself. All concepts are being registered in that ever-present wakefulness. The negation of phenomena is only to take the focus off of appearance so that this innate presence of awareness can be recognized. When the notions of self and other are negated, the positive recognition of your nature of innate, non-conceptual awareness is still necessary. Negation is a mental operation. Non-conceptual awareness lies entirely beyond the grasp of conceptual thought.



As long as the focus is on a particular teacher, then people are still looking away from themselves. The very definition of being a student or follower is a definition of the limited 'I' notion. At that level, the 'I' assumption is not even being investigated. In order to be a student, I have to first be someone. It is that definition of being a 'someone' that is the root notion that causes us to overlook that what we are seeking is what we already are. It is so simple to see if one is open to just looking into direct experience. If there is any hankering for a special state of awakening, or if there is the concept this is something one will attain in the future, the obviousness of this will be missed, even when it is pointed out nakedly and directly.



There is no absolute truth in pointers. They are all just words that come up with different people 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 emphasize this as 'different' from the appearances. Of course, from the position of the source, all appearances are only appearances of that. They are not the fundamental nature as such of 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 at most provisional. 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?



You have everything you need. You are what you are. All the ideas and experiences come up in natural presence-awareness—whatever pointer might be used—and you are that fully and completely here and now. I do not like to draw things out and lead anyone to believe it is anything more than this. The seeker and anything she feels she might attain or experience are really mythical, as there is no seeker apart from this non-conceptual knowing and being. Awakening, paths, stages, gurus—or whatever—are simply notions coming and going in the space of being-awareness. If you look around within this, you cannot find yourself as some separate person apart from it. So you are that. That is that. If you come or do not come to meetings or whatever you apparently do or do not do, you cannot be other than what you already are. Time is a present concept arising in awareness itself, so time and anything that would arise in time are imaginary. No truth needs to be transmitted because you are and always were the truth. Even if you think you are 'not there', where else are you, but present and aware? Such notions are laughable. Even if thoughts and emotions come up, they only come up in this

that you are. All exits are cut off! All excuses and conditions are baseless. You are what you are, nothing more or less than this. And now you know! How can you be a seeker when you are what is being pointed to? How can you not know yourself when you are yourself? Being and awareness are beyond doubt and undeniable. And that is about it!



The mind is an appearance in what you are. The real question is what are you? All the other questions can wait until that fundamental question is resolved. The other questions just lead you into more and more conceptual thought. But the question 'Who am I?' takes you beyond conceptual thought. As is often pointed out, the answer is not in the mind. The answer is in the non-conceptual recognition of your true nature, which exists with or without the mind and its questions.



Question: Though grace I have the full intellectual grasp of the teachings of both Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ramana Maharshi, but what can be done now? My facts are straight, but the ultimate understanding still eludes me.

Where is this 'me'? Drop the doubt. Drop the question and where are you right now? You are that simple non-conceptual awareness, now and ever. You are the missing tenth man asking me, 'Where is the tenth man?' What can I say? You are being hoodwinked by the belief in the existence of the separate 'I', as well as the continued faith in the doubts of the mind! See this and all is over. Why follow or allow the doubt when you are present and aware as truth itself? See your true position. Then you will laugh at these doubts and questions. The answer is not in the mind. You are present before the mind appears.



Each and every problem is simply a concept in the mind about a 'me' that is separate and incomplete. We appear to suffer as long as interest continues in the thoughts. It is nothing more or less than this.

The antidote is a very clear sense of your true nature. Your real being is not a separate, defective person apart from reality. As the non-dual traditions have told us, you are the supreme reality itself. The interest and belief in the self-centered concepts in the mind springs from a lack of clear understanding of who and what you are. There is no substitute for direct and clear self-knowledge. The belief in the 'me' is sustained by a belief in the reality or existence of the separate 'me'. That belief endures because we assume the 'I' entity is present. You can address this by a direct investigation of the assumed reality of the 'I'. Where is this defective, separate person? Have you ever found it? Other than a few thoughts, perceptions and feelings passing in awareness, what else is present? There is no magic bullet except for returning to the fundamental points and making sure they are clear, not as concepts or ideas for mental agreement, but as direct knowing based on your own immediate, first-hand experience.



Start by getting to know what you are. You exist. That is beyond doubt. What are you? Are you a thought, a feeling, a person, a body? The point is to clarify who and what you are. There is no use looking for states and experiences if the basic point is not clear. If you clarify your identity, all the answers come in that. If the basic identity is not clear, we will keep looking for our identity in some definition or concept in the mind and be fascinated by those thoughts and images. You are not in the mind. You are the one to whom the mind appears. The mind comes and goes before you. So what are you, the one who is aware of the mind?



If you simply pause all thoughts and concepts, all images and references points of yourself (the mental representation of yourself), where are you right now? Can you deny your existence? Is that existence inert, or do you find that it is fully alert and cognizant? This alert and undeniable being is what is being pointed to as your real nature. It is not simply consciousness, but that undeniable presence that knows the fact of

being conscious. Consciousness itself comes and goes as an experience for you. You are the non-conceptual awareness that knows the coming and going of consciousness. See that this is what you are, here and now.



Everything the mind says about you is simply a fabrication in conceptual thought about an imagined entity standing outside and apart from non-conceptual awareness. There is no such thing. At some point, you will see that you have been playing a game of hide and seek, pretending to be a separate someone apart from reality. But the whole show is a passing phase appearing and disappearing in your abiding nature, which has been shining in plain view the whole time.



'Awakening' is one of the most misleading spiritual concepts being offered in the spiritual market place.



Every reference in the mind to 'me' is simply concepts and words about an imaginary person. The apparent delusion or lack of self-recognition is only due to assuming that concept (of the 'me') to be valid. But you are not a concept! You are aware of such a concept and entirely beyond it, even now. That is why I strongly recommend that you cease giving the energy of belief or identity to these images and stories in thought and see the basic facts of your present experience.



All notions, such as not being awake enough, not being advanced enough, being far from 'it' and so on are conceptual positions based on the assumed presence of the individual who stands apart from being-awareness. The most direct and penetrating resolution is to see that all of these conceptual positions are in reference to that 'I'.

'I' is simply a phantom-like notion that arises and sets in the open, empty, ever-present awareness that you truly are.



Drop all the conditions, requirements, memories and identities and look to see what you are. You will find that you are not the 'I' constructed in thought, but the aware presence in which that thought and all else comes and goes. It is nothing more or less than this.



See what you actually are, not what you think you are. You are not a seeker, a person, an unadvanced soul or any other concept proposed by mind. You are nothing short of the non-dual reality here and now. The answer is not in the mind and cannot be approached by any definition, concept or thought. Before the next thought appears, you are. Your being and its aware nature are fully evident. Your identity as that is clear now, if you take a few moments to verify this.



Be willing to pause thought long enough to notice that you have never been in bondage and that everything the mind has ever said about you was untrue. You existed before the mind ever appeared. How could it have any knowledge about what you are?



First of all see that the mind appears to you. You know you are. You know you are aware of the mind and all else. That sense of being and awareness is not theoretical or mental at all. It is direct knowing and experience. You can see that you already have a direct experience of your being, which is not mental. Do not pretend any longer that you have only intellectual knowledge!



If you are seeking attainments or experiences, you are going to be looking away from the basic point, because your natural state of

being is already present. The question 'Who and what am I?' is key. You know you are, but what you are may not be precisely clear. From this basic confusion comes all the seeking, suffering and doubts. When this confusion is resolved, so are the seeking, suffering and doubts.



The 'body' is a concept, or a label, a way to describe temporary processes coming and going in consciousness. The first step is to recognize the presence of consciousness. Next is to see that this consciousness is what you are. The body appears and is transient, while you are the common matrix of consciousness in which the body—and all else—appears and disappears. Before delving into the non-existence of the 'I', it is more important to make sure that your identity as consciousness is clear and established. Is this clear for you? From that platform, other things can be looked at more easily. The two basic points are 1) what you are, and 2) what you are not. The first is most important to settle. With that clear, it naturally becomes apparent what you are not (body, senses, mind, personality, ego notion and so on).



Never forget that regardless of what you read or hear or think about, you are free right now and always. All bondage is totally conceptual and imaginary. All that appears comes and goes in that which is ever free and uncompromised. Being-awareness (whatever it may be called) is here, is free, and you are that. That is the finality. All apparent suffering and bondage is due to overlooking this basic fact.



Sometimes the word 'bliss' is used as a description of our true nature. A blissful experience is more of an expression through the body/mind of the underlying deep unity, peace and love that you are. Keep in mind that this is all just words. The expression of the changeless being-awareness that you are can and will reflect through the body/mind in many ways. But all those expressions are of the source. Often, when the turmoil of suffering subsides, the

presence of the natural peace seems like an intense, blissful state by contrast. It is like being very hungry. When you first eat, the food tastes incredibly good in contrast to the hunger. Once your hunger is satisfied, the contrast aspect mellows. In terms of bliss and joy, when that is the abiding and natural state (that is, when experience is no longer overlaid with suffering and conceptual 'problems'), it may seem as if it settles into a deep, unshakeable peace or fullness. But this is from the perspective of the mind. It is best not to label too much! Just abide in the ever-present truth that you are. You can only know what you are by being what you are. All concepts and descriptions come after the fact. You are always that which is prior to words and thoughts. I always liked Nisargadatta Maharaj's description of his experience. He said, 'It is hard to put into words. All I know is nothing is wrong with me any longer'.



'Awareness' is a word. That word is a concept. You are prior to words and concepts. What you are cannot be framed in any concept at all. Awareness is just like any other concept that is used to point to what you are, prior to words and labels. Some word is used to point to that. Leave off the words and just be. There is no label for what you are, but you cannot doubt your being. And that being is not inert or void. It is alive, sentient and crackling with intensity.



The key issue is to clarify your identity. You need to know who and what you are. It is the basic confusion about our identity that drives the belief in the erroneous sense of self, which in turn becomes the root of all the subsequent identifications that are at the basis of fear and suffering. The real issue is knowing what you are, rather than having some realization that 'no one is here' or whatever. You are. That is certain. So what is this that you are? It does not involve any special realizations or anything exotic. That is looking in the wrong direction. The point is seeing and understanding what is already present.



It is generally more productive to put the emphasis on clarifying the positive truth of what you are. The 'what I am not' becomes clear by default. If we say 'no one is here', that is fine, but we may still be in some doubt about what we are. What is here—your very being—needs no realization because it is already present. This gets you out of the false game of waiting for some 'realization' to happen. In truth, that is just a concept and misses the real point of things.



The focus of self-knowledge is not to integrate or resolve relative matters. There are other means to do that. Those can be very appropriate at the level at which they apply. Non-duality addresses the core issue of who we are at the deepest level. Our confusion and suffering in life is ultimately traceable to a basic misconception of our identity. To be unclear about what we are leads to other assumptions and beliefs that augment and perpetuate our sense of separation and suffering. When our basic identity is clear, the root of suffering, seeking and doubt is resolved and a fundamental peace and freedom naturally reveals itself. This experience is not dependent on life's events, nor can it be shaken by them. We then have no special task of integrating or resolving experiences. Rather, a natural clarity and freedom informs and permeates everything that manifests in life. Life feels like a tapestry of many colors and shades, including both the light and dark events. All of it can be seen and felt as an expression of the deeper presence of life, which includes all of its many appearances. This brings in a sense of peace and acceptance in the midst of events that previously would have been difficult to manage or bear.



The most important thing is a clear and solid recognition of your true nature. If that is not clear and we are still living under some misconceptions about who and what we are, that will color whatever other investigation we make or understanding that we have. The net result is that basic misconceptions or misidentifications continue to be perpetuated. This keeps the unnecessary psychological suffering in play because the root of it is not addressed.



If you see non-conceptual awareness as some principle or state, not as what you are, then the notion of being a separate someone apart from reality is still present. This is the ultimate root of the problem.



You clearly are, but what you are may not be clear. If who and what you are is not clear, all other spiritual endeavors will be clouded by that partial perspective or view of things.



What you are in the deepest sense has no suffering at all. To know what you are is the end of suffering. Any attempt to rid oneself of suffering without clear self-knowledge will fail, as the root cause of suffering is not being addressed. Suffering is ultimately a product of a false or mistaken sense of self. When this is addressed, the cause of suffering is naturally resolved.



There is pain in the body and then there is suffering, or what I might call conceptual suffering. The latter is entirely unnecessary and can be resolved, irrespective of whatever the body may go through, including disease and even death, as is proven by those for whom the basic self-knowledge is clear. Without self-knowledge everything in life potentially will become a source of suffering. With self-knowledge, no activity compels the arising of suffering. Buddha said that life is suffering. It would be more accurate to say that life lived from the perspective of being a limited, separate self is experienced as suffering.



The key is to clarify your identity. Meditation or any other practice is not sufficient on its own to accomplish this. Nor are such practices needed for everyone, so no blanket statement is possible. You are. Whatever is to be 'attained' is present as the fact of your present being. You already are what you are seeking, but may not know this

clearly at this stage. Do not wait for some future event, but see what you already are. You most certainly exist. Start with that. What is this that you are? That is the real issue. When this is clear, everything is clear. Most people who meditate, practice, pursue enlightenment or whatever it might be, often lose their way and fail to get around to answering the basic question 'Who and what am I?'



Sensations are not problematic and cause no limitation, suffering or bondage until they are interpreted by the conceptual mind rooted in the notion of one's being a limited separate self. To state this very simply and directly, thoughts, feelings and perceptions simply appear and subside in awareness. There is no bondage, suffering or personal problem with any of it unless and until the conceptual mind begins labeling and interpreting in reference to an assumed self-center. The belief in the existence of the self-center as one's identity and, by extension, all of the definitions created in the conceptual mind about that self-center is what drives the perceived sense of limitation. But, in reality, you are not that root concept, nor any of the concepts appended to it. What are you? The only abiding and consistent presence throughout all the changing appearances is being itself, which is not only present but aware. It is also peace, which is another way of saying that in it there is no conceptual limitation, suffering or bondage at all. The main point in all of this is to come to a clear recognition of one's natural and abiding identity, for the root of all troubles is taking oneself to be something that one is not. No one can deny his or her very being, but until this is deeply examined, the nature of one's being is almost always misconceived. Suffering really boils down to living under a confused and erroneous sense of one's identity.



Thinking about what you are is really just speculation. It is good as far as it goes, but it is best to look at one's direct experience. You can see that thoughts, experiences, feelings, perceptions and so on come and go and cannot be your abiding and essential nature. Still you cannot deny your being. You are coming close to the essence of it when you notice that what appears to be present is a dark and empty nothingness, but this evaluation is from the mind's perspective. The mind cannot know your true nature, because the mind works with objects and concepts. What you are is neither an object nor a concept. The mind evaluates what you are as some empty nothingness. Be willing to look past this label put on by the mind and continue to explore your real being. You will be delighted to

find that the mind's comments are completely off the mark. Keep exploring this and do not be too quick to judge things.



When you reject all that you are not, what remains? What remains is not a nihilistic void or mere absence. The point of the 'not this, not this' process is to clear away the coverings so you can see what is present. You may have deconstructed the false or conceptual 'me', which is very good. But when the conceptual 'me' is negated, did you actually disappear? And, if not, what remains? That is what non-duality is really communicating about or pointing to. Remember, in addition to the 'not this' pointer, there is also the 'you are that' pointer. Even after negation, some positive kernel remains. This needs to be recognized. If you only negate the 'not self' and leave it at that, you will end up in nihilism or a void of nothingness.



The sense of seeking itself is a misconception based on a mistaken view of who and what we are. That will resolve itself as you clarify your actual identity. Do not push things out into a future state or attainment. Your being is already fully present and available. The issue is that we overlook the obvious. Pause all the thoughts and conceptualizing about this stuff and have a look to see what you are presently. Your own being is naturally present. You are both present and aware. What we miss is that this fundamental being-awareness is what is being pointed to. You will be amused when it dawns that you already are what you are seeking.



