



NON-DUALITY PRESS

JOHN WHEELER

Full Stop!

The Gateway to Present Perfection



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Resonance

All pointers converge on a central theme. This is the simple truth of what we are, the essential and inescapable reality that shines behind the doubtless sense of being present and aware. No one can say 'I am not', as the very statement presupposes the existence of the one attempting to deny his or her own existence. This is why one's existence is the touchstone or 'gold standard' by which all other truths are evaluated. All pointers encourage us to probe the fundamental fact of our self-existent being, which not only *is* but *knows*. This is the heart of the matter, the constant and final theme of all of the great traditions that have come down to us under the banner of 'non-duality'. Non-duality speaks to the non-separation of the seeker and the final reality being sought. As all of the traditions tell us, each in its own way: you are that.

In our own times, the direct communication of this basic truth was famously shared by the well-known sage of Mumbai (Bombay), Nisargadatta Maharaj. I was fortunate enough to meet one of Nisargadatta Maharaj's direct students, 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, in Melbourne, Australia, a few years ago. He shared with me the essential pointers he had received from Nisargadatta Maharaj. More importantly, he was able to point to the reality of my being so directly that it could no longer be avoided or overlooked. As he once mentioned to me, it is not the words themselves that are important, but the living reality behind the words that makes the difference. This reality, when recognised by one who knows, informs whatever words may be used as pointers. This causes a resonance in the inner being of the receptive listener such that the true nature of the listener is recognised in all its immediacy and livingness. This is the pure light of non-conceptual awareness beyond thought. It is not that reality is difficult to perceive. In truth, it is so simple that we overlook the

obvious. For, how many thoughts, feelings or experiences can you have without being present and aware to have them? Still, a direct pointer to this by one who knows is extremely helpful, as many can attest.

The recognition of the inescapable and ever-present nature of the listener's real self lays bare the false basis of the belief that one is a separate, limited, isolated person apart from reality. As this is the basis of all of the concepts and identifications that generate limitation in life, this revelation effectively cancels needless psychological suffering. Such suffering is only sustained through a false belief in being something we are not. Not only is reality found to be shining within oneself as one's very self, but the seeking, suffering and doubt that may have been carried for a lifetime is overcome at a stroke.

In seeing and experiencing these basic truths for oneself, there may naturally arise a desire to 'share the good news' with others who would resonate with the pointers themselves. There is no fixed set of pointers or manner of speaking of these fundamental truths. While the essential points, being timeless, remain consistent from year to year and age to age, the manner in which they are framed and communicated must necessarily vary, based on the needs of the times. Furthermore, the questions and issues raised by those engaged in the verification of the truths in their own experience are bound to change. This is why it is useful to have fresh expressions and pointers set in contemporary words and speech. This allows us to focus on the essence and frees us from having to digest archaic terms and outdated cultural trappings.

Beyond Words, Shining in Your Heart

If we are looking for answers at a conceptual level, the pointers are just words. Clearly, words have no real life or substance, being dead images. Listening to words is about as fulfilling as trying to drink water from the painting of a lake. At some point, an interest may arise to drop all the concepts, pointers and words—in fact, to stop looking in the mind entirely. In that pause, let the looking turn directly to that clear, doubtless existence shining in your heart.

If you are hearing pointers but not looking at what is being pointed to, this will seem like so much empty prattling, for that is all it can ever be at a verbal level. But take the cue and look directly into your own heart. See, know and *be* what you are. Drop the concepts and come face to face with your real self, your undeniable being.

All the pointers such as ‘love’, ‘oneness’, ‘awareness’, ‘life’, ‘aliveness’, ‘unconditioned’, ‘free of suffering’, etc., are only trying to give a sense of the nature of what you *are*. If they are left as words, they are just empty husks. But is what is shining in your heart a lifeless dead image? If not, what is it? This is what needs to be seen, non-conceptually, in direct experience. Nothing is gained or attained, because what you are has been here all along.

Words Are Only Pointers

It is a bit tricky quoting the words of 'great' teachers for confirmation of anything, because the words are only pointers and concepts arising in particular situations. In other words, in the moment the words were delivered they were spontaneous pointers of encouragement for someone in that moment to drop a particular concept or perspective in order to notice what is here prior to concepts. Later, when we read the words, it is actually a case of moving back into concepts and away from what is clear and present. Seeing this may free up a lot of space. That is why reading about non-duality is a bit misleading and often complicates the simplicity of it.

For every passage one quotes, you can find dozens more asserting the opposite view. It is helpful to see why this must be so. There is not a fixed 'teaching' at all. There is a stream of spontaneous points arising to expose whatever dualistic notions the 'seeker' may have been holding as true. It is more a matter of love in expression rather than some spiritual verbiage one should sift through years or centuries afterwards. People think you get to the heart of this by studying philosophy, learning Sanskrit, or delving into the recorded words of Shankara, Buddha or whomever. This is entirely erroneous and completely misses the mark. It only fattens the stock of concepts and keeps the attention locked in the mind. It is overlooking your ever-present natural state.

Pause the concepts, whatever they may be, and notice what is present, what you actually are here and now. That is already evident and available in all its immediacy. No teacher, guru, scripture, satsang or awakenings are involved. I cannot stress this strongly enough. That we thought they were was only an ignorant mistake. So return to the basics and have a look for yourself.

Instead of talking about concepts, chuck them all overboard and talk from what is actually present in your experience. Non-duality books, quotes, spiritual jargon and hypothetical 'what ifs' are entirely incapable of revealing the direct recognition of immediate freedom and happiness. That is present as the pure light of simple knowing and being shining in the core of your mind or the centre of your heart. In that light, the universe and all bodies and minds arise and pass like specks of dust in the warmth of a vast, cloudless sky, which is the sky of your being. That non-conceptual awareness or presence of life beyond the mind pours out through your senses and bathes each thought, feeling and experience in a timeless and inescapable clear cognisance. Call it what you will—being, awareness, love, presence, what is, knowing, light, life, intelligence, spirit, etc. Whatever it is, it is undeniable and inescapable. It is being that cannot be doubted or contradicted; an unborn, undying awareness without ceasing; life with no boundary; a peace and causeless joy that embraces all appearances, all possibilities, all opposites. Nothing can be outside of that; nothing stands apart from that; there is nothing other than that. And you are that.

Awareness and Objects

The resolution of the apparent duality of awareness and objects lies in seeing that the supposed difference is not really present. In other words, there is an assumption that there is awareness *and* objects. Then the mind gets tangled up in how they are supposed to be stitched together. This is like the person who asks, 'How do I awaken?' and then gets wrapped up in that concept. He or she overlooks that awareness is already awake, and that the supposed 'I' entity is not really present, except as an assumption. In the clear seeing of this, the dilemma collapses.

The issue is similar with awareness and objects. No object or experience can ever stand outside of, or apart from, the awareness of it. This resolves the issue directly. The objects and awareness are not separate, even now. So why talk of how to put them together, or how to see them as one? Are they separate to start with? No. Therefore, the concept and the problem drop.

Most people naturally assume there are only objects and have no real sense of awareness itself. So the pointer is brought up to distinguish objects and awareness only for the purpose of highlighting the presence of awareness, *not* to create an absolute split between them (because there isn't one). Once awareness and your identity as that is clear, you can look back at the apparent objects and see that they have no real substance or independent nature apart from the awareness of them. This is somewhat like the figures on a carved marble relief not being separate from the marble itself. The false dilemma is apparent in the question, 'How are the carved figures and the marble to be seen as one?' The real question is, 'Have you ever seen them as separate from each other?' The bottom line is that there can be no experience outside of awareness.

So, to speak of awareness and objects as if they were independent is not possible based on direct experience.

It is very important to mention a subtle point that many miss at this juncture. The objects are not in themselves the same as awareness, or the abiding reality. Objects are appearances, but your real being remains independent of the presence or absence of the objects. In practical experience, you can see that objects are constantly changing, but your own being remains without break. A wave is nothing but water; but water as such is not a wave as such. Therefore, it is not a one-to-one equivalence. That is why when people say 'all appearances are the oneness', it is not a precisely clear and accurate statement.

Images and Thoughts Are Not Me

Question: Your meeting last night was very helpful for me. I now see that the mind and its concepts are just that—mind and concepts. I recognised the truth from the first time you explained it to me a few years ago, but for the last few years I have been unclear in regards to thinking and thoughts. Like Alicia Silverstone in the movie ‘Clueless’, you just need to say to thoughts: ‘Whatever!’.

I have been investing value in thoughts and projecting identity into them, which is a typical Gemini trait! Last night helped me to see the simple point that beingness or awareness is what I am, and I need not (nor can I!) leave my beingness. Thoughts are not the problem. I can see much more clearly now that it is just ignorance (ignoring the obviousness and simplicity of who I really am) that prompted me so often to identify with thoughts and to lose sight of myself in mentation.

John: The basic issue in this context has to do with ‘returning’ to the mind with some sense that whatever the mind is saying about you (the conceptual ‘me’ or person notion) is an adequate, real or true definition of who you are. But those images and concepts in the mind are always in reference to one’s identity as that image or entity, which itself is an appearance in the mind. Our own being or consciousness nature is not an image, a thought or an appearance in the mind, as it always precedes and survives any such thoughts. The direct and clear seeing of this position takes the steam out of any tendency to look for our reality, identity or happiness in that network of thoughts. Why would the sky look for itself in a mass of passing clouds? It would never imagine itself to be one among the number of clouds that happen to be appearing, saying, ‘That particular cloud is me’. The sky is open and at ease as it is, always

untouched and unaffected. What can a cloud do to obstruct the sky? It is the same with thoughts; they are images blowing through the clarity and spacious nature of non-conceptual being-awareness, which is your innate self. Clear seeing shows that the images and thoughts are not me. They do not define me. I exist at an entirely different 'level' or 'place' (as the space in which the thoughts appear). Looking in this way makes it hard to grasp hold of any particular thought with a sense that 'this is who I am'. It is no bar on thought or the meaningful use of the mind in the appearance of things. However, there is a clear and emphatic recognition that no thought ever defines or limits your innate and abiding self.

Awareness Is Constant, Contents Are Changing

Question: I have been seeing in experience that awareness is always present, without effort; no searching necessary; and 'I' appear in awareness rather than awareness appearing in me.

John: You are the awareness. The key is to see that the dualism implied in 'I and awareness' is false. It is not you in awareness or awareness in you. You are that. That is the whole essence.

Q: When thoughts and concepts are gone, I am still here and aware. There is no problem with that in experience. Then there is trying to stay in presence-awareness and less in thought.

John: This brings in a false dualism. If you are awareness and the separate 'I' is not, who should try to stay in awareness? Knock this concept out with a bit of clear seeing.

Q: The pointer that is difficult to reconcile with my experience is that awareness and the contents of awareness are the same.

John: This is not really needed. This is only a concept that the mind is trying to reconcile, and it just stirs up the doubts. Make sure your identity is clear and that there are no doubts about that. The rest will become apparent on its own.

Q: I feel awareness illuminates the outside world, but that seems different than saying that the world is awareness. I can reduce being to two: awareness and its contents.

John: The point is that you do not experience any content independent of awareness. That would be entirely speculative. It is not that the appearances *are* awareness. How could they be? Awareness is constant, non-objective, cognisant. Contents are changing, objective, insentient. Equating awareness and contents one-for-one is not possible. Contents are appearances of awareness. They have no substance or independent nature apart from awareness. So the awareness is what is real or substantial. The tried-and-true analogy is waves on the ocean. The waves are nothing but ocean water, but the ocean per se is not waves.

Keep in mind, though, the key point in all of this is not to get lost analyzing appearances. It is to know yourself. Do not lose sight of this point.

Q: All things are allowed without resistance. All things need awareness to come into being. But I am struggling with the point that awareness and the objects of awareness are one and the same.

John: Think over what I just said. That should clear things up.

Q: Allowing things is not the same as being things.

John: There is a subtle concept in here. Who is allowing? Things are simply happening. It is not a matter of allowing them. That would bring in a subtle sense of separate self. Drop all references to the concept of separation and be what you are. That is perfect freedom and peace.

The Gateway to Pure Being

Question: You say being is the reality.

John: Words are pointers. In this context, 'being' is being used as a pointer to final reality.

Q: But is being or 'I am-ness' not observed too?

John: Beingness (note, the suffix 'ness'), 'I am-ness' and consciousness are often used in reference to the first manifestation of pure being. Note that 'being' and 'beingness' are different. One is reality, the other is a quality (or the expression) of reality.

Q: Is being just a gateway to reality that is beyond being and non-being?

John: Being and non-being, consciousness and unconsciousness, etc. are dualities. As such, reality transcends and includes them. When I say 'being', I am generally referring to 'pure' or 'non-dual' being, meaning beyond the duality of being and non-being. Words are limited!

Q: Nisargadatta Maharaj clearly made the point that we are not the concept 'I am', nor are we the non-conceptual 'I am-ness'. He said the non-conceptual 'I am-ness' brings us to the absolute, which I assume is pure awareness, which is everything.

John: Yes, 'pure awareness' and 'pure being' are pointers to non-dual reality, your natural state.

Q: Yet being is observed and leaves us, whether in deep sleep or death.

John: Not true. Consciousness departs. As does knowing that I am. These are really the same thing. The awareness of being departs, but your actual existence remains. That is the absolute that is prior to consciousness. Do not just go by words. Make sure you see what is being pointed to by the words.

Q: Are you just saying being is reality as a gateway, or what?

John: As stated, the experience of consciousness, of knowing that I am in duality, or beingness (the experience of being) are the gateways. They are pointers to that which is prior. That which is prior (or always there) is usually termed as one of the following: pure awareness, pure consciousness, pure being (beyond being and non-being), your real nature, non-dual being or awareness, or the absolute.

Note that knowing that you are comes and goes. In sleep, you do not know that you are. But your real being is always there. That is always present and always aware. You even know the coming and going of consciousness. This is self-evident, but we tend to miss this point because we are always focused on objects. But even now, what we are is not an object.

The sense 'I am' is the first manifestation of your pure being. This is also what Ramana Maharshi called the 'I thought'. Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ramana Maharshi recommended tracing this experiential 'I' or 'I am-ness' to its source. Therefore, it acts as a gateway to the reality that you truly are. Remember, you are that here and now. The pointers are only temporary devices to be used if this point is not clear.

Getting to the Root Assumption

Question: I have been looking into my discontent or misery to see the truth about it. This morning I woke up with the feeling that, while things are okay right now, sooner or later it is all going to come crashing down. There is nothing rational to the feeling, but it was very strong (and still is to an extent). I looked at it as simply a feeling that would pass and give way to another feeling, and that a feeling is just a feeling, not a fact. This was of little consolation, however. Trying to counter these feelings with 'good' thoughts does not work either. How does one go to the core of this and see the truth that nothing is wrong and that these feelings really have no bearing on what I am?

John: One thing to notice is that the feelings are driven by assumptions or concepts. Ideas can be just as powerful as events, when it comes to our felt response to them. A key approach is to be clear on precisely what the ideas are claiming, so that you have some space to question them to see if they are true. That is not a complete solution, but it is a vital initial recognition. Once you get a sense of how these thoughts work, you can look a bit deeper at the core assumption at their root and see if that is really true. A bit of looking shows that all the thoughts are different labels and concepts about 'me', about who I am. There is a common theme running throughout all the patterns and concepts, which is that I am some limited person in the appearance of things who is subject to suffering and some horrible fate. Ultimately, this assumption needs to be looked at head on. The key is being very clear on the positive truth of what you actually are. That is the essence of it, because the notions of limitation and separation depend upon overlooking that aspect or being in some doubt about it. In the end, any limiting experience in life is only a call to know yourself. Make sure these points are clear,

and use them as the basis of any other understanding or looking. If who you are is not clear, any other looking will be colored by that perspective. That is why most spiritual practises and approaches fail to deliver lasting freedom. The assumptions we take into them often hamstring the results. When the basic sense of what we are is clear, we can look at concepts—even the root ‘I’ concept—and see them as untrue, based on our own clear sense of who we truly are.

Concepts Come and Go, but You Remain as You Are

Question: I am just coming to the end of your book The Light Behind Consciousness, which is beautifully clear. There seems to be a clearer recognition now of my true nature. The simple fact that I am present and aware right now is recognised. But I still have nagging thoughts regarding the inquiry into the 'I'. In the investigation, the mind will not leave alone the notion that the body is related to the 'I'. Upon looking for this phantom 'I', the body is seen and is related to as my 'I'. I am failing to see the falsity of this, and so the suffering appears as related to something very real. I know I am making this too complicated, but I cannot see past the idea that I am this body.

John: To see yourself as the pure, simple being and knowing presence is the heart of it. Pause there and drink in the clarity and freedom of being itself. See that all the thoughts and appearances come and go in this. Everything simply arises and sets in your being or innate presence. That presence remains as it is—solid, present, profoundly cognisant, still and yet wonderfully alive and radiant. That is the point—to see this, know this and *be* this. Even those words are too much, for you effortlessly *are* this. It is just a noticing of a simple fact that we may have overlooked.

If we go back into the mind searching for answers and trying to understand various pointers, that is only engaging the conceptual mind. So do not complicate the point of all this. The pointers are only to bring us to see this, our natural state. Once recognised, the pointers have done their job. The thoughts 'I am the body' or 'I am not the body' are both concepts coming and going in what you are. Neither is true; neither is false. Also, neither of these concepts is what you are. Clearly those concepts will (and do) come and go, but you remain as you are. It is not so much that the body is a problem,

for it is not. Like everything else, it is an appearance (meaning an appearance *in* awareness). From the position of simple awareness, all appearances are at the same level. All appearances are in and of awareness itself. The thought 'I am a body' is clearly a concept. That concept is not your abiding reality. To believe that thought means to 'trade in' your non-conceptual nature for a mere concept. You are not a concept! The point is not to grasp that concept or identify that as yourself. Then you simply remain as you are, concept-free. All things, including the body, arise and pass in the clear light of being and knowing, like clouds passing through the sky. All is well.

Identifying with a Conceptual Image Generates the Problems

Question: Would you say that part of the problem is believing in the idea that this understanding of what we really are is something to be acquired?

John: Yes, exactly.

Q: I think you are saying that what we really are is something that is already clear and already understood. To seek understanding or clarity is creating a problem where there isn't one.

John: Again, yes. But now you see this. Not recognising this was the 'problem'!

Q: In the first conversation we ever had you asked me if I was a seeker. I was not sure what you meant then, but I think I understand now. With a bit of embarrassment, I admit, I am a seeker.

John: So you think! Rather than taking on board this identification, it is better to drop all the labeling and see what you are. Then you can decide, based on what you find, if you are rightly to be called a seeker. Maybe you will find that you are the non-dual reality. One never knows without having a look!

Q: It is obvious to me now that I identify with this idea of being a seeker so much that questioning it feels like questioning my very existence. It is a little scary.

John: Yes, we have become used to being identified with a conceptual image. At some point we realise this generates the problems and suffering. Then we become interested to question the truth of the self-limiting concepts. Most people are not interested in this, because they are not yet open to examine who they are. Even spiritual seekers are generally more comfortable with keeping their 'enlightened' gurus and tales of awakening, rather than looking to see who they are. In fact, most run at top speed from this message!

Q: Part of me romanticises the idea, and the other part knows that this idea is probably the root of all suffering.

John: It is not the idea that 'I am a seeker' that is the root of it. It is the idea that I am an 'I' (separate 'I') at all. The seeker notion is just one among many labels that have been added to the core concept.

Q: I can tell myself that there is nothing to seek, that I have everything right here, right now. But this just becomes another idea, and the whole cycle starts up again and the seeking continues on but with a different mask.

John: Exactly. It is great to see this. Still, the question, the final question, remains. As Nisargadatta Maharaj once said, in his down-to-earth manner, 'Who the hell are you, anyway?' Dispensing with concepts is an important aspect of this, but it is not the core issue. You *are*. It is about being clear on this. All of the other points flow from this.

Awareness Is the Abiding Reality of Things

Question: Are you saying that the contents of awareness are the manifestation of awareness? Or are they mutually dependent upon each other? You succinctly point out their different characteristics, but I am still struggling with the unity of all. I see the unity in the point that 'all things are known through awareness'. Is that the unity?

John: Have you ever had a thought, perception or experience outside of awareness? You cannot say so. So on direct evidence you do not experience 'things' as apart from awareness. However, awareness remains regardless of appearances. That is why there is not a one-to-one correspondence. Awareness is the abiding reality of things. Appearances come and go in and on this and have no independent existence apart from that aware presence. This is the simple truth of it. Said another way, objects are nothing but awareness, but awareness itself is not an object. Another way: because objects are never experienced apart from awareness, they must be awareness. But awareness is not limited by the appearances. That is why I prefer to call objects 'appearances'. That is about all that one needs to see with this. Why? So that one can drop the interest in appearances and get down to what really needs to be looked into—your real nature, which is completely non-objective and utterly independent of objects.

The inquiry about awareness and objects is not the heart of the matter. The point is to recognise what you are. That is all. The nature of objects may be an interesting topic for discussion, but such a discussion is not the same as knowing yourself. If you find you are trying to piece things together at an intellectual level to make the pointers 'work' for the mind's conceptual understanding, that is an exercise in futility. Before the next thought appears, you are

undoubtedly present and aware. That is the essence of what is being pointed to. If that is clear, the other points follow as a matter of course.

Complete Absence Is Your Total Presence

Question: The time-delay fuse on the 'non-duality bomb' you planted with your books, e-mails and phone conversation finally reached the detonator and blew off my head this morning! I was working in the garden when I realised why seeking stops. Seeking only stops when:

- a) The seeker finds 'it' (lucky boy!).*
- b) The seeker gives up on 'it' (tragic!).*
- c) The seeker realises absolutely that 'it' cannot under any condition be found.*

My severed head landed in column 'c'. 'It' cannot be found because 'it' cannot be an object of itself, except by the convolution of self-reference, in which case it has necessarily morphed into a mere concept of itself. So, 'my' awareness can never find itself. I can only be it. In fact, I cannot not be it. It is all there is—except for everything, of course. I think I have just stepped over the line into the place where words no longer cut it. Enough said!

You might wonder if there was any particular pointer that lit that fuse. There was. It was your innocent little e-mail phrase: 'seemingly innocuous'. The phrase itself is seemingly innocuous, a perfect example of self-reference that ultimately referred to the fact that self-reference is inconceivable. That was a classic 'turning word', a semantic palindrome, a 'life spiral'. Anyhow, seeking is pointless. Doubt is pointless. Suffering is pointless. Thus, there is no task left to which the busy little beaver can heroically dedicate himself!

John: Ah, another one who lost his head! There seems to be a noble line of such happy souls! It appears the points have struck home. Good news. So you are what you were seeking—inescapable and undeniable being-awareness itself. And that, too, is simply a pointer. Any word will do. The imagined seeker, who is the basis of all seeking, suffering and doubt, is not to be found. Not only do you have no head, but you have nothing else either. The complete absence, however, is only pointing to your total presence. All that appears is only an appearance of *this*, your innate nature. In this recognition, all is resolved. All limiting concepts make a tacit reference to the entity to whom they apply. But no such entity is present. This is the insight that severs the 'gordian knot' of doubt and leaves you present as the magnificent clarity that cannot be denied. Such a denial would only shine by virtue of that presence, your own natural state.

Are You Doing Anything to Be?

Question: I really enjoyed meeting you. I am glad I had a chance to do so. Some of your pointers cleared up a lot of false beliefs and made things clearer to me. However, I am still not seeing as I would like to see.

John: But you *are* seeing! The seeing is in full play now. Awareness, or your own nature, is here in full view. That is not an issue. There is nothing lacking in this regard. There may be a few unnecessary ideas getting in the way of the simplicity of this.

Q: I question and meditate on all the pointers in order to try and target this awareness.

John: This is over-complicating things. The awareness aspect is already here. Aren't you naturally seeing, hearing and thinking? That principle in which all that is happening is what is being pointed to. The comment about 'I question and meditate' overlooks the point and gets back into the (assumed) duality. Awareness is not so much to be 'targeted' but recognised as a present and undeniable fact. There is a pause at that point, because what is being pointed to is clearly evident. Do not 'overshoot' this point. Once you get back into 'I' and 'awareness' and some action between them, you are bringing in too many moving parts!

Q: I can only randomly get tastes of this, but then I fall out of the moment.

John: Check this out on direct evidence. Do you ever 'fall out of the moment', and if so, exactly to where do you fall? Wherever you seemingly fall, aren't you still in the moment? You are looking for

some experience and not quite finding it. See that all this activity is displaying in clear and present awareness. After all, who is cognising all of this? You. You *are* what is being talked about. You have not fallen out of being you!

Q: There are not many questions I can think of for which I do not have an answer. So I do not know what else to do at this point.

John: Why are you doing anything? Are you doing anything to *be*? This is not about questions and answers, but the basis upon which the questions and answers appear, which (again) is what you are.

Q: Maybe the answer is misinterpreted from something I read in a book. When I meditate and ask 'Do I exist?', I can answer 'Of course'. But then I ask myself, 'What knows that knowing?'

John: This is needlessly complicating things. When you notice the simple fact of aware existence, just pause there. No further questions are needed. The question 'What knows the knowing?' is not needed. It gets too conceptual. Knowing *is*. Full stop. See what is here in the full stop. Do not approach this through more thinking, but look directly. Simply see what is. Notice the 'taste' of clear and present awareness, which is shining in all its nakedness and vividness right now (and always right now).

Q: Yes! That knowing is what I am. I feel empty space. I feel it is just me, the awareness, with nothing else. I can be in the moment for hours, but it falls away.

John: Does it!? How do you know? What is knowing that experience? It is still registering in awareness, which has not gone anywhere! Full stop here and laugh with sheer joy and delight that your mind was playing tricks with you. Do not listen to the mind's comments, but instead look at your direct experience and go by the facts.

Q: It is starting to drive me crazy. I do not know what to do! I cannot find any new information to read to make anything clearer. I am feeling desperate moments, in which I want to cry. I do not know what to do. I am already here, but I must not be experiencing my true self.

John: All this lamenting comes from 'falling' for the mind's assessment that you have left your natural being. This is simply not true. As usual, the suffering is based on the wrong assumptions of who and what you are. The thoughts are saying you are a miserable someone who has departed from his being and needs to have ways and means to get back, which unfortunately (or fortunately!) are not working. Pause all these concepts and see what is here. Do not be hoodwinked by the concepts.

Q: It was good meeting you in person. I am glad you take the time out to meet with strangers.

John: See what you are here and now, and we are no longer strangers. We are both present and aware as that clear, bright, alive being and knowing that shines without break. Your own nature is here because you cannot deny your being and knowing. Be clear on this. It is much, much easier than you think.

What Can I Do to Help My Daughter?

Question: First of all, thank you for all you are doing by sharing your clear teachings. You have helped me to clear up my last 'stuck points'. I have been at this a long time, and I am hoping to soon share this message myself.

John: With the key points of this clear, whatever appears will naturally happen on its own. If you are speaking from your own direct experience (of knowing and being what you are), then the sharing will certainly have its impact.

Q: I have a question, which is a difficult one for me at this point, and I could use your insight. My oldest daughter, a bright and gifted light of twenty-eight years of age, living in Paris, France, is bipolar. Basically, she is in denial of this disease and refuses to take medications. While, overall, she somehow manages to be somewhat productive, the condition impairs her judgment and keeps her from making decisions that are best for her and would allow her to live anywhere near her potential. She has had a few serious episodes. While she is much loved and such a light, she causes pain for others close to her and, obviously, despite my perspective of this as an appearance of awareness, I worry about her. I search myself as to what, if anything, I can do to help.

John: This is only natural and expected as a movement of compassion and intelligence. I do not see anything at all amiss with these feelings and experiences. Basically, you do whatever naturally comes up, as in any other area of life. Our bodies and minds are called upon to act and function in the appearance of things. That may include feelings, preferences, decisions, and all manner of actions and responses that arise based on circumstances. Knowing

your real nature does not mean you have no feelings, cares or concerns. Undoubtedly, such experiences can and will arise as these are part of the normal functioning of life. And in all of it, there is no personal suffering, meaning there is no sense that something has gone wrong with 'me' or the world. Even sorrow, sadness and frustration may arise. Again, it is a natural appearance and not for a defective 'me'. This is the difference. Then you do whatever you can or whatever comes up to do, and there are no regrets, agonising judgments, self-pity and self-concern. You do the needful based on the situation. And you remain as you are. Your fundamental being has not been lost or altered at any time. Nor has hers.

Q: As I understand it, this is a brain chemistry disorder, so the fact that she came into this manifestation with this 'defective' mind-body mechanism, hurts my heart. I feel angry and perplexed as well as helpless in trying to help her.

John: If it were up to us to choose the nature of appearances, perhaps we would have chosen differently, but that is not how it works. We do not even know our next thought. So we have no basis for lamenting appearances, as we did not decide them. Our contribution is how we respond, not what has happened. It is important to see that the body-mind expression is only an expression, not the real being of someone. The body-mind has its appearance in the scheme of things for a time. What we can do is see through and beyond what is appearing to what is abiding. You can see through the appearance to the abiding and perfect nature of your daughter, in spite of the expressions of her body-mind. Seeing someone in this way is the greatest freedom and support you can offer. Otherwise, we are compounding the mistake of taking the body-mind to be the essential reality of the person. And then with this clear perspective we can help in the appearance to whatever extent our time, resources and capacities allow. There are no heavy regrets. There is a distinct feeling that you have played your part to the best of your ability, and the mind remains free of needless suffering and doubt. This does not mean that we get some specific outcome we desire. But actually we lose such demands and

expectations, because that is not how things really function. To define or label experiences and create expectations generates suffering in our own minds, as it creates a separation between what is and what the mind believes should be. Without these labels and conditions put on by the conceptual mind, the inner turmoil is not present. In other words, the sting is removed—and this has nothing to do with the situations, which may or may not change.

Q: I have been able to deal with so much in life through the perspective of awareness, or true nature, that I have gained. But I need all the help I can get on this one.

John: In addition to being clear about who and what you are, I would certainly recommend you seek the best counseling and medical expertise you can find so that you can make the best and most informed decisions under the circumstances. At a practical level, this will allow the mind a certain acceptance, in that you have done the best you can in the situation. Granted, this is a challenging situation. But I know from personal experience that challenges are not able to shake the core truth of who we are.

Q: This has come to the forefront recently, as my daughter may be coming back to America to stay with us for a while as she decides what to do with her life. One other fact is that she tends to drink heavily to 'medicate' herself in lieu of other medications that she feels make her feel bad. This worsens things and really exacerbates her ultra-sensitive nature (she is a poet and writer), making it difficult at times to talk and reason with her.