From the mind's perspective, awareness is just emptiness. But you will notice that that emptiness is also aware. It is not a lifeless, insentient vacuum. Get to know that space of awareness without labeling it. Once you start getting into notions such as 'I must not be there yet' that moves you back into conceptual thought and into the imaginary sense of self. In doing that, you turn away from the immediate, non-conceptual recognition of presence-awareness. So, basically, do not worry about the labels and self-evaluations. Also,

keep in mind that this awareness is what you *are*. Another pointer to presence-awareness is simply 'you'. Are you an empty vacuum or void? When the mind attempts to frame this in its words and concepts, it seems to be a dead, empty object. But you are not a dead empty object, are you? Even though no word can capture what is being pointed to, endless words and pointers can be used. All of the scriptures, sutras and words of sages who were talking about this are descriptions of your true nature. That has no limits, no problems, no worries, no suffering. Be willing to get to know your true nature without prejudging things.



Take whatever steps come up to be done in the appearance. Know that the fundamental essence supporting things, your basic true nature, remains as it is and it is not lost or compromised. No amount of acting, perceiving, functioning can contradict the truth of who and what you are. With that clear, anything may arise and be done in the appearance. Whatever that may be will resolve itself based on circumstances and conditions. As long as we do not insert ourselves—conceptually—into the situation as a defective, limited entity, all is well. The outcome may or may not match the mind's expectations, but there is nothing wrong with that either. You have not lost your true nature, in any case.



Does your being manifest for periods of time, or is there a natural presence and awareness shining continuously? Start by seeing this clearly and establishing your identity as that undeniable presence of knowing and being. That has no dependence on the concept of some ephemeral entity being present or not. And what is present when there is some entity in mind? What entity is there, actually? And does this concept in reality eclipse or diminish the presence of awareness? See this much and all sense of going in and out of states is finished for good. Make sure this is clear.



The state of being conscious comes and goes within non-conceptual awareness. Being awake or conscious is not the same as non-conceptual awareness. Consciousness is the first manifestation or experience in duality. But consciousness itself comes and goes in the non-conceptual presence that you are. You are aware of being conscious, correct? Parse that out very carefully. *You are aware of being conscious.* Therefore, you are that which is aware of the coming and going of consciousness. That awareness is not a state or experience, however glorious or exalted. It is the basis and ground of all experiencing. It is what you *are*.



What is being pointed to is your natural being, which is always present and aware. You cannot understand this via the mind. It is what the mind comes and goes within. It is always present, knowing and illuminating the mind. It is present when the mind is not active and present when it is active. It makes absolutely no difference. Have a look and see if what you are is affected by the thoughts. Thoughts come and go in the presence of what you are. It is that simple. The notion that thoughts disturb your natural being is due to thinking that the mind has something to do with this. Look away from the mind and see what is aware of the mind.



First of all, see, know and be what you are. It has nothing to do with paying attention, being here, or being aware, as some special exercise. Those are all activities initiated by the mind under the assumption that there is some special state which is not present. But your true nature *is* present. What is this that you are which is present? This part needs to be very clear. You are not a thought, feeling or perception, since these are just transient appearances. Still, you are. Some pointers used to indicate your natural and abiding state are 'being' or 'awareness'. These are just words. You need to have a look and see for yourself what these words are pointing to. Once this is clear, it is helpful to understand the nature of suffering. Suffering ultimately revolves around concepts of and about an assumed separate 'I' apart from reality—which is what you found

as your true nature. As long as this assumed separate identity is taken as valid, the belief continues to return to the self-centered concepts, which is basically what suffering is. So, you need to investigate the reality of this 'I' to see if it is true. If you find it is not true, then all the residual interest and belief in the self-centered concepts simply withers for lack of interest in them. You remain naturally and effortlessly as you are and always have been.



Anything can and will happen in the appearance of things. Without the belief in the self-center, which is purely conceptual, it is not taken personally. Irritation happens (or not), but no 'I' is irritated. Then can it be suffering, that is, a limited experience in reference to a defective self-image? What has happened to your innate being and cognizant nature in the midst of all of it? Nothing at all. That has not changed or been compromised in any way. Thoughts are thoughts, not 'your' thoughts; experiences are experiences, not 'your' experiences. All the psychological suffering and limitation is removed, even though the situation may or may not remain as before.



The core dilemma in life is living under a false identity or sense of self. A working definition of 'right' and 'wrong' might be: those actions and mental states that strengthen the false sense of self are 'wrong' (unethical, immoral). Why? Because they exacerbate ignorance, delusion and suffering. Those that diminish the self-center (the sense of self) are 'good' (ethical, moral). They tend toward greater wisdom and happiness both relatively and absolutely.



The point is to know who and what you are. Until then, the mind may and will speculate about anything. But it is all entirely speculative and conceptual. Any answer the mind may come up with is a speculative thought subject to doubt. Drop the speculation and clarify your identity. You *are*. That much is clear, but what you are may not yet be clear.



Non-dual approaches point out the basic fact of who and what we are. All the other questions are relevant at some stage, but they all resolve into this final one. Until this final question is tackled, no other answers can be conclusive. The fact of your being is evident and beyond any doubt. Have a direct look into this and make sure that what you are is clear. If you keep your investigation directed to the core question, you will find there are few if any other issues that remain to be resolved.



What you are cannot be known as an object. But, still, your actual presence is not absent. Although what you are cannot be known, neither can you be unknown. Beyond the known and unknown is undeniable being-awareness, utterly undisturbed and free of duality.



There are no beings who abide in non-conceptual awareness. That would leave beings intact as separate entities and non-conceptual awareness as some state that those special beings have access to. If you give any reality at all to that notion, the immediate recognition of what is being pointed to would remain overlooked. Non-conceptual awareness is what is present and all beings are that, here and now. In fact, there are no beings, only this. That which is prior to thought is consciousness, presence or being. But even that is not what is being pointed to. Take away the labels 'consciousness', 'presence' or 'being' and see what remains (what is present without the labels). That which is prior to such concepts is what you truly are. That is the non-conceptual awareness that is there even prior to the sense of 'I am'. It has no duality or differentiation and is the non-dual, absolute state. There are no beings, entities or concepts present, because even the first notion 'I am present' is not there. That which is 'there' is ever 'here' as your natural and abiding condition. It is actually prior to being and knowing, but the source from which they emerge. The first expression is the sense of being and knowing. Prior to being and

knowing, you are. When you say 'I know I am', that concept or experience appears to one who is there prior to the dawning of that concept or experience. You are that.



Conflict is always a conflict between two opposing concepts in thought. Fortunately, what you are is not a thought, so your actual being has no problems or conflicts at all.



You are. Your being is clear and doubtless. Put the emphasis on that and look at whatever appears from that vantage point. Do not make it any more complicated than that. Be somewhat neutral toward the internal reactions, simply knowing that they come and go and they are not what you are. The problem is never with the thoughts and feelings per se. They are not you; nor do they alter what you are. They are not even problematic or uncomfortable until the mind labels them so. Suffering arises through superimposing a sense of identity, reality and happiness upon the thoughts, assuming they relate to your identity. They do not relate to the actual you, but only to a mental idea of 'you', that is, the conceptual self, which is not even present, except as a notion. As you come to see that this conceptual self is not really present, and certainly is not what you are, all the interest in, and identification with, the mind evaporates. This happens naturally, not because of anything 'you' do, because that 'you' is the conceptual self. The 'real' you does not need to do anything, because it is ever-present, free, whole and complete by nature.



Do not over-analyze. Just keep with the basic points and let them blossom. Keep your true nature in view and look at experiences from that perspective. Keep in view the immense depth, glory and magnitude of what your true nature really is. See the mind and feelings for what they are—ephemeral images that arise and set in the space of undisturbed being-awareness-peace that you truly are. Give them their due at a practical level, but do not take them to

represent what you are. In truth, the mind cannot cognize your presence at all. Therefore, everything the mind attempts to say about you is a misplaced concept.



Watch the mind and its contents come and go. Watch and see how this activity affects your being, and if it does. Do not accept any concepts about what you are. You know that you are. Get familiar with the nature of what you are. The identification with the mind comes from a lack of full knowledge and appreciation of what your real nature is. The best approach is to really nail down what you are. The energy of seeking your identity in the mind will naturally settle down as corollary. All the 'How do I ...?' questions and other doubts and worries are really just more mind stuff. What does your real being have to do with these thoughts anyway? To get too involved in them is looking in the wrong direction and putting the focus back on the mind. Return to your being, which is present, solid and beyond doubt.



The point of non-duality is to clarify what you are. All the theoretical issues and popular catch-phrases are beside the point. They are usually misapplied pointers that are not understood. 'There is no one here to do anything' is a complete misunderstanding. It implies that nothing can be done. This is totally wrong! Of course doing happens. The point is not to ascribe the doing to some fictitious sense of self, as if the concept 'I' is actually doing anything!



The notion of 'final understanding' is totally misconceived. The point is to look at and clarify what you already are. What you are is not a concept. The mind's notion of some final understanding is simply the mind's misrepresentation of what is being communicated.



Notice that experience is taking place in a greater space, an open and aware presence of knowing and being. What is aware of any experience? Look in this way and feel your way into the understanding that experiences appear *to* you. They come and go and cannot be you. But to whom do they appear? What is the nature of what remains? This moves you in the direction of getting to know yourself, in other words, genuine self-knowledge. This is where the journey begins—and ends. Your real being has always been present but not recognized for what it truly is. Remember, there is what appears and then there is you, the one to whom appearances arise. Get to know this, your abiding and true self.



Bring things back to a clear and simple focus by keeping in view what you are in relation to the mind and its concepts. Continue to look at what you are, as opposed to what the mind says about you. This is the heart of the approach. It naturally resolves any lingering doubts and confusions. Your being is already fully clear and present, in spite of what the concepts assert.



You can just as well discard such notions as 'I do not yet get the fullness of it'. This may be what your mind says. That statement is loaded with some hefty concepts, such as 'I', future time, getting something that is not present or some imagined state of fullness. Direct looking slices right through such notions to show the nature of what you actually are. From there, you can see the concepts as they are—totally imaginary!



Pause all concepts. Realize that you are fully here prior to concepts. That fully present non-conceptual presence is not to be achieved or attained by some imagined person ('I') in some future time. Nor can it be deepened, as if it is some experience that can be full or less full. It simply is and—you are that. Look past the notions thrown up by the mind and abide as what you already are. This is the heart of the approach. Get friendly with what is, not what the mind presents as

some experience in time to be had by you, as if you needed something other than what you already are.



Everything returns to this ever-present non-conceptual awareness that is not to be attained, because it is what you are.



Do not be concerned about asking questions or sharing experiences that may reveal some unexamined concepts and assumptions. It is good that such notions come out for inspection. Then they can be seen and discarded. Ultimately, you see that all the notions and beliefs that generate suffering relate back to the sense of the separate, or limited, 'I' who apparently stands as a real entity apart from the deeper reality, along with the notion that we are that limited self. Belief in the reality of the separate self, or ego notion, is the root cause of all possible suffering. Expose that; see through that; lose the capacity of belief in the core concept; and all possible suffering is uprooted at the source. All problems are for the 'I'. If the 'I' is not believed to be me because its unreality is recognized, then who or what is left to seek, question, doubt or worry? What remains is the doubtless, non-conceptual awareness that must always be present, because it is what you are. You cannot lose your innate nature. All is settled.



Does the sky 'care' if clouds, wind or rain are present? This is *not* about rearranging the body, mind or feelings. Leave things unaltered, unmodified, uncorrected. The issue is interest in, or fixation on, the mind content due to looking for reality, identity and happiness in the mind, as some imagined defective being. Most of the conceptual traps of thought revolve around the 'I' sense, such as 'I want to abide in awareness' or some such. Suffering equals belief in thought about the 'I'. The assumed presence of the 'I' drives the mechanism. The real way to ace this is 1) to thresh out what you are, and 2) to see, really see, that the 'I' as some defective entity is not present, does not exist and has never existed. For example, where is the 'I' who

wants to abide in awareness? Where is the 'I' who is not enlightened? Where is the 'I' who has no insight? These are smoke and mirrors, concepts about some entity which has never existed. And where is all the thought activity appearing? In the vast, clear and entirely free awareness-presence that is the reality being pointed to and which you are. Looking back to the mind in any sense, whether it be evaluating the number and quality of thoughts, is still looking at appearances to confirm that things are OK, or that I am OK. Why look to the mind to know how things are when you are not even in the mind? The answer is not in the mind. It is all done already. You are what you are seeking. Nothing is to be gained, achieved or known but this self-evident fact of being present and aware.



Concepts are powerless to change what is. They are all based upon a self that has never, ever been present. Do not look to appearances for confirmation of what is real. Look to your own being, your own abiding presence. Look into what you are and start to consider that. The interest in the mind and appearances just vaporizes, like a ball of cotton approaching the sun.



The mind and body are mere specks of dust appearing against the face of the infinite sun of non-conceptual awareness. That in which the mind appears is entirely beyond all limits.



There is awareness and then there is what you think about it. It is crucial to see the difference between these two. The mind can think and speculate all it wants about things, but this does not alter the fact of awareness. In point of fact, all experiences, including the body, mind and universe, come and go in awareness. Set aside all speculation about awareness and know awareness as it is, free of concepts. It is not 'your' awareness, which implies that 'you' and 'awareness' are two things. Are you something other than that which is aware? Once you see that you are that which is aware, then the sense of duality crumbles.



Every life and expression is and must be different in the appearance of things. The main thing is to see and abide as what you are. From there, all happens naturally, and you remain as what you are.



As far as 'nagging thought patterns', the key is to see your real identity in relationship to them. Thought patterns are simply energy arising and setting in the open presence of non-conceptual awareness, like clouds blowing through the empty sky. They may be acted on or not. No mark is made upon the sky itself. It is not to deny or judge the thoughts, but only to see them as they are. The 'nagging' part comes from the assumed relationship of the thoughts to the sense of 'me'. But it turns out that the 'me' they are in reference to is the conceptual sense of self spun up in thoughts, not the actual truth of what you are. All the bondage hinges on the presumed separate 'I' and the relationship of all the self-centered thoughts to that conceptual entity, which is assumed to be what we are. It is the belief in the reality and substantiality of the conceptual 'I' that creates the linkage to the thoughts. By investigating the reality of the 'I', you find the 'I' to be only an assumed presence, an assumed reality posited in the conceptual mind. But such an 'I' as a real thing is not present nor even findable in experience. Therefore, the 'I', as some presumed separate self is a complete fiction. More importantly, this notion is not what you are. You are not a thought! Seeing this, all the belief and energy goes out of the notion of the limited self and all the corresponding concepts that have been built up about it. That is the end of suffering, seeking and doubt. From there life unfolds as a spontaneous expression without reference to the concept of a defective, limited, separate 'I'.

Looking in this way wraps up any lingering attachment or bondage in relation to the mind. Nothing is gained, but your natural state is all the more clear, even though it is always ever-present and in plain view. It was only overlooked due to interest in the self-centered concepts. Even then, the very concepts could only be present on account of the conscious-presence knowing them. All is resolved.

Seeing this, you can never return to the position of not seeing the obvious!



There are an infinite number of ways and means of describing the appearances, the nature of bondage, etc. But they are all provisional. Unfortunately, such descriptions tend to keep the focus on the appearances and rarely enable us to get to the root of things. It is better to focus on the root of the issue, which is clearing up your identity.



The so-called 'ego' is only an assumption, a false concept. It is not a 'thing in itself' to be talked about as something really present, to be overcome, to be gradually whittled away or whatever. All of these notions continue to grant reality to the concept, as if it were present. In fact they actually sustain belief in it! Self-knowledge has nothing to do with gradually abandoning egoic structures. Egoic structures are phantoms built on and sustained by a core assumption that the separate self is even present. Dissolving egoic structures is actually a self-centered egoic activity!



The notion that one will diminish or shrink the ego as a means to freedom is a serious miscalculation. If there were a person at all, it could be diminished, but this is all still taking place at the mind level, in time and by someone who is presumably in the picture as a person. There is no person present, except as an assumption.



The 'pain body' is a theory for explaining the presence of suffering. Unfortunately, it is taken as a factual presence, and then the program is to dissolve it and overcome the ego. This is not workable as a complete solution to the matter, not by a long shot. Can you see that the 'pain body' is itself a concept, a notion created in the mind? And likewise are the ego and its supposed 'structures'. To take such

concepts as realities keeps the mind looping in self-created concepts. The bottom line is that the imagined freedom is projected into a future time, when (and if) the overcoming of the impediments is (we hope) going to happen. Usually, the interest in self-knowledge gets traded in, in favor of more and more psychological ‘work’, ‘deepening’, ‘growth’, ‘dissolving structures’, ‘awakenings’ or what have you. It misses the essential point that what you *are* is complete freedom, here and now, and that no separate ‘I’ has ever existed, except as an imaginary concept. All the so-called structures based on that concept are also imaginary.