John: There is no implication that you are supposed to accept everything. It may come to a point that the situation is unworkable and you have to lay out alternative living arrangements. Do not forget that your daughter has her own life and learning to go through also. You are only playing one part in that. It is not all on your shoulders. Her life and experiences are not all your responsibility. Ultimately, we cannot change or alter someone's experience of life. We can only point, encourage and share by example. This not only

applies to a relationship such as you are describing with your daughter, but also to sharing the spiritual points with someone interested in knowing who they are.

The Value of the 'Full Stop'

Question: The more I try to focus on 'I am' or presence-awareness, the more elusive it seems to be.

John: Trying to focus on your true nature is something like looking for your eyes, when the whole time you are looking through them. If you try to focus on your being or aware presence, you will be trying to turn it into an object. Since you are not an object, you will be looking in vain. Just see this point and pause. Being-awareness is here in all of its immediacy and clarity. *That* is it. Why should you try to focus *on* it, when you *are* it? See the false concept and the error contained in it. Your being is not to be obtained. It is pointed to as a present fact.

Q: But can it be described? Is it the sense of consciousness? Is it the feeling of 'I exist'? Are all these contained within it? In order to find out 'who I am' must this not be known first?

John: This is who you are. So, full stop. At this point, the tendency to dive back into the doubts and concepts is the hang-up. That is the value of the 'full stop'. You are what you are seeking.

The Certainty of Being

Question: Is there anything we can agree on?

John: This is not the core issue. It is about getting to the root of who and what we are, of clarifying this. Why? So that life is not being filtered through a network of unexamined beliefs and assumptions about our identity. At a very practical level of experience, it is not particularly fruitful to live a life without having some sense of who we are. Any other issues are largely irrelevant and missing the task at hand. All sense of limitation, doubt, suffering, worry, fear and so on ultimately arises out of a wrong or unexamined view of ourselves. The spiritual jargon often becomes just another network of beliefs to embellish the unexamined sense of identity.

What is your identity?

Q: The certainty of being. Nobody can deny this.

John: Exactly. Very clearly seen. In fact, there is nothing so intuitive and certain as 'I am'. Even to doubt, you must be present to doubt. You know 'you are'. Your own being is not in doubt. Start right there. The key is to have a clear sense of this being (your own existence) without identifying this with any concept. One thing you can verify right off is that your being is not a concept. That is why this has nothing to do with concepts, even spiritual concepts. This has nothing to do with teachers, teachings or particular experiences, however glorious, because this undeniable being clearly has nothing to do with any of those things. No teacher, system, path or approach owns this, because it is already present as your own self. Once you catch the drift of where this is heading, you can drop those other concepts as beside the point.

Q: I consider all appearances to be downstream and the source upstream.

John: This is certainly a reasonable way to view things. You eventually also see that the appearances do not exist as independent things apart from the source. But, to get rolling, it can be very helpful to be clear about the source. The other aspects all flow naturally from this.

Q: We all meet at the junction called 'certainty of being'.

John: It depends on what you mean. At the level of being itself, there are no separate appearances. In other words, at the source itself, there is no 'I' or 'you'. They come in only in the downstream appearance of things and are generated by the conceptual mind. If you are saying that at the level of being itself, we all meet in and as that oneness or source, I would agree. There is no 'my being' and 'your being', just being itself. Keep in mind that 'being' is only a pointer, so do not make too much of that word. Call it anything, but that refers to your own natural existence, which shines before, during and after any concept or experience. Again, the point is not to make some metaphysical split between that and the appearance. It is just to highlight your abiding nature so that is clear. As a reminder, we already saw that *this* is already present. Nothing is being brought in at all. We are simply having a straight look at something so present that we may have overlooked it, being more interested in other things.

Q: Going further upstream toward the stateless state, do we part?

John: This starts to get a bit hypothetical and less emphatic. In fact, it is entirely conceptual! There is no going further in non-conceptual being. Who? Where? See that the question essentially returns to the conceptual level and introduces distinctions, separation and doubt. See something very key here. The being is doubtless. The conceptual overlay brings in the sense of separation and doubt. This

is why the answer is not in the conceptual mind. But pause the mind and the answer is (ever) here in all of its immediacy and clarity: the doubtless fact of your own being. That is not an inert void or vacuum at all. One of the ancient Zen masters called it 'this pure mind, the source of everything'. The beauty of it is, this is what you *are*. It cannot be grasped in a concept because it is not a thing to be grasped or understood by the mind. Still, your existence is undeniable and cannot be doubted. That is why it is called immediate or non-conceptual knowledge or experience.

Q: Does disagreement start up again once beyond the common junction of 'certainty of being'?

John: Yes, but only by returning to the conceptual level, as I mentioned. The concepts do not have to be discarded, just seen for what they are. That is enough.

Q: Beyond the certainty of being, what is there out of which this certainty springs that equally cannot be denied and that is the final and eternal understanding?

John: This assumes there is some further development needed. Try a 'full stop' here and linger awhile. Realise that anywhere you move just goes back into a concept. Non-conceptual reality is where the buck stops. You can try another spin in the mind for a lark, but see if it gets you anything more than being what you already are.

Consciousness and Death

Question: Far from being some kind of eternal awareness, this 'presence' will vanish when the organism dies.

John: There are a couple of problems with this. First of all, it is stated as factual. But this is a claim not based on direct evidence at all. To verify it, you would need to bodily expire and then show in direct experience the absence of your innate presence. This you cannot do. Therefore, you cannot assert this experience as factual in the absence of sufficient proof. My main point here is simply to highlight that, far from being a certain fact, this is actually a claim delivered without sufficient evidence. So it gets down to 'my claim is truer than yours because I say so!'. Therefore, you need to go back to the drawing board on this particular issue.

This reminds me of a statement made recently by someone to the effect that when a relative passed away 'obviously there was no presence-awareness present any longer'. This proof was offered with a note of triumph, as if it had refuted all the non-duality pointers. But this was blatantly overlooking the fact that the actual principle of her own presence and awareness had not gone anywhere at all and had not been denied or contradicted in the slightest. The refutation could not have been delivered outside of the presence of being-awareness, which was still present and beyond doubt. Nothing had been refuted at all. All that happened was the questioner was looking outward at a bodily form and, not seeing any evidence of life or functioning in that body, assumed that being was absent. It is a matter of mixing up appearances with what is being pointed to as being-awareness and assuming that the coming and going of appearances determines the fate of the greater context in which they appear. The pointing out of the obvious transiency of appearances

and then making a claim that one's essential being is thereby transient is not a clear or proved case at all. Again, you would have to physically die to prove it. That being somewhat impractical, one will need to take a different course.

This highlights why it can be useful to talk in terms of consciousness as a product or transient manifestation based on causes and conditions. In this regard, I agree with you that the manifestation of consciousness as an experience in duality is dependent on the body and has a beginning and end. This was a basic point made by Buddha, Nisargadatta Maharaj and others. Even in our own experience we can see or observe the coming and going of conscious experience, not as an assumption, but as a direct experience that needs no proof. So, in this sense, consciousness clearly comes and goes. I doubt that anyone can recall being conscious before the sperm and egg came together and formed the body endowed with breath, for example. When the body dies, the life or consciousness expressing in that body is finished. However, it would be a mistake to assume that consciousness, as used in this context, is necessarily the same as what is being pointed to as our abiding nature. Consciousness in this sense is conditional. It is an appearance like any other. But that may not be the whole story. To claim that it is, is very premature. More looking and investigation is called for before a definitive claim can be offered.

It needs to be noted that all the while, and on direct evidence, your very existence, that in you which is cognising even the fact of being conscious, is not being contradicted or refuted at all. This experience is not a hypothetical matter and is not a result of conceptual proofs or refutations. On the other hand, to speak of 'what will be after death' is entirely provisional and speculative. This is the difference between non-conceptual experience and conceptual thought. Notice that the former is doubtless and evident, while the latter leads to doubt and potentially unverifiable claims.

Awareness and 'Pure' Consciousness

Question: I was hoping to ask another question about an area of confusion that tends to come and go. That is a big clue right there! Ha! The awareness is here. And the 'I am' as an assumption, or a deeply held idea, is also clear.

John: Why even say it is 'deeply held'? It is just an idea, one among many others.

Q: There is a regular seeing of thoughts and feelings.

John: Yes?

Q: There almost seems to be two levels of consciousness. One is the personal conditioning of the human being that generates the experience that each person perceives, and interprets events and others according to their individual genetic and historical conditioning.

John: But this is not consciousness. It is an appearance in the consciousness. It is rather mechanical, and, if you like, 'conditioned'.

Q: The other experience is the impersonal consciousness that seems to manifest the phenomenal universe.

John: Yes, the universe appears in consciousness.

Q: It does seem that the body is needed in order to perceive the manifest world. It is like a camera, a viewing lens that makes sense

of what otherwise could not be seen or experienced. Does this seem right so far?

John: Exactly true.

Q: The non-conceptual awareness is prior to both of those and is the source of both of them, in an ultimate sense.

John: If you want to use that language, I would agree. Some people make a slight differentiation between 'consciousness' and 'awareness'. In that case, consciousness is 'consciousness of', while awareness shines before, during and after all acts or experiences of consciousness. You are the awareness, while consciousness comes and goes in and on that, like a wave on water. They are the same substance or essence.

Q: In I Am That, Nisargadatta Maharaj says that the body identification is one of the most difficult identifications to see through. I find this true. It seems as if the awareness is located in the body. What pointers or inquiries clarify this? There is awareness of bodily sensations, feelings, senses, etc. There is also a clear awareness that the body changes all the time, while this basic sense of beingness never changes. Is this it? Is that all there is to this?

John: Yes. Not only the body, but all experiences are in consciousness—other bodies, the world, the mind, etc. If you care to make a distinction between consciousness and awareness, then that consciousness also comes and goes in awareness. Nisargadatta Maharaj (actually his translators) usually used the term 'beingness' as a synonym for the transient consciousness.

Q: I may be getting confused by the word 'awareness' as a pointer to the absolute reality. Awareness seems like something that would be more characteristic of the body-mind or the nonverbal 'I am' consciousness, rather than an attribute of pure consciousness, the absolute reality.

John: 'Awareness' and 'pure consciousness' are the same pointer, so use whatever word works best for you.

Q: Without the body and its perceptual mechanisms, how could the absolute view anything?

John: This is exactly the point. There are no objects or any need to view anything without the presence of the body, senses and mind. So pause, and realise that all those appearances come and go in what you ultimately are.

Looking beyond Concepts

Question: There are only concepts coming and going, creating the appearance of two. And that appearing includes all the concepts—not just the ‘me’ that seems to be the most stubborn one, but even the most so-called ‘spiritual’ concepts like oneness, consciousness, timelessness, non-duality, presence, awareness. No one ever reaches or discovers these ‘things’. They are all images. The quicker this is seen, the quicker the illusion of ‘me’ falls away totally. It takes no time if seen directly.

John: A bit of clear looking shows that the ‘me’ notion is the hub or root of all the other assumptions. If the ‘me’ is a fiction or mere phantom, then ‘who’ needs to be awakened, enlightened or liberated? Many approaches, even under the banner of non-duality, tend to leave the ‘me’ intact and offer it various ‘carrots’ or attainments, which really do nothing but flatter and strengthen the false identity. It is not so much that the illusion of ‘me’ falls away, but it is seen to have never been present in the first place.

Those who work on the overcoming of the ‘me’ are falling into the false perspective that there is a ‘me’ present at all. That is why the moment you hear people speaking of losing the ‘me’, overcoming the ego, losing the egoic structures, etc., you can see they are barking up the wrong tree and have not yet grasped the basic point. In other words, the problem has been misjudged, and so whatever action is being undertaken based on that view is bound to be off the mark. Yet these approaches are immensely popular. Why? Because they play into the concepts that are already being believed—that I am a limited person in need of something to be whole and complete.

This is definitely not about ‘losing ego structures’, getting free of conditioning, resting in the silence, embodying the understanding or

what have you. These all sound cogent until we look deeply into things. At that point they lose their charm because they are not even responding to the real issues. They are all events, experiences and states offered in the future to a person that is taken as real and present. They always speak to a person about special states in time. And the bottom line, however 'non-dual' the position being offered may sound, is that 'you are not quite there yet'. So there are more attainments, more work, more progress, more levels, more stages or what have you. And there is always the 'enlightened' teacher and selected 'students' who are rumored to have 'it'. Of course this is all the height of nonsense and completely out of sync with the basic point of all this.

We tend to miss this, because what is offered in the progressive approaches appears so enticing, so reasonable to the image we have of ourselves. But if you strip away the noble language, the basic message is 'you are not there; you are not complete; there is still something missing'. A rare bird will see that this is completely contrary to the basic non-dual message—that you are that unconditioned reality here and now. Note well. It is not that you *will* become that; you *are* that. That is the difference between paths of becoming, such as are offered in many popular approaches, and the direct pointing to what you are. The difference is as between night and day.

You say all the spiritual pointers are concepts. Oneness, awareness, presence, etc. are *not* your nature. These are only words attempting to point. That is all they can do. It is you who must see for yourself what is being pointed to. In having a straight look at your actual being, however you want to call that, you see that your abiding nature is not a concept, not a word; so the interest and fixation on the words, even the 'non-dual' words, fall away. In that space, that 'full stop', where the concepts are not grasped, you *are* present. It is a self-evident fact, not theoretical or verbal. That is non-conceptual knowing or pure experience of being what you are. That is *really* what this is about. Nothing is brought in, because what you are is here and now and has always been so. Yet, for most of us, the utter simplicity of this is usually overlooked, until it is pointed out

(possibly with some force!) and we see the complete obviousness of this. All along, you have been only *this* and nothing else.

This is not about progressively losing concepts. That is a common misunderstanding. Your present and undeniable self-nature is ever-present, ever-attained, beyond getting or losing. All talk of attainment, awakening, enlightenment and all the rigmarole that goes on in the name of spirituality crumbles to dust. This, your natural, innate being, is pure radiance, timeless and unshakable peace, immense clarity that cannot be obscured by any experiences, feelings, thoughts or circumstances. In truth, it is prior to and independent of all concepts, however sublime. This is your natural state, here and now.

I Am Seeing This Space, but the 'Me' Is Still Here

Question: I have been seeing this 'space' instead of my head (forgive my English), but the sense of 'me' is still here. Everything remains the same for me and nothing seems to change. What is happening? Are there other people in the same situation?

John: Perhaps you can clarify what you mean by 'I have been seeing this "space" instead of my head'. If you are referring to the pointers of Douglas Harding, that 'space' is the pure, non-conceptual knowing awareness itself. There is no 'you' seeing 'that'. That clear space of knowing and being is what is looking. 'You' are not standing apart from that. All there is, is the seeing only. There is no other 'you' in the picture 'on present evidence'. The point is that you and that are not separate, but you *are* that.

The sense of 'me' is itself a notion coming and going in that space of clear knowing. Before worrying about any sense of 'me' and whether such a thing is present or not, make sure the positive truth of what you are is clear. If this is not really clear, any other pointer is bound to be either misleading or misunderstood. Most people looking into non-duality tend to miss this key point.

Seeing the body, mind, world and universe arising and setting in the space of your being-awareness, which remains without change, is change enough! The interest and belief in the notion of the separate 'I' and all the other concepts and identifications based on it are undermined, because how can you be a limited, separate person if you are the space in which the entire universe appears? Seeking, suffering and doubts are generated through the self-centred concepts and the belief that they are your identity. By clarifying your real identity, the energy of belief cannot be sustained in these

concepts. Therefore, the seeking and doubts are conclusively resolved.

If you find yourself talking about 'space' and 'me' and wondering how things fit together, then look a little more deeply into who and what you are. All the doubts are resolved in that. Start with the one thing you are sure of: the fact of your being. Do not move away from that into any other concepts or side issues. What is the nature of that undeniable being that you are?

Stop Twisting My Words!

Question: [Following some previous correspondence ...] *You should stop twisting my words to fit yours!*

John: I have no intention to twist words, only to point out that whatever concept or structure the mind creates has no finality or ultimate reality to it. More importantly, what you are cannot be defined, limited or confined to any concept whatsoever. That is my point.

Q: You are very much aware that words are the only tool we have to communicate what cannot be communicated.

John: This is not true, as there are other ways and means of communicating besides words. But, yes, concepts can point. They can point beyond themselves to what is prior to concepts. Or else they can point back into more concepts. In the first case (when concepts point beyond themselves), all fixation and interest in the concepts fades. You are left naked and bare, with no support at all. The alternative case is when the pointers become the basis for further concepts. It is important to see the difference. The pointer itself is neutral. One and the same pointer can function either way, depending on how it is being handled (that is, the intention behind it and the assumptions of the one who is listening to it). There is no blueprint or fixed truth in concepts. That is why the recorded words of sages and traditions very often become dead and ineffective. Without the life behind them and the appropriate readiness to hear them, they often become conceptual anchors that accentuate the sense of conceptual bondage.

Q: When I say 'teachers', I mean ones who can relay to you the truth of who you are and not by your definition (stated in your previous correspondence).

John: This is fine as far as it goes, but it is a makeshift way of talking. I think we can move past that now. How far are you from being-awareness in this moment? Who needs to relay this? *Can* anyone else relay this? Is it not fully present and inescapable? When this is so immediate and available, there is not much need for talking of teachers and students any longer.

Q: Even though there is 'no other', we live in a world as if there are. Else why are teachings offered if there is 'no other'?

John: You say 'as if'. That is the key. In truth, 'we' do not live in a world at all. Like all else, the notion of 'the world' comes and goes in immediate awareness. Seeing this, the 'as if' qualification falls. Then it is just being what you are. All attempts at defining oneself in terms of concepts ends. It is important to see how all notions—the body, mind, others, world, universe, etc.—simply arise and set as present thoughts or labels in aware-presence. It is not as if any of them have any independent reality at all. It is all too easy to spin up a world in conceptual thought and proceed to get lost in all sorts of imaginary distinctions.

Q: Anyway, all is included and nothing is excluded (including the illusory beings). This is all part of what is.

John: This is a pleasant notion and may pass for a direct pointing in some circles. Still it does not really get to the core of what this is about. It is easy to come out with phrases like 'all is the oneness' or 'there is no one here', etc. Again, they are fine as some kind of initial pointer and may serve some value in some contexts. But, in fact, they fail to address the heart and soul of what is being pointed to here.

Consciousness and the Absolute

Question: After listening to some of your podcasts on the Urban Guru Cafe website (plus reading one of your books and being familiar with Bob Adamson's teaching), it seems to me that you emphasise seeing and being the turiya (the fourth state, or relative consciousness). No attention is given to the absolute, only to consciousness, which Nisargadatta Maharaj says is a result of the body. The absolute is prior to or beyond consciousness and is the highest state.

John: These are all simply ways of talking. Some approaches meld together the consciousness and awareness and do not emphasise the distinction so much. Keep in mind that the distinction between consciousness and awareness is, in the end, conceptual and only for the purpose of discussion. I am familiar with the 'double step' approach. It depends on the context and who is asking. The interviewer in the podcasts you refer to never brought up the issue, so we did not get into that aspect. In general, I favor the more subtle approach that Nisargadatta Maharaj used. It is also very similar to Buddhist presentations, in which consciousness is a material product and the unconditioned awareness is beyond. That scheme works very well in certain contexts.

When it gets to what is beyond consciousness (as the term is used in this context), words are clearly only pointers. In the end, all the words, approaches and descriptions fail to convey the non-conceptual reality that is prior to dualistic consciousness. Keep in mind that when I talk about non-conceptual awareness, that is the unqualified and absolute essence, not the dualistic expression. Also, as you likely know, in Vedanta the term 'consciousness' is used in an absolute sense as the ultimate reality.

Basically, the distinction between consciousness and the absolute is not strictly necessary, but it can be helpful in certain contexts and to address certain topics. It is like a surgeon's kit; you do not always have to use every instrument for every patient.

What Is Being?

Question: I have read your books, but it is one thing to read a book and quite another to actually converse with the author in person. Yes, I do notice from time to time that I am aware and alive. But when I get up in the morning, the deep emotions of not wanting to be up or the idea of having to face difficulties at the office come up. With that, I seem to lose this perspective. Sometimes I have human emotions like being jealous or upset or angry. These also make me feel like a trapped individual again. It is hard to see the fact of presence in those moments. That is why I thought it would a good idea to root out the 'I' and see it for what it is. I have just started noticing that I am the noticing, but sometimes I still feel like it is me who is noticing and not awareness. It is as if I am looking to find out if the brain is indeed consciousness and not only the receiver of senses.

John: For the moment, do not worry too much about the body-mind and whatever is manifesting. Be natural and normal and take care of day-to-day events per the usual. The point is not to get hung up in all that, but to clarify your identity, to know your real being as it is. This is the place to start, even before looking at the 'I' concept. Start with the fact that 'you are'. This you can see and admit without any doubt. This is what I am pointing you toward, to have a good look at this undeniable sense of being that is with you right now. Make sure this is clear. Is there any problem knowing that you are? Can you recognise the sense of being that is with you right now? Look right into this to appreciate it for what it is. This is what I mean by 'looking'.

[Follow up.]

Q: I took some time to look at how being is for me. Is being the aliveness that is present when I look out of my eyes or when I feel things, such as the computer keyboard or the sensations of my body? Is this being, or is being the awareness of being alive? Sometimes it feels like I am trying to grasp at myself (like the eye trying to look at itself), and I end up feeling frustrated. It feels like awareness trying to watch awareness. So I focus on the sensation of being alive and of seeing and sensing things. Is that what you mean or is being more subtle than that? Does being require doing? I know that it is what I am, so being myself should be effortless.

John: It is just the sense of ordinary being. For example, if someone asks you if you are present or do you know that you exist, you intuitively know that fact. It is nothing more complicated than that. Now, this sense of being is what you can look at. All the sensing, knowing, looking and so on is happening because you are present to experience all that. That leads to the next aspect. This being is not just present like some inert stone or dead object. It has an awareness or sentience to it. In other words, you not only know you exist, but you are aware also. So there is this being and knowing quality right now in your experience. See if you can notice these two aspects first of all. Do not strain and grasp at this. It is not complicated at all. Simply notice what is naturally and effortlessly present.

What to Do When It Seems Like ‘So What?’

Question: I took to heart your advice that the main thing is to get clear on the positive aspect of who I am. Putting aside everyone else’s formulations and concepts, what I come up with is: I am alive. I am always here to experience and know (except when I am under anesthesia or in dreamless sleep). I experience and I know what registers in the field of awareness or attention. Now, how does that help me with my suffering? In some moments, I am very clear that I could not want anything more than my mere existence, as it is a miracle. A ‘bad hair day’ is a miracle, equal to a ‘good hair day’. Whatever particular experience I am having is not the point. The point is the mind-blowing wonder of being here as a sentient being on this planet. That is how I see it at times. At other times, the fact of my being, and being aware of my being, does not seem that magnificent. I am just being honest.

Then, another point is: I realise I am here. Still, despite every single thing that has occurred in my life—to me, around me, in my mind, in my body, to my body, etc.—something remains unchanged despite the changes. I do not know what to call that. But I am here, still. So I could define the positive aspect of myself as whatever this ‘unchanging-ness’ is. This is only another attempt to ‘define’ the positive aspect.

The main thing for me, besides defining ‘it’, is that if ‘it’ is inert, it is useless to me. I heard you loud and clear that this positive aspect—who we are, who I am—is not lifeless, inert and boring. My problem is, well, sometimes it seems to be and sometimes not. What to do when it seems like ‘so what?’. I would like more help on this aspect. Can you add anything further to help clarify my thinking?

John: Keep looking at this alive, unchanging existence. Those are a couple of facets of your essential identity, no doubt. There is a lot you can see, once you start looking in this direction. That looking will bring a greater clarity about the nature of what you are. What is the practical effect? Suffering is really the tendency to seek reality, identity and happiness in the images of thought. The root of that is a lack of clarity or a basic question about who or what we are. In other words, lack of clear self-knowledge is the root of all seeking, suffering and doubt. So the more clear and solid you are with your identity, the less you will be looking for who you are in the mind. Consequently, the suffering and conceptual difficulties are resolved.

Also, keep in mind the following. There is a positive element to all this. What your being is, is not some cool, indifferent 'principle', but the light and energy of life itself. As this is recognised more clearly, other aspects emerge. They were present before but not noticed. There is a clear sense of peace, oneness, warmth and unconditioned presence or love that is part and parcel of the true essence of things.

The question 'so what?' is only a passing concept. Continue to look into that which you are, which is there before, during and after the 'so what?'. The 'so what?' comes and goes, but what you are remains.

The Root of the Problem

Question: You wrote:

The real key is the 'I' thought itself. In order to be a body or mind, you must be an 'I' first. Taking oneself to be the conceptual 'I' is the initial link in the chain.

It seems that the 'I' thought is the mind's acknowledgement of the fact of being, that there is presence-awareness. This thought is one of the objects in the awareness. Somehow it is believed that the 'I' must be one of the appearances or objects in this awareness. Then it is believed that there is an object that is aware. This divides awareness into a bunch of awarenesses and assigns them to different objects. It seems that the conceptual 'I' is the belief that one of these objects contains awareness. Obviously this is ludicrous, but awareness is so easily overlooked that it happens. It is as if the mind knows there is presence-awareness and mistakenly assumes the presence-awareness is one of the objects in presence-awareness. It seems the first 'I' is I as an object. Then the next object identified with tends to be the body because that object seems to hang around a lot. Is this looking in the right direction?

John: Yes, this is on target. If the 'I' thought is considered as a pointer back to being-awareness, then all is fine. It is a pointer to your nature as awareness itself. However, if this is not seen, then the pointer goes outward and there is identification with some appearance. Then there is a confusion, which is based on taking something which is not myself to be my real nature. Then we begin to worry about the fate of the thing that is taken as my real being. Therefore, the 'I' thought is the culprit, not the object or the awareness. Seeing all this clearly is important, in order to expose the

root of the problem created by the concepts. In all of this, what has happened to you? Nothing! You are still present and aware as your natural self.

If There Is No 'I', What About Emotions?

Question: I was just reading your book You Were Never Born. Having lost my sense of 'self' and finding no 'I', the question of emotions has arisen.

John: This is fine, but it is not really what this is about. It is about knowing what you *are*. Knowing what you are *not*, or seeing the absence of an 'I' concept, is not precisely the same as knowing what you are. The key issues of who and what you are still remain to be nailed down.

Q: Since nothing has inherent meaning ...

John: This is a false concept. Things have a perfectly adequate meaning at a conventional level. Again, this is missing the point. Why talk of things and their meaning, when the purpose is to know and be what you are?

Q: Things have no meaning except that which we attribute as meaning. Emotions, therefore, seem to be 'I' related. But at the same time, there is little to no sense of that 'I' being present here any longer.

John: I am not hearing much communication about what you have discovered about your true nature, your doubtless self or real being.

Q: Could an emotion be just one of those things that simply 'arises' and which then moves 'us' into action.

John: Yes, like all else, emotions arise. There is no problem and not much to look at with them. But this requires that your real nature is clear. The interest in emotions, or anything else objective, comes from looking for our reality, identity and happiness in them. If your true nature is clear, there will be no urge to look for yourself in appearances.

Q: It feels like there is no 'me' to act. Then what is the urge (prompted by the arising thought or the arising emotion) coming from to do so? This is tough!

John: Let things be as they are. Why be concerned? Again, this appears to be rising from an abiding interest in the appearances due to a lack of clear self-knowledge. Is the sun worried about clouds? It is the same from the perspective of being what you are. The interest or concern with thoughts, emotions and actions has a tinge of the self-centre reference point.

Q: Perhaps the arising is all there is, and by paying attention to and acting upon my arising thought and emotion, 'I' become an arising to someone else. But, as I understand it, there is no one else.

John: You are going down a blind alley at this point. What is needed is knowing your true nature. Everything else takes care of itself from that. Until then, we will always be interested in appearances and looking for answers in them.

A Few Questions

Question: Can you help me clear up some questions? I have just been reading Prior to Consciousness (talks with Nisargadatta Maharaj, edited by Jean Dunn). In it there is a comment along the following lines:

From deep sleep to waking state, what is it? It is the 'I am' state with no words. Later the words start flowing and you get involved with the meaning of the words and carry out your worldly life with the meaning of those words—that is mind. But before the waking state, that borderline, there you have to be. The subtlest part is this—from deep sleep to waking state. To abide in that, you must have an intensely peaceful state. In that state, witnessing of the waking state happens. You must go to that limit, but it is very difficult.

When he talks about being at this borderline between deep sleep and waking, and that it is very difficult, it implies something beyond just the understanding that we are not the body-mind. Could you help?

John: It is necessary to have some familiarity with the whole Nisargadatta Maharaj 'world view' to make sense of this stuff. In general, that is why, though many are inspired by Nisargadatta Maharaj as a spiritual 'figure', few are able to assimilate his teachings from reading his books. That is why I went to see Bob Adamson, who met Nisargadatta in person and can present this stuff in plain English!

Perhaps the following may be of help. When you wake up in the morning, consciousness as a phenomenal state dawns or appears.

In that consciousness, the world and all else appears. But the appearance of consciousness implies someone who is present to experience that. That is you, the one who is there to experience waking, dream and sleep. In this sense, what you are (your natural state) is prior to consciousness. In Nisargadatta's terms, you are that which is aware of the coming and going of consciousness (or any other appearances). That is about it in a nutshell.

Q: OK. But in spite of understanding that there is no entity here, desires still arise.

John: The real question is: have you realised with conviction who and what you are? All other issues are secondary and cannot be usefully tackled without that being clear. So stick with that. When your real nature is clear, there will not be too many, if any, issues to deal with.

Q: From reading Nisargadatta, I think he would advise using the desires to question the source of those desires and see that there is no one there.

John: Know your true nature. That is the point of it all. Start with that, and then we can deal with other questions, if there are any more.

Q: But if the feeling arises and 'I' act on that desire, that means that there is still an 'I' there, right? So I guess the true test of the loss of the 'I' is if the actions that arise are impersonal or, as the Bhagavad Gita would say, they are done for the sake of the action itself rather than its (personal) fruits.

John: This is going off into too many hypothetical issues. The purpose of this is to be clear on your true nature. The fact of your being is beyond doubt. Start with that. Once you know what you are, we can see if you ever were a separate self apart from reality. All discussion about the nature of the separate self and how to deal with it are speculative and conceptual, really. Why? Because the 'I' is only an imagined entity, not a reality. Still, it is more important to know the

truth of your undeniable being. All other problems come from this not being clear.

What You Are Is Clear and Obvious

Question: I have read all your books, and I am now re-reading Awakening to the Natural State. It cannot be denied that presence-awareness is immediate and needs no conceptual verification. I have read many times that that is what you are, so full stop. However, over here, although that is so obvious

John: Full stop at this point!

Q: But how can it be known that that is all you are?

John: This is returning to the conceptual mind and overlooking the obvious fact. Do you need this thought to be present and aware? Just pause here and taste the present wakefulness that is undeniable. At this stage, it is more about discarding residual notions and concepts, because what you are is clear and obvious. There is no doubt about your being and its aware nature. Appreciate this fact!

Conviction Is Already Present

Question: I do understand what you are saying, but I guess it comes down to your question: 'Have you realised with conviction who and what you are?'

John: Ask yourself how sure you are of your own existence. That *is* the conviction. It is already present but not fully appreciated!

Q: The understanding of the teaching is there.

John: Well, this is not about understanding any teaching. It is about understanding what you are!

Q: I guess the conviction is not present, because the mind keeps coming back and gets carried away in desires and fears, etc. Then the mind remembers the teaching, the desires and fears are seen as meaningless, and silence is present.

John: Yes, the first step is to have a clear and solid sense of who and what you are. This may not be clear yet, so look into this. This is what pulls the interest out of following thoughts and concepts in the mind about who we are. From there, it is also important to have a clear understanding of the nature and root cause of suffering. Together, these insights end the seeking, suffering and doubt. Why? Because we know beyond doubt who and what we are, and the root cause of suffering is exposed and no longer taken as real.

Q: Nisargadatta Maharaj talked about how to get a firm conviction of the understanding. He talked about abiding in the 'I am' consciousness, that he did this for three years before he realised, and that that abidance would take you beyond the 'I am'.

John: This is a slightly different approach in terms of the style, but is essentially the same as getting clear on who and what you are. You are nothing that comes and goes, including any variable states of consciousness. Still, beyond or underneath even the coming and going of consciousness as a state or appearance, you are.

Q: He also (occasionally) talked about action being consistent with the understanding, and that this would help conviction grow.

John: Yes, you might as well have your life and interests consistent with your spiritual inquiry. Ultimately, this is not about outer activities but inner attitude. But in fact, once you are deeply looking into this stuff with real interest, other aspects will take care of themselves. Keep on track with the real point of it all.

Q: I can see that I am being-awareness. And I can see that the body-mind is an object in my perception and, therefore, cannot be me. How does this become a deep-rooted conviction?

John: Like I said, ask yourself how sure you are of your own existence. That is the conviction. It is already present but not really appreciated! You do not have to generate the conviction, just like you do not have to generate the real self. All you need to do is find it as already present in your experience. Nisargadatta Maharaj did not attain anything at any time. However, he did find that which was present but overlooked and assumed as lost. This is exactly what you are doing also.

There Is No Person to Come Home

Question: The words of Bob Adamson are so true, so unshakably true! It is watertight. In fact this is all you need to know and understand. I grew in this by seeing through the concept of a 'me'.

John: The 'I' is only another thought passing through, a cloud in the sky of awareness. But seeing is always happening. That is the point. Once the 'I' is seen as false, was it ever there? So there is no use going back and discussing a 'me' and its story, when there never was one!

Q: I read so many books in which there was a mystification of realisation, like there would be big fireworks, the park walked through was suddenly not the same, seeing more clearly, love shining on everything!

John: Just let your existence be as it is. That is the being, awareness, love—whatever label you want to use. That is life itself, the one and only life.

Q: I can only say that it is so simple! The 'me' is not real. It was just a thought. All the time it was just a thought! And now my mind is trying to be a spoilsport by saying that this cannot be the real thing because I do not have these 'great balls of fire'. But now I am seeing through this too!

John: Yes, such thoughts are all fictitious because the 'I' is only a phantom. There is no need to be spooked by non-existent ghosts!

Q: So anyway, I have to settle in this, to grow more in this, to unlearn the mental assumptions, to come home through seeing through all of

this.

John: Sorry! If there is no one, only undeniable being-awareness, do not put any agendas out for a non-existent person. The old Buddhist quote is still good. 'All there is, is self-shining, ever-fresh, non-conceptual presence-awareness, just this and nothing else. There is nothing other than this'. So toss out the concepts of 'I', 'have to settle', 'have to unlearn', etc. Do you not see these are needless concepts coming and going in the ever fresh presence-awareness itself! This is the end game, not some realisation and post-awakening program as mistakenly promoted in some popular interpretations. If you do not see this, you will find yourself back in the game as the 'I' looking for something in the future. It is all so much smoke and mirrors.

You are the reality. You are home itself. There is no separation and no person left to come home.

I Am Becoming a Very Nebulous Thing

Question: The thing is, I do not know who I am. I am becoming a very nebulous thing. It is getting difficult to even address or look for what I am because I do not know what I am looking for anymore. To seek 'enlightenment' there was a concept, a well-defined model that could be chased. Now that the concept has been seen as silly, what to do? Am I supposed to know who I am? How does one know this presence? What does it even mean to say 'I know who I am'? If I do not think about it, there is no need to find out. I guess that is it then?

John: This only gets nebulous by returning to the mind to confirm yourself at a conceptual level. Not only is it nebulous. It is impossible. Prior to concepts, you are. That is as clear as day, and there is nothing doubtful or nebulous about it. 'What is wrong with right now, if you are not thinking about it?' Your being does not need to be known, analysed, grasped, understood, perfected, deepened, used or anything else. It is prior to any concept, even the concepts of being or consciousness. Your true being is not merely conscious, although that is a useful pointer. It is that which makes consciousness possible or, one may say, the knower of consciousness. Any movement from this self-evident fact must, by definition, be a return to conceptualising, dualism and limitation.

So what can you do at this stage? See this 'mechanism' itself, such that it is entirely recognised. In other words, the habit has been to return to the conceptual mind, which generates suffering and limitation. Take that energy of inquiry or interest and use it to dismantle the inner workings of suffering and doubt. Why not? Why settle for any lingering potential to suffer? The real being is already settled. You already are what you are. The reality does not need to add anything to itself. Any subtle limitation comes only by returning

to the belief in the need to define the unconditioned in terms of the mind. Even to try to understand what you are is a conceptual activity at this level! Before understanding anything, you are. That is clear and doubtless. So understand what is going on when we attempt to grasp the self-evident reality by means of concepts. Seeing this dismantles any residual tendency to look for who we are in thought, which is the very definition of suffering itself.

Also, where is this 'I' who is having the problems? All these comments and questions are comments for and about the conceptual 'I', not the real you. As long as any shred of reality continues to go into that assumed entity as being real or who we are, we will continue to get tangled up in such thoughts. So rather than follow the thoughts, question the validity of the owner of them. The 'I' thought is a fiction; thus all the problems are for and about a fiction. But your real being is not a fiction.

Self-Knowledge Is Always Accompanied by Peace

Question: I have been reading, listening, watching videos and attending satsangs and silent retreats.

John: Not a good sign! Those activities have little to do with this. It is better to get down to the real point of it. Who and what are you? That is the question, and it does not get answered by those activities.

Q: Most of the things I hear or read sound true.

John: Maybe, maybe not. Any proposition may sound convincing. But again, that is beside the point. Do you know who you are? That is the key issue.

Q: The problem is that I am still identified with the 'me'.

John: This is a secondary issue. We are only identified with the 'me' concept if our real identity is not clear. The issue of the 'me' cannot (and often need not) be addressed once you know who you are.

Q: Everything else makes sense, but when I question the 'me', I always come to the recognition, 'OK, it is clear; there is no me'. This moment always goes hand-in-hand with a headache!

John: Yes, because that is not self-knowledge. Knowing what you are *not* is not the same as knowing what you *are*. Self-knowledge is always accompanied by peace and relief—because it is self-evident and beyond doubt!

Q: I think the understanding is here. But it is obvious that deep inside I still believe in the 'me'. Now I am at a point where I wonder if questioning this 'me' is something I need to do with the mind. Is this 'me' the mind? It seems so, but still I find myself reacting and thinking as a separate entity. The only good thing is that I now do it consciously.

John: As I mentioned, this is looking in the wrong direction. I am not sure how you got off on this tangent. You took a wrong turn. So drop it and look afresh.

Q: I am completely hooked into all this, in the sense that it is only when reading or listening to someone 'who knows the truth' that I feel calm and peaceful.

John: Forget all that utter nonsense! How do you know they 'know the truth'? You cannot even determine that until you know for yourself. So focus on that and let others take care of themselves. Even if 'they know the truth', it is irrelevant to the point of this. All you need to know is yourself, nothing more nor less than this. It does not sound like you have been looking too much into this, thus the lingering confusion.

Q: I hope it is not the mind keeping me from realising. Here I go again! This is like a mouse running in the wheel!

John: Well, if we are chasing concepts, it is like a dog chasing its own tail. Drop all the politically correct spiritual activities and ask the real question, which Nisargadatta Maharaj once phrased as 'Who the hell are you, anyway?' Consider what I have been saying and see if you can see what I am getting at.

[Follow up.]

Q: No. I do not see what it is that you are getting at. Is it not impossible to know what you are as such? I can see clearly that everything I find is objective. My understanding is that maybe by

seeing what I am not there is a possibility for my true identity to be revealed.

John: Perhaps, but you are still interested in what you are not! Books, videos, satsangs, retreats, calm, peace, searching for the 'me', etc.—all this activity and interest in objects takes one away from a clear comprehension of your real being as it is. You know you *are*. Your being is not a fiction. Start with that. This is what is to be known and recognised for what it is. Have a look at your own self and see what you can find out about it for yourself. Books and 'expert teachers' are not going to help, but only add more concepts! Start with the one thing you are sure of: the fact of your own being. Do not get diverted into objective affairs. Stick with knowing yourself. Even if you find there is no 'me', that is still not going to be a clear knowledge of your positive and true nature. That is why your search has been ineffective so far.

Do Not Leave Any Ghost in the Machine

Question: There is a question that needs clarifying.

John: We always attend to the questions, but overlook the fact of being itself! This is important to see.

Q: When everything is seen in awareness and left as it is, without any effort to modify the seeing, is there a shift in the appearance of things or happenings in awareness?

John: Everything is in awareness. That is the fact and the most important point. The notion of leaving things as is, is a concession to the separate self concept. Who is leaving them as is? It is not that there is a 'you' concept in place who has the task of leaving things as is, although that may be one view of it. The deepest view is that there is no one there to do anything or not do anything. Things are as they are, not left as they are. This view (the recognition of the falsity of the self-centre as a valid reference point) may certainly have an impact on the content, especially the conceptual content. Why? Because the self-centred concepts, those that depend on the belief in the reality of the self-centre, are no longer given belief, are not grasped, are not used as a reference point through which life is being viewed.

Q: I see thoughts and reactions arise that are negative. When there is the questioning of who is really having these thoughts or tendencies to react negatively, they appear to lose their energy and dissipate.

John: Yes. The belief in the self-centre is like a hub that holds the conceptual patterns in place. As that is seen and no longer believed,

the tendencies fade, due to lack of any energy or interest in them. That is why seeking, suffering and doubts are overcome, in spite of what some people may say!

Q: The same can be said of positive thoughts and reactions.

John: Negative and positive—who is judging, anyway? That is another reference point! So-called positive concepts can be just as ego-centric as so-called negative ones.

Q: Seemingly 'personal' behavior appears to be changed.

John: Yes. Why? The person concept is dropped! There cannot be personal behavior if there is no person! It is just movements and activities appearing spontaneously.

Q: Should there be no (or less) focus on the inquiring at this point? Should I simply watch with awareness what is happening and let the happening just play itself out?

John: This contains a subtle concession to the 'me' reference point. Who is to let it play out? Actions *do* play out, not in reference to a self-centre.

Q: As what is seen in timeless awareness is just an appearance, can the dream be modified, as long as it is understood that there is no real 'I' really doing?

John: If it comes up to modify the dream that will happen or not. It is just a natural functioning. It is like the heart beating. The beating is going on quite intelligently and may alter due to causes and conditions. The mind will decide, think, feel, choose, act, evaluate, etc. Why not? But it is not being orchestrated by a person that was never there.

Q: The inquiry lingers, because that was useful in seeing that I am not the person (body-mind) I thought I was.

John: Nor were you the 'you' you thought you were! Do not leave any ghost in the machine that will still be present to have problems. Thoughts, feelings, perceptions, actions all arise spontaneously in awareness. Where is the problem if we do not introduce a separate 'me' into the equation? Seeing this is the end of the game. There is no one left to play it!

Others Can Take Care of Themselves

Question: It appears that seeing the limited self as a false concept does not result in the notion falling away instantly. Is this what causes people to question whether they have understood or not? Is this why they feel they must do something more?

John: Seeing there is no separation ends it all. If you carefully look at the experience of the people you are talking about, there is usually a subtle return to the belief that keeps it going. Verbally claiming that the absence of self has been recognised is often only that—a verbal claim, not the actual seeing. When something is seen as non-existent, how can it be believed? People talk about having awakened and seen there is no one there, etc. But then they talk about how ‘they’ will deepen, progress, do more work, etc. Clearly the notion of the ‘me’ is not really seen as absent. This is the kind of activity that often goes on. Anyway, this discussion is not really so important for you. Just make sure your real nature is clear, and that you see and know beyond any doubt that the cause of suffering (the separate self) was never, is not, and never will be present. Then, for you, all is resolved and settled. Others can take care of themselves.

Besides, there is no self present to fall away, whether instantly or not! Even talking about a self falling away is giving it too much reality. There is no self standing outside of doubtless presence-awareness. Just confirm this fact, which is not hard to do. You will see that all doubts arise only with the notion of the ‘I’. Even comments about so-called other people are false and potentially misleading. Which people, which entities are you talking about? Even to speak of people and whether they have understood is false. There is no one there other than ‘I’-less, non-conceptual awareness itself. So, full stop. Forget the others. Speak for yourself and go by

your own experience. Do not talk of hypothetical topics. If you see the basics, all is good for you here and now. If there is a question, fine. If not, even better!

Q: In your case, you say that hearing 'Sailor' Bob Adamson say it to you clearly a few times was enough and it all fell away. Clearly this does not happen for everyone. Despite the telling and the pointing, something keeps the illusion firmly in place.

John: It is better not to indulge in such stories and imaginary concepts, which is all this is! How far are you from awareness now? And if there is an 'I', where is it? If you want to talk about anything, make it about this—for then you see what needs to be seen.

Awareness Is Self-Evident

Question: I was looking at awareness and noticed something. I am never looking at awareness. I am always looking at objects. The only reason I know there is awareness is because there are objects happening. Without things happening there would not be awareness, or else awareness would be an assumption. Of course, as soon as there is an assumption there is awareness of the assumption. My point is there is no awareness separate from appearances.

John: You are getting this backwards. You are never looking *at* awareness—because you are that which is aware. You do not infer awareness from the presence of objects. Awareness is self-evident and prior to any inference. It is the necessary presence for all objects to be cognised. It is not dependent on objects. Rather, objects are dependent upon it, your own presence in the equation. You are making the objects the yardstick of reality, when in fact they are mere appearances coming and going in aware presence. The statement that ‘without objects there would be no awareness’ is false, totally so! Both objects and lack of objects are only spoken of because of the clear cognition of both states. If awareness disappeared with objects, there would never be any knowledge of absent objects. Objects are coming and going constantly. Your abiding being (which we sometimes point to with the word ‘awareness’) is totally unaffected by the presence or absence of objects. In fact, there is awareness separate from appearances. For example, thoughts coming (present) and going (absent) are both clearly cognised in a prior principle. You say that the only reason you know awareness is due to objects. This again is false. The presence of awareness is self-evident and ‘known’ without any need to go to objects for confirmation. Do not get hung up on the words.

'Awareness' is only a pointer. We are talking of yourself, your own being or natural state.

When I talk of awareness, I am not talking of cognition, perception or consciousness in duality. I am talking of that in you which is aware of even the coming and going of those things. That is why there is sometimes a distinction made between 'consciousness' and 'awareness'. Your discussion is more in terms of the consciousness that comes and goes as an appearance, like everything else. That is fine and is excellent seeing. What I am pointing to is that non-conceptual presence, which I happen to point to with the word 'awareness', which remains clear and present regardless of any objects or relative consciousness. I am talking of your irrefutable being, which remains in all states of consciousness or absence of such states. The pure, non-conceptual awareness I am speaking of is prior to mind, prior to consciousness. What you are is clearly present in and through all such activities or lack of them. You cannot even speak of the presence or absence of consciousness without being present to recognise both states. Therefore, you are prior to both. Or said another way, you are there regardless of them both.

Q: So you are saying that the word 'consciousness' is referring to the knowing of objects and the word 'awareness' is that which contains this knowing?

John: Yes, that could be a way of phrasing it. But do not just go by my comments. Look at your own experience. Remember, the point is not to get sidetracked into parsing the words, but to have a clear view of who and what you are. In spite of the discussion we are having about what consciousness is or is not, you are still present beyond any doubt. In truth, your very being is not dependent or involved with perception or even consciousness. Those experiences happen to you. So keep focused on that, your own identity in the equation. Consciousness and objects may come and go, but to whom and for whom? What is cognising even those experiences? The trouble is that everyone overlooks his or her own being and identifies that with appearances. That is the confusion that needs to be cleared up.

The 'I' Notion Is a Figment

Question: I have a question about a statement from 'Sailor' Bob Adamson in his book Presence Awareness. I thought perhaps you might be able to answer this question because you have stated similar things. The statement I question is on page 58. It is:

Why beat yourself up about what you could have, should have, shouldn't have done? Realise that there is no personal doer of it. Who was the 'you', the idea, the entity that could or could not do it?

I understand that the 'me' is not a reality independent of thought.

John: Yes. So, basically, the 'I' notion is a figment with no actual referent. In other words, there is no 'I' as a real entity with any substance or independent nature. Any subsequent problems come in from reconstituting the 'I' notion. If it is not present, then it is not present. No further problems can arise for an entity that is not present! See the implications of this.

Q: I understand when Bob says 'thoughts just happen'. But then, who or what is it that acts?

John: This is a false dilemma. It is bringing in the reference to the entity (the 'who' in your question), which is a tacit reference to the 'I'. Actions happen, but there is no doer thereof (as reportedly stated by Buddha). Refer to the cases of the heart, breath, digestion, growing hair, etc. These are all perfect examples of action without the 'I' notion involved. This extends right up to thought itself.

Q: If it is just functioning that acts, and if thoughts just happen, then who is it that acts as a compassionate, loving entity? Or who acts as a rapist and murderer?

John: Again, this is a false reference to the 'me' or 'I'. Actions happen due to causes and conditions. They may be driven by certain views, ignorant or otherwise.

Q: Do kind and loving thoughts followed by kind and loving actions just happen to one instrument, and hateful and cruel thoughts just arise and happen followed by hateful and cruel actions to another instrument?

John: Basically, yes. But it is based on past events and conditioning, not randomly. Views determine actions, generally. Not for 'anyone'. Actions colored by 'I' and 'mine' generally result in exaggerated desire, aversion, self-centred behavior, etc.

Q: Is 'intelligence-energy' or awareness just randomly functioning?

John: Is your heart beating randomly? No! Intelligence-energy has an intelligence. However, if the mind is distorted by illusory concepts and notions, the action will be filtered through those views, which will likely be out of harmony with reality or expressed in some exaggerated way.

Q: Does the statement 'there is no personal doer' imply also no personal responsibility for actions that harm and make another suffer?

John: There cannot be personal responsibility if there is no person! You cannot have it both ways. There is the appearance of such things at a conventional level, but they are not really how things happen ultimately. Again, the problem comes from bringing back in the person concept.

Q: Would life without a 'me' be just as capable of compassion as it would cruelty?

John: Not at all! Like I said, the greed, delusion, selfishness, etc. are the outcome of the 'me' concept. Without belief in the concept, the root of the selfish action is removed. How can there be selfish actions, if there is no longer any belief in the self?

Q: Then why abide in one's natural state, which results from life without a 'me'?

John: Who is present to abide or not abide? The question implies an entity to do either. The point is there is not such an entity present. In seeing that, the dilemma falls. Life without the 'me' concept means no further seeking, suffering and doubt. That is inherently valuable or meaningful, without having to bring in any artificial reference to a 'me'.

There Is No 'Me'

Question: I must admit I have been on a bit of a searching binge recently. Something inside is saying 'do not rush off in too many places all at once'. It can get a bit as if 'one more thing may show me who I really am', if that makes sense. But at the same time it seems to make it far away and be something to work towards.

John: Yes. Past a point, looking outside for more pointers and descriptions is distracting. It is about you, your abiding nature. You are never going to find that in a book or in descriptions by other people. So just settle down with what is clear and present in yourself. That is all that is needed.

Q: I really like your book and it resonates strongly with me. It is very simple and makes everything sound accessible. I know the awareness, or am aware of it, more often these days.

John: It is not something to be aware of, as it is your actual self. What you are looking for is what you are, so the looking at it or for it is a bit redundant. This is only a pointing to something so clear and self-evident that we have overlooked it. In overlooking it, we have allowed the mind to create its own picture of who and what we are. In believing that concept, we look away from the real nature of what is present, our natural state.

Q: Sometimes I think that there is no 'me'. But mostly not!

John: It is best to focus on your real being first. The 'me' is the imagined separate entity, which is assumed to be limited and apart from that. If you can find yourself outside of the ever-present being-knowing of your true nature, perhaps there is a 'me'. But the real

question is: have you really ever seen such a thing? This is clearly understood by being clear on the positive truth of who and what you are. This is the most important thing.

Q: I find it relatively simple to look and know what is being aware of everything. What I find harder is to look for the 'me'. It seems difficult to look or know what a 'me' entity would feel or seem like. It is much easier to connect with the awareness, or simply rest in the sense 'I am'.

John: Who is this 'I' or 'me' that needs to connect or rest with awareness? That concept is the 'me' we are talking about! There is no 'me', because you are not apart from awareness at any time. That is what the idea of 'no me' is trying to convey. If you try to connect with or rest as awareness, that is only possible by believing the separation has occurred. The way to understand the absence of the 'me' is to see that the separation from awareness never happened. If it has not, then there is no 'me'. If there is no 'me' now, then how could there have been one in the past, and how can there ever be one in the future? Then, full stop! Awareness-presence is what you are, and all is resolved then and there.

Q: I am now off to read some more of your book!

John: Better would be to look into the points being made, and then no more books are needed!

[Follow up.]

Q: Thank you very much for the comments. They are extremely helpful. It seems so easy to get subtly sidetracked and miss this.

John: The simplicity is key. It is easy to overlook the utter availability of this and follow the mind's last attempts to frame this in concepts. But, like I said, before the concept, you are. There is no need to follow the concept, because you will not get anything, in terms of your being, by looking into the thoughts. But without that, here you

are, naturally present and aware. That is all that is being pointed to. There is not even anyone here to see it or not see it. It is more immediate than that! The notion of 'me' only comes in with the concepts, not before. That is why, ultimately, there is absolutely nothing to do or see, nor anyone to do those things.

Q: I have been sitting a lot with the feeling of existing, but sometimes it turns into an experience.

John: Being or non-conceptual awareness (these are different words for the same 'no thing') can never be an experience. That is the beauty of it. The word is not it. You cannot experience being, because you are that. It is not two. Thus non-duality. Even the attempt to experience it leads us (at least conceptually) away from it. But, in fact, it has gone nowhere.

Q: When you say to focus on my true being, 'I am', I suppose this is what you mean. I had thought that it is good to notice what is an object, such as a thought, and what is simply being.

John: Being is already there before any sense of 'I am'. The notions of being an entity apart from being and looking back to try to experience it are only concepts. Drop the attempt and realise being *is*—beyond doubt. Full stop. See the futility of looking for, focusing on or trying to see what is self-evident.

Q: This does seem so extremely simple that it is very easy to miss.

John: But it is the 'elephant in the room', the self-evident fact that never changes throughout all experiencing. It is not hard to miss an elephant in the parlor!

Q: As you say, it is just so clear and self-evident that I have always missed it.

John: You have always been it. The 'I' separate from it has never been present. Look at this assumed separation to see if it ever was

true. Are you apart from or outside of being-awareness now or at any time, based on present evidence?

Q: Now I notice and think, 'Is it this simple?' I seem to get flashes of knowing that. For example, today I just realised that instead of needing to concentrate on being, I am anyway.

John: Precisely. Stop here.

Q: However, it did not last for long, or rather the knowing it did not.

John: Good catch. The being is still present. It is not being known as an object. In fact, it is the knowing itself. Did the pure knowing actually stop, even when you thought the being was not present?

Q: But things do seem to be clearer and clearer.

John: Ever-present, ever-clear. Go by direct experience, not thinking about it.

Q: You say it is not something to be aware of. But how can one just be, knowingly, with self or abiding in self, if the awareness is not there?

John: It is always there, as the ever-present, ever-necessary basis of all experiencing. The 'I' notion is what is coming and going in this.

Q: This is where I get confused about what is experience and concept and what simply is.

John: Are you a concept? Or are you present and aware as a fact? You are before the concept, as the one to whom the concept appears. It is so simple we miss this self-evident fact.

Q: Today I felt as though I got glimpses of it. There was a sense of life just happening.

John: This is too complicated. Do not look for states and glimpses. Look for what is here beyond doubt always. The 'me' and 'it' attitude needs to go! There is no 'me' or 'it'—just this ever-present wakeful reality that cannot be doubted or denied at any time.

Q: You mention not being apart from awareness at any time. I understand this in terms of being aware of something, but I had understood that it was a good thing to be knowingly aware and conscious. Are you saying that this is not the case?

John: You are introducing too many consciousnesses! Also, you are still holding the stand of being a 'someone' apart from this. One of these has to go, and it is not going to be the being-awareness. See the 'I' as a mere language epiphenomenon coming and going in this natural, timeless awareness that is your natural state.

The Process of Manifesting

Question: I am wondering about the process of manifesting.

John: The world is a manifestation of the underlying reality. That is entirely impersonal, that is, it is not with reference to some assumed separate individual.

Q: If you choose to experience something, it sometimes happens and sometimes does not.

John: This is in duality only from the perspective of the assumed individuality. It does not really come up when we are looking at the actual truth of what you are.

Q: I am defining 'you' as presence-awareness.

John: Maybe! In truth, the 'you' you are referring to is an individual in the appearance.

Q: I am guessing that the mysterious creator-destroyer that is doing everything is what manifests. It is the object manifesting for me (as presence-awareness) to experience.

John: There are too many variables here! You have the 'I' who is guessing, the creator-destroyer, the object and awareness. This is all hypothetical. It is an example of how the mind goes astray with this. Drop all the concepts and see what is here.

Q: Is this where 'ask and you shall receive' comes from? Is it the process of manifesting into reality that which one wishes to

experience? Or is this all just an ongoing accident that is never-ending?

John: These are all imaginary concepts based on an assumed set of dualities. Once the dualities are assumed, the mind will spin endlessly in trying to piece everything together. At that point, any theory is about as good as any other. So there is not a definitive answer at that level. In the end, none of it applies to your ever-present natural state.

Hidden Beliefs and Blind Spots

Question: Are you saying that because you know who you truly are, there is no more identification with psychological suffering, that there are no repressed thoughts or identification with any beliefs that may still have a hold on you? In other words, it is definitely 'full stop' with no hidden beliefs or blind spots?

John : This is looking at the wrong end of the equation. Thoughts and beliefs are not the problem, per se, and do not constitute suffering as I am speaking about it. What I am talking about is the erroneous sense of being something that one is not (the limited defective person standing apart from reality). That notion, if left unexamined, becomes the root of all other thoughts and concepts related to that imaginary reference point. This is the conceptual self and all the self-centred concepts the mind has created to define that presumed entity. The unquestioned identification with that conceptualising results in overlooking our actual being or nature. This is what I am referring to as 'suffering'. This means all of the seeking, doubts, anxiety and dis-ease that stem from the unexamined belief in the reality of the self-centre and our identity as that.

When the matter of identity is resolved, then the belief, fixation and identification is no longer going into the concepts, and so the seeking, suffering and doubt is conclusively addressed. You are what you are, not what the mind was defining you to be. All is clear from that perspective. Thoughts, feelings and beliefs will appear, but they are not a problem, as they are no longer referred to a fictitious entity that was equated with our real self. Like everything else in life, the appearances move through and resolve themselves naturally according to circumstances.

Thoughts, feelings and experiences are no more 'yours' than the clouds, wind and rain in the sky. No one says 'my clouds', 'my rain', etc. Nor does anyone talk about repressed or unexamined wind, rain and clouds, etc. That would be a case of misplaced personalisation! The body, emotions and thoughts are as much a natural expression as any other display of nature. You do not have to 'do' anything with natural phenomena to be what you are. Nor do you have to 'do' anything with the body-mind to be what you are.

This has nothing to do with 'living the teaching', 'embodying it', 'bringing it to the heart' or whatever. Those approaches fall to pieces the moment it becomes clear there is no entity present to do such things. Such notions make an implicit reference to the presumed separate person or entity, so they keep the ignorance in spin by leaving the root unexamined.

This is not about getting rid of or processing beliefs, blind spots or repressed material, etc. That generally results in an interminable process that leaves the root issue unaddressed. Instead, it is the dissolution of the assumption that there is anyone present to have such things. In other words, the habit of referencing the content to 'me' is what is resolved. That is the freedom, and it is entirely independent of the nature and manifestation of the content. That is why the freedom is never progressive or achieved by 'someone' in time. This certainly has nothing to do with dissolving conditioning, as is popularly assumed. It is the recognition that the person having the problem never existed in the first place.

However, this is only just one end of the stick, so to speak. On the positive side is the fact of your natural state or true condition, which is that ever-present clarity, vividness and fullness that is already perfect as is. It is utterly unconditioned and not determined by the appearances at all.

The activity of living goes on from a position where all is settled and at ease. That is not a result of some reconfiguration of the appearance, but rather a clear appreciation of the nature of what is here and now.

Full Stop, *but ...*

Question: Let me try to explain how it is seen from over here. Consider this just another point of view.

John: Yes. All points of view! Nothing of what is basic and true is being contradicted at any time. You are present and aware. Full stop. Thou art that, your mind is the Buddha, etc. Beyond that, it gets down to how much continued interest one is willing to give to the contrary concept that you exist as some separate person apart from the immediacy of what is clear and present.

Q: In truth, there is no 'me' or 'other'. So there is no problem. Full stop.

John: Yes. But it appears you are not prepared to follow your own advice! A 'full stop, *but ...*' is not really a full stop.

Q: From the absolute view, you make your point very clearly. But from the relative view, which is where the question is asked, it is very unclear.