You say, ‘Do I believe that I am the mind?’ That is not quite the issue, although close. The mind is *not* the issue. The mind has no substance, really. In fact, there is no mind at all, in truth. The notion ‘mind’ is just another idea! Ephemeral, weightless, insubstantial ideas flit through awareness moment by moment. The moment they are perceived, they vanish. Try to grasp a thought. Can you? Thoughts are like ripples on the surface of clear, vivid awareness. Just like waves on the sea, they have no actual existence as independent realities and are nothing but the substance on which they appear. Even to talk of thoughts is a thought! Even when thoughts seemingly appear, it is only one awareness shining constantly.



If you try to stop believing in the mind, you are back in the struggle mode, back in time, back in duality—back to leaving the ‘I’ intact with some new program to follow. So, as usual, do not fall for that concept! Who are you? Who is this ‘I’ that is present to believe in the mind? Turn the concept around and look for the ‘I’ on which is it based. Blow out the ‘I’ by looking for it, and there is no one left to believe in the mind or do anything at all. Then you will see the point of that statement that ‘All that is present is self-shining, non-conceptual, ever-fresh presence-awareness—just this, and nothing else. There is nothing other than this’.



Freedom from suffering is dissolution of the belief in the 'I' through finding that it has never existed. All other tasks and achievements, however lofty, can only occur through a continued belief in the presence of the separate 'I'.



As far as the world goes, like everything else, it is an appearance that comes and goes in consciousness. Such appearances are clearly not 'you', since you are the one to whom they appear. That is about the extent of it as far as this stuff is concerned. The point is to know who you are. Once you see that the appearance is not what is being pointed to, then the interest can fall away from that. It is fine for what it is. As Nisargadatta Maharaj used to say, live your life with full zest and enthusiasm and play your part. Just do not take it to be who you are. Analyzing appearances gets you into metaphysics rather than self-knowledge. Also, it starts to put the emphasis back on the mind as the instrument of knowledge. This is fine for relative affairs, but useless for self-knowledge, since what you are is not in the mind. Pause all concepts, and what you are is fully present, as clear as day. It is non-conceptual being-awareness itself. That is not a body, mind, person or separate self, all of which are appearances in what you are. Let the sense of identity return to its rightful place. That is self-knowledge and the end of all seeking, suffering and doubt. You are what you are seeking. All else is a concept based on the notion that you have separated from the source. But you never have. Therefore, the root of all problems is seen never to have occurred.



Be very direct and simple with this. 'Presence' is not something you move into and out of. That would be a dualism. Such a dualism leaves your assumed separation from that intact. That will get you another five to ten years of needless seeking and suffering! What I am referring to is the fact of your being, your fundamental existence. You are this. It is not something you move into and out of. That

notion hangs on the assumption of the reality of the separate 'I'. But you are not such a separate one at all. You are the one present and aware always. Drop the 'I' concept and be what you are. This is the direct approach and cuts out all the time and separation at the start.



The nature of what is real is that non-conceptual awareness, and you are that, here and now. It does not get more direct than this. All appears in this and has no substance or reality apart from this. In essence, all that appears is this. There is no duality or separation at any time.



All troubles are conceptual and rooted in the assumed reality of the separate self (that is, that 'I' stand apart from reality). But the notion is patently false. In fact, no separate self has ever been present, except as concept.



Residual momentum of thought patterns is not a problem. In fact, 'residual momentum' itself is a concept, because all there is, is moment-by-moment experiencing in pure awareness itself. Patterns appear and disappear. Clouds may display some pattern or momentum to their shape or form. Does the sky have a problem with that? Who is present to care? Moods, seemingly good and bad, are not problems per se. If there is some way in which they are being viewed in relation to the imagined separate self—as personalized experiences—then have a look and see if they are happening to a 'me', or if they are only movements in clear, open awareness itself. All forms have apparent patterns and momentum. A running stream holds the same shape (apparently), but there is no suffering generated by it. Why? Because it is clearly not in reference to the 'me' of memory. Neither can thoughts and feelings create suffering unless they are referred to the 'me' of memory. Otherwise, they are simply appearances. See them as they are and let them be—unmodified, unaltered, uncorrected. Abide as what you are—ever-present, undeniable freedom itself.



Moods may arise due to any number of reasons. And they will continue to do so as long as the body is present. That is not to be denied. Some moods are generated and sustained in response to the false belief in the self-center. Those naturally settle down with the clarification of one's identity. What is left is just the functioning of the body/mind in relation to circumstances. It is not a problem—ever—unless it becomes an experience defined in relation to a limited sense of self.



I am not talking about 'awakenings', sensing 'presence', experiences of 'stillness' and what not. I am talking about your unchanging and constant identity. There is no going back and forth from reality. That would imply that you were coming and going out of existence, if such a thing were possible. Is your being wavering? Can you slip back from what you are? I am talking about your existence itself. That is not, and can never be, an experience, however sublime.



If you grant any continued belief to the notion of the 'I' entity as some real character who is apart from reality, there will be all kinds of ups and downs, in and outs, awakenings and non-awakenings, getting it and losing it and so on—all of which are purely imaginary and have nothing to do with what is being pointed to. You are. Keep the consideration there, not in all types of fanciful notions!



Even to point to your true nature as consciousness has its limits. It is really only a pointer, a less misleading concept, so to speak. Understand that consciousness itself, which is the basis of all experiencing, is also transient. It too is an appearance. But this does not mean that it can or should be dispensed with as a useless pointer. Consciousness is an appearance, but it is a necessary appearance for all other experiencing. Without consciousness, there can be no experiencing. That is why, in the world of appearances, it is the highest principle. And it is helpful to see it as such. Once this is clear, it is possible to see that consciousness also appears and disappears before you as an experience. Then you are in a position to probe into what is your ultimate identity, which is the source from which consciousness arises and sets.



Your actual being and its aware nature are not theoretical. They are vivid and present and beyond any doubt whatsoever. Then there is what we think *about* what we are. Notice that all the doubts, problems and questions arise in thinking about what we are. In other words, the problems are created at the mental level in concepts. But there is no question or doubt about your being. The point of all this is to point to the undeniable fact of your own presence, your own being. This is much different than thinking about things. It is essential to understand the difference between thinking about and direct—non-conceptual, immediate—experience of what you are. This is why writing about this can be potentially confusing. Words are concepts residing at the mental level. What I am pointing to is neither a word nor a concept, nor does it exist in the mind as an object of thought.



The focus on awakening experiences is a total diversion. Your very self is ever-present. It cannot be experienced, known or arrived at, really, because it is what you are. If this basic point is not clear, it can certainly be pointed out so that we can see the obvious.



If you are seeking awakening, you are still missing the basic point.



There is no separate one apart from what is being pointed to. If this point is clear, all the notions of ‘awakening experiences’, ‘stabilizing’, ‘going back and forth’ and so forth are exposed for the concepts that they are. The question is always—for whom?



There is no one ‘watching feelings going by’! Who would be doing that? Even the witness or watcher notion is only that, a notion. Emotional reaction triggers contraction of what? For whom? We must be very clear to see if there is some subtle belief being given to the notion of the ‘me’ as some real presence apart from reality. The emotions and thoughts are practically irrelevant to the issue at hand. Let them be as they are. Leave them as is—unaltered, unmodified, uncorrected. Who is even present to care if emotions are present or are contracted? What is that reference point and who is making the determination that such experiences are good or not good? Does the sky care if a cloud goes through? Is a contracted cloud any better than a spacious one, as far as the sky is concerned? Even in this, there can be a subtle overlooking of the ever-present fact of what is really present. Is the sky looking at the cloud formations to determine whether or not it (the sky) is free?



The only apparent bondage is any residual tendency to be looking at what appears from the position of the limited (non-existent) reference point of the pseudo-subject, or ‘me’. Without belief in that reference

point, what is wrong with right now, and who is present to live the teaching, watch the thoughts, get free of contraction or whatever? In fact, spirituality as we know it is over with immediately. If this is not seen in its totality, we are apt to fall back into the 'awakening, deepening, post-awakening processing' model, which still exists in reference to the imagined 'I'. This is, of course, the popular paradigm, widely discussed and taught by professional teachers and 'dharma' experts. I guess they need to have something to talk about and teach! The progressive model can be taught, because it is conceptual. Immediate and timeless freedom cannot be taught, because it *is* what is real. At most, it can be pointed to as the listener's immediate experience and understood to be the case.



The question was raised, 'Is there a place you get to where the realization that there is no personal entity doing anything is so clear that you remain consciously aware that there is no personal "I"?' See the catch in the question: 'Is there a place you get to ...?' The problem here is that the question is still granting the presence of the 'you' entity. If there is no 'you' as a conceptual entity, 'who' is present to 'get to' anything? Thus the answer is both yes and no. When the conceptual self is seen as non-existent and an invalid reference point, the root of suffering is overcome in that seeing. This is because suffering is not just the appearance of thoughts and feelings. It is the belief that they relate to me as a defective, limited person. The origin of suffering lies, as most of the traditions tell us, in the belief in the 'ego' or false self. The real cause (or the cause of the cause) is actually deeper than this. Why is there a belief in a false identity? Because we are not clear on what we truly are. That is the key issue to be addressed, not simply trying to lose belief in the 'I' concept. Taken alone, that usually is not sufficient, in my experience. But if we pose this issue as a case of 'me' getting to some future state, then we are leaving the 'me' notion in place, and we miss the point profoundly. But to speak plainly, suffering and seeking end only by clearly understanding what we are and coming to see that the 'I', as a separate entity, is mythical.



Awareness is, and you are that. If you try to think about it, you will have to turn it into a concept. Awareness can never be a concept. Let the concepts go and be what you are.



You say, 'I am trying to get this'. Forget it! That is a losing battle. Who? And what are you trying to get? You are. Full stop.



Awareness cannot be thought about, except if you turn it into a concept. Then what you are thinking about is no longer it. The word is not the thing.



In fact, there is no liberation needed. Freedom and liberation are concepts that only apply in reference to an entity who is assumed to be in bondage. Is awareness bound or free? Drop the notion of liberation and be what you are.



Choice happens in the mind. What you are is prior to choice and to mind.



You cannot find yourself in the mind or its products. See this, and be what you are!



Best is to see and be what you are. Then there are no states or attainments to deal with. You are. Thoughts come and go to you. You exist and are aware. That is certain. The body, mind and world appear in your presence. Interest in thoughts comes from not being clear on who we are. The mind may be telling some story about a 'me' or 'I' with some tale of weal or woe. So what are you? Are you some 'fortunate' or 'defective' person? Or are you pure presence-

awareness itself? See very clearly what you are, and see if this is the limited, separate person that the mind is rattling on about.



There does not need to be a 'last question'. A last question for whom? Questions can go on forever, but is there anything wrong with what you already are?



The whole issue is overlooking what you are and assuming yourself to be some image in thought. Can you be an image in thought, if you are the one aware of thought?



You are and you know you are. All else, even the revered 'awakenings' and 'penny droppings' are merely concepts appearing in what you already are. That is the long and short of it. Your being is not in time. It is not the result of a becoming. It is. And you are that. That is what was always overlooked.



When talking about our true nature, all the words are limited. But once that is known and acknowledged, you can keep using words. Seeing what you are, the words flow from that. It is not so much that words create separation. The only issue is viewing oneself as a separate being apart from the source and having a belief in that reference point. Without that, the words can and will come. They will always have their limits, but it is fun to use them anyway. It is like being in love. The words do not fracture or destroy the love, but the words can never really contain the experience either. And you do not have to stop expressing your feelings just because the words are limited. They can contain or convey the perfume of what you know to be true in your heart. Then, if there is a resonance in the hearer, there is a mutual recognition of what the words are pointing to.



Awareness (being, presence, oneness, the natural state) is. And you are that. Full stop. All further movement from right here, right now, puts the apparent seeker back into time and looking away from the fact that all is complete presently. Here is the bottom line: awareness, your natural being, is awake. The 'I' who would want to awaken is a conceptual self that does not exist. Abide with the clear and doubtless knowing that you already are what you are. All duality ends without remainder in this emphatic recognition of what is fully and clearly present. You are what you know and you know what you are. Now you know!



One thing I will point out is that questions appear in the mind. Without the mind, you cannot raise any questions. Whether the mind has questions, you are still present as the one knowing the mind. This approach is about self-knowledge, which is knowing and being what you are, not what you think about. It is important to see the difference between what you actually are and thoughts arising in the mind. Are you a thought? If so, which one? This does not make sense. You are the one to whom the mind appears. No amount of thinking will bring you closer to what you already are. That is already here and beyond doubt. Eventually, all the interest returns to this basic fact, the fact of your being. Till then, the mind may have any questions, and it is good to ask them so they can be resolved. Why? Then we stop paying attention to the mind. It is not in order to get answers! It is to drop the interest in the mind!



Who is seeing? Who is breathing? Who is beating the heart? Who is blowing the wind? Who creates the next thought? Is some concept of an 'I' doing all those things? Any attempt to explain or provide a reason is only a conceptual, provisional answer. Destiny, spontaneity, God's grace, effort, impersonal energy—all are plausible, but all are really only guesses or theories. It is an appearance, spontaneously arising, following its own rules. What is the problem with any of it?



The main question—and the only one worth putting any energy into—is who and what are you? Why waste time trying to explain appearances to the satisfaction of the mind, which is itself only an appearance? The point is to know yourself, because the root of all problems is a misunderstanding of our real nature.



To believe in myself as a conceptual 'me' and experience life through that image is suffering, pure and simple. But is that 'me' image your actual self? Is it anything more than just an idea? Life without belief in the 'me', that illusory entity, is problem-free and self-validating. Without the belief in yourself as a 'me', who has a problem? All seeking, suffering and doubt come from seeing yourself as that conceptual entity. You are not the 'me' thought, or any other thought.



Once the questioner assumes the object exists independently, the questions may arise as to why and how did the object arise, etc. In truth, the subject and object are both conceptual. The object is not different from consciousness, and consciousness is not different from the reality. So it is all reality, and that is not different from your true self. There is no doubt or problem with yourself. The questions arise from seemingly dividing the non-dual reality. Instead of accepting the duality and then looking for answers, it is better to see if the division is actual. Keep in mind, the real purpose and point of things is knowing who you are. Inquiring into the nature of apparent objects is not as direct as inquiring into your own self. It all gets back to the same points, though.



Keep in mind that when Buddhism denies the self in the body/mind as 'This I am not, this is not me', your actual presence does not disappear. In other words, the 'final state' of Buddhism is not nihilism. Otherwise, what is the point of Buddhism? If the Buddha ends up as a blank void with no existence at all, that would be a

strange type of Buddha, not even worth the effort! Something remains when the apparent self is negated. This is the 'unborn, uncreated, deathless, peaceful, free' nature that Buddha talks about as Nirvana. It is also talked about as unconditioned consciousness. Consciousness appearing in the body/mind is conditioned. But consciousness present beyond the body/mind is the true nature itself. This is all beautifully laid out in the early teachings of Buddhism.



See through the concepts as they arise and realize that nothing—nothing at all—needs to happen for you to be what you already are. Time, future, awakening, getting rid of ideas and so on are all simply presently arising notions in effortless and obvious presence-awareness. In the end, we come to see that the simplicity of what is being pointed to is overwhelmingly simple! In order for anything to be, your knowing presence must be there first. That is what is being pointed to as the basic and fundamental reality. Everything else appears as an experience in this. It is funny to realize that all the feverish practicing and attainments are only being done in reference to overlooking the obvious—you were never bound in the first place!



Do not give too much weight to ideas, even your own! When it gets right down to it, all the troubles flow from an incomplete or erroneous view of who and what you are. You already are what you are, of course. You are not even the 'I' thought. It is that conceptual 'I' notion that has all the troubles. We suffer as long as we see ourselves as that image, or entity, in thought. Fortunately, you are not a thought and have never been a limited 'I'. See this clearly and do not give a lot of credence to thoughts, concepts and beliefs about the 'I'.