John: These are all conceptual divisions created by the mind. The minute you begin following the concepts, it gives the appearance of things being murky and unclear, no doubt.

Q: The way I see it is that the truth of who you are includes the human aspect of 'what is'. This is what is causing the suffering, the frustration, etc.

John: This is misdiagnosing the issue, which is why the core remains unresolved. The body-mind appearance is rather benign and non-problematic. As Nisargadatta Maharaj once said, 'What do you expect from a mere body-mind?'. The real issue is the false concept of self and the subsequent association of the body-mind-personality with that concept. In all that conceptualisation, you overlook the simple truth that you have never been a person in bondage in the first place. Hunting through the body-mind appearance searching for hidden problems and unresolved material is not going to clarify things. This is not to deny the relative value of medical treatment or psychological support. Just do not mix up levels of discourse here.

Q: To deny the human aspect is what keeps the so-called separate self in bondage.

John: This is not true at all and is, again, a misdiagnosis of the problem. The assumption of the existence of the separate self *is* the apparent bondage. If you tackle it there, at the root, you will find the problem much more straightforward. If not, the root of the issue will go unexamined, the identification with the body-mind will thrive, and you will find yourself trying to alter, modify or correct appearances in an attempt to fix something the mind has determined to be wrong according to some concept.

Q: Even though one gets to the root of this, the battle is not over because there appears to still be 'beliefs' that keep the separate self in place.

John: This is getting the problem backwards and will not work. Believe me, after a few decades of trying this, I learned through experience. What keeps the self-centred beliefs 'in place' is the belief in the self-centre concept. This is what I call the linchpin. The separate self concept is the *cause* of the other beliefs or concepts. The resulting concepts are the *effects* or *symptoms*. My advice is to look at the cause. Tackle the root, rather than trimming the leaves.

Q: I am not speaking of 'fixing' or 'getting' or 'becoming', but being 'present' in the face of those hidden uncomfortable beliefs (thoughts) if and when they arise. They must be seen for what they truly are, just 'thoughts believed'. This takes courage.

John: For whom? This gives much fodder for the separate self concept and its sense of its own importance. The ego identity is still active here. There is still an assumption of someone in bondage in this view.

Q: All is included in what is, including the belief in the separate self. Therefore, there is a need to investigate and see if it is true. Honesty and courage are necessary to see the validity of these beliefs that appear to have a strong hold on the so-called separate self.

John: Instead of all this drama for the separate self, just have a straight look to see if it is even present. In general, I agree with your intent here. All I am saying is cut to the chase and thresh out this entity. If it is not present, then who is even there to have the problem? Then it is truly full stop.

Q: I agree with what you are saying, but I feel that there is more to it than 'just seeing' and 'just knowing'. There is work to be done.

John: Again, for whom? As long as the notion of separation is given belief, there will be an interest in returning to more work, more things to do, etc. See the real implication of the point that you are what you are seeking. Also, see the real implication that the ego is a false assumption, a completely non-existent phantom. Your comments indicate to me that these points are not completely clear or fully understood. Do not just give lip-service to these points and go back to working on the non-existent entity and its problems! Do not follow the thoughts but see for whom they arise. All problems are for the ego notion. When you look for it, you see it is *not*. Then there are no problems, because there is no one to have any problems. This is the real spirit and intent of the inquiry.

Q: Time and effort are necessary to see that time and effort are what stands in the way of true seeing.

John: This is not really true. This is not about seeing per se, but rather being what you are. Anyone can see for themselves that 'time' and 'effort' bear no relation to being your present self. No amount of time will bring you any closer to what is present. It is the same with effort. I would agree with you in the sense that seeing the immediacy or undeniable facts being pointed to, the concepts of 'time' and 'effort' naturally fall away. But why introduce the false concepts as prerequisites for seeing their falseness?

Q: Anyway, this is how it is seen from over here.

John: I appreciate your perspective and see what you are getting at. The only issue I want to highlight is that if we emphasise too much the work, courage, time, effort, etc., which are all purely conceptual, it is apt to cause a diversion away from the real point being made. The basic point of non-duality is that here and now, you are *that* (reality itself). Said another way: there has never been a separation at any time. Why not take this crisply as is from the start and see it for yourself? That is what allows the 'full stop' and the direct recognition that there is nothing wrong, now or ever. It is not an issue of tinkering with the body-mind appearance and drumming up notions of work, effort, time and courage.

As I said, I agree with the intent of much of what you are getting at, but I am simply adding some clarifying points based on my experience in looking into this over the years. Do not settle for a 'full stop, *but ...*' approach. Instead, follow the points to their full conclusion.

[Follow up]

Q: I hear what you are saying, but it is not like I am settling for a 'full stop, but...' Instead it is more like settling for a 'full stop, and...' I will ponder what you said, as you make some very good points. I cannot

accept blindly without investigation first. Thanks for your input. It is much appreciated.

John: One key point worth considering. This was something that 'Sailor' Bob Adamson pointed out to me, which helped immensely. The troubling beliefs all tend to revolve around the separate 'me' notion. Once the 'me' idea is in spin, there are endless other beliefs and concepts that the mind can (and has) attached to that. This gives us a vital clue to the source and root of any and all possible self-referring beliefs—the belief in the separate self itself. If you think of the self-notion as the cause and the other self-referencing concepts as the effects of that cause, this can simplify things quite a bit.

Here is how it works. Say, I have some beliefs, such as:

- I am not good enough.
- I am not free.
- People do not like me.

... or whatever the concepts might be.

They all hang on the presumed validity of the 'I' concept. All the beliefs are, in fact, only qualifications or descriptions of the 'I'. If we verify that the entity is entirely fictional, that renders the other concepts null and void out of the starting gate. There is no one to whom they apply! All of the questions, doubts and problems (all of them!) eventually reduce to this same formula. In other words, all problems are for and about the 'me' notion. None of them are about you, that is, your real being. Your natural state of being, awareness, presence, no-thing-ness (or whatever you wish to call it), is innately unconditioned and free from the get-go. The troubles are all conceptual and based on the 'me' concept, not your actual nature.

Bob Adamson had mentioned to me once something to the effect that without the cause, can you have the effects? He had also

indicated to me that if the 'me' idea was seen (really seen) as entirely fictional, *all* of the problems, questions and doubts would be resolved immediately in that seeing. I did not actually see this at the time, or let us say that I had no evidence that it might be true. It did sound interesting, though. I had done various types of inner work over the years and somehow things never did seem to be fully resolved. Now I see that the 'I' belief was not really exposed up till that point. How do I know this was the case? Because 'I' was still seeking enlightenment, working on 'my' beliefs, doing 'my' inner work, etc. That is just like people talking about 'their' awakening or liberation or whatever. It is still a bunch of self-centred concepts. This is why the seeking, suffering and doubts still go on, however many gurus you follow, events you attend, and so-called awakenings you may have.

So, seeing this, I took the suggestion to heart and had a really good look at this stuff to absolutely nail down the reality of the 'I' entity. I never did find it (and still haven't!). Then I realised that all my life-long problems were for a character that had never existed. Nothing was really achieved at all, but the belief that was at the root of the suffering crumbled away with a bit of looking. Mark my words! A *bit* of looking! All my years of struggle, meditation, processing, longing, reading, pondering, etc. were not as effective as a bit of looking at the real root of the issue. You might say that I had been looking in the wrong direction, or at least not seeing the real root of the problem.

Even the seeking for enlightenment, practice and meditation was still in reference to the assumed 'I'. Bob's clear and pointed encouragement exposed the whole production fully. My mind was not able or willing to any longer hold onto the 'what ifs', buts, maybe's and other protests spun up in the concepts. And looking in this way did not leave a residue of beliefs and issues to deal with at all. This is very contrary to what 'common sense' (i.e., the mind's assumption) might lead us to believe.

This reminds me of a Nisargadatta Maharaj statement: 'All your problems are for the person you take yourself to be, but there is no such person'. So if there is no person (no conceptual reference point

falsely taken as 'me'), then who is present to have the problem? Who is present to have residual issues, etc.? Even if there were such issues, they would not be 'yours' anyhow. Does the non-dual reality have issues? Does the immaculate and unconditioned nature that you are have issues? No! Only the fictitious entity has issues! If the entity is not, who has them?

This is how it worked for me (if there ever was a me!).

Getting beyond Intellectual Understanding

Question: Can you provide any tips on getting beyond an intellectual understanding of the falsehood of 'me'? Although I seem to understand what you say, I still act like I believe I am a mind-body, and I experience depression and anxiety related to threats to the mind-body. Does reflection or meditation on the non-existence of the 'me' help? Or is it just listening to the pointers? Or should I simply not worry about it? I get backed into a corner with myself, trying to fulfill admonitions such as: do not seek; do not meditate; just be, but do not try to just be; stay in pure naked awareness, but do not try to stay in pure naked awareness; you are already there anyway; there is nothing to do. But why do I continue to think there is something to do?

John: Do not forget, the most important part of the equation is clarifying who and what you are (in other words, seeing or recognising your natural state or real being as it is). The 'me' or lack of 'me' is a secondary issue, really. Because the real nature of who we are is not seen as it is (that is, it is overlooked), we have tended to seek the identity in the concepts. The mind has provided a conceptual image of who and what we are. That is the 'me' concept. If we try to wrestle with the 'me', we are bound to come up short. I suggest starting with the positive side of the equation. You cannot doubt your own self, your very being itself. Start by having a look at that. Go by direct experience and have a straight look at the most important fact of your own experience: yourself. The essential message of the non-dual traditions is that there is a reality and you are that. Note the clear and direct point: you *are* that. This means that here and now, whatever this ultimate reality is, is what you are. There is no attainment, awakening, shift or event implied or needed. There are no steps and stages. This is where most of the popular

presentations go astray. They get you so wrapped up in seeking for something you do not have that you overlook the point that you already are what you are seeking.

Let us look at some of your comments in more detail.

Although I seem to understand what you say, I still act like I believe I am a mind-body, and I experience depression and anxiety related to threats to the mind-body.

I assume we are not dealing with legitimate health issues here. It is natural and intelligent for the body-mind to respond to actual threats. That is intelligence in action. I just want to get that one out of the way! Barring that, when the sense of who and what we are is not clear, there is a tendency to identify our being or abiding nature with something objective. There is nothing wrong with the body-mind per se. It is a useful appearance at its own level. But to take the sense of being or innate existence (who we are in the deepest sense) and associate that with, or limit it to, some appearance is bound to give trouble. Again, the best way to tackle this is not to struggle with the identification, because the identification is only a symptom, not the cause. So be clear on what your natural being really is. Then the false identity will stand out naturally and be seen for what it is. This is a natural and effortless corollary to recognising clearly who and what you are. Anytime there is struggle with this stuff, we are looking in the wrong direction.

Does reflection or meditation on the non-existence of the 'me' help? Or is it only necessary to listen to the pointers? Or should I simply not worry about it?

Anything may be of some help, but the final issue is: do you know who you are? That is the essence of it. If that is not clear, nothing that is done or not done will be conclusive. It may have some benefit, primarily if it encourages us to look at who we are. If we do not get to that, the approaches, meditations, paths and practises will go on indefinitely.

I get backed into a corner with myself, trying to fulfill admonitions such as: do not seek; do not meditate; just be, but do not try to just be; stay in pure naked awareness, but do not try to stay in pure naked awareness; you are already there anyway; there is nothing to do.

All these pointers and pseudo non-dual quotes are not going to help much! They are all assuming that you are a limited person, separate and apart from what is true and real. The root concept is in full swing. The core point (that you already are that non-dual source) is lost in the shuffle. It is best to drop all these concepts and pointers and see what you are. It is not a matter of 'staying in pure naked awareness', even. That quote 'sounds good' but is really entirely dualistic! It leaves the assumed entity in the game with some task to perform (to stay in awareness). It is putting all the attention into that erroneous sense of self. It is better to drop all the notions and see your own undeniable being or nature as it is.

But why do I continue to think there is something to do?

Because there is! See for yourself what is true. See what your real nature is. In this seeing, the basis of the belief in the concept of the imagined self is resolved. If you assert 'there is nothing to do' as a mere concept without the positive truth of who you are being clear, you will run into the dead end you are describing. Even though the concept is that 'there is no one here to do anything', in practical experience, we are still giving belief to that assumed separate person and taking that to be a true definition of our self. Just to assert 'there is no one here' over and over is ineffective. Even if I get some intellectual appreciation of that notion, I may still have no clue as to who and what I actually am.

To sum up:

1. Put the emphasis on the positive side of the equation. Start with the one thing you are sure of: the fact of your own being. Look directly into this doubtless reality to see, appreciate and know it

as it is. It is very simple, because it is the one constant, ever-present fact of experience that can never be doubted at any time.

2. With some sense of that, it becomes much easier to look at any concept or definition in the mind about who and what we are to see if it is true. How do we do this? Easy! By comparing it against our own *direct* experience of what has become clear in #1. This will get us off of the conceptual level and into direct experience.
3. Avoid looping in popular non-duality quotes and platitudes picked up casually in books and meetings. There is no real assurance that these are true or helpful and, many times, they are actually misleading.

The basics of non-duality are clear and straightforward. Keep with the basic few points and see them for yourself.

Does Seeing Yourself Happen Gradually?

Question: I have had many communications with you. Right now I am not thinking a lot about seeing who I truly am. I am just living life. Sometimes I think I should be thinking and doing something in that direction. But that feels like it is only thoughts from the mind, so I let it go. Then sometimes I get these 'waves' (for lack of a better word) in which I can see the connection with all things and see who I am. It is very brief but peaceful. Does seeing your true self happen gradually in glimpses or in one overwhelming act of awareness? Thanks for your continued help.

John: Does your very existence come in waves? Does that awareness, which is the necessary basis for all appearances, happen gradually or suddenly? As the scriptures and traditions tell us, that natural state or absolute reality is described or pointed to as being-awareness-peace. That is not coming and going. It is neither gradual nor sudden. We are only noticing that fact, having been a bit mesmerised by the notion that we were something other than this. In doing that, we were more interested in chasing after the concepts in the mind, rather than seeing what has been here all along. In hearing about this and looking at the facts for ourselves, we are less and less inclined to put much attention into the contrary concepts that captivated our attention in the past. Nothing is attained at all. But there is a natural recognition, which is really abiding in and as that non-conceptual awareness that is always present. No study, thinking or pondering is needed for that to be. It does not depend on what you do or do not do, because all appearances and possibilities are displaying in and on this radiant space of being and knowing that is your natural state.

How to Know and Embody This?

Question: I have recently been introduced to you. It is very, very obvious that what we label 'awareness', 'stillness', 'void', 'silence', etc. is always, always here.

John: Yes. It is good that you see that. Another key point: you *are* this. There is no separate entity or person in the equation. That assumption is the root of all the questions and problems.

Q: Of course the mind will ferociously (grossly or subtly) do its best to convince us we are anything but presence.

John: Yes, but it cannot be denied.

Q: How does a human being unequivocally know and embody (of course without the mind) that, in fact, if I am anything at all 'I am presence', 'I am unlimited silence', 'I am pure awareness'? How do we do this in order that we may truly express our true nature in the world of time and space in a practical way?

John: The manner in which you are framing the issue contains the root of the problem. See that the entity you are referring to is entirely fictional. Like everything else, the 'human being' is also an appearance in the ever-present reality. In your question, there is a subtle identification with the human appearance. Therefore, your stand shifts from being that reality to the perspective of being the assumed limited person. Investigate and see if this is true. If the shift in identity is delusive or unsubstantiated, the question falls. The whole world of time and space *is* the expression of natural reality. So, full stop right there. There is no need to know or embody

anything. It is the pure knowing itself, which is already in expression.
There is nothing else.

How to Reconcile Contradictory Pointers?

Question: I was hoping that you might be able to clarify an issue that I have been struggling with for a couple of years now. Most of the teachers that I follow suggest staying with 'Who am I?'. But in the next breath they will say 'full stop' and 'call off the search'. I do not know how to reconcile these two seemingly opposite techniques or which one I should focus on. The 'full stop' technique seems most confusing. When I stop, there is not even the idea of noticing who or what is here. This 'stopped state' is also the place I go into every night (sleep), but there is obviously no recognition of my true nature. I assume that if there were, then I would be 'realised' upon awakening from slumber.

John: The point is to have a look at what you are and be clear on what this self-evident and doubtless presence is. No amount of 'calling off the search' or 'full-stopping' is going to achieve that. The point of those comments is to stop looking elsewhere for what is being pointed to—which is the fact of your own self. Non-duality traditions state unequivocally that there is a reality and that this reality and your being are one and the same thing. That shows you where to look. Who and what is this self-evident nature that cannot be denied? Most people are overlooking this point and are identifying what they are with some objective appearance or concept in the mind. Thus, they are completely oblivious of what they truly are. This is the cause of all seeking, suffering and doubt. The cause can be resolved through a clear and direct recognition of what is being pointed to, namely, your real nature.

So the points work together, really. First you must have a basic sense of what this is about. Then you stop looking in the wrong direction and have a look at who and what you are. Then you settle

down with that clear and direct seeing of your real being as it is. This resolves the root of the problem and restores you to your natural state. This natural state was only overlooked through a misunderstanding or false identification with a conceptual sense of self. Any of these points may be stressed, depending on the stand of the questioner at a given time.

Where do you stand with all of this? That is the only issue, really. Do you know your being as it is, or is it still getting mixed up with a concept? That is what it gets down to.

The Beauty of Actual Non-Duality

Question: I would not say things are resolved. I do feel a sense of freedom that I have never felt before. It is almost like I cannot remember some of the things that used to bother me, nor can I say where they went! A question arises. Why would this 'awareness-intelligence' arise or appear in such an unintelligent way? For example, I have done and thought some incredibly stupid things, hateful things. The stupid thinking and fantasising still comes up—is that just conditioning?

John: Thoughts and experiences that are based on an imagined separation from reality are based on a profound misunderstanding of the facts. How could they not be unintelligent? Greed, hatred and delusion are based on the belief in the separate self.

Q: If we do not choose (how could we if there is no 'I'?), does it really matter if we suffer or not? You had mentioned in your book that if you had not seen Bob Adamson, you might have been suffering for years. Is it possible to take responsibility for anything? How can we if we are not the doer or thinker?

John: Choosing happens. There is thought but no thinker. Suffering, seeking and doubt only carry on based on a presence of a cause, which is the assumed reality of the separate self. It is not that 'we' suffer. It is a symptom based on ignorance. Because suffering is out of harmony with the real condition of things, there is no peace with it. In other words, it is unnatural.

Q: Isn't there a definitive moment when you realise your natural state?

John: Who? This is couched in reference to the erroneous self-centre. When was being *not*? Being is not a moment. Because the separate self has never existed, how can it realise anything?

Q: I have read so many books in which the author writes about the experience of awakening.

John: This is unfortunate, because the vast majority of those books are total bullshit and entirely misleading when looked at in perspective of the simple truth of things.

Q: I have not had the experience of awakening.

John: Good. Reality is not an experience.

Q: I do have a sense of freedom that I have not had before, but I do not have the 'knowing' that I am done.

John: Who? This is an irrelevant concept. Is your being done or not done? It does not apply. You are still getting hoodwinked by the self-centred concepts.

Q: I still see other people as 'other'.

John: Only at a conceptual level. Pause the notion and what is everything? Only appearances in ever-present, non-conceptual awareness. What can exist outside of, or apart from, awareness? Nothing. Non-separation is already the fact.

Q: There is still a sense of separation.

John: Not if you look at direct experience. Are you separate from being-awareness right now? If not, it is the end of the line.

Q: I do not identify with this awareness-being.

John: Who? The self centre again! Awareness-being is, and beyond any doubt. Are you separate from that right now? If so, where is the separate one?

Q: But it still seems to be a concept.

John: Is your very existence a concept? I think not!

Q: I sense it, but I do not experience it as 'I am that'.

John: Pause the doubts and concepts and acknowledge the undeniable presence of your own being. This is all it ever was. It needs no awakening or recognition or development at all. It is.

See how you do with these points.

[Follow up.]

Q: As I was going about my morning routine, I noticed that I still feel the impulse or urge to seek. For what, I do not know. But the question arises, 'Is this it? Is this all there is?'. And 'Who is looking?'. When I look for the 'I' or 'me', I cannot find it. But I must still be identified with words and images, or else I would not feel that impulse to seek. I obviously have not undermined the mind, and I have had so many realisations about what a crippled and blind instrument it is! I have had those 'ah-ha' moments when I realise 'This is what I have been listening to? How insane!'. Yet I keep waiting for the dream to fall away. It has not. So I must be stuck in some concept, though I do not know which one. Or does it matter? There is just this very subtle thread that ties me to the 'I'. It is impossible to explain. Somehow I still believe that I am the doer and thinker. How can that be, when I have investigated the non-existent 'I'? I am assuming I have not investigated it enough. But how much is enough?

John: The real issue is—do you know what you are? All the looking and seeking and identification with thought are rooted in this aspect

not being nailed down. Make sure this part is clear. This is the heart of the matter, which is missing at this point.

[Follow up.]

Q: Well, it seems too simple!

John: This is a good sign! Ever-present, inescapable being; one without a second; you are that. There are not too many moving parts to work with. You already are this, just this and nothing else. You get the point.

Q: I know that I am awareness, but my belief in an experience associated with that knowing is still there.

John: Do not say 'I know I am awareness'. That involves too many parts. Awareness is. You are that. Actually, not you are that; but just that. Words get in the way! Awareness is *not* an experience. That is why there is no approach, deepening, embodiment or unfolding involved. All those would be conditional. Reality is not conditional. It is, as it is.

Q: I have obviously read all the wrong books!

John: There is a lot of dualistic and confused literature out there, no doubt.

Q: To be honest, that is why I was so mystified by Bob Adamson. It just seemed too simple and direct.

John: Only from the mind's perspective. You are what you are. It is simpler than simple.

Q: So these other non-duality teachers—are they deluded?

John: You are calling them 'non-duality' teachers. I would not! They are teaching an attainment in time, a deepening, a process, etc. That

clearly requires time, someone and a special state in the future. That sounds like duality to me. There are of course some non-dual style pointers in the mix, but still much dualism. Many of the teachers did not study with nor get any direct feedback from a genuine non-duality teacher, such as Bob Adamson did with Nisargadatta Maharaj in person. What do you expect? Most teachers couch this as a special realisation at a moment in time, etc. Most of those who were aware of the non-dual nature of reality refused to be categorised as teachers in the first place. Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj, for example, did not view themselves as gurus or teachers, even though they were often defined as such by others.

Q: Did teachers of dualism just have an amazing experience, and they are still living in the memory of it?

John: Whatever experience they had may have been interesting or not, but just remember that what you are (and what this is about) is not an experience. Being-awareness is not an experience at all. It is the space or possibility in which all experience happens.

Q: They write as though they are really living this awareness.

John: As long as 'they' are living awareness there is still a personal component, a duality, going on.

Q: They seem to be saying all the 'right' things.

John: Actually this is not true. Like I said, there are some good pointers in the mix, but there is often a very large amount of duality and other conceptual notions mixed in, which neither they nor the students generally stop to notice. Once you see what we are talking about here, it sticks out like a sore thumb and is very plain to see. It is hard to see if you are enamoured by being a teacher or a student and 'playing the game'.

Q: Are they lying?

John: Not really. It is just a blindness from never having had the directness of this communicated. It does not really matter. This is not about teachers anyway. It is about you knowing for yourself what is true, not about someone else's concepts or experiences.

Q: This is so shocking to me! It is shocking because it has been part of my belief system for so many years.

John: This is only because of the fond beliefs getting challenged a bit. Many turn back at this point due to attachment to concepts about spirituality, etc. If the intent is to get to the bottom of who and what you are, then all is well. You are not a concept. You need no spiritual concepts to be what you are. No one can give this to you or take it away. It is not an experience that comes and goes. It is utterly independent of all of that.

Q: And yet I am finding that something has 'quieted' down, or become still.

John: That is the 'full stop', the pause that comes in noticing that you do not need any concepts to be what you already are. No awakening or liberation will enhance what is already present. This is what people overlook. In overlooking that, they return to the concepts of duality, awakened teachers, special states, future attainments, etc. In doing this, they trade in who they are for a self-centred concept in the mind, even if it be a glorious concept such as 'I am enlightened now'. Even that is to be, and must be, thrown overboard.

Q: Do I know what I am? I just said that I know that I am awareness, but I have not yet nailed that down.

John: Says who? In truth this is a concept. However, look into this present awareness and see it as it is. You will find you have never been a separate person at all. All along, you have been nothing other than the non-dual reality itself.

Q: My mind jumps in every time I ask the question and tells me, 'No, I do not really know. How could I possibly be that? There is nothing here. It just is. What is the big deal?' When does the mind quiet down around this?

John: The answer is not in the mind. The mind has many ideas, but it can never tell you who you are. See this and you will stop looking for answers there. What keeps it wound up is looking for who you are in it. See what you are and settle down with the fact of your being. It is here in all of its immediacy and clarity. We have only overlooked it, till now. We were so busy looking for awakening and following teachers that we missed the point that we already *are* that. Why is reality seeking to get liberated and following teachers, when it already is *that*?

Q: That was a big piece that fell away. It finally clicked that awareness is available now, and it does not come with a shift of experience. I was completely convinced that that had to happen. After having this realisation, I thought, 'What do I do now?' There is nothing to do! It feels strange. Wow! Thank you.

John: Non-conceptual awareness *is*. That is one of the many pointers to ever-present, ever-attained reality. If you stand apart from this, we can talk about that 'you' and all of its doubts and questions. If that separate 'you' cannot be established, then the course is run—*now*. Because, how can we talk about issues based on separation, if the separation has never happened? How can you be anything other than what you already are? All we can do is point out this basic fact. Nothing is ever attained at any time. That is the beauty of actual non-duality.

How Has Your Life Changed?

Question: Can you tell me how your life has changed since 'seeing' what is?

John: The sense of seeking, suffering and doubt based on confusion of who I am is resolved. Life happens without those conceptual problems.

Q: What was it like right after you saw what is?

John: This is not about a moment when 'I' saw anything. It is a timeless seeing that the 'I' itself never existed, or only existed as a notion in the ever-present non-dual source.

Q: Do you get caught up in the illusion anymore?

John: The 'me' is the source of the illusion. In seeing that the 'I' is not present, how can we get caught up in the 'me' notion? Everything else is resolved by that.

Q: Does your world morph into your consciousness?

John: Everything is an expression in and of consciousness. Consciousness arises and sets in what I am.

Q: Is it more fun watching instead of investing so much in the illusion?

John: Yes!

Q: Do you have any questions anymore, or do you start to see truth everywhere?

John: Truth is everywhere. All is that. 'I' as some defective entity apart from that is only a false assumption.

Q: Are there any other pointers that you can give me so I can 'see'?

John: Whatever you think is not what you are. Pause the thoughts and see what you actually are, not what your mind tells you that you are.

Awareness Is Not a Concept

Question: After your visit, the questions had stopped, but in the last week or two another question keeps coming up. Try as I may to just let it go, it reappears.

John: The main thing is to realise that all questions depend on your being, your own doubtless, awake presence. That needs no answer, because there is no question about it. It is impossible to doubt your being. The looking should naturally return to that, rather than examining appearances. That shows more interest in concepts rather than what is aware of concepts. Still, if a question arises, something may be said. The purpose of the response is to quell the questioning mind and allow the return to what is here beyond any doubt!

Q: Last week at our twice monthly get-together someone asked the same question I have. I find that it is always a show stopper. So any help or pointers would be appreciated. In your book Shining in Plain View you say that awareness is taking in the whole of manifestation.

John: This is utterly beyond doubt. No one ever had any experience outside of awareness.

Q: You go on to say that awareness is not even really connected to the body.

John: *All* experience is contained in your knowing presence. The body is only a concept, a label for a flow of changing sensations. All of them are in awareness, and the notion of the body is also coming and going in awareness. Without awareness, no experience of any kind is possible.

Q: But what if the assumption that awareness is not connected to the body is simply a concept? Or are you saying that there is some special revelation showing that awareness is not body-dependent?

John: The more important fact is that awareness itself is not a concept. It is more accurate to say that the body is a concept in awareness. So the root of the issue is the assumption that a concept may be generating awareness. But what is the actual experience? Is awareness coming and going in a concept? Or are the concepts coming and going in awareness?

Also there is some confusion here between perception and awareness. Perception is clearly body-centric, granting the existence of the body. Perception is related to the sense organs which are tied to the body, again assuming the reality of the body. So perception is limited in time and space and is dependent on the location of the body. Still the whole show is presenting in awareness. In truth, being-awareness has no location at all, as it is not an object. This is why it is better to keep the inquiry on the nature of being-awareness, at least to start. On direct evidence, being-awareness is timeless, spaceless, non-objective, and the ever-present factor in all thinking, feeling and perceiving. I wrote the following recently, which may shed some light on this:

Why limit awareness to a physical body? Isn't the whole universe appearing in awareness? Think of a dream. It would be like you claiming your very being and awareness are contained in the dream character. In truth, the whole dream is in awareness. Correct? To assume that being and awareness are tied to one speck in the dream is the root of the error. That assumption creates the notion that 'I' am one body among others, and different from them. That leads to a sense of separation, but it is only based on the concept, not the actual state of affairs. As I said, all thoughts, feelings and perceptions come and go in awareness. The world, body, others, etc. are only complex concepts built up out of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. These are tied together by subsequent concepts

and assumptions. Start by looking at thoughts, feelings and perceptions and notice the difference between them and what is aware of them. Awareness is not any thought, feeling or perception. Get to know the awareness as it is without identifying it with an object, such as the body. That is only a learned concept, and not a certain fact at all.

Q: The specific question is: Is presence-awareness just a faculty or capacity of the central nervous system and brain of the body?

John: Do not confuse perception with awareness. The dream analogy is helpful for this. Awareness is not inside the dream character, and it does not go anywhere in relation to the body of that character. It is the same with the waking body. The relative cognition or perception is appearing from a certain location. But that cognition is time-bound anyhow. It cannot possibly be what we are talking about when referring to 'presence-awareness'.

Q: Maybe awareness is simply the highest or most stable capacity of the human being, something like what psychology calls the 'observing self'. Perhaps this is the only self that does not come and go in human experience.

John: You are referring to awareness as reflected in or through the body-mind as relative consciousness. That sense of consciousness in duality is time-bound and highly body dependent, no doubt. Keep in mind that the dream character is not conscious of everything in the dream either. It is important to see that what we are talking about as awareness is *not* the dream character's conscious experience in the dream. Still, your actual being is not in the dream at all. It never was and never will be. This is the same as in the waking state also.