Words are not a problem, really. Of course, words are not what they describe, but they are still useful and appropriate for everyday life. It would be hard to get along without the use of words. Words are not

the problem—but only mixing up words and taking them to be more real than what they are about. If this is clear, any amount of words can come up for practical purposes. And there will not be any bondage either. The word is not the thing. Once that is clear, then the source of the confusion is cleared up. Thoughts and expressions can appear without being run through the image of the limited ‘me’. Then it is just spontaneous thinking not dominated by the limited view of the separate self. That is action with no actor, or self-less functioning. It was never the acting, thinking or speaking that was the problem, but only the wrong view of ourselves. This is very freeing because there is no need to edit or change the natural functioning (not that such is actually possible either!).



Different words are used, but you are not a word, so the words are not the point. You are and you know you are. There is no trouble or doubt with yourself. All the troubles come from looking away from this simple being-knowing-presence and following conceptual thoughts, particularly those about ‘I’ and ‘me’. Without that, what is wrong with right now? Is there any doubt about your very being? Is it good, bad, separate or incomplete? Does it even need to be awakened or enlightened? All such concepts are created in conceptual thought. Most people miss this and engage in fruitless searches for things that are of no use whatsoever.



Pause the questions and doubts and see what you are here and now. That is the highest and, ultimately, only necessary pointer. Stick with the basic point. All the questions are only movements away from the clear and obvious. Then it is up to you whether you want to pursue them or not. For my part, I would say to drop the questions and be what you already are. Is there any question about the fact of your being? Settle down with being what you are.



Start with the only thing you are sure of, the fact of your being. You are. There is no doubt whatsoever about your existence or its aware

nature. Settle down with that point. Just see that the mind—and all else—arises and sets in your knowing presence. That knowing presence is clear, beyond doubt and filled with the light of awareness and energy. It is the light from which all thought appears, the love from which all feelings emerge and the ground of being from which all appearances derive their existence. Your real self is profound beyond all words and experiences. Without a sense of the ever-present and completely wonderful nature of what you already are, all spiritual pursuits only divert you away from the simple truth of things. If you do not know what you are, then the mind with its image of you being some defective, separate person dominates the proceedings.



Start with the positive recognition of your being. To be alive, aware, present and conscious is such an amazing thing. Do not overlook this wonderful fact.



Once you are clear beyond any doubt what you are, then it is easy to see that all suffering is created in thought and revolves around the notion of being some limited 'I', which is also created in thought. Is this what you are? Can you be some thought in the mind? Of course not! That is about the extent of what needs to be seen. Other than that, just be what you are! I do not have any advice for you, because there is nothing wrong with you. You are perfect freedom itself, so what else can I say? Do not forget what you are. Then do whatever comes up to be done.



Just as every leaf on a tree is different, so, too, is every expression in the appearance of things. That which is the essence behind the appearance is not something that anyone can create, nor is it a path to be followed or cultivated. It is the essence of each apparent person. Beyond that, all the words can do is point to this self-evident fact. Many paths and formulations have been tried and they all turn to dust in the end. As Nisargadatta Maharaj once said, 'All paths lead to unreality'. Let your expression flow from your own direct

being and knowing of your true nature. Then see that the expression is not what is being described. There is always a tendency to turn this simple truth into a teaching, a technique or path, but then it becomes a concept, a dead image in the mind. People begin focusing on the teaching instead of seeing the basic point that they are already what they are seeking. Until this is recognized, there will be continued interest in the stories of awakenings, enlightened people, achieving liberation, living the teachings, seeking stillness, questioning the stories and what not. A few will see that even these apparently relevant spiritual activities are still arising from overlooking the obvious.



The simplicity of this is so well, simple! It is easy to turn it into something more complex than it really is. A couple of choice pointers that lead you to recognizing your own nature, then full stop! There is only one way to go from there, which is back into concepts and thoughts. That is why the comprehensive point that 'There is no answer in the mind' is so valuable. That cuts off all avenues that lead back into concepts, even the spiritual ones. And you are left with being-knowing what you are.



Objects in space can be localized. That is clear. Perhaps a case could be made that perception or cognition is localized, i.e, that it is associated with the spacial location of the organ of cognition. But you cannot really say that about 'being' or 'awareness'. It does not really make any sense. Where is your being? Where does it start? How large is it? Where is the edge of being? And so on. Consciousness as a state is still known by a principle beyond it, which is what you are. The whole universe of time and space appears in consciousness. How can you say 'where' or 'when' consciousness is? If what you truly are is the non-conceptual source to which even consciousness appears, how can that prior-to-consciousness principle, which is your abiding essence, be bounded in time and space, given that it cannot even be defined by the presence or absence of consciousness?



It can be of help to contemplate these issues in relation to a dream experience. The figure in the dream can also make the case that consciousness appears to be localized to his or her dream body. But what you are is not confined or limited to the dreamed figure. While the dream figure cognizes and perceives relative to the dream body, there is another basic consciousness permeating the whole dream experience. Beyond this is your actual being, which is not limited to the dream body or even the consciousness which illumines the dream. When the dream and the consciousness of it subside, you remain. In terms of the dream content, you are no thing perceivable or conceivable in the dream. Even the role of witness of the dream is time-bound and in relation to the dream only. But your innate existence, which cannot be named in relation to the dream, still is. What you are in truth is not any kind of existence or consciousness in the dream. That is why the terms 'being' and 'consciousness' are really only pointers to what you are. I might try to point to this (your fundamental nature) by saying that you are the non-conceptual awareness that cognizes even the fact of being conscious. But no word will really do. It is just your natural state here and now prior to the next concept! Only what you are, nothing else. Of course, that is not even a 'you'. It is you without the concept of 'you'!



Events cause us suffering when they are related to the reference point of an erroneous sense of self ('my' thoughts, 'my' actions, 'my' feelings, etc.). Things will always be a bit dicey until this is seen clearly. That is why there is focus on clarifying the real nature of the 'I'. What is this 'I' that has all these troubles and problems? We think the troubles are the trouble! But it is not so. It is the 'I' that is the real trouble. This 'I' is a false identity. You are not that thought or concept! If you are not the 'I' that is the source of the trouble, then who are you? This is the central question and the only thing really worth finding out. A clear recognition of what you are ends the belief in identification with the 'I' thought. With this recognition ends all seeking, suffering and doubt. Why? Because the suffering depends upon overlooking what you are and trading it in for a mistaken idea.

It does not feel right to live in the framework of a false idea, any more than it would feel right to walk around all day in shoes that are three sizes too small! Think of suffering as similar to wearing the wrong size shoes. Once you see the problem, things are naturally remedied. But if you do not see that your pain is being caused by ill-fitting shoes, you might make all kinds of efforts to reduce the pain, but all in vain until you see the root of the problem.



The notion that 'I am entering in and out of the state of non-conceptual awareness' subtly leaves the sense of the 'me' intact. With that sense still in the picture, there is still going to be a point of view of things happening or not happening to 'me', which keeps us in time, becoming, and all the ups and downs that flow from that position. Non-conceptual awareness or natural being is a present fact, one that is entirely unrelated to any concept about a 'me' or anything else.



The 'me' comes and goes as a concept upon the necessary principle of natural being and knowing. Being and knowing are impersonal, that is, not related to the 'me' of memory. This is the saving grace. The image comes and goes, but what we truly are simply is—the natural and ever-present state.



The 'I' image can swell or shrink based on how events jibe with its self-centered concepts. Fortunately, you are not that image! The 'I' is something like a balloon filled with air. It is taken to be something substantial, but it is really just a weightless thing with no real substance. To see the 'I' thought for what it really is drains all the identification and belief out of it. You are not the 'I' concept but the natural presence of being and knowing in which that thought and all other experiences come and go. This is not a matter of entering into or leaving it, for at that level, the 'I' who would do such a thing is not even present yet (i.e., it has not been conjured up in thought). Non-conceptual awareness, which is your genuine state, has no 'I' entity in it. The 'I' image appears, and then we watch the ups and downs of its supposed existence. A bit of looking exposes the 'I' for what it is—merely an ephemeral image coming and going in awareness, certainly not what we truly are.



The reason you cannot get 'it' from a book is because what 'it' is, is your own being, your present self. Your self is not in a book. That is

the long and short of it. There is no mysterious hocus pocus here! Even the notion of 'getting' it is flawed because you are 'it'. You already are what you are seeking. If that is clear, then the gist of this whole matter is understood.



Seeing your nature as present awareness may not be 'enough', so to speak, because if there is any lingering suffering, questions or doubts, they ought to be resolved. It is not entirely satisfactory to be eternal presence-awareness if you are still seeking and suffering! This is addressed by understanding the nature of the suffering as being self-centered conceptualization dependent on the assumed presence of the limited 'I'. As long as this is not understood, the doubts are bound to continue. I am not there; I lose it; I am not enlightened; I should or shouldn't see a teacher; I am reading a book; I am stabilizing, etc. These are all mental concepts of and about the 'I'. That is why the 'I' concept is the root of all suffering. You can appreciate the fact that if the 'I' is found to be non-existent, the basis of all suffering is removed. It is very worthwhile to wrap up the show by a clear realization that the root of all suffering is not present. There is not and has never been a separate 'I' standing apart from presence-awareness, much less has such a creature ever been what you are.



What you are is not something to be lost or found, because you have to first be present in order to have the sense of feeling lost. If your being seems not present, the very concept means you are fully present. You can never lose your true nature. This is why your real being is perpetually present and inescapable.



There is no need to get hung up on the words. What are you supposed to call that which is not confined to the mind or even the states of consciousness, all of which are clearly appearances? No word of course applies. Whatever you call that necessary principle—that in which even consciousness appears—is only going to be a

pointer. All I can say is—that is what you are. You are the one to whom all appears, including the fact of being conscious and all that subsequently appears within that concept. That is why consciousness is the first experience, or the first requirement for all other experiencing. On the other hand, what you are cannot be called unconscious or unaware either. As odd as it sounds in language, you are aware of the presence of consciousness, just like any other experience. You may call that 'life'. Some call that 'non-conceptual awareness' or 'pure being that is beyond being and non-being'. Others call it 'non-duality', 'your true nature', etc. However you label it, it is simply what you are, your natural existence prior to concepts.



Who is looking into the pointers, you ask? No one! The question introduces the erroneous notion of self or doer into the mix. The point is that the question 'who?' is misplaced or invalid. Awareness is, but there is no 'Who' in it. The pointers are used only to show this basic fact. Drop the 'Who?' questions and just see what is being pointed out here.



Awareness or being is. That is undeniable. You are that. Any entity apart from this is a fiction. The 'who' is a fabrication or construction in the conceptual mind. You are already present naturally, before the question about 'who' is created in thought. Before the 'who' concept appears, there is no 'who' in the natural presence of what you are. Do not retrofit a 'who' back into the self-less reality that you are.



Who is seeing right now? No one! Seeing is happening. The mind may say later, 'I see', but that 'I' is only a word. The 'I' thought was not present in the seeing and, in fact, cannot see anything at all. Perceiving, feeling, thinking and acting are already entirely self-less. The 'I' always comes in as an afterthought. See this fact and the entire network of suffering and doubt is annihilated. Who sees this?

Do not ask, because it is a wrong question. Seeing and doing happen, but no entity has ever seen or done anything.



I suggest putting the consideration on the fact of your being. Remember, the point is self-knowledge. Your self or being is already present, correct? In all the practicing and such, where is the understanding of what you are? It is being ignored. You are looking entirely away from that fact of what this is about. You are already what you are seeking. No one can deny his or her being. That being is what this is about. Have a look and get to know this ever-present, undeniable true nature that is here already. You are not practicing to be. What does practicing have to do with self-knowledge? Nothing! Drop the concept. You are much freer and happier without it.



Self-knowledge is so simple we overlook it. Your being or true self is naturally present and also happens to be aware. This natural presence of being and knowing is effortlessly shining here and now and through all experiencing, and you already are this.



Do you know that you already are the ever-existent, self-shining, naturally free reality? Reality has no problems, and this is what you are. Get to know what you are. Make sure this is clear.



My advice is to know without any doubt what you are. That is always first and foremost, and all that this is about in the end. All trouble comes from being unclear on one's natural identity. All seeking, suffering and doubt spring from overlooking what one is and putting the energy of belief, or sense of identity, onto an image in the mind and taking it to be oneself. If there is some unresolved sense of seeking, suffering or doubt, then simply understand the nature and origin of suffering. What is such suffering except concepts of and about some image of a supposed deficient person that I am taking

as myself? That is all suffering is. All questions and problems are only concepts appearing in the mind about some assumed person who is 'not yet there', does not quite see 'it', has fallen back into suffering or whatever it might be. None of these notions have a whit to do with your innate presence of being and knowing, which shines radiantly free and clear, even in the midst of the doubts and questions. Look at the doubts like this and they will evaporate. The thoughts are just arising and setting in the pure, available, open clarity of this present moment that cannot be denied and which you already are. That is the end of it, the end of the search, the doubts, the questions and so on. You are already what you are seeking. All the problems are for the entity created in thought (the assumed self, person or defective being). All the thoughts are for and about 'me' as a conceptual representation in thought. They are not about the real you, which is ever-present, non-conceptual awareness, utterly free of all appearances, yet intimately shining in and through them all constantly. That defective person idea is a concept only. You cannot find any real, palpable defective person in yourself. All there is at any given moment is a few thoughts, feelings or perceptions coming and going in consciousness, but no separate 'I' at all. Therefore, the 'me', which is at the root of all suffering, seeking and doubt is purely a figment of the imagination. There has never been, nor ever will be, any such entity. This is all that needs to be seen, and it is a very simple, basic point to be noticed right now (never at a future time, which is itself a concept!). That is the end of it. The 'me' of memory is a mere figment. Except for the word or idea, nothing tangible is present. This recognition kicks the legs out from under the belief for good. It is no use saying 'I know there is no me present' and then returning to the stories, doubts or problems about the 'me'! See this basic point right now. In truth you are fully, finally and completely free in this moment and ever. Any other experience is a mere imagined concept that is taking place in the ever-present freedom that you are. The end!



Get to know the glorious and radiant gem of your self-nature that is shining in plain view. This is what you are. Otherwise, you will be like

someone with a priceless gem in her hand asking, 'What do I have to practice to obtain the gem?' You are the gem! Before the next thought appears, the true nature is already here, full of life, awareness and joy. It is simple being, which is naturally aware. But we overlook this fact and go chasing down the dark alleyways of the mind looking for the answer. Do not forget that thought must appear to someone or something. That is the true self, and you are that. If you investigate along these lines, the seeking and doubts must dissolve very rapidly, because they appear only due to overlooking your actual identity.



You can drop all the thoughts and doubts and see the simple fact that present awareness is shining in plain view. You are already that. No separation from that ever happened. This is the essence. Perfect peace is present in seeing this basic and simple fact.



'I' is a word. You have never been a word! In fact, there has never been any such thing as an 'I'. And that assumption was the root of all suffering, seeking and doubt. If the 'I' has never had any substance or reality, the root of suffering has never existed. This is the simple fact of it.



Everything arises in awareness. You are not separate from that awareness. That is what you are. Appearances may appear. Note: they are *appearances*, not independent realities. What are they appearances of? Of awareness, because it is the only thing present prior to the appearances. There is nothing there before the appearance arises, except non-conceptual awareness itself. So, in essence, the appearances are themselves only awareness. That is why, in terms of self-knowledge, it is immaterial to consider the nature of appearances, because the appearances as such are not substantial. The issue of your fundamental identity goes right to the heart of discovering your essential nature of non-conceptual awareness (or being, emptiness, reality and so forth—many terms

are used to point to it). In realizing your real identity, there is a simultaneous understanding of the nature of appearances, since they are only an expression of that which you are. In that non-conceptual reality, there is no concept present of an 'I', 'you', 'other' and so on, as all those notions are created in thoughts, which are a subsequent appearance on the pure awareness itself.



The pointers are addressed to the apparent seeker who is under the delusion that he is a separate 'I'. One way to dissolve the fascination with this concept of the 'I' is to investigate it. If the counter argument is that there is no one present to do the investigation, this is precisely the point being made. And then all the seeking is over. (If there is no 'I', how can there be a seeker?) The pointers are not for one who already sees his true nature! Usually, what happens in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred is that the counter argument is being asserted based on intellectual understanding, and the 'I' is being believed at some level. In that case, it is a case of armchair philosophizing. For example, who would be reading books or seeking advice, if the realization of their true nature and the absence of the person were already clear? The very activities imply that the seeking is still in place, and hence the 'I' notion is, in fact, being believed. That is why the argument, which is sometimes raised, that the pointers are confirming or accentuating the 'I' is misplaced. If you know the basic truth of things, the pointers are not necessary. If you are still seeking, the pointers are attempting, as far as possible in language, to expose the root of the problem. When I say have a look at yourself, there is no implication that there is any entity present to do or not do that. Seeing happens naturally. It does not depend on a conceptual entity to do it. This is actually the case at a relative level also. There is seeing now, but no 'I' is seeing. The false concept of the 'I' is seen through, but not by an 'I'. It is just pure intelligence, a non-conceptual understanding of the facts.



A pointer is given to 'look away' from thoughts to see the ever-present awareness-being-love. From there, looking back at what

appears, that is only the display or manifestation of awareness-being-love, so the looking is all-inclusive at that point, an ever-present moment of non-conceptual awareness-being-love without beginning or end. That is all that is here, nothing else.



Stay with the simplicity of things. You say, 'I do not believe it is so simple'. Well, that brings back in the 'I' thought! Who? That is just another self-centered thought! Have a look and see what this 'I' is. Is it anything other than ever-present, natural awareness itself? And is this thought anything other than an imaginary reference point? It may be useful for communication, but it is not a real entity. You say, 'I am present as the idea of Jim, or as crazy Jim or sage Jim'. Again, a false reference point. You are not an idea! You are that non-conceptual presence for whom the idea appears. If you take yourself as an idea, the imagined 'I' is back in the game. Each of these examples is a concept about an imaginary 'I'. You are not any of these reference points. In all of this thinking, have you moved away from your naturally present and aware being? Do not trade your essence for a passing thought! Use thoughts, but do not be used by them.



Bodies are born and die. That is evident. In this process, the universe and whatever is supporting it do not vanish. In questions about the death of the body there is usually a subtle identification of your essence with the body. If this is the case, then you are finished along with the demise of the body. But are you the body? If so, which one: the child, youth, man, or dream figure A, B, or C? Consciousness in manifestation can arise in an infinite number of bodies. Yet, the coming and going of the bodies does not end the continued manifestation of consciousness. Keep in mind that what I am pointing to as your real nature is not even confined to the manifest consciousness. If consciousness in manifestation clearly survives its vehicles, what about that which is the source of consciousness? Before consciousness dawns, you are present as

the one to whom it dawns. Anyway, a key point is examining the assumed identification of one's essence with the body.



This is not about getting the mind to surrender to the self. Why put another condition on things? What is wrong with your natural and undeniable true nature? Leave the body and mind to resolve themselves at a practical level. Keep your recognition on what you already are. Just be what you are, and there is the end of troubles. All of the questions come from turning away from the ever-present peace and attending to the problems created in the thoughts. You are there with or without thought, so there is not much to be gained by seeking and searching in appearances. Just be what you are, and let events come and go naturally.



Many doubts and questions revolve around the notion of some special event (such as awakening or realization), how and when that happens, what life is like after that and so on. You might start to suspect that this view is part of the problem. What you are is already present, so to conceive of some special realization happening in time is an error. Your very being and knowing presence is undeniable. Is that not already present? Are you anything other than what you already are? The interest in the doubts and questions keeps all the focus on the mind and looking away from our natural state. Being what you are does not involve any attainment at all. It is just a simple recognition of something that was always present but perhaps overlooked. The first thing is to understand clearly what your true self is. Most people overlook this, which leads to doubt. Once your real nature is clear, it is helpful to understand the genesis of suffering and what is at the root of that. At that point, your real being is clear and the root of the doubts is severed once and for all.



This is only about seeing what you already are. The mind is clearly an appearance that comes and goes to you as an experience. The mind has about zero percent to do with any of this. What the mind

appears to—which is you—is both present and aware. This is completely obvious and beyond doubt. Even a doubt about it requires that you are present and aware to perceive the doubt. Settle down right here with your doubtless sense of knowing and being and get to know this present nature that you already are.



In order to be free of the 'me' concept, there had to be a 'me' concept. But what was the 'me' ever really, except an imagined concept? And apart from the 'me' is there really any defective person present? No! The bondage was only based on the assumed 'me' concept. Therefore bondage and liberation themselves are only conceptual. They are only in relation to the 'me' concept. Liberation depends on bondage. But the bondage is only assumed or imagined, because the 'me' was never real. All our problems are based on taking ourselves to be something that is only imagined to exist!



Nothing ever really happened at all. There were only appearances arising and setting in the perfect clarity that you have never been separate from, because it is what you are.



Consciousness is a time-bound state. Before you were born, you did not have any consciousness or sense of being present. The same is true of deep sleep or after death. The world and everything that is experienced in it only exists for us when consciousness becomes manifest. Consciousness itself is a temporary appearance with no substance or enduring reality. Therefore, all experiences, knowledge and activities that appear in consciousness (this includes everything perceivable and conceivable) have no final reality whatsoever. Some say that everything that appears is all the oneness. But what the appearances are one with is consciousness, which is not the final reality. The core issue is—what is the source from which consciousness emerges? Because consciousness comes and goes as an appearance to me, the source of consciousness must be what

I am. Many assume that consciousness, being or presence is your real nature, but what you are is beyond all of these.



Take a deep breath and realize that what you are is incredibly clear and solid—the immovable and ever-present being that is radiant with awareness and life. It is the source and substance of all that appears. The mind is looking for something to grasp, but what you are is that which the mind appears within. Seeing this, there is no need to grasp anything. It is more of a relaxation or abidance in a state of simplicity that is not only present, but fully aware, alive and full to the brim.



Even the concept ‘I am liberated’ is still based on the perception of individuals, some who are judged as in bondage and others who are judged to be liberated. That view is still from the perspective of the assumed reality of the individual self. The concepts of bondage and liberation are still concepts relative to the root notion of the separate ‘I’. They may be useful concepts in the beginning, but ultimately will have to be relinquished. With the dissolution of the ‘I’ notion, the notions of bondage and liberation are also dissolved. Who is in bondage? Who is liberated? The ever-present true nature has never been bound and does not need to be freed. This cannot be asserted as merely an intellectual concept. Your seeking and doubts will come to an end through understanding your real nature. There is no doubt about it.



The natural state is already present, already attained, already established. This is almost universally overlooked. We have been conditioned to look away from the naked simplicity of what is present right here, right now. Instead, we look for some special state or attainment in the future. I met many teachers and so-called ‘awakened’ beings during my years of searching, yet I never met a single one who could point to the presence of immediate freedom free of becoming. References were made to ‘what we already are’

and so forth, but when it got down to it, the message was really about a progressive path of realization or practice leading to awakening or something similar. But even that apparently was still not good enough! There were further stages and intricacies to be dealt with. Teachers make a comfortable living preaching the path of becoming, as it lends itself to a never-ending stream of meetings, retreats, products, tours, events and so on. All of this is a clear sign of the ineffectiveness of the message. I was able to see through this after meeting 'Sailor' Bob Adamson. He was the first one I met who pointed to the presence of immediate freedom and refused to compromise the pointing with a message of duality or becoming. Instead of 'you are free, but ...', the message was consistently 'You are free; full stop!' Such a direct approach is very rare and almost completely absent in the current spiritual culture, in which the emphasis is almost always on a progressive path, a special attainment or the special status of the teacher.



Once you get it in your mind to pursue enlightenment or awakening as some special attainment, you have already taken a wrong turn. Why? Because the very notion of some special event is dependent on several false concepts. First is the notion that you are a being in need of awakening in the first place. This is a clear contradiction of the basic tenet of non-duality, which is 'You are that' ('that' being absolute reality itself). Why would the absolute reality need to awaken when it already is the absolute reality? Second is the notion that reality lies in the future, not the present. This overlooks the fact that time itself is purely a mental concept. How could reality reside in a concept? Third is the notion that reality is reducible to some special experience or event. Clearly, experiences and events come and go and cannot bear any relation to what the non-dual traditions point to as the ever-present, changeless reality. So, those who preach a doctrine of a special awakening are only peddling false concepts to the unwary. A clear and direct sharing of the essential message of non-duality results in the immediate recognition of one's own true being as always present and ever-attained. Dualistic spiritual approaches tend to stress either the so-called pre-requisites

to self-understanding or some assumed post-awakening development. These approaches invariably leave one either practicing endlessly in hopes of awakening 'some day' or else attempting to deepen some imagined awakening experience. Either way, one is left with a view of being incomplete, rather than standing firmly with the recognition 'I am that'.



The key is just to see that the 'I' notion is a construct, a concept. It appears within the reality of what you actually are, which is non-conceptual awareness itself. Actions arise spontaneously in this. The 'I' is only tagged on later. In truth, there is no 'I' present, either to do or not to do. You say, 'I keep the dream going, when it might be better to just do absolutely nothing (which should end the dream world)'. This is still in reference to an 'I' that is there to do all this. Let that notion go, too! Just be natural and let activity flow according to circumstances. Do not believe that a concept is doing it or not doing it.



To see the world as appearing in the space of your being does turn the tables on how the uncritical mind may have viewed things. But this is in fact the natural and normal state, looked at on its own terms. You are no thing in particular within appearances. At the same time all appearances arise and set in the space of your knowing being.



People express the feeling of being lost in a fog, but that which recognizes the fog is the ever-present clear seeing. It is that simple.



Any teaching needs to be examined critically and the results verified against one's own direct experience. Keep in mind that what is being pointed to—your natural state—is not a 'teaching' at all. Once you begin to consider a teaching as such, what you are dealing with is concepts, not the reality. This is true for any teaching, however lofty and sublime it may be regarded. This goes for non-dualistic Advaita Vedanta, Buddhism, etc., even in their highest presentations. The presentation is itself in concepts, and what is being pointed to is not a concept. Past a certain point, words and teachings tend to overcomplicate the direct and simple truth of things. Reality is not a teaching. It is what is, not a description of what is.



Pause all thought and look in direct experience. What is here and now, and what are you? How far are you from non-conceptual presence-awareness, and where is the presumed person, with his need for paths, practices and purifications? Before granting the need for such things, one must first establish the presence of the defective person. If there is no person, then who are we speaking about? The problem with all teachings, however grand they may be, is that in the end they are collections of concepts. The recorded teachings of the greatest teachers, such as Shankara, Buddha or whomever, are nothing but words and concepts. What I am talking about is your natural state, which is here and now and not even touched by the

mind. This is the beauty of the direct, non-conceptual truth of things. All the questions and problems are constructions in thought, for and about an imaginary entity whom we cannot even establish as present. That is the hitch with approaches that are dualistic and unfold in time or through a process of becoming. (These are often, incorrectly, labeled as 'advaita' or 'non-duality', when in fact they are far from it.) These approaches reaffirm the primacy of the individual, time, processes, attainments, teachers and students and so on (all of which are purely conceptual), as opposed to the ever-present, non-conceptual reality that you are. So you are right back in the duality you started with.



Once the simplicity and naturalness of what the non-dual message is about is clear, the need for some separate endeavor to be undertaken for spiritual purposes falls away. You are what you are seeking, and that is about the end of it. From here, life unfolds as it will. There is not much more to add, as any more talk does not enhance this natural state. It is simply life without the trouble, strain and strife that was based on the belief in being a limited self. All is well.



The point of all this is to know yourself. Is your being and its true nature clear at this point? All the questions and problems arise from this being unclear. Rather than deal with questions on a piecemeal basis, go right to the root issue. Who and what are you? You know you are. That cannot be denied. But what is the nature of this that you are? Tackle that first and all the rest will stand clarified by that. Until that point, even if questions are addressed, there is no real end to them. But when you know what your true nature is, the doubts are over with. I would suggest dropping all other pursuits, spiritually speaking, and settling in with that basic question.



It can be helpful to distinguish between consciousness and non-conceptual awareness. In Buddhism and also in the teachings of

Nisargadatta Maharaj, consciousness is a conditioned appearance based on the presence of the body, mind, senses, etc. But this arising of consciousness is witnessed or recognized by a deeper principle. That is what Buddha called the consciousness without feature or mark. Other types of Buddhism, such as Dzogchen, point to that as non-conceptual awareness or mind essence. This has nothing to do with the consciousness element, which is a material product. When I talk about presence-awareness or awareness, I am not talking about the element of consciousness, which is a concept, a product, an appearance. I am talking about what you are, the non-conceptual presence upon which consciousness and all else appears. That is different from consciousness, which clearly comes and goes as a state. You can see that consciousness appears and disappears. Sometimes you are conscious; sometimes not. Sometimes you are awake; sometimes asleep. The interesting question is 'Who is cognizing these appearances?' That is what the word 'awareness' is attempting to point out. You are this already. What you find is that, in essence, the traditions are pointing to the same thing, just using different words and concepts, which is one reason not to get too hung up on the pointers. The basic questions are always, 'What am I?' and 'What am I not?'



Ultimately, anything that appears, be it a thought, concept, feeling, sensation or perception is reducible to an object in consciousness. What appears to you and is clearly recognized to come and go, leaving you intact, cannot be the abiding essence of what you are. The point here is only to highlight the fact of your non-conceptual, non-objective nature. It is not to create some metaphysical split between objects and the consciousness in which they appear, because, in truth, the objects cannot appear separate (or apart) from consciousness. This is evident once consciousness is known for what it is. A better way to talk about objects is as expressions or appearances of consciousness. But just like the wave as such is not the water, neither can you say it is a separate entity apart from water. But if you miss the water and only see the transient wave, you miss the abiding reality. Ultimately, you come to see that even

consciousness you are not, as consciousness itself appears in what you are. The same type of seeing applies here also. Consciousness itself has no independent existence apart from you, as you are the one who recognizes the fact of being consciousness. But that recognition is not constant either. To whom is that recognition? That is what you are, here and now and ever. Any word used to describe that is clearly insufficient. It is probably best to leave it unnamed. Some call it your true nature; some call it reality; some call it pure being; some call it cognizing emptiness; some call it 'what is'; some call it non-conceptual awareness. It is that which is present now before the next thought or appearance arises, even the concept 'I am'.



Our mind, based on misunderstanding, assumes we are a separate person apart from reality. Then we seek a path, practice, goal and so on. But the problem is a creation of thought. Without the thoughts, is there a problem? The concept on which all other troubling concepts is based is the notion of the separate 'I'. The one with the problem—the 'I'—is the problem itself! Until this is seen, the seeking, suffering and doubts cannot help but go on. How can an illusory character let go of an illusion which is, in fact, itself? The key is seeing the flaw in the mind's core assumption. Then the problem drops, because it is erroneous and misplaced. Pause the doubts and see what is present right now. Can you deny your very being and its aware capacity? Yes or no! Be clear on this. You are nothing but non-conceptual awareness, which is just a term pointing to your own being. The concepts are built on the notion of the existence of a separate 'I' and your identity as that. But is this notion true? Where is this separate self? Where is this defective, limited 'I' in reality? Noticing that it is only a concept with no actual substance, how can we believe it any longer, much less take it to be ourselves? So, all the energy of belief falls out of the concepts of and about the 'I'. What is present is what is always here, your inescapable being, in all its clarity and vivid presence.



Understand the mechanism of suffering and what is at the root of the interest in the appearances. Until this is understood, the wavering between being what you are and the arising appearances is bound to happen. Objects do not pull you into them. It is the interest in them that does so.



Keep the focus on your own being. The investigation is not into the objects, but yourself. Keep in mind that the word 'awareness' is only a pointer. What we are talking about is you, your natural being. Make sure that is clear.



Why go off on a tangent of speculation, when your own self is already present? Take a break from the interest in objects and concepts. Have a good look at yourself. Then all the other stuff is clear.



Keep to the root issue. Clarify your own identity. Objects and appearances can take care of themselves.