Q: But in direct experience this body leaves the room and awareness goes with it.

John: This is false. Awareness goes nowhere and is ever-present. The cognition, perception or consciousness goes with the body,

granting the reality of body. Again, do not confuse perception and awareness. Another analogy is electricity. Electricity as such has no location in space at all. It is not a physical object. But if the conditions are right, it could erupt through a battery, wires and bulb to create light. That light comes and goes, but the electricity does not come and go.

Q: But it is not like the body leaves and awareness hangs back. Awareness does seem to follow this particular body-mind! If awareness is the unmanifested source of everything that exists, then I can see how the body is a reflection or manifestation of that one source. But when we start focusing on the presence-awareness that is registering and awake to this very moment, then it is harder to know that it would be there without a body.

John: Do not forget, this is all purely speculative conceptualising! It is all taking place in the doubtless principle of awareness, anyhow. All the attention goes into the mind and, again, there is not a non-conceptual, non-mental recognition of awareness as it is. As usual, the thoughts are doubtful and inconclusive, while your own being is present and aware beyond doubt. The answer is not in the mind. A simple experiment is to look at awareness as it is. Is it coming and going at any time? Or is it always now, always here? The latter is the case 'on present evidence'. The awareness is present wherever you go, not to mention in the dream and other states in which there is not even any waking body present. Once it is seen that awareness is not an object, how can it be located in time and space? It is better and truer to see time and space as appearances in awareness.

Also, this is not about analyzing the body-mind, etc. The body-mind comes and goes. So the questions are really about ephemeral appearances, not reality. It is better to look into the clear and doubtless presence that is here supporting all the questions. A bit of looking shows that this being, awareness, peace is utterly present and beyond all seeking, suffering and doubt, here and now.

In summary, a simple way to look at this is to see that awareness shines through the body as conscious experience in duality. Such

experience is time-bound and body-dependent. But sheer being or the awake presence of your abiding nature remains present in all states and all experiencing.

Q: The electricity analogy really helps. Having studied psychology for so long, I can fall back into these specific concepts of awareness as a psychological attribute. Perhaps the word 'intelligence-energy' sidesteps some of these conceptual snares for me. Awareness as that which 'shines through the body' and is all-pervading, ever-present and prior to the perceptions and experiences of this world-dream cuts the confusion. When I stop and look, this fundamental 'am-ness' is right there. It is before, during and after all the concepts. In day-to-day experience, the thing that seems most effectively to cut to the quick is to just notice that there is nothing wrong unless there is buying into passing thoughts. The point is once again well taken and noted that paying more attention to what is always here is more freeing and revealing than swimming in the ideas and doubts.

John: From a purely experiential, psychological perspective, one simple fact can be noted also. When the doubt comes up, whatever it is, and the doubt is followed, the experience leads to a sense of uncertainty or, as you say, that something is wrong or missing. On the other hand, the consideration of the fact of being is always accompanied by a clarity and non-conceptual sense of certainty that cannot be subject to any doubt. If we are looking for clarity or certainty, the path is clear. Metaphysical speculation is conceptual and has little, if anything, to do with direct self-knowledge. You are not a thought! The mind is an unstable, fleeting display of images. The 'answer', in this case the direct fact of what I am, can never be grasped or arrived at via the mind. Seeing that clearly, the attempt to look there ends. What is left? Inescapable presence and awareness that cannot be denied. And that is full and total peace or doubtless experience. That remains whether the body is sitting in the kitchen or walks into the front room. It is totally independent of the location of the body in space or time. It is unaffected by any activity of the body, senses or mind.

The Simple and Final Point

Question: Feelings of slight desperation are coming up. Yes, to whom? An 'I' appearing as thought in this clear pristine awareness.

John: Keep a good clear view of this. That clear pristine awareness is what you are. Make sure to appreciate the immense implications of this point.

Q: I have a sense of being burnt alive in this. The sense of 'my world' and any identity is getting very shaky.

John: Exactly who are you speaking about? This is speaking from the position of the identity spun up in the mind. Settle down and be thorough with the recognition of who you really are. Are you an appearance in the mind, or are you that in which the mind appears? Looking for oneself in the mind, as if your being is a mere concept, gives the feeling of being shaky. How stable is a thought?

Q: There are so many 'I' and 'me' thoughts, and they seem so compelling.

John: Yes, but which one is you? That is why you must clear on what you are. Then how can such flimsy thoughts be compelling if they are patently false? All of this resolves by keeping with the basic point: who and what are you? All seeking, suffering and doubt come from looking for reality, identity and happiness in the conceptual mind—where it can never be found. Settle this point firmly, and things clarify directly and naturally.

Q: The looking for the reality of the 'I' often seems to engage the thoughts in more thoughts.

John: This is looking at the wrong end of the stick. This is *not* what this is about. It is about being clear about *what you are*. Stay with that. That recognition naturally shows that your real being does not exist as a separate entity in the mind. If your real being is not clear, the so-called inquiry just becomes a mental exercise and is looking in the wrong direction. You do not use the mind to know and be what you are.

Q: There have been periods of very clear seeing of my identity as present awareness and the flimsy dream-like quality of wispy thoughts passing through. And then, the apparent loss of this and back in a fog!

John: That is only due to interest and identification with the conceptual patterns. Awareness, what you are, does not exist in periods of time. It is the constant space in which all life appears. You are that. In truth, there are periods of time when the interest wanders into self-centred thoughts! Suffering is what comes and goes, not your natural state.

Q: I have three of your books. You make it as clear as it can get on the verbal level. I do not know what I expect you to say other than to repeat your excellent pointers.

John: There is nothing I can do other than pointing out the basics and encouraging you to see them for yourself. Look a little more deeply into who and what you are. Nail down what this is and have no doubts about it. Also, be clear that what you are can never be found in concepts, because you are not a concept. Then there is no more looking for who you are in the images of the mind, and hence no seeking, suffering and doubt. Stick with what is clear and certain—the ever-present fact of aware-being. See the concepts as mere ephemeral images with no substance and no ability to define what you are.

Q: There is almost a distaste for reading about this anymore.

John: Books can only point. You will *never* find your real being in a book, no matter how seemingly profound the book is. If you read them to find yourself, you will fail, of course. Be what you are. Then if you read a book, presuming it is clear on the basics of this, it will only point out what you already know—and are. There is no harm in it, nor any particular gain either. You are only reading for pure enjoyment at that stage, not to get anything.

Q: Only the living, vibrating awareness that I am is enough now. To feel that it is getting lost again seems unbearable.

John: But is it ever lost? This you must answer clearly for yourself once and for all. Isn't the feeling 'it is lost' only a concept in what you are? See this point now and settle it. Then all this 'back and forth' is finished in that seeing. You tell me—can you lose your being and its aware nature? Does it ever go anywhere at all? It is the thoughts, concepts and doubts that are coming and going, not you. So let the thoughts go, and be what you actually are. There is no doubt or problem with being what you are. All doubts come from looking away from this simple and final point.

Am I Over-thinking Things?

Question: I am what I am, of course. There is nothing else I could be. At times I really do see that there is nothing else. There is nothing outside of myself. Even my seeing this is part of it. But there is still a 'me' who sees things this way!

John: This is totally false. Not at all. Seeing is simply happening. There is no 'me' involved. This is the catch driving your residual questions. The 'me' is conceptual. What you actually are is not.

Q: I know this 'me' is an illusion. I feel as if I have a question, though I do not know exactly what it is. I understand that there is no question. How could I ask you about what is, if I am all there is? I feel the simplicity of it. I feel ready to accept this as all there is, to stop looking for 'more', to allow myself to be as I have always been.

John: Here there are too many references to 'I'! There is still a bit of belief going into this concept. Instead of allowing these thought and concepts to thrive, examine the 'I' itself. Who and what is the mythical entity? Can you find it?

Q: I want to allow myself to be as I have always been, but I am not there yet.

John: This is the false position, which is the continued belief that there is an 'I' to be there—or not. That is the final point to see through.

Q: Something in me has not let go. Am I over-thinking things?

John: Yes, you are over-thinking and not looking at actual experience. Where is this separate 'I'? This is to be examined, not conceptualised.

Q: I can feel my mind wanting it to 'happen'. I am the awareness in which these thoughts arise, correct?

John: What else? But you must see it for yourself. As you can see, the identity is still a bit shaky, so this is where the doubt comes in.

Q: I have been reading your book Awakening to the Natural State. At times your words will resonate with me so deeply that I feel silly reading about who I am, and I put the book down. You mention how important meeting Bob Adamson was for you. That is why I was interested in meeting in person to talk. It is so funny to me that I am going through this, so to speak. But I have absolutely no choice in the matter.

John: If there was an 'I' to have choice!

The Issue of Identity Is Paramount

Question: I am at a point where what you are talking about does not make sense, neither conceptually nor in my direct experience.

John: But you are not actually looking at and speaking of your actual identity. Being is not a concept nor an experience. Being is prior to concepts and prior to experience. It is the undeniable fact of your sheer existence, which is the necessary ground of any subsequent conceptualising or experiencing.

Q: Having spent the last three years reading and pondering every bloody day for hours seems to suggest quite an intense interest in ending the ongoing suffering.

John: But you have been overshooting the simplicity of it. What does reading and pondering have to do with being present? Nothing at all. I am not denying the sincere interest in ending suffering, which is the natural desire of everyone. Focusing on the end of suffering is not the same as a clear, immediate knowing of the truth of what you are. That is what effortlessly and naturally resolves the sense of seeking and suffering. Seeking and suffering are an inevitable by-product of looking for one's nature (or identity) in the mind. What your direct and doubtless experience is showing is that you have been looking in the wrong direction, away from what you really are. It is not your being that is the problem. It is looking for who you are in the mind. The good news is you can see this right now.

Instead of blaming the basic pointers, notice the potential fault of the way one has been approaching the issue. There comes a point, due to natural intelligence, when it dawns that we have been looking in the wrong direction, that is, we have not been able to find an

answer in the mind. That is the key moment, because we are then open to looking freshly and reconsidering the facts.

Q: If, in fact, I had the simple choice to make this distinction voluntarily, I would of course choose to see through it.

John: I am not speaking of choice. That is introducing an irrelevant issue. It is also emphasising precisely the root of the problem, the notion that 'I' stand apart from reality as a separate, autonomous entity. That notion is the assumption that I am a defective, incomplete, limited 'I'. That is the root and cause of all suffering. The issue is: is it true? All of life's problems, struggles, issues and doubts are reducible to living under a wrong identity. Return to the sense of being. Does being have a problem? No. Are you struggling to be? No. Does being have an issue? No. Is there any doubt about being? No. So you can see that being is unconditional, doubtless, clear, and problem-free—now. If that is what you are, then where is the problem?

The issue of identity is paramount. How you see yourself determines the experience. The question 'How do I get free of suffering?', or the attempt to get free of suffering, is already a symptom of living under the false belief. However, there is an answer. It is most accessible and practical. Look to see what is the nature of what you are, instead of what the mind says you are. You may be delighted to find that what you are is that perfect and problem-free being-awareness-peace itself. A man may have a million dollars in his pocket and not know it. Therefore, he feels he is a beggar. It is only his wrong notion that is the problem, that is, not knowing what is actually the case. The truth can be pointed out, but he must look and confirm the facts for himself. You cannot blame the man who points out the gold in your pocket!

Q: It is apparently not that simple to do. I am the living proof! It makes me think of one of those 3D-pictures. When you look at it, everything is right in front of you, but you do not see the hidden picture within the ordinary picture. Likewise, I do not recognise the

presence-awareness that I am. I feel that until I really see it at a 'gut level', as one author says, it keeps on slipping through my fingers.

John: This is going back into all the conceptual stories. Then you are picking up phrases from books and using them to justify the concepts. I hope you can see the trap of this. Never look into genuine non-duality pointers for reasons why you are bound. This is still letting the conceptual mind run the show. The only purpose of the pointers is to show that you have never been bound in the first place. You will never find yourself (your natural being) in books, videos or meetings. As long as you think so, you will miss the heart and essence of this.

Q: I travelled to Amsterdam to see Tony Parsons and then went to the United States to see you. If I could choose my experience, those trips coupled with my extensive readings would speak for themselves.

John: This is all mind stuff. Talk to me about being what you are. All you are really saying is that you are getting some slight sense of being, but the second a thought or doubt appears, you turn away from who you are and give all the focus and reality to the mind. Your direct experience shows that this generates the suffering itself. See this. The 'extensive readings' are basically a waste of time, because reading is done in and through the mind. You visited me briefly, but left before getting to the root of the problem and resolving it. There was much more we could have covered and resolved by looking into this together. But apparently practicalities needed to be attended to. It does not matter where you are. But you must be clear for yourself on the basics.

Q: To me it seems more like my interest goes into the conceptual world all by itself. It is not that I choose to do that. It happens entirely spontaneously by itself.

John: It is going there because of interest and identity with the mind and the concepts. This is not about whether or not one has a choice.

That is just a ploy by the mind to keep running the show by avoiding the looking and by raising theoretical issues. Forget the mind and look at the nature of present being. Do not just glance at it and run back to the mind and the doubts.

Q: But you must agree that there is nobody to direct the interest going somewhere particularly.

John: But that is not the issue. The issue is why is the interest going there at all? Because of the assumption that reality, identity and happiness lie in the concepts. See if this is true and the interest drops naturally and effortlessly. You are mostly missing the core point here and spending the time looking at concepts, not your actual being. It is like looking for water in a mirage. But when you see where the real water lies, you naturally find it there and the issue is resolved. Do not use non-duality quotes to prove your bondage. Instead, look at what you are and find your present and ever-attained freedom.

Simply Being What You Actually Are

Question. There is knowing that I am awareness, not the separate doer.

John: So far, so good! It is not just that 'I' am not the doer, but that the 'I', as some separate real person or entity, is purely notional. In other words, the 'I' is a thought, a word, a label. Basically, there is no 'I' at all, except as a concept. There is seeing, doing, thinking, feeling, etc., but it is not being done by that notion 'me'. It is action without the actor. The actor is posited, but not really present on direct evidence. Acknowledging awareness and non-doership are key points. But it is good to see right through to the core point that the 'I' notion itself is an idea. That idea is not what you are. Are you that thought 'I'? No! You are that existence in which all functioning happens. Not only that body-mind, but all appearances arise in the space of that knowing-being. As such, there cannot be 'my' body or 'my' actions, except notionally. If these are seen as notions, there is no problem. Those notions are not doing anything. The actions are happening spontaneously and not in reference to the concept. In fact, the 'I' gets appended later, after the event. There is no 'I' in any present thinking, acting or doing. But the 'I' thought is added later and claims the ownership of the activity. Then we think 'I' did that, when in fact the activity happened and was only claimed later. This is a good chance to thoroughly examine the nature of the claiming 'I' thought and how the identification with that thought brings in a sense of limitation on your natural state.

Q: Today I realised that careless acts of 'mine' had caused discomfort to 'others'.

John: 'I' and 'others' are not given in experience, but only labeled afterwards. 'I' and 'others' hang on the 'I' notion. In direct experience prior to conceptualising there are no 'I' or 'others'. It is not the event that is binding, but the conceptual division and the subsequent identification with the 'I' side of the conceptual equation. Otherwise, it is all a manifestation of the one conscious presence. And in that manifestation there can be changes, improvements, more harmonious behavior, etc., if that comes up of its own accord. Just do not make it a personal issue. I call it sensitivity and intelligence in action, but not for or by a fictional person!

Q: A few days ago I was organising a sailing trip. This morning, I realised that it appears that 'I' forgot to include someone who signed up late.

John: The events are not the problem. If something needs to improve, it will happen. In other words, the body-mind may seek out some more intelligent action based on experience. The only problem is adding in the 'I' notion. That is purely notional. If the 'I' is notional or conceptual, the way the mind is framing the issue ('I' was doing activity 'x') is going down a conceptual 'slippery slope'. Seeing very clearly the conceptual nature of the 'I' completely resolves these types of experiences. It does not imply careless or unfeeling behavior at all; it just prevents the unwarranted personal claim of ownership. *That* is the sticking point, not the actual events.

Q: Another example is that I left something out that my cat got into this morning, and it gave her discomfort.

John: I am sure the natural intelligence will function in response. I would leave it at that. Again, there is no benefit to introducing the 'I' concept into the mix.

Q: In these cases, first the thought shows up blaming myself for my being careless. Then the thought comes that I am awareness and not the doer. Then the thought comes up that not being the doer is a good escape from the blame of being careless. Then the thought

arises 'What about responsibility for one's actions?' But who is responsible and who is acting if there is no separate individual and no doer? And the sense of personal responsibility shows up again.

John: As you are seeing, this is all very conceptual and thought-driven. The bondage is the assumption of the validity of the 'I' in the mix. Let it be functioning in the light of conscious presence. That is all. If something needs to improve or could happen differently, that will come up. It is acting without claiming doership. You will find that without the appending of the 'I' notion to claim responsibility that 'I' am doing it, the actions roll on more smoothly. This does not imply being irresponsible. It is being naturally responsive (intelligent, aware, compassionate) without running events through the 'I' concept. It is acting without the notion of being the actor. In terms of what you truly are, that is shining fully and clearly throughout all events and experiences as the clear and present light of being, knowing and loving—without any break at all. Let the actions roll on in the light of that conscious principle of love and peace beyond the mind. All is well from that position, which is not a 'position' at all, but simply being what you actually are.

Reconsider the Basics of This

Question: I have continued investigating the fact of my being as well as the notion of 'I,' and I have two sets of questions for you. First, below are two recent citations from your website that are relevant to what I wish to ask you:

See the false as the false and you do not have to find the truth. You are left with truth. It is there of its own accord. ('Sailor' Bob Adamson)

I am not saying 'you' should do something, because that would be presuming the fictitious entity anyway. I am saying to be very interested in the fact of your being. Look at it; ponder it; explore it; acknowledge it; discuss it; think about it. It is like anything else you are interested in. I do not have to tell you 'how' to be interested in something you enjoy. If the interest is there, the looking goes there automatically with no need for a 'how'. (John Wheeler)

Bob Adamson's quote relates to an aspect of the investigation into what I am and what I am not that has been troubling me. This is the relationship between the 'negative' (what is not) and 'positive' (what is) aspects of the inquiry. My question is, is it enough to 'see the false as false'? Does doing so lead directly to, or even equate with, the direct non-conceptual awareness of the true? Or is something else, something of a positive inquiry required? Either way, what does it mean to see the false as false in this context? It seems I can and do accept (conceptually) the false concepts (for example, there is no 'I') as false concepts. But I still do not see them as false in a direct, non-conceptual way. How does one move from the mere conceptual understanding to the direct non-conceptual understanding? The

conceptual-only understanding leads to a big sense of 'so what?' 'I' may be only an empty concept, but the painful stuff floating around that helps lead to the belief in 'I' (thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, body, etc.) is still there and it is still painful. Even though I cannot deny my being, there is no direct non-conceptual awareness that I am that undeniable being, forever unaffected by the passing content.

Your quote above may provide part of the answer to the last part of my first question. Perhaps, regarding how to see the false as false, I also need to come at it every way possible. But this leads to the second area of query to you, and this is not unrelated to my first set of questions. Investigating the notion of 'I' (and the fact that it is merely a notion) is happening with fair regularity, and the energy motivating the inquiry arises on its own. It has become 'my question', and so I spontaneously fall to pondering, discussing, looking, etc. Not so for the positive side of the coin, the investigation of the undeniable fact of being. I cannot muster the same spontaneously occurring energy to investigate this as I can the 'I' piece. Contrary to your quote, I do have to be told how to be interested in it! How do I get past this, and how do you investigate the positive side?

This frustrates me greatly! You have written many times that one should check to see if one can deny one's own being. The answer is an obvious 'no'. I ask myself this all the time, and the answer is obvious. Nevertheless, I must confess with enormous embarrassment that this inquiry goes like this for me. 'Can I deny my being? No. So what?'. It is the 'so what?' that is so troubling, and this connects back to my wondering about how to go about looking at, and being interested in, being. Is it a sort of objectless meditative inquiry, perhaps?

John: You are barking up the wrong tree here to a large extent. The conceptual mind is hijacking things a bit and leading to doubt. Any time we turn to the mind for 'answers', there is doubt and dis-ease. Why? Because we are looking away from what is simple, clear and certain in ourselves. So 'full stop', and reconsider the basics of this. What you are calling the inquiry is only taking you back into the mind

and hence into doubt. Why not pause the attempt as you are conceiving it now and become friendly with present and inescapable being that is here in all of its immediacy, naturally present and aware? What do you need to do for that fact to be?

The thought of 'so what?' is the mind taking over, rather than you 'getting into' the being itself. Get to know this being. See it for what it is. After all, it is you. That is like saying 'so what' about your very life! Spend some time getting interested and familiar with this being. The incentives are several:

- It is what you are (and everyone is naturally interested in him- or herself).
- It is what all the sages and traditions are pointing to.
- It is the means to resolve the root of seeking, suffering and doubt.

Q: My being is one-hundred percent undeniable, but looking at this point has so far meant absolutely nothing to me. What am I missing? In fact, my experience has been that the impossibility of denying being is the very cause of suffering, as opposed to the cure for it. Not a happy state of affairs. It is absolutely not being seen that I am this undeniable being that is unaffected by all that arises within it.

John: The 'me' in this statement is the fictional 'I' concept created in thought. The accent in this statement is on the mind again. There is implication that you and the being are separate. What is happening here is that you are getting your being pointed out, momentarily considering it, then turning back to the conceptual mind and not actually seeing and exploring the being itself. It is like a thirsty man coming up to the edge of a stream and then walking away and complaining that his thirst is not getting quenched. It will dawn on you that returning to the mind for the answer is simply looking in the wrong direction. Then, instead of turning away from your real nature,

you will take a good plunge in and see what it really is, not what your mind thinks it is.

All I can do is encourage and rouse your interest to look a little more deeply into this, but you must do it for yourself. The good news is that you have everything you need, because your very being is what all this is about, and you already are whatever you are. Up to this point, however, you have been apt to turn away from it and let the conceptual mind run the show. It is always possible to challenge the status quo and look in another direction. Sit on the edge of the lake of being for a while; gaze into it; and see what you really find to be the nature of this being, which you already know to be beyond any doubt.

So Simple

Question: I am twenty-four years old and have been seeking for six months. Thanks to your books the search is over. I can hardly believe that the one that was seeking was the one that was sought. It is so simple. Everything is just happening in the awareness that I most blatantly am. What a freedom to not have to be somebody.

John: This is the essence of things.

Question: This insight is only three days old, so I still find myself in thought every now and then. I thought I had lost it this morning. My mind said, 'I have lost it'. Then I burst out laughing at the ridiculousness of that thought. How can I lose myself? Who is the one that is observing the thought 'I have lost it'?

John: Yes, exactly. Also, be clear that the 'I' (for example in the statement, 'I still find myself in thought') is also a thought. All the troubling thoughts are for and about that 'I' thought. But what you actually are, as you are seeing, is the non-conceptual awareness itself. Is that ever lost in thought? No!

Question: Yesterday I found myself walking through a public garden that I drive past every day but had never stopped to look at. It became very clear that there was no one walking, just awareness. Just this. This seeing was so blissful and beautiful. The world is just such a beautiful expression of what I am and what everyone is. I spontaneously felt the urge to start running through a beautiful grass field for no reason whatsoever. Awareness just wanted to run and admire its own beauty. I now know what it feels like to have God move through you. I cannot thank you enough, John. Your pointing

was just so clear and consistent. It is just about resting in this awareness.

John: Only if there is an 'I' to rest in it! More emphatic is just *being* what you are. If I have the notion that 'I' am resting in awareness, it may give a bit of life to the 'I' thought and a duality between what I am and that awareness itself. As I am sure you see, there is not a you and a that. You *are* that. That undermines any lingering conceptualisation for and about some separate 'me'.

Question: It does not matter what one is doing, because there is no one doing it.

John: This is the point I am making.

Question: Everything happens by itself effortlessly. But this is not my constant experience yet.

John: Challenge this view a bit. Awareness is not an experience. It is what you are. The way you are framing the issue here brings in the 'I' concept and time. In all experiencing, have you ever left what you are? See this. And let the notion go. Awareness is not an experience, nor is it in time, nor is there any separation from it. Without such notions, what are you and where are you right now?

Question: When I find myself grasping, I just come back to seeing and questioning what is actually the case at this moment. This usually clears things up.

John: The only confusion would be from putting a bit of focus on the dualistic concepts. Just see them for what they are, and the belief, identity and interest in them resolves itself. Besides, the thoughts can only appear in the doubtless, clear awareness anyhow. You are that now and always.

Question: Thank you. Words are a pitiful tool to express my gratitude. I will express it by just being what I am.

John: This is the essence and point of it all.

Relationship Issues and Self-Knowledge

Question: There is frustration here as a particular thought and emotional pattern is continually being brought into. There are various thought patterns arising. I should have a mate. I am getting old, and I do not want to get old alone. It will get harder to do things alone. I am missing something by not having a mate. I am lonely. I would be happier and more fulfilled if I had a mate. I am missing out on not being in a loving relationship with a man.

John: I cannot really say too much about the specifics of desiring a relationship per se. I do not see anything 'wrong' with this, as it is natural to enjoy social contact, friendship, intimacy, etc. It is pretty much hardwired into the body and psyche to enjoy companionship. At that level, as in the case of other practical matters, I am inclined to defer to knowledgeable people for guidance (for example, a good relationship counselor).

However, there is never a requirement for suffering or a feeling of limitation in terms of who you are, because your fundamental being is not really affected either way, whether you are in an intimate relationship or not. Clearly these thoughts and feelings are concepts, beliefs and assumptions. Even without the non-dual perspective, the assumptions are worth being investigated and examined to see if they stand up to any real questioning.

Question: It feels like I am the separate 'me' who keeps getting drawn into the thought pattern. There is identifying as an 'I' rather than as awareness, which is what I really am.

John: All of these thoughts and beliefs are definitions of and about the 'I', or conceptual sense of self. The limitation and suffering arises

from looking away from what we truly are and giving a sense of reality to these notions. All suffering really is, is equating what we are with a concept. The interest in the thoughts appears due to the assumption that they are saying something true about our identity and happiness. Looking from this level, whether or not you have a relationship is not really the issue. The issue is whether or not you are taking these thoughts to be true and valid descriptions of your real being.

That is why it always gets back to the deep and clear looking at the nature of who you are. I would suggest looking at what you are, to become very clear and confident in what is the nature of your being. The word 'awareness' is only a pointer. But what is this nature itself? What is the real nature of what you are? This question is important and must be resolved; otherwise, some doubt will remain about who you are. If this part is not clear and experiential, then when the mind presents concepts and definitions about who and what you are, the interest and attention naturally goes to them. Then you get wrapped up in the conceptual mind, rather than being what you truly are.

In the end, there is no finality to these or any other concepts that generate seeking, suffering and doubt without clear and emphatic self-knowledge. Because in knowing who you are, the basis for looking for your identity in the conceptual mind is addressed at the root.

You do not mention where you are with your understanding of your real nature. That cannot be left out of the equation! Again, the word 'awareness' is only a pointer. That is not your own seeing, knowing and being what you are. My suggestion is to put the consideration there, on what I call the positive truth of what you are. Become very familiar, based on your own looking, with what you are. This is the sure and certain way to resolve all seeking, suffering and doubt, including the types of issues you are raising.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be in a relationship, and such a desire may come up in spite of whatever you know about yourself. Still, the sense of personal suffering, whereby the concepts get related to a limited sense of 'me' and taken as true—that whole

movement is no longer being given any energy of belief. Then you remain as you are, which is perfectly whole and complete, with no problems as a limited person in the appearance of things. Why? Because you find that that is not what you actually are.

Seeking Has Stopped

Question: Thank you for the clarity of your message. I was at your Santa Cruz meeting on Thursday, a week ago. Since then I have been able to see and be who I always have been. It is so odd. It is right here, now. It could not be more obvious. After our meeting, I saw that seeking has stopped. What a relief. I can see clearly now when the mind starts to try and 'rev' something up about the future or whatever. It does not seem to be able to generate much juice, so it is really not a problem if there are thoughts present. This is truly the diamond in the pocket, except it is not even in the pocket! It is right here now out in the open. I could care less about enlightenment or whatever other spiritual concept, because there is no one present to become enlightened. I guess I was always holding out that enlightenment would happen somehow in the future if I did the right things or the stars were lined up just right. But that just kept pulling me away from the present experience that was always available. I still like to meditate, but it is only sitting quietly and being, without trying to get anywhere. Where would I go anyhow?

John: I appreciate hearing from you. Your experiences are direct and straightforward and carry the taste of simple clarity. I do not have much to say, except to point out that your experience is self-confirming. You cannot manufacture ease, peace and the end of the sense of seeking based on the assumed separation from one's true nature. A bit of looking reveals the falsity of this assumption. This is the simplicity we always overlooked—that right from the start we have always been what we were seeking. It is nice to hear your expression of this.

Seeking Is Not Over

Question: Seeking is not over in my case. There are not really any doubts left, just this sense of separation. A 'me' is still there, more like a residue or out of habit. I look and look, and it feels like there is a very thin veil there, preventing this clear seeing. Any suggestions?

John: Your being is undeniable. It is both present and aware. Make no bones about it, this is what is being pointed to. How far are you away from being what you are? This is the point that utterly terminates all duality. There is no separation from your true nature. All doubts come from overlooking this fact of experience. Even assuming there is a separation from that, that there is some entity or limited person (a separate 'me') standing apart from reality, where is it? Did you ever even find such a thing? If you look in experience, all you can ever find is a sensation, perception, thought or feeling arising in the clear, doubtless knowing presence that you already are. Where is there any evidence of some separate, unenlightened person? And how can you be such a thing if you cannot even find it? Since all of those appearances come and go before you, the only alternative is that you must *be* that natural awareness itself. There is no other option available. So, you are that. There is no veil between you and that, because you are that. And where is the veil, even if you think there is one? Can you see any such veil between yourself and that doubtless being-knowing?

The clear seeing is happening full on right now. There is seeing, thinking, feeling, sensing, knowing, etc. That is undeniable. It is all contained in that natural, non-conceptual awareness that you are. There is no state or magic 'moment' when clear seeing happens, because it is already in full swing. Waiting for clear seeing to happen is assuming that it is not happening. That clear seeing is only the

natural expression of your own existence. To deny the presence of the clear seeing is to claim that you do not exist! That you cannot do. You cannot say 'I am not'. What you affirm in that statement (the doubtless fact of being) *is* the natural state. Just be clear on these inescapable points. Even the doubt that the clear seeing has not occurred is being registered in the pure knowing presence itself. See the truth of this, and realise that you are that already. If you *are* that, how can you be a seeker? Nothing more needs to be understood than this.

I Am in the Ignorant Stage

Question: I read your website posts every week. This week I see the following quotes:

The only thing you are absolutely certain of is the fact of your own being. That translates as the thought 'I am'. But is that thought 'I am' what you are? ('Sailor' Bob Adamson)

Find THAT which never sleeps and never wakes, and whose pale reflection is our sense of 'I'. (Nisargadatta Maharaj)

The above quotes suggest that this is only possible after realising our real self and not before. For this, the 'I' thought has to stop emerging altogether. This means this is only possible for a person like me after self-realisation or enlightenment. For this, the 'I' thought has to stop popping up altogether, correct?

For me, this 'I' thought is taking up its post full-time during the waking state and even during sleep. In deep sleep it is absent, of course. As far as I am concerned, both the quotes are meant for me. They confirm that I still have not realised my true self. I am in the ignorant stage. I say this because I have not found out that which Maharaj refers to. I am still in the state of the individual thought 'I am' that Sailor Bob refers to. So unless my ego is erased completely, it is impossible to find what is 'that' or to realise the self.

Do you agree? I understand how you explain about the 'I' thought being the mythical 'I'.

John: I disagree with your analysis of the situation. It sounds like you are familiar with some variation of non-duality teachings. But basically, you are spinning around in all types of acquired concepts

and missing the point. The notion of needing a special realisation or happening is false. Your present being, that doubtless presence that always lets you say 'I am', is already the final reality, the true self. You already are that now. The notion that something needs to happen is only created by overlooking this point.

Pause all the concepts and doubts. There is a naked, bare presence here, doubtlessly existing and naturally aware. That is what you are and all this is talking about. The 'I am' sense and all other appearances, states of mind, etc. come and go in this naked awareness. Even consciousness as a state comes and goes in the naked and ever-present being that you are. This consciousness is the first experience in duality upon which all other experiences depend. It is the same as the 'I' thought. This means, the first taste of knowing 'I am'. This happens every morning when you wake up. First the sense 'I' appears; then you know all other objects. To be more precise, the 'I' thought and the ego sense (individuality) are to be distinguished. Ego arises when the consciousness or 'I am-ness' gets conceptually identified as the body-mind and there arises an individual entity or separate self. This is entirely notional.

The point here is that even the rising and setting consciousness is still happening to you, as an appearance. Nothing needs to change or happen. All we are doing is understanding the facts of what is going on. No state or special enlightenment is needed. You already are the unchanging absolute here and now. This is what we missed. The purpose of all the pointers is only to bring us back to recognise this fact. Do not forget the basics of non-duality. There is reality and you are that. Egos, time, realisations, etc., are all imaginary and based on the concept that you are a separate individual apart from the reality. The resolve is to look and see what you are. You are already the doubtless self, the pure being and unchanging awareness itself. See this and all the concepts are uprooted. It is as simple as this.

Q: But my ego persists twenty-four hours a day, and the true self is not realised here. Because I am ignorant, I would be a hypocrite to consider myself a knower of truth simply after reading your pointer.

In your case it is different, because you have realised your true self. Why did Ramana Maharshi insist on erasing the ego or realising the egoless state? In my case, that has not happened, and I am living the life of an ego twenty-four hours of the day and night. Surely this is not what Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj would like me to do. He would certainly say that I have not realised my self. What is the use if I say 'I am the self' and then go on living the life of the 'I' thought, mythical as it may be.

John: Clearly, you are bit confused on your identity at this point! No problem. The sages would only have us look to see what we are. You talk about needing realisation, etc. Once you find out what you really are, then we can see if your true nature needs any realisation and if you are a separate ego standing apart from the absolute. Rather than assume that is true, get to work on seeing what you are. Of course, you cannot simply say 'I am the absolute'. You must see for yourself what you are. You are assuming you are a separate individual. I am saying that, in fact, you are not. But it is up to you to verify the truth of what you are. This is necessary. Nothing will be attained at all, including some mythical 'enlightenment'. But you will clear up your identity, and that is all that is needed.

My suggestion is to drop all the spiritual verbiage and settle down with a deep looking into what your nature is. Start with the one thing you are sure of—the fact of your being. In the end, you see that this very being is already the absolute. Even the 'I' thought is appearing and disappearing in the sky-like presence of your timeless being.

[Follow up.]

Question: Thank you for your comments. It is appreciated with deepest gratitude. You said as follows: 'Clearly, you are bit confused on your identity at this point!' Yes, the confusion is blatantly obvious. The confusion is that I am entirely focused on the waking state, the body and the ego or individuality and ignoring completely what you have beautifully described regarding the absolute and true self aspect. Also, I do not quite understand the issue of mental tendencies or habits, as mentioned in some traditions. I guess that

will all perish the moment we realise we are the absolute and not the individual? I say this because I am not all satisfied with the way I live my daily life.

John: All of the questions, doubts and speculation are coming in at the mental level. It is a bit of a trap because it allows the conceptual mind to keep the focus and hold the field. Sometimes reading and studying this stuff is a liability, in truth! That is why those of simple mind and heart, such as Ramana Maharshi, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Sailor Bob Adamson, etc., seemed to grasp this stuff more easily than we who were previously acquainted with Vedanta and all the recorded teachings, etc. Fortunately, they were there to provide some assistance to us!

The bottom line is that what is ultimately real and your own being are the same, and this is what is being pointed to (the fact of your own being). Once this point is clear, the use of the mind in thinking about this stuff is mostly a distraction. Looking at the mind content is looking precisely away from the essence of this.

Start with the fact of your undeniable being. You know you are. That is beyond doubt, even by the mind. It is a self-evident fact. So get curious about this. What is the nature of this self-evident and inescapable being that is already present? In truth, it is you (your own being) who are present. Looking in this way is really clarifying your own identity. All the books and teachings of the sages are not that helpful at this point, because what they said is now preserved as concepts. But *you* (your being) is not a concept. So gaze nakedly into this doubtless being-knowing presence and see it is as it is, free of concepts. As the Upanishads say, all words and thoughts turn back. But still, your existence is inescapable. If you look in this way, the doubts will rapidly get resolved.

Your being is not to be attained, but it has been overlooked so far. In overlooking it, we inadvertently identified ourselves with an image created in thought (the conceptual 'me'). But that thought is not what you are. Is it? All of the doubts, thoughts, questions and problems are conceptual and only pertain to the conceptual 'I'—not to you. Make sure this is very clear. What questions or problems does being

have? None! That is why what you are presently is being-awareness and peace. Find this gem in your heart, because it is already present but has been overlooked due to excessive interest in the mind. Why? Because we assumed our identity was there. But now you know it is not. So the age-long ignorance is being exposed.

Without looking in the mind for what you are, your natural state is the ever-present true self. Settle down here at this point. It is hard to convey in words, because it is too simple for words!

Question: What prevents us from realising we are that absolute self and not this body with an ego? Traditional teachings say that it is the habits of mind.

John: Nothing prevents knowing who you are. It is just a simple ignorance. Ignorance means only ignoring the truth. That ignorance led us to assume that our identity was with the body and mind. That gives rise to the notion of being a limited person, a separate self. This instinctively feels limited because it is a contradiction to your unbound and natural condition. However, not seeing the root of the issue, we continue to look to the mind to tell us who and what we are. These self-limiting ideas, beliefs and concepts generated by the mind are the so-called mental habits or tendencies. There is no real freedom to be found in them or from them as long as we continue to put the focus of belief into them through ignorance. The resolve is to re-examine the situation and re-evaluate what you, in fact, are. All the concepts are for and about the 'I', the entity who has the concepts and limitations. That limited 'I' is assumed as what I am. So the only real answer is to look at this 'I' and see what it is. This amounts to asking or examining 'Who am I?'. What anyone will find if they sincerely look (and not merely conceptualise about it) is what the sages have been saying all along. You are not a separate entity at all, but the pure, changeless, ever-present being itself. It is easy enough to read about this or verbally assert it, but you must see it for yourself. As long as we continue to be interested and identified with thought, we will not actually be looking to see the real truth of it. That is why it is very important to understand that the answer (your being) is not in the mind. Look away from the mind for even an instant and

you find inescapable, natural being and knowing. It is shining untouched and undefined by the conceptual mind. This is also why reading about this stuff rarely 'works'. It is more of an intuitive, non-conceptual looking at the facts, rather than thinking about anything.

The question 'What is the cause of the delusion?' is still being raised by the mind. It assumes you are not the true self and some actual problem has happened. The real answer is not to get lost even in such questions because that keeps the attention in the concepts. Look instead to see who has the delusion and you come back to seeing what you are. That snaps you out of the mind and back to actual seeing what you are, rather than conceptualising about what you are. How far are you away from your being right now? See how close it is! This is what we overlooked for so long due to simple ignorance.

Do Not Use Spiritual Knowledge to Prove Your Bondage

Question: Yes. Every being is already ever realised and naturally aware. It is not a case of getting or attaining enlightenment or self-realisation in the future but discarding the false knowledge of the not-self. But 99.99 percent of us do not realise that. I am very happy for you to belong to that .01 percent. Blessed are you indeed to remain as the self or the pure self-awareness. I understand the words here are not the absolute.

John: This is logical and seemingly sensible, although it goes off on a conceptual tangent also. When you say, 'But 99.99 percent of us do not realise that. I am very happy for you to belong to that .01 percent', this goes back to conceptualising about 'me', 'you', etc. and we are back into concepts of imaginary beings who are 'not there'. This is the type of thought that will keep you wedded to the mind and not appreciating what is really being pointed out here. I am not in some select group, nor are you or anyone else in some non-select group. Drop this needless conceptualising.

Your being is present and inescapable. Here and now this is the unchanging, unconditioned, unborn, undying true self. This you must look at and verify in your experience. Thoughts come and go. Do you come and go? Awareness is present. Are you anything other than the one who is aware now and always? Can you deny your own existence? Are you outside of simple being itself? Look at the facts and see if you are some miserable, unenlightened seeker standing outside of the ever-present true self.

At this point, you are getting hung up by traditional knowledge and intellectual sophistication. Unfortunately, you are using your spiritual knowledge to prove your bondage rather than demonstrate your

inherent freedom. When spiritual knowledge becomes the basis for proving one's limitations rather than pointing out the ever-present freedom of the spirit, a wrong turn has been taken. Therefore, it is time to re-evaluate. That is why most of those who study traditional 'knowledge' are making little, if any, progress. In the end, even the most profound spiritual knowledge is only conceptual and adds to the bondage.

No concepts need to be discarded to be what you are. That assumption is only another false concept. You are the true self. At this point, you are still willing to follow the mind and let it dictate what is true. The mind deals in concepts. But you are not a concept. So the mind has no place in self-knowledge and will *never* understand what we are talking about. At some point, the understanding will dawn that the answer is not in the mind and who you are is not to be understood through concepts. The mind is not the right tool for self-knowledge. Therefore, all the mental conclusions and analyses are erroneous. Turn away from the conclusions and concepts of the mind and abide as the real self that you are. There is no one outside of existence or consciousness. If the truth of this simple statement is taken in and heard, all your defenses and excuses are annihilated on the spot.

Forget about others and look at what you are. Everything else is a useless delaying tactic of the conceptual mind.

Non-Duality and Traditional Spiritual Concepts

Question: I thoroughly enjoyed a talk of yours that I recently attended, but I had a question to ask you. You spoke of being and awareness but did not mention bliss. This is the third aspect of the traditional 'sat-chit-ananda' (being-awareness-bliss).

John: I do not favor the word 'bliss' as the best translation of 'ananda'. It has too many potentially misleading connotations. A better alternative is 'peace' or 'fullness', that is to say, the absence of suffering. This is synonymous with being-awareness. These are all pointers to the same thing, your natural state free of concepts. These are only pointers. So the whole talk was really about this, whatever label you wish to give it. Knowing your real being is 'ananda', meaning the absence of seeking, suffering and doubt. Call it peace, oneness, fullness, love or any other name. These are all the same.

Q: I am wondering what your experience is concerning the possible interconnection between desire (kama) and wealth (artha).

John: You clearly have some background in Hindu spirituality. You probably know more about that than I do! This is at a lower level than where I was speaking from in the context of the meeting, which was at the level of non-duality. Desire, wealth, and right living are at the level of individuality. Self-knowledge is the dissolution of the individual and the final aim of spiritual teachings. As such, it is the highest purpose, greatest wealth and highest mode of living. In self-knowledge, the notion of a person doing this or that, desiring this or that, achieving this or that does not apply. While the individuality is taken for granted, those things are relatively valid and the proper courses are laid out in the scriptures, etc. There is no rule or blanket

sanction that can be offered. My best advice is to know who you are and all the issues will take care of themselves naturally.

Q: As one moves ever closer to a constant awareness of non-duality, it would at first appear that one's purpose in life might seem far more an impression of social conditioning than a true calling based upon one's individual karma or dharma. If this becomes one's experience, would it be a natural progression that all those who experience some relative degree of non-duality begin to feel purposeless and/or that their personal responsibility is to teach or point others in the similar direction of non-duality?

John: This is mixing apples and oranges, because it is still talking in terms of the individual viewpoint. It is best not to struggle with these issues that still concede the separate self and are generated by the mind. Just get to the task of knowing who you are and all these issues dissolve. Definitely do not get into 'relative degrees of non-duality', etc. That is conceptual! You are keeping the person concept in the picture and assuming that looking into this will give different experiences for the personal perspective. What we are talking about here is the abandoning of the personal perspective.

Q: I wonder if I am unique in feeling that the greater my experience of non-duality becomes, the more my truth, desire and wealth all seem to converge towards increasing my own experiences of liberation, as well as helping others to experience the same?

John: Who? Again, you are bringing in the personal perspective. Freedom is not *for* the person, but *from* the person. The person may acquire all types of spiritual concepts. This has very little to do with your abiding real nature prior to concepts. In fact, even bondage and liberation are only from the personal perspective. Your real being needs no liberation, because it is the reality itself. If you try to divinise the person, you will end up with an expanded sense of limited self, but not the natural freedom of your innate condition.

Q: The paradox of non-duality for me is that, on one level I know there is nothing for me to do, yet I still feel compelled towards the 'bodhisattva ideal'.

John: Only because you have read about it. Better is just to be what you are. Life flows from that naturally. The 'bodhisattva ideal' is an expedient teaching for the person still under the sway of ignorance of who they are. The true bodhisattva (awake being) has a mind which alights on no concept at all, even of being a bodhisattva. Still, if you are committed to that perspective, there are teachings at that level that you can pursue. Just keep in mind that it is a stepping stone to the non-dual view.

Q: I wonder if you have gone through something similar? As I believe you have, how did you decide to commit yourself to teaching or pointing the way for others?

John: This is, again, the personal viewpoint. This type of approach is not for a person to implement, nor does it leave one in the game to wonder about his experiences and what he will do. The 'he' disappears as an effective reference point. From there, selfless functioning happens according to circumstances. The individual reference point is cancelled by seeing the person never was present. So the types of issues you are raising dissolve from experience. You are left with no more puzzles, doubts, programs, stages, etc., all of which are still for the individual.

The Search Seems to Be Over

Question: It was a pleasure to see you again and to talk this past Sunday. I cannot remember if I gave you my name. I guess it did not seem relevant at the time. I was the one in the lavender blouse and we chatted after lunch about the end of the search. After our last meeting, it became even more clear that there is not anything left to be found at such gatherings, at least as far as the mind is concerned. To the mind, the idea of satsang seems incredibly boring now. I recently invited a spiritual friend to give a satsang at my house, and I actually slept through a good part of one of the sessions! After ten years, the identity as a searcher seems to be completely at an end. This has been the driving force for so long, and there seems to be a need for some guidance at navigating its disappearance.

John: My suggestion is simply to be clear on who and what you are. It is not about meetings or whether you are searching or not. All of that takes care of itself. I would stress that the point is being clear on your identity. Your real being is not an entity in need of guidance. So that way of phrasing things is still coming from the personal identity. The searcher is the concept that you stand apart from reality. It is not a matter of 'seems to be at an end'. It is a matter of whether or not the concept is true.

Q: There seems to be a space now that wants to be filled, some new activity that should be found that would be fun. I have little idea of what that could be, because so many interests have fallen away. The only thing I really see is some vague desire to sit around with people and sing folk songs from the '60s, even though I cannot really sing and I play no instruments. I think I just want to be with people, but I

am tired of the whole satsang format, or anything to do with self-improvement, navel-gazing, kirtan, etc.

John: Good, because this is all dualistic, conceptual activity! It is still for, by and about someone wanting a better 'me'.

Q: But, as I told you, my whole social life is bound up in this search. I meet once or twice a month with a local group. I feel some sort of obligation about continuing to go to this group, but the more I see what is real, I do not feel there is anything to get there, and the less I feel I have anything to offer. And who am I offering it to anyway?

John: Yes, I am afraid the impetus of being a spiritual seeker and all that that entails crumbles away in the clear seeing of what you are. But that does not leave an 'I' with nothing to do in the picture. We are not stripping away all the activities and leaving an 'I'. We are removing the 'I' and leaving the natural activities that spontaneously arise.

Q: There is also a sense that I should not try to do anything with this, that I should just rest as what I am.

John: Who? This is still leaving the scent of the 'me' in the game. You are what you are. It is not a matter of resting as you are, which is a dualism. Simply be what you are. That is not a defective, limited person, but the fullness, peace and clarity of the real self.

Q: I suppose I am 'making too much of the mind' as one teacher told me. I see confusion, loss, grief, and possibility. I see the mind wanting to figure this out and find a plan of action, just as it always has.

John: This is only if the 'me' notion is believed and the answer is looked for in the mind of conceptual thought. Without that, it is perfect ease and peace. This is not about ending the search, dropping activities, doing something as directed by some spiritual teacher, etc. All those are just activities for a 'me'. The real essence

is being absolutely clear on what you are. Dropping the searching, giving up activities, going to satsang, taking advice and so forth are still in relation to someone to do all those things. Therefore, the seeking, suffering and doubt are not addressed by such activities alone. Seeing what you are and realising that the separate 'I' is a fiction resolves it all. So I would stress a consideration of those points, not so much what to do or not do.

Q: Your words are very clear and seem to really connect for me.

[Follow up.]

Q: As I consider your words, there is laughter inside at the recognition of it. Yes, it is all so simple when I just am. What I am needs no guidance, no improvement. Only the body continues to 'improve' or not, as it moves through time, and I am beyond that.

I rest as I am. Then the mind gets in there with all kinds of stuff that pulls at attention and then blows away with just the resting as 'I' again, or so it seems. But I never went anywhere. I see the desires to 'get somewhere' and see them fade as I see there is nowhere to get to. That feels so much better. Yes, it is not that the search has ended, but that there is no searcher. The mind wants to say 'no searcher anymore'. But if there is no searcher now, was there ever one, other than just as a thought in the present? (That is not a rhetorical question. I notice that there is still some puzzlement over this and the mind wanting an answer.)

To see from this place is so radically different from the way the mind has been conditioned to perceive reality that the old habits of seeing slip in, and I suppose they will for a time. As you said, just continue to be clear on what I am. Then I suppose that there will be a ceasing of the mind wondering about things like where the searcher went or if there ever was one.

John: Take a few moments to understand suffering (or problems or doubts) once and for all. Basically, it is all thoughts and concepts. What can be wrong if you are not thinking about it? All the troubling

issues are thoughts, concepts and imaginings about 'me', or the sense of separate selfhood. Make sure this part is clear. This is important. Therefore, the 'I' concept is the root of the troubling thoughts. It is not merely the thought, but the lingering sense of belief or identity in that thought or concept. But are you that thought? Are you the 'I' notion? No! In fact, apart from the notion 'I', there is really no limited, defective self present. (If so, have you ever found it?) So the 'I' is entirely mythical. At best, it is a mere assumed thing created in thought. That is not what you are anyhow (that is, a mere creation of thought!). You are not and have never been some separate 'me' apart from being-awareness itself.

With this basic seeing, the root of all the suffering thoughts cannot be believed or taken as your identity any longer. If the 'I' is not what you are, there is no one left to seek, get liberated, do this or that, or whatever the case may be. There is no 'I' left to live a life, as such a notion is still in relation to the limited 'I' concept. Suffering is only seeking reality, identity or happiness in the concepts of the mind. Those concepts in turn are based on your taking yourself to be the 'I' concept. Seeing this mechanism, and how untenable it is, pulls the plug on the whole affair. Even 'living the teaching', 'stabilising in the self', 'going deeper', etc. are still conceptual and for the limited 'I' idea. You are not a person, you are *that*, the absolute itself. This whole thing can be seen and resolved here and now by simply seeing the facts as they are. Once you see that the root concept is not what you are, you cannot believe it any longer, try as you may.

So take a few minutes and be entirely clear on these points. Then you will no longer have to deal with the mind, seeking, doubts, questions, etc. It is worth a few minutes of honest examination. Without getting involved in the conceptual thoughts any longer, there will be no distraction from being what you are—the ever-present being-awareness-peace absolute. Then you can live your days in peace and clarity. The body and mind will function according to circumstances and in the light of love and peace, no longer in relation to a defective 'me' reference point. The question 'What should I do?' will not even arise or be given much concern (if it does), as the 'I' is only conceptual. What to do next? Only what

comes up naturally. This is effortless living. It is your native state and birthright.

Dealing with Residual Doubts and Identifications

Question: My assumption was that once this presence-awareness has been seen, all is over, all is done. Then when thoughts and moods are coming, they arise in the presence-awareness and one does not have to bother with them. Now I see that this assumption made me fall back into the ways of the personality, with only periodic recognition that presence-awareness is present. But, basically, there is not much difference than previously. At one point I met Leo Hartong and suddenly everything was crystal clear. The understanding was that everything comes and goes in presence-awareness. There was not even an effort to see more clearly. Somehow that clarity became obscured. Now it seems that there is still something that has to be looked into, something to be done. One must keep seeing until all is settled and solid, until nothing is able to obscure any longer, because the understanding has touched rock bottom.

Going over all this the last few days made this presence-awareness (this wide open space where all is free and light and in which all appears) shine forth. So keeping up the looking seems to make a difference. Please let me know if this is the way it is.

John: You say, 'My assumption was that once this presence-awareness has been seen, all is over'. All over, for whom? That is more conceptualising! Presence-awareness is, ever and always. Undeniably so. That is pointed out as 'the way it is'. That is present, and you are that here and now. Do not lose sight of this key point.

That said, the conceptualising process, based on the notion that you were apart from the true nature may appear, just as it did from time immemorial, due to innocent ignorance. I suggest a clear and direct understanding of that 'mechanism' such that it is no longer a

tie and creates no problems. In other words, in this clear understanding, any tendency of belief or identification is addressed at the root. This is not a process or achievement, because even this understanding is happening in the clear and solid light of non-conceptual awareness itself. It is like sweeping dust off of the porch in the noonday sun. Why settle for a dusty porch? But do not think that the sun is being enhanced! You cannot even do the sweeping or see the dust without the sunlight. The sun never was, is not, and never will be touched, altered or modified. The belief in the self-centred conceptualisation can be exposed and rendered null and void through understanding. That is only natural. It is more or less a 'mopping up' operation. It is a means of dealing with any residual doubts or identifications should they arise (assuming you have any inclination to do so).

You are free, totally one with reality, now and ever. So do not relinquish that stand. If there is any doubt, question or identification, simply have a look and understand it for what it is. That seeing unravels the very root of the imagined bondage and shows the ever-present freedom. This seeing naturally resolves itself, much like the stick stirring the fire (to use a famous analogy). But do not forget that you were never a stick or a fire in the first place. You are that ever-fresh, non-conceptual freedom, peace and clarity now and always.

Who Is to Get Back to What?

Question: The mind can always build concepts out of anything, be it the 'positive' or the 'negative' way. There is no guarantee that one thing or the other is going to work in every single case. It is a very individual thing, like you say. And of course methods and techniques are very useful for many things, but when it is about getting to know who or what you really are, to rely on them is almost a contradiction in terms. But some techniques, for example the ones suggested by Douglas Harding, were useful for me.

I think it is important not to be dogmatic. In my case, having started with Tony Parsons, there came a moment when I was simply stuck in concepts about emptiness and there being no one. When I came across your approach it was a big relief for me. Things started to make sense, and there was a radiant feeling of aliveness. But again, after some time I was stuck again in mental repetitions.

I still do not know how it happened, but one night both approaches combined, and suddenly there was the seeing of 'it', the 'no thing' that had been overlooked for so long. Since then life goes on the same way, but, strange as it may sound, much more pleasantly. Of course, there are conflicts still arising, but as there is no resistance, they dissipate very easily. And in the background (and sometimes in the foreground) there is always this shining 'home' to get back to.

John: You say:

I still do not know how it happened, but one night both approaches combined, and suddenly there was the seeing of 'it', the 'no thing' that had been overlooked for so long.

There is no need to know! That is just returning to the mind stuff! The pointers eventually did their work and the resonance with them arose to confirm what had been present all along. That is about the most you need to say. Anything else would be conceptual guesswork arising in the ever-present, ever-clear being-knowing of 'what is'.

Foreground and background are only changing appearances on the ever-present ground. There is no foreground or background to reality as it is. Reality is not something to get back to. That assumes a separation, that there is 'you' and 'that'. Do not forget that you *are* that. The separate self, being entirely notional, who is to get back to what? It is just being what you are and always have been, inescapable being or non-conceptual awareness. That is not even a 'you'. It is just what is, was and ever will be prior to concepts, the very ground or basis on which conceptualising arises and sets. It is timeless, spaceless, personless reality that cannot be denied or avoided at any time.

What Appears Is an Appearance of Awareness

Question: In looking at this sense of 'I am', it seems that this sense is equivalent to the appearance of sounds, sensations, sights, and thoughts too—that is to say, everything. Put another way, it seems that awareness and the content of awareness are equivalent. Thus it seems that the mental activity of seeking after presence-awareness is also just presence-awareness! Further, it seems that this realisation is equivalent to the realisation that there is no separate 'I'—that is to say, there is no one 'back there' witnessing the appearances, but rather the witness and the appearances are one and the same.

Lately I have become so frustrated with all of this that I no longer care about getting 'it'. I just want to forget the whole damned thing. And then this 'insight' (for lack of a better word) will spontaneously pop up again at the most unexpected times. I feel like the search might be over. There is nowhere I can possibly go with this. Yet it is clear that the mind will never, ever be certain of this, or anything for that matter. What say you on this, John? Much gratitude to you for your kindness in taking the time to respond to my questions.

John: An issue here is trying to find the answer in terms of objects and appearances. From how you are positioning this, you are looking *in* appearances for the answer and concluding that all there is, is appearances. When confining the looking to appearances, naturally you do not find any 'thing' that is awareness, a witness, a looker, etc. So you conclude that the content is all there is. One positive aspect of this is that you are forced to admit that there is no separate 'I' entity standing over and apart from appearances as a thing. This is deconstructing the conceptual subject and seeing it as entirely notional, which is a clear insight. However, you are left with

nothing but the objects of experience and are forced to conclude that whatever reality might be (awareness, witness, or whatever), it must be synonymous with the appearances. If you confine your looking only to appearances, this is the natural conclusion. But this is out of step with all of the non-dual traditions, which talk of reality as changeless, non-objective, unconditioned, non-conceptual, etc. But the qualities of appearances are the reverse of these.

Think of the ocean and waves. Are the waves the same as the ocean? If the waves cease, does the ocean vanish? It would be a mistake to conclude that when seeing the waves you are seeing the ocean as such. True, the waves have no independent or separate existence apart from the ocean. But the ocean does exist separate and apart from the waves. In other words, it is not defined or limited by the waves. It is the same with the content of awareness. Appearances are like the content of awareness. But you cannot say that the appearances as such are the awareness of them as such.

The basic question might be framed as: What is aware of thought? Clearly that is not going to be another thought. Yet, that knowing presence cannot be denied. A thought is not knowing itself. Even when the thought passes, that being-knowing remains. If you try to grasp it (awareness) objectively, you will fail. Why? Because it is not objective.

One of the fruits of your search is the clear recognition that reality is not to be found in the mind. That is a huge insight. Just because you no longer look for your being in the mind, does not mean that you are not present! Your very being-knowing presence is here as clear, solid and sure as ever. Truth to tell, that has nothing at all to do with content. Content is coming and going as an appearance to you.

Q: What you are saying is really striking home here. This is the second day in a row that I have had a strong sense or feeling that the search is over. I know better than to get my hopes up by now, but the mental grasping seems to have burned itself out. I cannot be totally certain, but I am certain of this much: 1) There will never be any resolution in the mind, and 2) Existence is beyond all doubt, for

as you have pointed out, even to make the statement 'I am not present' requires my presence.

John: Your insights here contain the essence and heart of things. If the answer cannot be found in the mind (and everything objective is in the mind), then I am no longer searching there. Still, I am. That 'I am' does not need to be searched for because it is present and cannot be denied. Why would there be a search for what you are, anyhow? In the end, everyone is searching for himself, his real being. But it becomes clear that you already are what you have been seeking. So on both counts the seeking and searching resolves itself. When the conceptualising pauses, what is here in the pause is what is being pointed to. That is not a 'thing', but it is a clear, vivid, radiant, awake reality. Call it what you will. But this exists, and it is the basis and substratum of all that is. Appearances are like the waves or ripples on the surface of this present awake existence that is your very nature. That is not a separate, isolated entity floating in the appearance, one thing among many. It is the very ground and substance of all that appears. What appears is only an appearance *of* this. Appearances may come and go, but only in and on this.

Your Being Is Not an Object

Question: I have read your books and website for several months now. I find your pointers very clear. There seems to be something about a living teacher who uses contemporary language very clearly and simply that resonates and leaves little room for doubt. And yet my mind is left with a doubt that perhaps I need to have resolved personally, as I have not seen it discussed in your materials. I was wondering if you can help resolve it?

I am quite aware of feelings within my body and an almost ever-present contraction around the heart and spine. When I read pointers and begin to see clearly, this pain (if we can call it that) often pulls strongly at my attention. It feels like it wants to burst, resist, or something, and fear, anxiety and sadness can emerge. Sometimes periods of presence are followed by the arising of such feelings. It has the effect of drawing the attention away from presence. What is this, and does it need to be resolved somehow so it does not distract the attention? I have noticed that it is like a subtle belief, as though the belief is there and the desire for it not to be there is the actual cause of it being there. Yet it still draws my attention most times.