Thoughts, feelings, moods and experiences must continue to swirl through consciousness as long as there is a body present and intact. From the perspective of non-conceptual awareness (your innate nature), the manifestation of the appearances is inconsequential, just as the sky is not bothered by the nature and configuration of clouds passing through. The clouds cannot appear without the sky, nor can they stick to the sky or compromise it in any way. The thoughts and feelings are entirely non-personal. Habitually, the mind associates the appearances with an 'I', a person who is present to own them. This is the bondage, which is the assumption that references things to the separate 'I'. But in looking for this 'I', you see there is no such presence at all. Then there are only thoughts, not 'my' thoughts; only feelings, not 'my' feelings. It is only the 'I' that suffers; but that only

occurs while the 'I' is assumed to be present. Upon looking, where is this entity? It is nowhere. It has never been present, except as an assumption. There is no being present to suffer the identifications and problems which the mind has foisted on this imaginary entity. All there is, is the radiant presence-awareness which illuminates all appearances and possibilities. Those appearances themselves are only the expressions of the one non-conceptual, ever-fresh, presence-awareness. There is just this, nothing else. Let thoughts and appearances arise or not arise. It makes no difference to you. Appearances are only appearances of your conscious presence, just as clouds are really manifestations of the sky itself. In this seeing, all returns to the one. That one dissolves into yourself, and all is complete. Nothing can ever shake you from what you innately are. That is pure absence and emptiness, which is always present and radiant with the light of non-conceptual knowing beyond the mind.



I recommend getting back to basics with this stuff. Do you know what your true nature is? You obviously exist. Is it clear what you are? If this is not clear, any amount of other pursuits will only be temporary palliatives that may soothe the symptoms of seeking, suffering and doubt. But since the resolution is only temporary, those things will return again. The resolution lies in clear self-knowledge, i.e., knowing what you are without any doubts. This has nothing to do with any spiritual path or 'ism', but getting down to brass tacks and answering the question 'What am I?'—not in terms of concepts or mental assertions, but in direct experience for yourself. What progress have you made in this essential, core pursuit? Is what you are clear at this point?



Clearly, you are not conscious one-hundred percent of the time. But notice the point of that statement: *You* are not conscious one-hundred percent of the time. Consciousness is a state or attribute that comes and goes to what you are.



Sometimes the old ideas appear. There is no problem with that. Even if they appear they cannot really be believed, and so they wither away naturally on their own. How can you be a seeker or searcher when your very nature is what is to be obtained? You can smile and watch the old ideas with some amusement! Whereas they used to generate seeking and suffering, now they cause a smile. In a few moments they are gone and you remain as you are, effortlessly. You are what you are. Any other idea, such as being some defective, separate person, is just a concept that appears to you and cannot touch you in any way. To discover that you are what you were seeking and that no concept can ever touch what you are, is the end of seeking, suffering and doubt. What remains is peace and love itself, and this is none other than what you are. You are that. All comes to rest in this.



My advice is not to make this too complicated. It is not a practice. There is nothing to focus on per se. That just becomes an event or activity, which is at the mind level and does not have any real lasting impact.



When you close your eyes, you still are. There is still your presence, in which the darkness or whatever presents itself is observed. In other words, your being and its aware nature are fully evident. This should be simple and clear. The trouble comes from trying to 'do' something. Your being is not a doing. It is just being what you are! Pause all attempts and be what you are. Even that is saying too much. You are what you are. Do not turn it into something to be focused on. That attempt does not change anything about your actual presence. Full stop! Pause all the attempts and abide as what you are. Get to know that which is fully present.



Consciousness and its objects are clearly a duality. When I talk about awareness (which is simply a label for communication purposes), I am pointing to something entirely beyond what we

normally think of as consciousness, which is a transient appearance. What does consciousness appear within? That is precisely what you are. It is what the term 'presence-awareness' is really pointing to. I would prefer saying 'non-conceptual awareness', but even that is only a word. You are the one for whom consciousness, the sense of being and all else comes and goes. The pointers can only point to that, and they are all limited. In truth, what you are has nothing to do with being, consciousness, awareness, presence or any other concept. All those words appear to you. The consciousness that cognizes those words itself appears to you. The presence that is there to be present to those words appears to you. Do not look for yourself in consciousness, presence or any other thing, however subtle it may be. All dualities are appearances only. Even consciousness is a duality (knower/known). There is a deeper reality which encompasses both and is the source of both. A helpful step is to reduce everything to consciousness. Without consciousness, there can be no other experience. In the realm of appearances, consciousness is the highest or fundamental reality. That is the 'I am', the sense of being or knowingness. But then you will see that this root experience itself appears, and it is in fact the primal appearance, the beginning of duality. In truth, you are not that 'I am' presence. You are the source or ground from which the sense of being, presence or consciousness emerges. In that, which is your fundamental nature, there is no duality, no other, no sense of consciousness, presence or being. Call it anything, but any concept or word is wrong or misleading. I can point to that as the non-conceptual, non-dual pure awareness from which the sense 'I am' appears. Once that sense of 'I am' appears, everything apparently 'other' is imagined within that appearance or concept. First recognize the 'I am', the source of the manifestation. Then see that what you are, even now, is that from which the 'I am' arises and into which it merges. It is prior to the sense of consciousness or sense of being. A lot of people are coming up to the sense of being, presence, consciousness or 'I am' and thinking this is the experience of non-duality. But it is still in duality, in time, in manifestation. That is why they can speak of the 'experience of presence', which is a clear duality. The true nature lies beyond duality, beyond the knower and

the known. It includes yet transcends all such apparent dualities. In the heart of that non-dual source, no duality has ever manifested at all.



The means to resolve the experience of suffering is a very clear and solid sense of your true nature. That is most important. That is what pulls the remaining belief and interest out of the 'I' concept, the belief in which is what sustains seeking, suffering and doubt. A lot of people overlook that the key is the clear and doubtless knowledge of who they are. Instead, they work on getting free of the 'I'. But the endeavor is ultimately unworkable, because the very undertaking is being sustained by the continued belief in the reality of the sense of 'I'. How can an illusion get rid of itself? The illusion automatically becomes impotent in the clear recognition of what you truly are, which is and has always been free of all suffering by its very nature.



Thoughts come and go before you. Whatever you are is present and aware. This being with its aware capacity cannot be denied. This is what you presently are and what is being pointed to. This is consciousness or presence, or the 'I am'. No changes are called for. That is a false notion. You are what you are. Full stop.



Instead of musing and pondering about awareness and your relationship with it and various pieces of 'hearsay' knowledge, just have a look into this undeniable, present awareness to see what it is. Really have a look and see for yourself, going by direct experience. The awareness or your own presence is already established as that self-evident factor that allows you to say 'I am' and 'I know'. Your natural essence is already here. The problem is having an incomplete view of that and getting it mixed up with false assumptions and then focusing on those assumptions. The cycle breaks by pausing the interest in the concepts and having a straight look at yourself. This undeniable present awareness—what are its qualities, its nature, your relationship to that, etc.? All of these things

must be clear or else you will forever cycle in the thoughts and doubts. Start with yourself, your own presence and look from there.



The falling away of the seeking, suffering and doubt is a natural side-effect of being clear on your true identity. Do not focus on the side effects, and certainly do not look for some 'life changing' event, shift, awakening or other non-sense! That is a pure concept and will put you right into duality and becoming. What kind of event do you need to have to be what you are? Just keep it simple and direct, and know beyond any doubt that you are already what you were seeking. This is the message of non-duality that nearly everyone overlooks. You are that. Everything else is a concept imagined in this that you are. Leave the thoughts and concepts alone. Abide effortlessly and naturally in the simplicity of being what you already are. And there is no one to do that, because that is what you are, and the entity that would do that is only a false, imagined concept. This is the essence in a nutshell.



If the basic presence and nature of awareness and your identity as that is clear, that is very good. Keep in mind that your being and its aware nature is *not* an acceptance by the mind. It is a non-conceptual fact, as hard as a nail. Just be clear that this recognition is verified in direct experience and not merely assented to by the mind. That is the first point. Awareness is. You are not separate from that. The coming and going of thoughts does not alter your very presence. This is all to be verified based on direct confirmation in experience.



You say: 'I have to make an effort to remember to revert to the awareness that is always present. I have to make an effort to revert to awareness when I get attached to this or that thought. This constant reversion to awareness is really practice by another name; it is not an effortless, conscious dwelling in awareness'. This is getting away from the point. If awareness is undeniably present and

you are not separate from that, which I am suggesting is the case based on direct evidence, all such statements are redundant. If you examine them more carefully, they are all in reference to an assumed 'I' that stands apart from itself. That is the only way that effort, practicing and reverting would even arise. Correct?



Until the nature of suffering is clearly understood, there is a tendency believe in the thoughts. All doubts and suffering involve the arising of concepts about the assumed 'I' entity and its identity as yourself. This needs to be thoroughly seen and understood. The doubts are purely conceptual and are sustained by the subtle acceptance of the reality of the 'I' notion as a legitimate definition of oneself. All questions, problems, doubts, seeking and suffering are sustained by the same mechanism. Once understood, the belief and sense of reality drains out of the mechanism of the conceptual or imagined bondage once and for all. This is a key point that cannot be overlooked. Is this aspect clear for you? For my part, the suffering and doubts continued until this was pointed out and understood. Then the root of the problem was resolved.



Your being is reality itself. That is it. Full stop. Pause there. All the thoughts and doubts about teachers, paths and attainments are just ephemeral concepts. You are the ever-present reality. If doubts appear, do not follow them, but ask to whom do they appear? To the 'I' notion. That thought you are not. Who are you? Only the pure being and ever-present awareness itself. Why follow thoughts and give them more reality than your own self? How much longer are you willing to play that game?



After all the years of looking, it comes back to what is clear and present and has been here all along, simply yourself, your undeniable being. That being or presence not only is, but is vividly alive and cognizant, taking in all thoughts, perceptions and experiences, even the fact of being awake or asleep. That is why in

truth 'being' and 'consciousness' are only pointers. Being has its opposite in non-being. Consciousness has its opposite in unconsciousness. But you include and transcend these opposites. No word can frame your sheer presence. It need not be known or recognized either, for it simply *is* beyond any doubt. Prior to any recognition, you *are*—the one for whom the recognition happens.



The whole essence of this is a deep looking in direct experience to see what is the nature of what is already present but has been overlooked and unappreciated.



Before any thoughts, doubts or experiences appear—even the experience of being conscious—you *are*. The notion that you stand apart as some limited person in the appearance is just that, only a notion. That notion you are not. There is no 'I' to do or not do anything. Yet, doing happens naturally. Seeing there is no separate doer, no actions can be claimed by an illusory conceptual entity that is a mere figment. There is no entity present to be enlightened or unenlightened. You are what you are and what you always have been. Point to that using any pointer you wish; but no pointer, however sublime, is anything but a signpost. It is never the undeniable, sheer reality-presence of your own being prior to concepts and experiences. Breathing happens. Seeing happens. Doing happens. It is a spontaneous shining forth of consciousness, expressing itself in and as the appearance of things.



Sharing of the pointers happens naturally. If it is 'I am sharing', then the impact is diminished, because there is no 'I' to do such a thing. If it is 'I'-less sharing (sharing without the sense of 'I'), then it is a spontaneous out-flowing of the heart, simply to delight in and share the good news of what is nearest and dearest. You cannot tell a flower to bloom or not. It is all the organic, natural manifestation of things. If the clarity of this shines in your heart, whatever you do or do not do will

naturally reveal your experience. A flower does not 'decide' to give off nectar to attract bees; it just happens in the course of things. Make sure the basics are clear in your heart, and from there whatever will arise, will arise.



Physical pain is a natural and organic response of the body. It is the intelligence at work. If you can deal with it in some fashion through medical or other means, why not? There is no use in feeling pain unnecessarily, if it can be managed. But it is not always unavoidable. Even sages have their aches and pains! This is much different from what I am calling suffering, or what some call 'psychological suffering', which is the seeking, suffering and doubt created by the conceptual mind based on a false sense of self. That is entirely a product of conceptual thought and believing in it as oneself. Without the concepts, such suffering entirely ceases to be. The question of 'to whom' pain is happening is misplaced. The 'who' is a concept. Like everything else, the pain appears in consciousness. And like all else it is transitory and not for a limited 'I'. In this, there is no personal suffering generated. The pain may or may not subside, but it is no longer a personal issue. It is not for, by or about 'me'. It is just a manifestation in consciousness. All appears in consciousness. Consciousness itself comes and goes in what you are. That is why your real being is beyond all duality and experience, beyond all suffering and pain.



I find the 'There is no one there, so there is nothing to do' approach a bit simplistic. That is just stating an ultimate conclusion. In fact, in itself it is nothing more than a new concept. All pointers are concepts, really. In and of themselves, as sound bites, they are fairly useless and possibly even misleading. What is more important is whether or not the basic position being communicated is understood and experienced by the listener who is interested in this stuff. It is not about having some insight about no person, then becoming a teacher and going around on a circuit saying there is no one present, all is oneness or whatever!



The beauty of this is that it is not about any one person sharing this, but the message itself communicating from heart to heart, like a candle flame igniting the next candle, and then that candle igniting the next one and on and on. This is not about the words, but the presence of the heart of clear awareness being pointed to by the words. That presence in you that is clearly recognized will resonate in your expressions so that apparent others will discover it in themselves. As soon as this is recognized those others stand on their own as that. This is the difference between teachings and the direct sharing of heart-knowledge. One is conceptual, the other is immediate recognition of timeless, non-conceptual experience. In a way, it is so simple that everyone keeps overlooking it. But no one can deny their very aware-presence, and this is always the essential pointing.



'I am' is not the real. It is the first concept or expression in manifestation of the non-dual true nature. It is also called presence, consciousness, beingness or being-consciousness-bliss. In truth, it is the first subtle experience or manifestation in duality. What you are lies prior to or behind this. This is the unconditioned, unborn reality that is not to be confused with or equated with consciousness. Your real being is prior to consciousness. The 'I am' is the witness. But that witness is relative to the appearance. What you are precedes the arising of both.



Even when the basic sense of 'who you are' starts to become clear, the nature and cause of suffering needs to be addressed. This is the 'other stuff' that appears in the clarity and presence and gives the feeling of 'losing it'. Once that is understood, the sting is removed and there is no more 'getting and losing' anything.



You are aware of the coming and going of consciousness. Sometimes the state of being conscious is present (waking) and sometime it is dormant (sleep, unconsciousness). But still, all of that is taking place in a greater context, which is the space in 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'. It is the basic, inescapable presence 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 dependent on the presence of the body to become manifest, you do not know that you are. Without that presence of consciousness, you have no sense, feeling or knowledge of your existence. 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. It is only after consciousness dawns and the concept of a separate entity appears that questions of knowing or attaining the absolute arise. The absolute, which is really your own natural condition, is not a state to be attained in the future when the mind is still or consciousness disappears. It is the basis of experiencing and knowing, even now.



You say, 'It seems like the best way to deepen understanding at this point is to merely go on existing'. Even this is a concept! Deepen—for whom? How can you 'go on existing' when your nature is existence itself? The notions are still a concession to the sense of a person in need of such things. There is no deepening of what you are. If you must think of progress, view it as the relinquishing of all erroneous concepts. Your nature is full and complete as is. All bondage and confusion is caused by concepts of being something other than what you are and granting belief to those notions. Reality, or your fundamental identity, is not a matter or approach, time or development. That is the beauty of it. It is not becoming but being what you are.



The nature of who we are is perpetually interesting as a subject of inquiry. There are many ways to approach this. As I see it, self-consciousness (the sense of knowing that 'I am') is itself a subtle experience and, in fact, the primary concept. Just note a simple point: in order to recognize 'you are', there is someone present to be recognized. That presence does not depend on being recognized. It—you—are there regardless. Non-dual awareness or pure being is entirely beyond the scope of dualistic consciousness and has no need or interest to know itself. Given that it is one-without-a-second, it cannot be known objectively. That is where the phrase 'awareness unaware of itself' comes in. Ultimately, awareness cannot know itself as a thing apart. Yet it is. It is sometimes called 'self-shining' or sometimes 'self-knowing'. Eventually the words must fall back and the attempts to grasp this objectively entirely relax, for the very instruments being used are only those within the plane of dualistic consciousness. So, full stop! In that pause of the attempt to get, know, apprehend or recognize, is a vivid, clear and undeniable radiance of awareness-presence. It hits you, so to speak, in a very palpable and tangible self-recognition that is entirely independent of the mind or even consciousness.