John: It sounds like you are making something of a split between your real nature and sensations in the body. What you are is not something you focus attention on. Your being is not an object. If it is conceived this way, there is a feeling of competing between it and objects, like the body, etc. This creates a tension. Your real being is always there and is the space in which all happenings appear. Begin to recognise your natural being as ever-present and unaffected by body, mind or subtle energy states. It is like a warm sea of being-knowing that is bathing and embracing all appearances. Get a taste of this and experience all appearances as resting in and dissolving

into this clear and radiant light of knowing. Do not set up a tension or dualism between appearances and what is conceived to be your presence. In reality, such a presence is only a subtle imagined object. See the heart, body, mind, etc. as arising, abiding in and dissolving into the constant and gentle sense of presence-awareness. This latter is not to be focused on because it is not an object. It is the constant light in which even the attention comes and goes. Looking in this way will dissolve the tension and dualism between different appearances. All appearances are only waves on the surface of the ocean of being, awareness and peace. As you recognize that this is your natural state, the tensions and fixations on the body and its sensations will relax quite a bit.

Interest in the 'Me' Concepts Is Identification

Question: As seen from awareness, simplicity comes and goes. Identification with that apparent simplicity is also seen. You have said that it is the identification with these thoughts that causes the suffering. I understand this, although not completely, or there would be no question to ask. If there is no doer (no one to have a problem or wonder if there is correct seeing), what is identifying with thoughts? To not identify would be to just be. So does that not imply an opposite possibility of identification? To identify or not identify, that is the question! It would seem that awareness is beyond even that, but identification is still happening, and that identification causes apparent suffering. To the mind it seems an answer must be found, an answer in the way of seeing, not doing.

John: What about the fact of being that aware presence that cannot be denied? Where has that gone? Has it disappeared at any time? And what is your relationship with that?

Identification arises from seeking one's identity, reality and happiness in concepts—primarily due to one's actual identity being in some doubt. Until the notion 'I' arises, there is no 'who' present. 'Who' is only a notion. So asking 'Who identifies?' is a false question, really. It presupposes there is some 'I' present to identify, which is not true. There is no one identifying with thoughts. It is only the interest or attention focusing on self-referring concepts. Do not ask 'who?', just clearly understand the mechanism of what is going on. That seeing is enough.

Knowing your true nature as it is uproots the tendency to seek your identity in concepts, which is all identification is. All the self-referring thoughts are for, by and about 'me'. Did you ever find this separate and defective 'me'? Seeing that the 'me' to whom all the

concepts refer does not exist pulls the plug on any lingering belief in the concepts. They are seen for what they are—images about an entity that is entirely imagined.

You are still talking of yourself as something or someone apart from the being-awareness. Be very clear on what you are. Look more into this positive truth of what you actually are. When this is not clear, we naturally seek for ourselves in the mind. This is what propels the interest in the 'me' concepts. This interest in the 'me' concepts is identification. The narrowing down of the focus of awareness on a limited, bounded concept taken as what I am is suffering. Spend some time reflecting on what your true nature actually is. Look deeply into this, going by direct experience. Knowing what you are beyond any doubt and in direct experience takes the wind out of the sails of looking for your reality in concepts.

You say, 'Simplicity comes and goes'. Is this really true? If simplicity equates with your natural being, does that really come and go? Or is it rather that thoughts appear and disappear? And can they be present without your awake, aware presence? So isn't it the interest that periodically flows to self-referring thoughts? Why should that be so? Why would I look for my reality, identity or happiness in concepts if what I am can never be defined or grasped in concepts? So I need to be very certain that what I am is not a concept, not an appearance, not a limited thing. This is why the positive knowledge of who and what I am is so important.

Assuming this is clear, it is important to understand suffering and how it is entirely conceptual in nature. The concept at the root of suffering, seeking and doubts (which are various expressions of suffering) is the 'me' to whom all the concepts refer. As long as that concept is assumed to be real and what I am, the mechanism of interest or identification with concepts is active. That is why the 'I' concept needs to be investigated. All suffering implies that the reality of the separate 'I' concepts is still given some belief or reality. When this is understood, naturally you will be very interested to find this 'I' who is the root of all the suffering. If the looking reveals it is not really present, what happens to the belief in it (and all the concepts about it)? It must subside because it has no foundation. Suffering is

sustained by the continued assumption in the presence of the separate self and one's identity as that. Questioning that, or investigating it to find its reality, is the direct means to eradicate any lingering belief in the concept.

It works best to do this looking against the clear and solid recognition of the positive truth of what you are. That is why I recommend putting most of the focus there.

The Best Practise Is to See What You Already Are

Question: I would like to deeply and sincerely thank you for your book Right Here, Right Now. It clearly and without any leeway drives home the unity of presence-awareness. My resolve is to be presence-awareness and let thoughts and body movements come and go in presence-awareness. Maybe someday presence-awareness will shine brighter and clearer. But, regardless, this resolve is in the right direction, and this, with your approval, is today's course. Again, deepest thanks for your book, which is a sort of 'final chapter' in a lengthy tale of searching.

John: Your natural presence or existence, which is and is aware, is in full expression now and always. Simply put, all sensations, feelings and thoughts shine in the clear and doubtless presence of your consciousness nature. The notions that it is not fully clear, or that some day it will shine brighter, simply appear in this that you are. Pause any doubt or concept and recognise that which is here before, during and after all appearances. This is the simplicity of this. It is so simple and direct that we are apt to overlook the fact that what the non-dual traditions are pointing to is here in all of its immediacy and presence now.

Q: There seems to be a human condition in which the mind's habits of individuality diminish the recognition of 'natural presence'. In traditional Indian 'pilgrim on the path' approaches, there is often a 'satori' experience or a glimpse of reality and then a period of time where the mind gives up its control and aligns itself to what was glimpsed. So I guess the question is: when the mind's habit of considering itself an 'individual in charge' becomes sufficiently weak, does the natural state that is always shining brightly become more noticeable?

John: Awareness or being is always present. It is really just a matter of the interest or attention going to the thoughts. This gives the impression that your natural state is coming and going, but it is not.

Q: For the first time, I understand that the desire to see presence-awareness more clearly is a desire of the mind, of the 'me'. It is pretty logical, but this fact just remained unexamined. Now it is clear that most important is to clearly understand the mechanism of what is going on. And that must be enough because any judgment that the seeing is not enough or that more will come in the future is a mind activity. The resolve is to experience all thoughts and happenings against the clear and solid recognition of our natural state. Does the expression of 'the penny dropping' have any meaning to you?

John: It is not so much an issue of desiring or not desiring to see what you call 'presence-awareness'. It is more basic. You need to be clear on your identity and understand yourself as you are. It is not very sensible to go through life without having a clear sense of who is going through it. All seeking, suffering and doubt is due to living through erroneous concepts and self images. The way to clear that up is to have a good look and see what you are. There is no special event needed. All the tales of enlightenment, penny dropping, etc. are just more tantalising prospects for the mind. Your natural being is already present, so have a look to see what is the nature of this already-present being. When people start waiting for enlightenment or the 'penny to drop', they tend to get so focused on some imagined event that they fail to see that what they are looking for is already present. So drop the spiritual concepts and see what you are. Your being is already present and is not a concept. Therefore, let go of such concepts and make sure you understand the nature of what you are. This is the real, practical implementation of the message of non-duality.

Q: It is clear that the more solid, basic understanding of my identity undercuts all the expectations that have grown in the mind over thirty-six years of 'practise'. There is no more 'yes, but'. There was

always a subtle looking to the future. Even when I felt I was understanding 'non-duality', there was still a subtle looking to the future. I deeply thank you for your patience, for staying with me until the last vestige of future expectation was exposed, and for helping to underscore the importance of clearly understanding what is really going on and what is the real identity. It is a very great thing to be set right.

John: Being (your natural state) is never a future state. It is now, always now. Looking to the future is looking precisely away from the heart of this. Your natural state of doubtless being-knowing (or whatever you may wish to call it) is not a practise. It is a fact, clear and solid as a rock, so to speak. Again, engaging in practise often leads us to look away from what is already attained. This is not to say that there have not been various methods and meditations offered to seekers at various times, but they were expedient means to get us to see what is here presently and naturally. If the practises are geared toward future results and attainments, they tend to sustain the false concept of the separate 'me'. The best 'practise' is just to see what you already are. The best follow up to that is just to remain what you are!

You Are the Absolute, Here and Now

Question: I have been reading your writings lately, as well as those of some other teachers, and have some questions for you. I would appreciate your feedback. When we believe in the 'me' or 'self centre', it seems we act from that place. It seems that the actions and activities are based on a life lived from a separate 'me' place.

John: The number one point is to know your real nature as it is. This is what clears up all the questions and doubts. Your real nature is doubtless, clear and uncompromised being-awareness. It is the source, substance and nature not only of itself, but of all that appears as seemingly separate. But there is nothing apart from this. All is this. The 'me' is a conceptual notion. When taken as a real or a valid reference point, things are viewed from (or through) this distorted position.

Q: We do all kinds of things based on being a separate individual with the ability to do things. But then, once it is 'seen through', different actions may happen based on the new understanding. If this is true, it does not make sense, because if there truly is 'no one', no 'me', then it does not matter whether it is seen through or not because the same things will happen regardless.

John: Yes, things still appear, but are no longer viewed through that artificial, false reference point. Hence, the suffering and doubt generated by that view are resolved.

Q: But I have noticed that living as awareness, certain things drop off or lose interest. When thoughts and emotions come up, they are witnessed instead of acted upon.

John: Actions may or may not appear, just as before. Seeing through the 'I' concept does not stop actions. Your comments still imply someone is present to witness or act. The 'I' vanishes as a valid reference point, but life still flows as before.

Q: I am, then, awareness standing behind all of the thoughts and emotions.

John: This is still an identity, an 'I' position! There is you, awareness and the content, too! Remember, this is non-duality!

Q: Ramesh Balsekar talks about there being no personal doer at all. No one can do anything. What will be will be, regardless, based on the destiny of each particular body-mind instrument.

John: This clearly deviates from the non-dual position, including that of his one-time mentor, Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Q: Tony Parsons says that all there is, is this. There is no one to do anything or even 'be aware', that even awareness is 'someone being aware', which is still a 'someone'.

John: Awareness is. This is undeniable. It is not a matter of someone being aware. The 'someone' is a concept coming and going in awareness. Just see the concept as a concept. Recognising awareness does not imply a person, any more than looking at a tree implies someone. It is just looking. The 'I' notion is added later as an overlay on awareness.

Q: I am not comparing teachers here or throwing names around for entertainment. I am just trying to get the facts straight and clear. Please understand where I am coming from here. Is this more about a 'take away' or negation? Or, is it coming from the positive way as 'you are awareness or consciousness'?

John: Both are the same, really. Negation is just a way to remove the brush and highlight the presence of being-awareness. On the other

hand, you can go straight for the truth of what you are.

Q: There seem to be layers of this whole thing. For instance, as body-minds living this dream, or in this play of things, we can certainly realise awareness and see through the imagined 'I'.

John: Body-minds do not see this! They are only appearances in awareness. Still, if we have assumed ourselves to be body-minds, that false notion can be pointed out and seen through. Not by someone! Just seeing what is true!

Q: But, Ramesh Balsekar also says consciousness is all there is. What is 'doing' all of this is only consciousness. We have to look 'behind the curtain' at what is the source of everything, at what it is that is functioning (kind of like electricity in a light bulb). Once it is seen or understood that we are just instruments or puppets, then 'who cares?'. What will be will be. All there is, is this right here, right now. That is what is happening.

John: This still leaves a subtle 'we' in the game. It leaves someone to have the understanding, etc. It leaves people waiting for some 'final understanding' but leaves them disempowered because there is 'no one present to do anything'. This is all nonsense and a complete reversal of the true position. Go back to the basics. You are the absolute here and now. Just pause all the conceptualising and see what you already are. Suffering is only conceptualising about a conceptual 'I'. See this 'I' for what it is—a mere concept. Look for the 'I' and it cannot be found. All belief goes out of the concepts and all the doubts end because you abide as what you are. You are no longer looking for your identity in fictitious concepts. Do this here and now. There is no 'final understanding' or 'penny dropping' needed. Just see the facts as they are. You can do this now. Do not get bogged down in pseudo non-duality concepts!

Q: So it is that easy? There is pure, non-conceptual awareness! Everything else simply comes and goes in that? And everything else

is also awareness? If so, we basically have two things or aspects to this whole thing: awareness and things in awareness?

But what about this life we live? What about this body-mind and our day-to-day experience? It seems a lot of 'teachings' do not account for this human being experience. Most of them just overlook it or do not speak about it, but I feel it is important too, because we are having this so-called life experience, even if it is a dream or illusion. I mean, if I go out in the middle of the street and let a car hit me, I will feel it or die. That is not an illusion! If my baby girl of eight months has something happen to her, I will feel the pain of that.

John: Well, first of all, there are not two things! Remember: non-duality! We talk about awareness and content in order to highlight the awareness factor. But nothing is really separate or apart from awareness. Like waves on the sea, everything that appears is only in, on and of *that*, which is one without a second.

You ask, 'But what about this life we live?' There are several angles on this.

- From the position of 'one without a second', the question does not arise! The notions of 'life', 'we', 'live' etc. are concepts that only appear as valid once the separation from source is assumed as valid.
- Who is the 'we'? The separate self is fictional, so there is no entity present to live a life as some autonomous entity.
- Practically speaking, life lives itself spontaneously and naturally, just like it always has. The galaxies, stars, planets, animals, plants, cells, microbes, atoms and sub-atomic particles are all functioning quite well without belief in the separate self idea. So will that body-mind. There is no 'I' running the show. There never was, is not now, and will never be, because the 'I' is purely conceptual.

- Just do whatever comes up to do naturally and spontaneously. This is called natural or effortless living and is the fruit of non-dual understanding.
- Once the question 'How do I live?' arises and is taken as valid, you are back into the false duality of assuming you are something you are not.

These are a few ways to dismantle the false question.

The Joyful Light of Ever-Present Being

Question: I have a few questions that have bothered me very much in my twenty-five year spiritual quest. Like you, I have precious little free time as a busy scientist and professor. I admire Swami Vivekananda, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Jean Klein, Ramesh Balsekar and others who I believe are self-realised through non-duality. I respect you because your wisdom is indirectly from Nisargadatta Maharaj. I have many times spontaneously felt that this world is but a dream and that the noumenon is distinct from this dream in a timeless, spaceless realm that can be indirectly apperceived through intuition and discernment. Meditation on my centre of being has made this more frequent and intense. Nisargadatta Maharaj, unlike anyone else, has explained the significance of noumenon versus phenomenon very well. He has also described the automatic functioning of phenomena. But still this intuition is not continuous for me.

How can I go beyond this simple perception of the phenomenal world as a dream and actually perceive the unity of all phenomena in the entire universe within my true self? The realisation of essential unity of everything is what I strive for and have not yet attained.

John: First things first. Step one is to realise your true nature as it is. Without that, any attempt to understand other pointers is only being conducted at the mental level and will remain problematic. With the nature of your true self clear, its relation to apparent other things can be seen more directly.

Q: How can I actually transcend the individuality or personality and shift my frame of reference to the absolute? Is this a sudden shift in the centre of one's being, or does this happen gradually?

John: Again, it is a matter of clarifying what you are. Your natural being is not a separate individual, which is only a concept generated in thought. You are not a concept!

Q: While contemplation on the true self brings about stillness of mind, when in the midst of strenuous intellectual activity (for example, writing papers, reading scientific writings, preparing lectures, analyzing data, etc.), how can the cognition of the supreme self be made continuous and steady, independent of the functioning of the mind?

John: Linking self-knowledge with a still mind is a trap and an error. Recognising what we are implies no stoppage of the normal thinking and sensing function. In other words, this is a non-issue, so do not create a needless problem!

Q: How can one function effectively as an individual in this highly competitive world as an intellectual if one has, indeed, shed one's illusory individuality and adjusted to a centre of reference that is the universality of the absolute?

John: Natural functioning is already going on without the need for a separate 'I' reference point. So this is also a non-issue. The notion of individuality is added onto the pure, non-dual experiencing. When this false reference point is seen through, functioning carries on as it always has. Functioning is and has always been self-less. This is not about altering functioning in any way, but only losing belief in the false reference point as yourself.

Q: If unicity is the absolute reality, and it is already our true nature, why can I not perceive or even gain a glimpse of that ultimate unity of everything? Or is this unity nothing else but the perception of the dream state?

John: The point of non-duality is to recognise beyond any doubt what you are. Do not overlook this. The appearance is an expression or

manifestation of the true self, but that becomes clear when the self itself is clear. Start with the one thing you are sure of—the fact of your being. Look into this and see it for what it is. This is the aim and purpose of this. The nature of the appearance can easily be dealt with once this is clear. Until then, the questions are only conceptual and speculative. It is better to tackle them after your real nature is clear and beyond doubt.

Q: These questions have been plaguing me for years, and only a modern sage can, in my opinion, answer these. If you will shed some light on these questions, I would very much appreciate it. Sorry for the lengthy message, but these questions have been very difficult to address through reading and contemplation alone.

John: Hopefully, the points above provide some clarifications.

Q: Your responses are very clear and direct. Please bear with me, but I have just a few more pressing questions. In your case, was your realisation of the self instantaneous or did it develop gradually over time?

John: Our real self is not an event in time. The notion of an event of self-realisation is from the point of view that it is not present. The dualistic mind conceives of realisation as an event that happens to someone in time. But this is wrong! The notion of the unrealised person is a concept that comes and goes in time! It is better to focus on the pointing at hand, which is to look at your natural being as it is here and now and have no doubts about what you are. Once you concede realisation as an event that happens in time, you are supporting many false and unexamined concepts that mask what is actually being pointed to.

Q: Was your recognition permanent or did it fade over time and need reinforcement as the ego-mind resurfaced?

John: Again, the question is based on some false premises that render it unanswerable as posed. The real self is ever-present and

always real. What we are seeing by following the direct pointing is that this is the case. The 'you' of the question is the conceptual identity created in thought that has been assumed as valid and as what we are. What really happens is that the ever-present nature of the real self is pointed out and revealed as always attained as the very fact of your doubtless existence. Also the 'you' concept, which is the basis of all the other doubts and questions, is shown to be purely conceptual and imaginary. In fact, you have never, ever stood separate and apart from the true self. All seeking, suffering and doubt come from ignorance of this fact. Following the concepts due to ignorance generates the sense of suffering. This settles down once the clear position is pointed out and understood. As long as the 'I' concept is given some belief, it gives the (false) sense that I stand apart from the real self and am in need of realisation. So the best practical approach is just to confirm the basic facts. It is not that the 'realisation' ever fades. But the interest in the self-centred concepts will continue until the basic facts are clearly seen as they are.

Q: Did your experience seem mystical or supra-mental? Did it take time to adjust to the new, higher reality?

John: No. It is the ever-present, natural condition. It is very familiar and natural. It is simply the clear and doubtless sense of aware-being that has been here all along. In fact, it is so simple that we overlooked it due to its utter simplicity. Mystical or supra-mental states are still only appearances in your natural being. They are not what this is about at all.

Q: Do you feel any different now than prior to your recognition of who you are —mentally, physically or otherwise? How do others who interact with you on a daily basis feel about your not having a sense of individuality? Are they even aware of your inner shift of frame of reference?

John: Life goes on as before. But there is no longer any involvement in the erroneous self-centre or the other concepts generated by or based on this concept. In other words, the seeking, suffering, doubts,

problems and questions generated by belief in the false self are resolved. The clear, awake, peaceful existence of the natural state shines unbroken by fixation on dualistic concepts. Life unfolds naturally in the joyful light of ever-present being as it is.

All Divisions Are Purely Conceptual

Question: Are consciousness, the absolute, the source, 'that', and emptiness the same thing as awareness? Is consciousness or emptiness simply aware through an instrument of a body-mind? Does it need an object to be aware? If so, does that mean that this nothingness only becomes awareness if it manifests as an object? If so, what would be the whole point of it all? Consciousness is simply aware of itself through an object? Is it just playing a game? Can awareness be aware of itself? And lastly, it seems the best way to realise this is through negation (not this, not this), by taking away or removing everything until one ends up with nothing. Is this accurate?

John: All the pointers are only trying to describe or point to your natural state. Whatever you truly *are*, that is what this is about. All the words are only concepts, pointers. You are not a word or pointer. So, in the end, they all fall flat! Do not put too much emphasis on the words! Before the next thought appears, you *are*. That 'you are' is not aware of itself as an object, a thing. Yet it is aware. That is called self-shining or self-knowing awareness. That is always on, always present with or without objects. That is the unconditioned essence, the non-dual source. No word or description can really cover that. It is your natural being as it is prior to concepts. Some call that 'pure awareness'. Some call it 'awareness unaware of itself'. This means that it is not recognised as an object to awareness.

That is also called 'emptiness' because it is not a thing. It is not perceivable or conceivable by the senses or mind, but it is present and recognised non-conceptually as the doubtless fact of being or existence. It is non-conceptual, immediate experience that is prior to and independent of all conceptualising. It is the ever-present basis and ground of all experience. It is the ocean of light and being upon

which the waves of experience rise and set. The waves are conditioned and impermanent, but in essence they are nothing other than the ocean itself. When objects appear, the knowing of the objects through the instruments of perception (body, mind, etc.) is sometimes called 'consciousness' or 'relative consciousness'. The 'consciousness of' as an experience comes and goes and is impermanent. But the pure essence that contains both the objects and 'consciousness of' remains.

There are different ways of talking about this. In the end you see that the objects are not different from the consciousness in which they appear, nor is the 'relative conscious of' really separate and apart from the basis of your ever-present natural condition. Therefore, all the divisions are purely conceptual and verbal and mostly used for the purpose of pointing in certain contexts. They are not absolute or fixed. Also, how the words are used depends on the assumptions of the questioner, not to mention the background and assumptions of the one doing the pointing!

The best approach is simply to follow the concepts and see what is being pointed to, your natural state prior to all concepts and experiences. Simply pause conceptual thought and see what is present here in the gap between concepts. There is a clear, solid sense of being present and aware that is utterly independent, unconditioned, changeless and perfectly adequate. This is why it is called peace or fullness.

All discussions of awareness, consciousness, negation, etc. only arise at the conceptual level once the mind starts up again. There is really no better method than seeing and being what you are. Then, it is full stop.

Wrapping Up Loose Ends

Question: I started reading, rather slowly this time, I Am That. I am really appreciating the beauty and poetry of Nisargadatta Maharaj's words, which I did not quite pick up the first time I read the book. Anyway, he keeps saying to focus the mind on the 'I am' with earnestness, and eventually the truth of what we are will come clear. The 'I am', I take it, is focusing the mind on the fact that I am everything I am aware of and that the awareness itself is my true nature. The mind cannot comprehend this; therefore it becomes quiet and the truth is no longer obscured. But in doing this I cannot help but feel that this is just another exercise of the mind. I am conditioning the mind to think and believe a certain way. The mind being incredibly flexible bends to this new idea and the truth remains obscured by this cloud disguised as an idea that will supposedly lead to the realisation of our natural state. What would you suggest? Observe this process and take note that the observer is the true nature?

John: Why are you focusing on the 'I am' or even looking for exercises? That is given to 'beginners' who are identified as the body-mind. It is to snap the focus off of the false identity so that the seekers can get some breathing room to see who and what they are. The 'I am' is the consciousness in which the world appears. But as it is pointed out many times, you are not that 'I am' either. You are the source of the 'I am' experience.

When you go searching for techniques and exercises you are clearly returning to the conceptual level. So I would skip it! Just be sure on what your nature is. Do not over-medicate! Why do you assume you need to go in search of practises? You do not need to turn Nisargadatta Maharaj's words into a practise for the mind. You

are beyond that stage. Why interpret his words by some imagined personal reference point? Just read and appreciate the beauty and depth of the pointers. They are pointing to your real state beyond the mind. There is nothing you need to do with the pointers, if you can appreciate them at that level.

Q: That actually was my natural instinct, to enjoy the beauty and depth of his words. To be completely honest, though, I still get caught up in appearances. On occasion, I confuse the truth of what I am with the reflection in my mind. I presume that you do not do this any more, which makes me wonder if there is still something left for me to do. But I will gladly take your advice. When it comes to this question of who I am, all of my doings have not done anything for me!

John: This sense of 'I', which is your real being behind the words or feeling of 'I am', is what this is all about. There is nothing wrong with having a straight look at this to see it for all that it is. You cannot deny your very being. That being is aware. This fact also cannot be denied. It does not hurt to get very curious about this true self that you are. Who and what am I? It is a natural question. There is a way of looking at the question that is not coming from a conceptual, dualistic perspective. If the mind asks the question and dictates the answer, the whole affair is dry and lifeless. Still, your own being is not dry and lifeless. This is an indication that you have not stumbled on the most fruitful way to approach the matter. If you are finding your approach dry and barren, drop it! Nisargadatta Maharaj is exemplifying the inquiry in the book by pointing again and again to what you are. Just enjoy the words and the resonance. Enjoy the taste and subtle flavor of what the words evoke. That unique, clear, perfume of awake, empty fullness is what this is about.

Do not hang on to methods that are not working. In fact, pause all the concepts, thoughts and questions and notice the quality and nature of what is present without the concepts. There is an intense, vivid, alive, awake presence here.

Q: I appreciate your response. You are right. I am beyond the need for simple exercises. The fact that I recognised that focusing on the 'I am' was a kind of mental conditioning is an indication that it is unnecessary at this point. Perhaps it was necessary at a previous point in my understanding.

John: Basically, the tendency to seek reality, identity and happiness in concepts naturally fades as the basics of this become more clear and solid. The basics of this are already there for you, so it is just a matter of reconfirming them, should the need arise. With or without that, you are still what you are, so nothing is gained or lost. There is nothing wrong with reconfirming this stuff and looking at any doubts or questions if they arise. Also, it is quite fun and interesting. It is only wrapping up any loose ends.

Q: That is a very refreshing message; nothing is gained or lost, and nothing is wrong with reconfirming these points. Perhaps it is my Catholic conditioning; I often assume, without any basis, that there is something I need to improve about myself, cleanse, etc.

Yes, it is quite fun and interesting. Dull and painful reactions tend to be the result of the mind focusing too much on something or creating pressure to do or become something we already are. I think you told me once that psychological pain is often caused by the looking away from or ignoring the truth of what we are, the truth we know deep down and can never forget. Of course it is painful. Why we would ever want to turn our attention away from the truth makes no sense, and yet I do. Even your pointing right now is enough to bring to light the pure liberation and exhilaration within my being, and it is quite obvious that it has always been here and always will be.

John: At this point, you do not need the whole basic teaching about who you are, the cause of suffering, etc. At some stage people do need that because the basics are not understood. At this point, a few reminders are enough to underscore what is already present and already recognised. And, again, there is nothing wrong in that.

You said, 'Of course it is painful. Why we would ever want to turn our attention away from the truth makes no sense, and yet I do'. Well, be curious about this and see what is driving it. When someone turns to thoughts and concepts seeking in them what is true, what is the motivation? Whatever is at the source of this activity is the root cause of all suffering. So it is definitely useful to be clear on this. An important part of resolving this tendency to suffer through pursuing concepts is being very clear on what is happening or, rather, why it is happening. What is someone expecting to find or experience in pursuing the thoughts? It is quite an interesting question. It needs to be seen very clearly and understood. Otherwise, the mechanism keeps in play.

Here is an interesting parallel question. What would motivate someone to seek water in a mirage? Some people do! And they come to some grief due to their delusion. Other people do not seek water in a mirage. Why not? There is definitely something we are seeking in the mind when we go chasing the thoughts. Our suffering shows us that we do not end up finding it. In understanding what is going on, the game resolves itself. Once I know water is not in the mirage, I stop looking for it there. That is end of the game. If I think water might be in the mirage, I will keep looking there. The mirage is analogous to the mind. What is analogous to the water? That should be clear in order to really see what is going on.

Q: Those are some really interesting questions you are posing. The passive part where I believe I am the role (the boss, husband, parent, etc.) might just be due to laziness. It is as if it is easier to hang onto this identity and not question it, even though it is a limitation. Since I was a child and was told that I am David, I am a boy, a man, a student, a Catholic, a son, an asshole, a kind person, etc., I have just piled one assumption on top of another. Then I have been buying into whichever notion fit the moment or my state of mind at a given time. What chaos! The other more active part is where I chase ideas, thoughts, or identities. That is really buying into the empty promise that I can somehow be better, smarter, more spiritual, healthier, happier, better than others or my present self, if I just do this or do that.

This really shines light on the whole mess, doesn't it? Thank you. This has actually been a great help.

John: You have hit the nail on the head. It all boils down to:

1) Attempting to define oneself in thoughts, and 2) Seeking happiness or fulfillment (in whatever way the mind defines it) via that identity. The questions would be: 1) Can your real identity be found in or defined by concepts? and 2) Is happiness or fulfillment to be found in the mind? We are uncovering the motivation that drives the energy to the concepts. This is an important understanding.

You Have Never Left Being at Any Time

Question: I see more clearly the difference between being and thinking. My mind only produces concepts—it does not create being. It is so easy to slip unconsciously into conceptualising and lose track of the being-awareness-consciousness that is who I really am. Everything is so simple when I am just being, and everything is so complex when I am identified with thinking! It feels like I am really confronting the core habits of my mind and slowly gaining an understanding and knowingness of truth.

John: Yes, it is key to see the difference between being and thinking (even thinking about being!). In that prior-to-thinking space, which is always 'here', there is no 'I' or separate person present. It is only pure being or I-less awareness-presence. At that 'level', there is no one present to have a problem or get identified. The notion of getting identified is only the concept that someone is present to get identified!

Get to the root by immediate and direct seeing that the 'I' that would identify or not, or get entangled in thoughts and feelings or not, is simply another appearance. It is an assumed concept! You have never left being at any time. And no person ever was present, except as an assumed presence. Being is simple and inescapable at all times, with or without thought. The person, which is always the basis of the identification, has never really existed. Both of these points can and should be confirmed to one's full satisfaction.

Avoid framing this in statements such as 'I am identified with thought', etc. This 'I' is entirely non-existent! Who is this 'I'? That kind of statement subtly maintains the mind's habit to split the being into being and 'me'. This is the very root of the whole tree of concepts. So do not even give it a foothold!

You are now getting down to the basic root of this, because you are finding there is no one present to do any such thing! Still, the seeing happens and this is recognised, not by an entity who sees it, but by direct intelligence prior to concepts. This is the ever-fresh, ever-present natural state of being-knowing that is never contradicted at any moment of time. You have never left being and never been anything other than being.

You Are Whole, Perfect and Complete Now

Question: I am writing to you with fear that you will disapprove. Yet I owe you so much, so I feel I must communicate what is happening with me. We have had an apparent disagreement about what happens after 'awakening', that there can be no such thing as 'deepening' of presence-awareness. This letter is not an argument, just a few pages from my journal. I hope you will forgive me if I offend!