One way I like to point to this is by asking, 'Are you aware of being conscious?' That which recognizes this basic fact is the prior-to-consciousness presence. Consciousness as a state will pass, but your abiding being, call it what you will, will not. That fundamental presence cannot properly be characterized as 'being' or 'consciousness'. Words are going to fall short, but perhaps it can be pointed to as the source from which being and non-being emerge, from which consciousness and non-consciousness—when conceived as states—emerge. The famous 'being-awareness-peace' is not the absolute reality but only the last milestone, so to speak. Or you can look at it as the first emanation or expression of the non-dual reality. Prior to the 'experience' of being-awareness-peace, you are already there as the one to whom that subtle recognition occurs. This is the source of the 'I-am-ness'. You can also see why everything else arises after the 'I am' appears and subsides with its

disappearance. But we do not have to make the 'I am' vanish because the source is present regardless of the presence or absence of that primary concept (or experience). Some talk about the 'destruction' of the 'I' thought, but the so-called destruction is only seeing the 'I' thought as non-separate from its source. If the 'I' thought arises and sets, what does it arise and set within, and can it be anything other than its source or substance? This brings it all back home. Source is all there is. All thoughts, experiences, objects, states, including the 'I am', or basic consciousness, are only that. And you are that, because all there is, is that.



No one can deny his or her own presence and that presence is what this is about. You are that. What else could you be other than what you already are? A bit of looking reveals this simple clarity, and the false assumptions are seen through naturally. There is only a natural abiding as what you are. No attainment, awakening or deepening is called for, as you simply are what you are. Such notions are empty because they all imply a separation from your real being, and there is no separation at any time.



Start with the fact of your own being. Is that a concept or hypothesis? Have a good look right into that, to understand the nature of what is present. Books are of little help in this. You have to look for yourself. Start with something verifiable and tangible as a self-evident fact—your own presence. That should keep you out of the clouds and speculations. See how you do with this.



In the end, the true nature, or your real being, is already present as what you are. It needs no work or attainment because you cannot doubt your own being. And that being is what is being pointed to. Once this basic fact is appreciated, it is something of an inside joke, no doubt!



Have a look at your true nature, your actual present identity. You are. That is beyond dispute, but it is more than just 'being'. It is vividly cognizant and aware. If you look a bit into this, you will see your own nature as a clear, open, spacious, vivid, cognizing knowingness. Thoughts and all else appear and disappear in this. But this does not disappear. A time-tested way to 'expose' this ever-present sense of being-awareness is the approach of discarding the appearances and seeing what is left over. Of course, what is left over is your natural and ever-present being itself. This is what is being pointed to, and what is realized as oneself. That being is not only aware and present, but has a profound sense of wholeness, completion or peace. Your true nature is ever-present, but often overlooked. In the ignorance of our true nature, we have come to think of ourselves as a 'thing apart', a separate person, usually identified with the body, mind and personality. Examine these assumptions by tracing the sense of your identity to its natural source. In this, the false identifications are abandoned and the ever-present natural state that was never lost is restored. Many people fail to recognize the simplicity of this because they can get so caught up practices and attainments and thus overlook that they are already the true nature that is being pointed out. Before the next thought appears, you are.



Your natural state or condition is neither Buddhist nor Vedantist. When all concepts are abandoned, your natural being still remains vividly present and cognizing, even cognizing the coming and going of consciousness. That prior-to-consciousness presence is pointed to as non-conceptual awareness. It is the non-fabricated, space-like awareness of the natural mind. It is unconditioned consciousness. It is 'pure' or 'infinite' consciousness, meaning having no limits or conditions. The key points in all the traditions are the same: you are that; your own mind is the Buddha, etc. This is never an attainment, but the ever-present natural condition.



The notion of 'teachers' is another product of the conceptual, dualistic mind. Nobody I ever met who understood their natural condition ever called themselves a teacher, an enlightened being and so on. All the focus on these external transient, ultimately insubstantial appearances leads away from the natural recognition of freedom. Also, I have never met anyone who had deeply questioned the nature of themselves being particularly interested in name, fame, money, teaching, etc. Those interested in teachers and students, levels, grades, behaviors, etc., are largely operating from the conceptual sense of self anyhow. At that level, all answers are provisional, because the entire set of issues is based on an unexamined premise. Only a seemingly separate person needs to view itself as a student or teacher, which are merely concepts. Your real being is neither a student nor a teacher. You can see how everything refers back to the 'I' concept. The best approach is just to grasp this basic point and see what you really are. All doubts and troubles fall with the resolution of that, so there is really nothing else worth doing if you want to get to the bottom of things.



Your natural being has its own characteristics. It is. It is cognizant. It is vivid and clear. It has no suffering, no doubt, no problems. It is the source from which the mind and all else arises and into which it sets. As such, it is the source and substance of all that appears. It is not a cold, aloof, impersonal presence by any means. I would rather call it warm, living, intimate, rich and full beyond measure. There is the temporary peace based on momentary experiences, but there is the deep and profound peace of the unconditioned natural awareness itself. In Biblical terms, this is referred to as 'the peace that passes all understanding'. There is peace as a state; and then there is unconditioned peace that is inherent in your real nature. The fixation on the dualistic mind keeps us looking away from recognizing all of the beauty, richness and depth of the natural state of our real being. Once you know yourself as this, the basis of the fixation on the false identity created in thought subsides, and the true nature of the

natural state reveals itself. You need to give it a chance to reveal itself and not jump to premature conclusions.



Past a point, the words are simply encouragements to look at your undeniable being. Consciousness is clearly a state that comes and goes. Since awareness—another pointer to your essential being—is non-dual, how can it know itself? Awareness cannot be an object. It is self-shining, but not shining as a thing to be known objectively. Consciousness is a tool that allows for knowledge. Without that, there is no need to know, nor anyone present to know. Ask yourself if you are aware of being conscious? If yes, that in you which recognizes the fact of being conscious is prior to consciousness. It is forever non-objective, pure or featureless consciousness or being. It is pure awareness, self-shining, self-knowing, knowing all else. The words break down because we are trying to talk about that which is prior to language and dualistic consciousness. Just remember, you are the one to whom consciousness appears and disappears. That is all. All further discussion leads back into the mind and concepts. So, full stop.



The basic point is to get a real solid sense of who and what you are. That is not something that will waver, because in the wavering, you still are there, present and aware, to note the fact of the wavering itself. It is important to be clear that your essential being itself is not doing any wavering. Your own presence remains, regardless of other experiences. Once this point is solid and clear, it is very useful to understand the nature, cause and root of the apparent 'getting and losing it' sensation. This really involves a clear understanding of the nature of suffering, how it is created in conceptual thoughts, how those are centered around the sense of the 'me', how that 'me' notion is the root driver of the concepts, and how the belief in the reality of that concept allows the interest to flow into the mind. This gives the mind a seemingly higher sense of reality and identity than our actual nature. Once this 'mechanism' of conceptual suffering is recognized and the belief in the root thought 'I' is challenged by

examining the truth of that concept, the interest and belief in the mind withers away naturally. Then the back-and-forth sensation, which is really caused by a residual identification with thought, settles down. It is not really a practice per se, but a clear understanding. This is what did it for me by a few choice conversations with Bob Adamson on this same topic.



Knowing and no-knowing appear and disappear before you. In other words, you are aware of the coming and going of consciousness. 'Consciousness' and 'being' are only pointers to what is ultimately true, which is your real nature. The first to emerge is the sense of being and knowing. Then everything else appears—and disappears—in that. You are that to whom the sense of being and knowing arises. Everything in consciousness is transitory and is merely a temporary appearance. Even consciousness, which is the macro-concept or experience necessary for all other experiencing, comes and goes. As you may note, you are not conscious in deep sleep. Still, you are there. When you wake up, consciousness appears first, which is the sense of being or 'I am'. Then all else appears to that, or in that.



To recognize your true abiding condition, just trace the experiencing backwards to its source. All appearances reduce themselves to consciousness as the necessary presence. You must be present and conscious for any other experience to occur. Then see that the sense of being conscious and present itself emerges as the first experience. Take it one step inward from there. Consciousness arises to you, who were there to recognize that experience also. This aspect is rarely discussed or understood very clearly, even though it is really simple and self-evident, once you reflect on what is being pointed out. Consciousness is time-bound, as it is a state. Your real nature is beyond time, space and all change. It has no beginning or end. It is utterly present and evident as your own self, but it cannot be grasped, attained or understood by the conceptual mind. That is where the 'full stop' comes in. You are what you were seeking.



What you are precedes all sensations. You may sense it as the inescapable sense of being-knowing that is the basis of all experiencing. Once that is clear, you will notice that even that being-knowing sense appears to what you are. You are. Before the mind can grasp it or formulate it in any way, that is an irrefutable fact. All experiences appear in consciousness. Consciousness appears and disappears to you, or in you. You are that to whom even the experience of being conscious happens. That is the timeless, spaceless principle which precedes all else.



Once you allow the concept that 'others' have 'it' (the understanding or whatever it may be), it subtly reinforces the notion that the listener must achieve some state that is not present. It is better to drop all the concepts and verify what is being pointed to. There is almost no value in talking about teachers and students. No one I met who understood this ever looked at themselves as a teacher. Why foster another conceptual role? The purpose is to demolish false concepts, not add to them.



You may ask, 'What is wrong with the idea that those, such as yourself, have shifted identification to the 'real', while others are still caught up in their ordinary conditioning and are not aware of this basis of reality?' This is a subtle misperception. If you say 'those' who have shifted, it implies there are some special persons or beings that have 'achieved' this. It is a subtle reference to a self-notion. There is no self, no entity, no person present at all. To speak of others who are still caught up in conditioning implies some entity present to be caught up. Rather than grant this, it is better to question the validity of the notion, instead of subtly reinforcing it by talking of 'those' who are free. There are no 'those' who are free. The notion of 'those' is the basis of all the imagined bondage.



Many 'teachers' claim some special awakening or attainment. A bit of looking shows that the vast majority of people coming under the influence of that perspective are hoping to gain freedom in the future via some special experience, rather than noticing that they have never been bound in the first place.



Whatever you do, do not make this too mental or cerebral. The point is that before thought appears, you are. That 'you are' is both present and aware. This is a fact, not a concept. The consciousness aspect of that sometimes manifests (waking, dreaming) and sometimes becomes unmanifest (sleep, unconsciousness). Those states come and go to what you are. To describe what you are as 'being' or 'consciousness' is only a pointer and not entirely accurate. In truth, what you are cannot be qualified by either of those attributes.



There are endless words to point to your true nature. Do not get hung up on words. Before words appear, you are there, the one who is aware of the words. You are present, or in other words you exist. What you are is more than just present; it is aware. You are present and aware. These are just a couple of pointers to get you looking in the right direction. Do not focus on the words or you will go right back into the mind and the questions and doubts. Is there any doubt about your own existence? No. Drop the words and thoughts and get to know your real presence. You will come up with your own words and pointers for that, if you care to try to talk about it. The pointers are infinite, so if you get into parsing them too much, you will get lost in the concepts and miss the non-conceptual knowing of your inescapable true self.



The relinquishment of belief in the self-center concept really knocks the wind out of the sails of seeking, suffering and doubt. With the basics of this clear, you see a marked reduction in these experiences, because they are driven by the belief in and identity

with that concept. When the concept of the separate 'me' is seen through by recognizing what you really are, there is not going to be the focus on it any longer. Not only is the false self-center no longer believed, but the self-centered thoughts and concepts, which are what suffering really is, are also no longer believed or grasped as true. Hence, there is naturally a huge reduction in the psychological turmoil generated in the mind. There is a marked freshness, ease, lack of worry and personal problems. Life flows without fixation or attachment to events and outcomes. There are still actions, decisions, choices and preferences, but they are no longer related to a defective sense of a 'me' whose very being seems to be riding on the outcome of all these things. Old habits and reactions of the mind may arise, but they do not have the same force and are no longer believed with the same conviction. Since they are not believed, they arise and pass. They generally fade naturally over time, due to lack of interest or identification with them. There is no longer much concern or interest in the old thoughts and patterns, even if they do arise, because even this material is no longer related to a personal owner (that is, they are not 'your' thoughts to worry about). Even the concern about it would only be from the position of someone to be concerned, and there is no longer such a reference point. This natural state is not cold, aloof or unfeeling at all. This ever-present substratum of the presence of life has a richness, depth and savor that really cannot be expressed in words, except perhaps in poetry. Your true nature is the reality itself, the source and substance of things, the essence of life, intelligence, love, the matrix of all appearances. I am not much of a poet, but hopefully this gives some idea.



There is a difference between studying spiritual concepts and actually clarifying who you are. You cannot really do the latter by reading books, no matter how apparently good they are. Once you realize that your actual nature is not a word or thought, you can drop the words and thoughts and really look deeply into what this present self is. Words such as awareness, consciousness, being, emptiness or what have you are apt to become more distracting than helpful at

that point, because the words are clearly at the conceptual level and what you are looking into, namely yourself, is not a concept. That is why the Upanishads say that 'words and thoughts turn back'. If you are trying to parse out the various spiritual concepts used as pointers, you will miss what is being pointed to. That is the downside of books and pointers in general. They are apt to keep the mind in spin. Still, once this is pointed out, it is pretty easy to see for yourself.



People miss the obvious point when they talk about waking, sleep, consciousness, unconsciousness, etc. They are aware of all of the states. Otherwise, they would not be able to make all the distinctions!



There is basically 'normal' stress and desire arising in daily life based on valid circumstances. Then there is additional stress and fear based on imagined causes, which is entirely needless. The latter fades out to a large degree with a clear knowledge of your identity. Clarifying your identity is the issue. With this there is a marked reduction of seeking, suffering and doubt based on a confusion of your identity. Make sure you know who and what you are. You will find the seeking, suffering and doubt resolves itself.



No awakening is needed. The natural awareness or being that you are is here and now and naturally awake. The awareness is the only thing that is awake and cognizant. It is clearly present now and always. The person that thinks of awakening is the conceptual 'I' thought. How can a thought awaken? With the exposing of the fallacious basis of the 'I' notion, all the concepts, including the spiritual concepts, just come tumbling down. But this, your natural state of being and knowing, remains in all its simplicity and clarity. You are that. What could you be but what you already are?



The old patterns may arise, but you know they all refer to a conceptual 'me'. (The concept of 'old patterns' is itself a presently arising concept with no substance!) The looking has shown there is no separate 'me' at all. Any attempts to pull the 'me' in are bound to fail because there is no 'me' present to be pulled in. All the appearances themselves are nothing but awareness itself anyhow. There is not much to worry about, because there is no 'I' present and no actual objects with any substance or independent nature.



Who is beating your heart right now? Who creates the next thought? Who brought the sperm and egg together? Who grew your body? Who is digesting the food? Who is generating the thoughts in the brain/mind? Basically, the 'who' is entirely conceptual, an assumption, not a real thing in itself. It is a notion. That notion is doing nothing at all!



All the events and experiences that happened in the past are gone now. Yet you are still present. There is no way your being could possibly equate with things which are no longer present. This gives a strong indication that things which are being perceived even now are not your essential being. In seeing this, you can drop the focus on the body, thoughts, person, etc., as being non-self, because all the analysis is ultimately done from the conceptual level and tends to keep the mind and concepts engaged, which is one-hundred-and-eighty degrees away from what this is about. You know that all that is perceived and conceived arises in the necessary principle of awareness, without which it could not be cognized. Turn the light of inquiry onto this awareness itself. That is a positive and clear presence in your experience, not a mere speculation or concept. Because that is present and undeniable, you should be able to probe into this and discover more clearly the nature of this already present awareness. Basically, you are looking into your direct experience to understand what is the nature of this awareness and your relationship with it. Once this is solid and clear, you have a much better vantage point from which to view things.



Before the next thought appears, you already are what you are. Leave all the concepts and have a clear sense of what is already naturally present. That does not take any time or effort to reveal itself, since it is shining in plain view. If there are any doubts or questions, they can be addressed by seeing them as presently arising concepts that appear in the ever-present clarity that you are. They are all rooted in the notion of being a separated individual apart from the deeper reality. A bit of looking shows that this root concept is untrue, as there is no actual limited self present in our direct experience. This recognition deactivates the basis of belief in the root assumption driving all seeking, suffering and doubt. It leaves you as this, the pure being/knowing that you always were and have never left. All that appears is a display or manifestation of this basic principle, your own aware presence. Even consciousness itself is an appearance in what you are. You are what you were seeking, and all that appears is only that also. Thus, non-duality. The mist of confusion dissipates before the sun of clear self-knowledge. All is well. There is nothing wrong any more.



The 'me' is extremely fragile, because it is not even present! The notion may be present. But how solid is a thought? But the actual 'me' is like the horn of a unicorn. It has never been there at all. The root of all suffering and seeking never existed in the first place!



Just to keep thinking 'I am awareness' is not the same as the direct recognition of the actual awareness, and more importantly your own presence as that. That is why such an approach is lacking in any real impact. When we talk together, we are not emphasizing the concepts but bringing the recognition to an experiential level. In other words, awareness is a reality, not a concept. Let the body, mind and activities happen as they will. If the remembrance of the points happens, let that happen or not. The key is seeing—really seeing—what is being pointed to. It is not just thinking 'about' awareness.

Explore, taste, fall in love with this undeniable presence which is bathing and embracing every thought, feeling and perception. The world is dancing in the warm and radiant light of consciousness-presence-light. Discover the glory and beauty of this presence by turning to it and being absorbed in it. Thinking about falling in love is not falling in love. It is the same with this.



All of this is more or less a re-education of our experience of life by bringing in a deeper view of who and what we are. The previous views tend to be colored by various concepts and assumptions. The kind of looking we are doing is going back to the root, to the place prior to the concepts. This is before the notions of suffering, doubt, seeking and separation were even present. But that reality is also present now, because it is the basis on which all else appears.



When you ask 'How to realize the self?' the answer is basically to become clear on the nature of what you are. This can be approached by considering the pointers and comparing them against your own direct experience. The point is that your own present being is the answer. But this is likely not fully appreciated, so there may be some doubts and confusion as to what your real nature is. Start with the one thing you know beyond any doubt: 'I am'. Look into this to discover and fully appreciate what this, your present self, is. In the end, this is about knowledge, true and clear knowledge of the nature of your own being.



The self-center is a concept that sprang into being in the wake of a fundamental confusion about our real nature. When this is clear, the basis of the wrong belief in the limited self is contradicted in that understanding. Once the basics of this are clear, that is, you know beyond any doubt what you are and what you are not, no further spiritual actions are called for beyond that, as the separate self concept is cancelled.



It is not about doing anything, such as keeping 'I am' in mind and all that. The mind hears the points as some program to follow. But the key is to understand what you are. You are. That is a fact. But what you are remains in some doubt until you focus on this investigation and resolve the matter. The point is to investigate what you are so that you are not living under any false assumptions. Self-knowledge is not a technique or a program, but a call to clarify what you are. Do not think in terms of doing, but understanding.



The whole intent of the pointers is to expose the fallacy of the notion of a separate 'who' apart from what is really present, however you choose to describe that. The pointer is given to one who conceives of himself as a separate 'who'. All types of pointers reveal the fallacy of this concept. The whole structure of thoughts and concepts is undermined. It is not that there is any separate 'who' present in reality. One set of concepts is presented to expose the falsity of another set of concepts, and then the whole lot of them is discarded. They are like Trojan horses filled with self-destructing bombs. If they are taken into the fortress of conceptual thought, it gets destroyed from the inside out. The question 'Who is being talked to?' is misconceived because it reintroduces the assumed reality of the separate 'I'. On the other hand, the very question can act as a Trojan horse and implode upon itself. People often feel that 'self-inquiry' or reflecting on the pointers enhances the false belief in a 'me', but this is not really the case. If you—the limitations of language!—really catch the spirit and intent of the pointers, the belief in the limited 'I' is exposed and undermined. All language is dualistic. Inherent in language are 'me', 'you', objects, time, space, causality, etc. All of these are mere notions appearing in the non-conceptual reality that is being pointed to. You cannot apply such notions to that which is beyond all concepts, call that reality, your true nature, awareness, truth, what is or any other name.



As long as it appears that there is 'you' and reality (awareness, being, truth), there is some room for doubt. This is the root assumption, the core concept. Awareness-being is undeniable. You cannot be without being present and aware. That is hard-wired into experience and beyond any doubt. You have to be present and aware to have the doubts! That leaves the 'me' notion, the assumed self. It is really a notion, not a real thing. It is a nebulous belief that 'I' stand apart from being. That belief is the basis of all possible doubts, seeking and suffering. The reality—or lack of reality—of that assumed entity needs to be addressed directly. If you conceive that 'you' may stand apart from awareness or being, verify if this is really true. Where exactly is this assumed separate self? Did you actually find it? Is it that there is 'you' and then awareness or being, or is it that you are aware, that you exist? It is very good to bring out the assumed entity for inspection and verification. It is like a ghost hiding in the shadows and thriving on not being investigated.



This is about making sure that what you are is clear. You already know you are. That is not open to doubt. There is no doubt at all about the fact of your being. This is 'how' you get out of the maze of doubts. There is already something in your experience that has no doubt about it. Once you start getting into 'How do I?', you move away from what is doubtless and clear and start getting into the concepts based on subject/object language. Why do you need to ask 'How do I?' when your own being is self-evident? Doubts are not resolved by trying to resolve doubts, because the mind can always create some fresh new ones! The best approach is to find that in yourself which is beyond doubts. Start with the one fact that you are already sure of: 'I am'. Once this point is clear, then begin to have a look at this 'I am' and see what it is. It is not a thought, perception, feeling or anything that appears and disappears. And yet it is. Nothing will be attained. But by looking deeply into what you are, what you are is revealed and no longer overlooked or misunderstood.



All the notions, such as 'You will settle in ...', 'This takes time', 'There is some magic event ...', 'Ideas must be abandoned ...' etc., are ultimately erroneous and due to misperceptions about what is being pointed to. Your present being and the aware nature of that is a settled fact even now. All of those notions imply some difference or separation from your true being. The presumption itself is false. It takes no time to be what you are, because you are that. You cannot deny your very self, and that is what this is all about. There is absolutely no need for years of seeking, deepening and all that. All thoughts and appearances come and go, but there is the space of knowing itself, call that awareness or being. That is what is really being pointed to. This is here and now in all its fullness and totality, right from the start.



You keep talking about the 'me', the 'me structure', the entity, etc. First of all you need to find it, then we can talk about whether it has volition, etc. It is only a concept. There is no such thing as the 'me' with any substantial reality. Where is this 'me' anyhow? Did you ever find it? Why be so interested in a phantom?



This is about knowing yourself, not dabbling in appearances. Let the body and mind do whatever it is they do naturally. You did not create the body, the genetic code, the experiences and conditioning that the body/mind received. You are not creating sensations, perceptions, thoughts and biological reactions. Of course there is volition, choice, decisions and actions taken. It is just that the concept 'I' is not doing any of it. The 'me' is a conceptual postulation added on by language. Life goes on quite well without the belief that that concept is who I am. Why take ownership and credit for things that are entirely impersonal? Besides, the body/mind is just an appearance to what you are. Instead of looking away from what you are and getting involved in concepts and appearances, stay with the basic point of this. Clarify your real identity and have no doubts about what you are. Then you see that you were never any concept or anything at all.



What I am talking about is *you*, nothing more or less. I am talking about the nature of what you are. Nothing is brought in; nothing is attained; nothing is achieved. It is simply a clarification of your obvious and undeniable present self. This is something that very few people ever stop to consider or investigate. Due to a lack of inquiry, they have come to associate their identity with all types of half-baked concepts and accumulated notions. This clearly will not do! To be functioning in life through a fog of unexamined and potentially erroneous notions of oneself is the root of all forms of seeking, suffering and doubt. We need to re-examine our assumptions. You can start with one simple fact that cannot be denied—you are. Your being, your own presence, is not in question, for your being is self-evident and beyond doubt. Then look right into this undeniable sense of being to discover what it is. Not only are you present, but you are aware also. Your natural sense of being and knowing are self-evident. They cannot be denied, if we go by direct, present experience. Is this being, this knowing self, an object to be seen 'out there' or grasped as a thing by the senses or mind? Absolutely not! In this recognition, you come face to face with another type of knowledge, knowledge of something that is clearly present and known but which is not objective. This is what is meant by non-objective knowledge, immediate knowledge or non-conceptual awareness. We tend to be either unaware of or mistaken about what we are, because it cannot be grasped in the usual subject/object experience to which we are accustomed. You can also see many other aspects of your true nature. It is already present; it is not to be attained in the future; it is not obtained by practice; it is effortless and ever present; the appearance/disappearance of sensations, perceptions and thoughts do not alter it; appearances are not separate from this; you are not separate from this; it is not a thought or concept; it is naturally transcendent and free of the mind; it is not a separate person or limited self. In this recognition, the root of all suffering, which is the belief in being a limited, separate self identified with the body/mind, is completely annihilated. Thus, the seeking, suffering and doubts are all conclusively overcome. Peace reigns. Your true being is realized as it is, and the root of all the

personal problems is resolved. This experience is available simply by verifying what is being pointed to here.



Examining the sense of 'I am' brings us right to here and now. But the 'I am' as a thought, sense or experience is not you. You are always aware of any such experience, however subtle. Before knowing 'I am', you are present as the bare or pure awareness itself. It is so simple, we overlook this point.



Trying to get free of the concepts implies you are bound by them. Who? You are free and unconditioned as is. Stopping the identifications from happening is just another identification. Forget all the attention to the mind. Leave it be. You are not a thought! Reminders or no reminders, you are. Do not turn this into a technique. Your natural being is not a technique! Wanting suffering to stop is another suffering thought. Your real being has no suffering at all. In all this doing, seeking, suffering and cogitating, the emphasis goes back on the mind. You are that which is aware of the mind. Do not turn this into a mental assertion and get back into identification with the mind. See the simple truth of what you are. Thoughts come and go. You are. Abide as what you are, and let the mind do what it is good for, like making a living or whatever comes up in relative life.



Even if there is some spiritual event or attainment in the future, it will still be only an appearance in the prior awareness. Since that awareness is already here, there is no sense in hankering after imaginary events. Your real being is already attained and is already what it is. All the thoughts and concepts about it are just that—concepts. There is no real sense in chasing them down, as that activity will not take you any closer to what you presently are. This is not a 'path' of doing anything, but rather doing 'nothing'. Why should one do anything when you are already what you are seeking?



You may ask, 'As for a deep knowing of what I really am, does it need to be any deeper than that I am present and aware?' Do not get too conceptual with this! As if there is 'you' and then 'awareness'! That assumption then brings in time, actions, attainments and so on. Can you see that the rise of that assumption (of duality) is what creates all of those things? But is the duality true, based on present evidence? Are you other than being-awareness itself? If not, then full stop. The delicious depth of this lies in the full stop, because in that, there is no 'I', 'you', time, duality, attainment or anything else, just pure non-conceptual awareness-being itself, your own natural state. There is no 'one' present there to know or be known, as there is no separation or duality. All spirituality ends in that, right here, right now. Any difficulties will arise from returning to concepts. Still, you never leave your natural state.



The purpose of the mind is to act and respond to the events of life. Without the mind, we would be in some difficulties in negotiating through everyday affairs. Let the mind do what it is good for. The only problem is trying to use the mind to know who and what we are. Then that must be entirely conceptual, since you are not a concept. You cannot use a conceptual tool to understand that which is not a concept. Once this point strikes home, then you are no longer looking for an answer (about your fundamental identity) in the mind. What remains is simple, effortless being-knowing that is present in spite of whatever happens, whatever the level of the Dow Jones, or whoever wins the next election!



Do not turn this into an exercise. Come back to what you are. Is being an exercise? Do you have to find your being? Or are you your being? The insight and understanding is there. Let it be without bringing in any extraneous notions that have nothing to do with who you are.



Before any experience can arise, you must be there. That sense of 'I am' is the same as 'consciousness'. It is also called the 'I' thought. It is also called the 'knower' or the 'witness'. But this functional aspect is periodic. It only manifests when there are objects to be perceived. In deep sleep, there is no 'I am', no consciousness (in the usual sense), no witness or knower. There is a more basic awareness that is prior to consciousness. And that is what you are, the one to whom the experience of 'I am' or consciousness happens, just like any other experience. The 'I am', 'I' thought or consciousness is the first experience, upon which all other experiences depend. But that first experience is still an experience. Your real nature precedes that and does not depend on that arising of consciousness or relative knowing. Thus, you are prior to consciousness, prior to 'I am', prior to even knowing that you are. Before you can 'know you are', you must already be present as the one to whom even that experience happens. You remain as you are, whether you experience 'I am' or not. In sleep, the 'I am' sense is gone, merged, absent. At some point that 'speck of consciousness' arises and the body and world appear in that, but that speck of consciousness you are not, because it is transitory. You precede it—and survive it.



Realize that the term 'non-conceptual awareness' is only a pointer to what you are, your natural and present self. It is not to be looked for or searched for, which would be assuming it was not present. Think of it as your being itself. It is here regardless of thoughts or other experiences. It is the bright and vivid sense of clarity that is cognizing the thoughts. That is also undeniably present. Once we get into 'looking for it', we are getting more into the concepts and missing the obvious. It is not something to be known, as if it were an object. Before the next thought appears, you are. That 'you are', which you cannot deny, is what this is about.



The hitch in the suffering thought is the reference point of the 'I' entity. The thoughts per se are not suffering. It is rather the belief in the reality of the defective person to which they refer. That is why the

clarification of who you are is really the way to resolve suffering. At some point, have a good look into this 'I' notion and see if it has any substance to it. You will be pleasantly surprised to find that the 'I' entity has never been present at all. This is the end of the belief in self-centered thoughts and, hence, suffering.



In order for any other experience to occur, I must be present. Even to know 'I am', I must be present. Even to be conscious, I must be there to be conscious. This is why your core nature can be referred to as being 'prior to consciousness'. Your real nature gives rise to consciousness, which in turn gives rise to the body, mind and world. Expressed in other terms, non-conceptual awareness gives rise to consciousness in duality or manifestation, which gives rise to objects. These are just different attempts to point to your essential nature.



Consciousness arises at birth and grasps the body as 'I'. This is when the sense or concept of 'me' comes into play. The body and consciousness arise together. Eventually, the assumption develops that 'I' am a thing (a body). It takes a bit of time to settle in, as it is artificial and unnatural. It cannot be present without several factors—the body, consciousness, the mind, the idea of 'me', the association of that concept with the body and a belief in that concept as my identity. All of these factors keep the mechanism in play. A bit of looking dismantles it like a hot knife slicing through butter, because the primary factor, consciousness, is itself an appearance. You are that to which consciousness happens. The coming and going of consciousness does not change your fundamental being. And therefore anything that happens in consciousness does not apply to your real being. Just see the facts of the situation and all the identification and beliefs are undermined. The main thing is to understand what you are. Until we start looking into this, the assumption is that the body is what we are. This is untenable, in actuality. As long as this association is assumed, there will be

limitations, because we are taking ourselves to be something other than our real self.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 2003, John met with "Sailor" Bob Adamson, who pointed out our nature of non-conceptual being or awareness and the absence of the limited person we imagine ourselves to be. With this heart-to-heart sharing, the spiritual search resolved itself. John enjoys sharing the pointers with those who are interested in self-knowledge and the resolution of seeing, suffering and doubt.

John lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is the author of several popular books published by Non-Duality Press.

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John Wheeler attracts a growing audience of seekers who are moving beyond traditional spiritual disciplines towards direct understanding. *Clear in Your Heart* contains further dialogues, correspondence and pointers which deal with the immediacy of life as it is lived, from the perspective of pure non-duality (*Advaita*).

John points directly to the true nature of the one who is seeking. This approach reveals what is real and true about who we are and clearly exposes the false ideas and beliefs that generate doubts, problems and suffering; those who are willing to explore these pointers come to a direct experience of freedom and the end of seeking and suffering.

"This natural self that you are is by no means a silent, aloof or distant witness that is disconnected from life and events. That is a pointer that may be used at some point, but needs to be discarded eventually, like all concepts. What you are is life itself, most intimately connected and unified with all that appears. Do not settle only for a spiritual concept about who and what you are. What you are is beyond activity and silence, or any other dualities. You transcend yet embrace them all".



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