15 April 2009, In the Garden

Pure awareness is duality. Awareness is of 'something'. The 'somethings' are duality as well. If awareness and the arising 'somethings' are the same thing, that is non-duality. Arguing with the arisings, or even disbelieving in them, is violence against the Self, against the life that I am. What arises, what it arises in, and what is aware of the arising is life itself. Who is owed life? Who has earned life? Who may demand life? Life is the gift. Is the gift a sign of unconditional love? What else could it be? What gives the gift? Why? I have no idea! But I am given to be the whole universe each instant, no matter what, with no demands. How astonishingly fortunate! It is jaw-dropping, primary magic!

7 August 2009

'I am' is the manifestation and proof of the profound love of the creator for my soul. I awoke yesterday with this realisation, recognition and experience. Even when I forget the experience, the fact is always true (and beautiful). How did I get there? 'I am' is outside and prior to all my past, present and future history. 'I am' cannot be deserved, denied, controlled or destroyed. The

mind cannot control 'I am', so the mind cannot be the enemy of 'I am'. Awareness of 'I am' arose suddenly when the way was ready.

My life is full of serious misdeeds, mistakes and regrets. Even awareness of 'I am' does not remove the dead weight of past karma. Only confession and true forgiveness lifts this spirit-crushing weight. Certainty of forgiveness precedes honest confession. Forgiveness requires compassion. Awareness has neither compassion nor scorn. Only the soul-heart can feel compassion. The unawakened soul cannot express compassion. Only 'I am' can awaken the soul. The paradox is that the soul owns 'I am'. What is the origin of 'I am'? 'I am' indisputably exists; therefore, 'I am' is, by definition, possible. What creates this possibility? Without answering the question, I can call it the creator. The creator grants the possibility of 'I am' to my soul. I call this profound gift love. Recognition of this love goes beyond mere recognition of 'I am' and awakens the soul.

John: Our first disagreement would be that there is any such thing as awakening at all! What is being pointed to as what you are is ever-present and ever-awake by nature. It is not an event that happens for someone.

Your thoughts and comments are nicely expressed, but continue to show references to a sense of being the fictional, separate 'I'. Once that is granted, then such a concept can and will have its inevitable awakenings, deepenings, levels and experiences. But that is not what you are, your natural state. What you are is not even awareness, 'I am', or any other such concept. Those are only pointers along the way. They are concepts to dissolve other concepts. They are only pointers to show you what is present as your natural state, which is ever prior to concepts.

If you are attracted to ideas of awakening, deepening experiences, and expressions in manifestation, then other approaches with a dualistic undertone will resonate, such as the approaches you are referring to. To me, your words show some

appreciation of the basic non-dual message, yet how you frame the followup to it, shows you are wrestling with a continued belief in the reality of the identity of the separate, limited self and its attendant concepts. You have written some inspired poetry and religious expressions, but they are colored by the personal view and so leave some impression of suffering and doubt, however subtle that may be. This is honest and sincere reaching for the light, no doubt. At this stage, if this is not recognised, you will find other teachings that cater to a similar view as you are expressing to be more resonant. But in truth you are mixing apples and oranges. There is no duality in non-duality. I am not offended by your words, nor do I expect you to be offended by mine. Follow your heart and all must be well.

Prior to concepts of awareness, 'I am', soul, God, awakening, non-awakening, sinner or saint, your natural being shines in its eternal radiance. All appearances are only appearances of this. There has never been any duality at any time. Pause the concepts, the analysis, the ruminating, the comparing of teachings and be what you are. The moment you begin to conceptualise (to quote the Zen phrase), heaven and earth are set apart! The journaling may be inspirational, but it is at the conceptual level. Thus it tends to show aspiration rather than non-conceptual recognition of wordless truth. What you are can never be written down, grasped or cognised by the mind. Yet, here it is in all of its immediacy before the next word arises!

[Follow up.]

Q: I thank you for your truly generous kindness and pointing. I have read and reread what you say, and I find nothing to disagree with. In particular, you mention subtle doubt. I think my doubt is not so subtle! Did it not exist, I would not still be wrestling with these issues. I always was the natural state, and always will be. It does not need to wake up. Yet, my awareness of this is only intellectual and emotional. Thus the continued seeking.

What I have understood so far has evaporated all the suffering I am aware of. There may be some hidden suffering. Obviously I cannot see that. But either I am at peace, or else I have the illusion

of being at peace. What I want is to penetrate utterly to the truth of what it is to be human, alive, and then to live there. I am reminded of Rinzai's remark. I do not want to be 'like one who, having found copper, gives up the search for gold'. Perhaps my way is slower than yours. I do have to (as you say) follow my heart.

John: I trust this type of direct open communication is what we both enjoy and value. When you say, 'What I want is to penetrate utterly to the truth of what it is to be human, alive, and then to live there', your own recognition reveals that there is some catch in this statement. The obvious question is: Who are you referring to in this statement? These types of statements seem natural enough, but they do bring back in the reference to the imagined self-centre. Hence, there is a note of limitation, future attainment, becoming and diminution of experience when the concept is taken 'on board'.

This type of problem also arises in notions such as 'embodiment', 'going deeper', 'living the teaching', 'bringing the understanding to all aspects of my life', etc. The hidden catch in these notions, which is almost never exposed, is that they imply that the present experience is insufficient, limited, bounded, etc. They also imply some future, better state. So one is back on the wheel of becoming as an entity evolving to the future. It is the same old story, but wrapped in an attractive spiritual garb. There is 'no one' to live 'there' because what is real is now, and the entity is merely a convenient mental fiction, not your real nature. 'You' do not need to live 'there', because you are life itself, ever expressing and manifesting itself always here and now. When you see that the universe erupts and blossoms each moment in your heart, all notions of being a person in need of living some imagined truth in the future dissolves.

Do not forget the key note of non-duality. As was stated in some Buddhist traditions, 'Your own mind is the Buddha'. What is taught in popular spiritual formats is duality, pure and simple. That is why it is popular—because it aligns with the commonly held notions the seekers already have. This is basically that 'I am not there yet, and will have something better in the future'. This is a total denial of the non-duality message: You *are* the reality, the totality. You are whole,

perfect and complete now. Any other notion is purely an assumed concept.

One in Love

Question: My wife, who has pretty well ignored whatever I read, study, think and write about, has recently found my website on non-duality. I was not hiding it from her. It just did not seem like anything she would be interested in. She is now coming up with questions like, 'Well, if there is no me and no you, then who loves whom?' 'If this is the way you see it, then it does not mean anything if you say you love me'. I tried telling her that essentially we are all love and that there is only that, and so there is even a deeper love expressing, but that did not seem to wash. She is religious, so I told her that essentially God is moving everything, making everything and creating this existence moment by moment, expressing in everything. But that did not really help.

I was prepared to handle speaking to anyone with interest in this subject and giving some pointers. But for one who thinks that there can be no relationship without the idea of a separate self, and that I must be on board with duality to function in such a relationship, I have no answer! I know that whatever happens just happens, but there was no intention to drive her away, and in reality there is no one doing that to anyone. But on the relative level, that may happen. This is just dealing directly with an ego that wants nothing to do with non-duality. I do not have a good answer for a 'mind' that has no desire to embrace this teaching, that could not grasp it if it wanted to. Everything just happens. The body-mind feels love and compassion arising, feels the need to protect the family. None of that has changed. There is just no entity there to do any of it. She just wants the whole package, that is, the appearance plus my belief in it as well. I told her it was not a requirement for her to buy any of this.

Is there any advice that you can offer? Non-duality is freedom in the utmost sense of the word. If anything, the (my) body-mind has

been a lot easier for her to live with, as it does not dwell on things, does not get angry and stay that way like it once did. If I cannot answer this question for 'myself', I probably should not be handing out pointers to anyone else! I appreciate any advice you can give.

John: As you can see, these pointers are primarily of use to those who are seriously interested in them. On the other hand, there are ways to be creative and flexible in order to make peace in the household! Basically, the idea is to find a point of mutual understanding. It sounds like the notion of 'no self' is very foreign to your wife. She appears to be trying to understand it through some pre-existing conceptions. If you can tie your points into something she can relate to, then she will gain a better appreciation of where you are coming from.

For example, all religious teachings are really about the abandonment of the sense of selfish will. Everyone sees the virtue of selflessness. Saint Paul said, 'I die daily'. Jesus said, 'Only by giving up one's life can one save it'. There are many other examples. The 'I' is really the false, egoic image or belief of standing outside or higher than reality or God. In Christian terms, this is called living as the fleshly man or some such. Saint Francis said, 'Not my will, but thine'. Such pointers are endless. Living life from a self-centred position of 'I, me, mine' leads to selfishness and suffering. The relinquishment of this position is synonymous with love, joy and connection with spirit. So what needs to be pointed out when talking about 'no self' is that it means the dropping of the false ideas and erroneous beliefs about who we are. It is not that we do not exist. It is that the ideas about who we are, are distorted and lead to misery, isolation and suffering. All was well in the Garden of Eden as long as Adam and Eve lived in oneness with God. Once they ate of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, they developed a pride of being apart from God's will. This pride is the belief in separate existence apart from the harmony of God. This belief is the self-centre that we are negating or showing as erroneous. We are not negating you, but only the false or limited ideas you have about yourself. This is what all the saints and scriptures are doing when they advocate selfless living based on the recognition of God and the value of others (as

opposed to one's selfishness identity). This is really the underlying message of the Gospels and all religion.

It is up to you to find a creative way to point this out! In this world of appearances, the appearances of 'I' and 'you' will continue, so your wife need not have any fear about that. However, it can be noticed that the sweetness of love, even in this life, is the merging of the sense of 'I' and 'you'. In love, the separate 'I' sense dissolves. The power of love is the dissolution of the rigid sense of 'me'. The husband and wife become one. The parent abandons his or her own interests for the good of the child. In all of the beautiful and deep moments of life, the 'I' concept is relinquished. Life with the 'I' is life at its deepest and most profound. This is what everyone longs for intuitively. Life concerned with 'me, me, me' is barren and empty. For all people, the dissolution of the 'I' sense and the feeling of oneness is the deepest and most fulfilling. That is all we are talking about, really. Anyway, you get the point. See if you can find a way to connect the dots for your wife. Then she will understand that outwardly you appear as two, but in the heart you are one in love.

You Are Perfect and Complete

Question: Your comments to me generate a sense of annoyance, because I feel like you just pick apart my words and the underlying message is lost! As you say, words can never truly describe this. But then I stop, take a few breaths and really look into your words to see what is here. You are right. There is no shift needed to happen to be what I am. But it seems to the mind that there is a shift in perception of consciously being reality. How can there not be? I am looking into this presently. There is an idea that the perception of the world will be different when I consciously am what I am, versus completely identifying with the body. I (as Jasmine) base this on descriptions I have heard and read of what it is like to consciously be awareness and, even though they vary, they certainly do not sound like the experience of being completely identified with a body. I currently know what it is like to be identified (even though that identification appears to be slipping somewhat) and when things seem different, there is looking for proof that something is 'happening'. My conclusion is that it must be awareness growing.

I can see that whatever can be imagined is not it, but I cling to the idea that whatever it is, it will be different. I can see that this tendency has been there for awhile. It used to manifest with ideas such as 'I do not want to be with people, so this must be a sign that I am making progress' or 'Now I want to be back involved in the world, so that must be progress'. After a few rounds of that, I could see that it was completely irrelevant to awareness, and I stopped trying to read anything into it. But it appears that there is still looking for signs, just in a different place. Something is trying to grasp at something, trying to make sense of things. But they do not make any sense. The mind wants to understand the mystery, and even that mind is just a concept. It is enough to create a headache!

John: I am not attempting to pick apart your words for the sadistic pleasure of it! I am only trying to bring to light any unexamined notions of duality that may be hanging in the shadows. All the notions of attempting to become conscious of awareness, looking for different appearances or experiences, comparing one's experience with others, etc., are bound to end in frustration.

Let us look at the idea of trying to become conscious of awareness. This implies a 'you' and something other (awareness). This brings in the notions of time, self, doership, etc. So, when I challenge this a bit, I am only trying to expose the underlying concepts. Rather than moving ahead with a subtle notion of being an 'I' apart from reality, it is better to pause the conceptualising a moment and see what you actually are. Consciousness cannot be denied presently. Nor can you say you stand outside or apart from that, can you? There is nothing wrong with doubtless consciousness. Nor is there anything wrong with you, because this is what you are. You are not a spiritual seeker. You are reality itself. The trick, so to speak, is to see what you are, rather than being pulled around by the mind's concepts.

Also, do not mix up relative states and affairs of the body, etc., with what we are talking about. The bodily states can be dealt with at their level. For example, if your body is tired, this does not mean anything about your nature or condition. In seeing (and being) what you are, the world is no longer viewed through the erroneous self-centred beliefs. In this sense, the world does look different. However, this is an organic and natural side effect of being clear about your real nature. If we turn it into some goal, we are just pursuing appearances, not seeing our natural being as it is, now and ever.

Awareness does not grow! Only things grow. Awareness is not a 'thing'. Still, I have a sense of what you are getting at. A clearer way to express this, in my view, is that the interest falls out of self-centred concepts. But the natural state always remains as it is.

The mind is only a term for thoughts. Thoughts are dead images, labels, words, memories. In this sense, the mind cannot understand anything. Do you use the mind to know you are? No. What we are

talking about is prior to the mind. It is very helpful to get the point that mind does not understand spirituality at all. It never will, because the mind deals in concepts, and reality is not a concept. Your mind will be much happier by seeing that spirituality is not grasped by the mind. The mind is useful for relative affairs, but cannot understand what we are talking about.

As Bob Adamson says, 'What is wrong with right now unless you are thinking about it?'. In truth, there is nothing that needs to be understood, grasped, attained, etc. What you are is perfect and complete. It is only the interest in concepts that keeps us looking away from what is present. As one Zen text says, 'Do not pursue truth. Only cease to cherish opinions (concepts)'. Therefore, what we are doing is wrapping up the show by challenging and dismantling any unexamined concepts.

There Are Not Two Selves

Question: I have an area of focus on which I can use some perspective. I would appreciate your input. I am not sure I can ask the question in a way that accurately reflects the fuzziness I have, but will try. There are two points about which I am unsure. First, the appearance of the separate 'me' needs awareness in order to manifest, but the converse is not true, namely, that the idea of 'me' is not required to be aware of awareness.

John: All this is true, except for the last phrase. There is no need to be aware of awareness. Awareness is. It is non-dual. And there is no one or no thing to stand apart from it to be aware of it. This is a subtle misconception. 'You' are not aware of awareness. Awareness cognises all appearance, including the notion of a 'you' (or anything else).

Q: Second, the 'me' concept is a created reference point that, when believed to be reality, shapes experiences and seeks to sustain itself by linking to thoughts and experiences that support it, while distancing from or rejecting concepts that disaffirm it.

John: Precisely true.

Q: Knowing that 'it' does not really exist except in appearance results in suffering based on the fear and desire associated with holding on to the 'me', which is itself tenuous to begin with.

John: No! Not knowing that it is an appearance results in suffering, due to a belief in the reality of that illusory reference point. Knowing it to be an appearance eradicates the false belief and consequent suffering (which is really self-referencing thinking).

Q: Phrases that come up in conversation at times are 'I am out of control', or 'I hate myself', or even 'Why do I let myself do that?' I have become very curious about such language and wonder if through examination a powerful pointer to reality can emerge.

John: These are only provisional statements, convenient ways of speaking. The only problem is taking oneself (one's real being) to be that fictitious entity. See the concept as a concept and there is no problem using ordinary language. Just as you currently use your name, but you know you are not your name.

Q: The suggestion in the phrases is that there is an awareness of actions that seem to be out of alignment with a separate concept of 'me'. This seems to imply duality: the 'I' that is observing and the 'self' that is being observed.

John: The concepts themselves are appearances. What you are is the abiding reality. In truth, all is the one essence. It is not the activities that are out of alignment. Rather, erroneous conceptualising interprets the activities in reference to a non-existent self and its associated belief structures.

Q: Is the 'I' in this case both subject and object?

John: There is no 'I' without the thought of it. Otherwise, there is only non-personal knowing itself, that is, knowing without reference to the self-centre concept.

Q: Is it only non-conceptual awareness, while the concept of 'me' is false?

John: The awareness (or being itself) cannot be false, as it cannot be negated at any time. Clearly, the 'I' concept is only a provisional appearance. It is useful as a concept, but not to be equated with the abiding reality. The metaphysical 'problem' was overlooking the abiding reality and projecting the sense of being or conscious

presence (your real nature) onto the 'I' concept and its associated notions (I am this; I am that).

Q: I guess the key question may centre on whether such phrases highlight directly the absurdity of there being two of me, namely 'I' the observer and 'me' the individual.

John: There is your real nature, what you are, and the conceptual representation of 'I' in the mind. One is real; one is only appearance. There are not two selves, but there is a 'real' self and a notional idea of self. Seeing the concept as a concept ends the erroneous identification.

It is very good to explore this stuff, as it exposes the root of the problem. In this direct looking, you clarify what you are (being-awareness) and what you are not (the conceptual notion of 'I' projected in thought). One is a reality; one is only a lifeless image. The confusion (i.e., the fusing together) of the two is the basic misunderstanding and the root of the imagined bondage. Note well: *imagined* bondage.

The Beautiful Rose of Conscious Presence

Question: I must confess I have had some up and down moments today. I have been feeling like I just do not get it, but I am trying to notice what does not change, which I take to be awareness. I feel like every moment I am attending to the details of life is time that I am wasting. I am sure that is not right. The only time I feel like I am not 'wasting my life' is when I am sitting and meditating or listening to satsang. Again, I know I am missing the boat with those feelings. I sat for a few hours, still confused, but contemplating and looking. Last night I woke up with anxiety and tried to see who was anxious, etc. I have had moments of hopelessness of getting this. But then I tried to see that they were just thoughts, and that I was still here and unaffected.

John: All of this is nothing more than thoughts, ideas and concepts being generated by the mind. These ideas are for, by and about 'I', the conceptual self centre. This is not what you are at all. So do not take on board these notions about a character that was never your real identity in the first place. How do these ideas apply to you who are the supreme reality itself? Who is this 'I' who is wasting her life, sitting, meditating, listening, etc.? It is only the fictional ego itself. Therefore these notions only feed and perpetuate the stories and identities in the mind. Over the years, we pick up all types of half-baked notions about who and what we are, including all the spiritual notions from books, teachers, etc. It is all misleading and off the point. Pause all the thoughts, the concepts, the spiritual pointers and directives. What is wrong with right now if you are not thinking about it? How far away are you from being, from natural awareness? There is no distance at all.

Meditation and inquiry itself become, for many, another set of concepts to fatten the illusory self-centre. So the following words of advice from Tilopa to Naropa may have some relevance here:

Let go of what has passed.

Let go of what may come.

Let go of what is happening right now.

Do not analyse.

Do not meditate.

Just be.

Notice the difference between simple being and thought. Simple being is all this ever was, is and will be. Nothing more. Without following the concepts, the undeniable being-awareness is peace itself. Get friendly with this. Let the seeds germinate. Spirituality is not an activity to be done at intervals. It is the ever-present state of being that shines incessantly as the essence of each and every moment of experience.

Do not over-medicate! Do not tie yourself in knots. Live your life with grace and ease and do what is needful. Gently take note, when convenient, of the simple sense of being. Get to know this ever-present flower, the beautiful rose of conscious presence shining naturally in your heart. All of life is constantly unfolding within the embrace of this gentle, yet changeless and constant light of your natural state.

No Distance

Question: Let me tell you something still very difficult for me to penetrate. The nakedness of this awareness seems so independent from the mind that for me to understand it looks impossible. On the other hand, this seems absurd, because it is the most obvious thing. Apparently, a few times clarity appeared for me. But mostly it is overwhelmed by the reaction of thoughts. Sometimes, a truly horrible sense of frustration follows. The mind becomes afraid of losing power and control, being very threatened by simple looking. My point is that I cannot believe the whole thing is so nakedly simple, that awareness is simply what I am, full stop.

I tend automatically to separate the good moments (vast space where I can see my existence as awareness) and difficult and obscure ones (where the intensity of the thoughts gets me back into troublesome identifications with my story). Those last ones are so much prevailing in my experience.

John: Who is trying to penetrate anything? That is only searching by a phantom character for water in a mirage! You *are*. That cannot be denied. Instead of looking for anything, just stop and see the nature of what is already present. The mark of reality or truth is total simplicity. The mind and its creation of the 'me' can never know this. Why? Because 'this' is prior to conceptualising. So give up the game. The answer is not in the mind. Until this point is clear, one searches in vain. One waits before a picture of a painted door hoping that it will open someday. Your real being does not need to be grasped, penetrated or known because it is already present and cannot be obtained. Before anything else appears, you must be there as the one to whom it appears. This prior being is what is being

pointed to. The path to it is: full stop. How far are you from being present and aware right now? No distance. This is the answer.

Being Is the Changeless Constant

Question: I was hospitalised overnight two weeks ago due to dehydration caused by a severe migraine. I only remember telling my husband that I did not feel well. The next thing I remember I was waking up in a hospital room. I am fine now, but this experience brings me to a question. You stated once, 'In all experiencing, can you say that you ever stopped being present?' My answer to that is 'Yes', for I have no recall of being present during the hospital experience. What happened to that sense of being, of presence, of awareness? Even when I wake up in the morning, there seems to be some knowing of having slept, having dreams and not having dreams. But in the experience I am relating, there was none of that knowing. What is the understanding that I am missing?

John: Memory, thought function, perceiving, etc., sometime come to rest. But you do not stop being what you are. Recalling is a function that comes and goes. You say you had no recall of being present. Yes! The act of recalling is still a function that comes and goes. To whom? To you. There is clear knowing that there was no knowing! It is so simple we keep overlooking this point! You say, 'Even when I wake up in the morning there seems to be some knowing of having slept, having dreams and not having dreams'. This is exactly it. So your actual being is doubtless all the way through.

These types of questions and issues are still a diversion from the simplicity of this. I see you have a very well-trained mind, through years of psychological studies! But though that may be useful for studying the mind and appearances, it is not so useful for direct knowing of what you are. It is too simple for the mind to grasp. That is why you will never find the answer in the mind. Before the next thought, question or doubt appears, you are there. You are

doubtlessly present. All the questions, doubts, what ifs, buts, etc., are resident in the thought content. That is all well and good, but the interest in the mind content keeps one from looking at the simplicity of this.

In looking as I am suggesting, you see the simple fact that this being, your own existence, is the changeless constant. It is doubtless, clear, beyond questions and undeniable—not theoretically, but factually. It is the very ground from which the mind, the body and the universe emerge.

Listen to the Sailor

Question: The ocean has been lapping up the individual wave more and more ...

John: Be thorough and clear on this. The imaginary individual does not progressively disappear! One does not see through the mirage by slowly bailing the water out of it cup by cup! All troubles are for this conceptual 'I', not your actual being. So the most direct approach is a head-on investigation of the reality of the separate 'I' posited in thought. Where is it? What is it? Did we ever see it?

Q: Through seeing what is, the false sense of 'I' is seen for what it is, an illusion.

John: Yes. And if it is an illusion, that means it never existed. The cause of all the problems never was present in the first place. If the cause of the problems has never been present, then what happens to the problems!

Q: Still, in my case there is the matter of a longstanding relationship that has kept the idea of a person going.

John: Nothing external keeps the false 'I' going. This is a bit of backwards logic! What keeps the 'I' going is the continued belief in it. External events do not generate that belief. Such faulty logic is a way that the mind tries to slip out of the directness of this inquiry.

Q: Now, even that concept has been battered by the ocean to give up its last vestige.

John: Well, there is the slow approach in which the belief in the 'I' is held and maintained and gradually relinquished—or else we can see the basic points and clear it up now. My vote is for the latter, the quicker and more painless approach!

Q: After twenty-one years, sadness, relief, turmoil and peace come up, are seen and disappear.

John: This is and always has been the truth of it. In what do those things come up and disappear? What sees them? Only that non-divided, ever-present, pure awareness itself. You are that. In seeing this, you are home—because were you ever anything other than that?

Q: In times of distress, however

John: This only happens when the self-centred thoughts come up and a bit of belief goes into the 'I' notion. What happens? One overlooks the natural state and assumes one is something one is not—a defective, limited 'I', instead of the clear, pure sky of knowledge that contains everything.

Q: The only thing that seems to bring 'me' back to reality are the words of 'Sailor' Bob Adamson: 'What is wrong with right now unless you think about it'.

John: This is one of those profound statements that contains all the essential points. All suffering is created and sustained in conceptual thought. It comes and goes in what you are, which is that changeless, clear, undivided being-awareness that has been forever undefined by the mind. Nothing needs to be attained because this is what you are from the start.

Q: Knowing that what is true is true always, I am praying for the strength to stand alone, with and as the 'all one'. Do you have any words for smooth sailing?

John: Listen to the sailor! Start with the one thing you are sure of—the fact of your own being. Right from the start, you are that. The separate self is a fiction, a mere appearance coming and going in the brilliant light of the doubtless true nature.

All Experiences Are That in Essence

Question: There is deep gratitude for your books and the weekly updates on your web site. These pointers of yours seem like the culmination of thirty-six years of searching.

John: The searching reveals that what you were searching for you already are!

Q: I would like to investigate the value of experiences.

John: Value implies someone for whom there is value. Experiences are experiences. They have their value or utility in the scheme of things, no doubt. But if the separate individual is seen as a fictitious reference point, there is no one left to need them or take delivery of them.

Q: The starting point is that present awareness is always present and is illuminating all thoughts. Experiences never change that truth.

John: Also, experiences are only the appearances of that truth. There is no duality. To talk of experiences as some independent or separate reality is to grant an unwarranted dualism. All experiences are that in essence. There is only that. This is how and why the interest in experiences fades. It is all 'one taste' as they say. Seeking experiences does imply some flavor of duality, either of the presence of the individual or the assumed separation of appearances from the source.

Q: It seems that experiences like satori, no-mind or other 'spiritual experiences' do not affect reality, which is seen to have always been present. However, they do affect the mind, which after the 'spiritual

experience' is much more likely to be a servant to reality, rather than acting as the leader of a non-existent individual.

John: The 'mind' is also a notion! It is a concept! So be careful of speaking of it as if it were some actual independent thing. If there is no mind as such, then what actually needs to be a servant of reality? There are moment-by-moment thought appearances. What are they? They are the crests and troughs of waves on the sea of the cognising emptiness itself, the natural state. They are that also.

Q: As I see it, the value of 'spiritual experiences' is to help the mind become more in tune with reality.

John: Again, this is only if the independent existence of the mind is assumed. That is a makeshift concept. If (and only if) that is assumed, the notion may have some relative usefulness for a time. But just be aware that the whole position is based on the assumed reality of something that is not ultimately present. It is like the old Zen story. The monk approaches the master and says that his mind has been troubling him. He asks if the master can free him of his mind. The master asks the monk to show him his mind. After a few moments of searching, the monk says, 'I cannot find the mind'. The master says, 'There! I have freed you of the mind'. The moral of the story is not to create false problems and then go looking for solutions. You may find many! But they all collapse when you look deeply into your original assumptions.

Q: It seems that pure intellectual understanding can attune the mind to reality.

John: This is a somewhat artificial distinction. You know something or you do not! Intellectual understanding is not much of an understanding to speak of! So I would rather not assume it is any understanding at all. If you know something, then the reality of it is clear. Then there is no need to continue the discussion with the distinction of 'intellectual' versus 'experiential'. Experiences per se are not understanding. You can have experiences galore (a still

mind, samadhi, subtle states, etc). None of this is the same as clear understanding of the facts (direct wisdom or insight). Experiences may (may!) have some value if they are evaluated in the light of understanding. This does not always happen. In fact, it usually does not happen.

Q: But 'spiritual experiences' lend a degree of tangibility, which is helpful to the mind's understanding.

John: Direct experience is better than mere theory. But experience needs to be understood with wisdom. According to traditional teachings, sentient beings have been cycling in appearances for eons, racking up endless experiences. There is no freedom in experiences per se. Also, be clear: the mind is not the tool used for self-knowledge. The mind cannot know what is prior to the mind, that is, your natural state or real being. So do not get the idea that mind is what is being used for this!

Consciousness and Awareness

Question: I have been confused about the differentiation between awareness and consciousness. When you say you see the coming and going of consciousness what does that mean? Are you talking about sleep? Or are you saying consciousness is the changing sensations and thoughts? To answer my question, I think you have to define the two, because I always thought awareness and consciousness were the same thing.

John: There are different ways of talking about this. So it depends on how you define your terms. In deep sleep, you are not conscious in the normal sense of the word. You were there, but not self-aware. You could say that awareness was there, but not aware of anything other (awareness unaware of itself). It is non-dual. At some moment 'you' became conscious of being. You knew 'I am', 'I am present'. That experience was not present in deep sleep. You were, but you did not know you were. That event or occurrence (of knowing 'I am') is an appearance, experience or state. All other objective appearances arise in that, or following that. In this style of talking there is a distinction made between consciousness-as-a-state and the prior or original source, which some have termed as non-conceptual awareness or non-dual being. Keep in mind that this is only one way of talking about this. I happen to find it a useful and accurate way of talking about experience. Also keep in mind that even in approaches such as Vedanta, 'consciousness' is not the absolute, but only a very refined pointer to it. As it always says in the scriptures, the true self is neither being nor non-being, neither conscious (knowledge) or unconscious (ignorance). All words and pointers turn back.

What is being pointed to here can be easily verified by looking at direct experience. Sometimes you are conscious (waking, dreaming), sometimes not (sleep, unconsciousness, under anesthetic, etc.). The experience of being conscious or unconscious is registered by your primordial natural condition which, properly, cannot be termed conscious or unconscious, as it transcends (and includes) both.

Some approaches do not look at it in as fine-grained a manner, which is also fine. Some say that consciousness remains constant even in deep sleep. It is a simpler pointer, which is perhaps easier to grasp for some. I happen to find the way I am speaking about consciousness and awareness in this manner more clear and accurate to experience. Past a point, however, you need to look beyond the words. You are not a word!

This Is Not a Meditative Achievement

Question: I was wondering if I could ask a question about a meditation I had. Last year, there were many of them, very much along the lines of a description you once wrote: 'The first object of knowing was pure space, vast and empty of all content'. The meditations were more profound if trust was part of the mix. At the beginning of this year, I began noticing that those meditations did not seem to go anywhere. I began wondering if there would just be this expansiveness and that would be it. Then those expansive meditations gave way to contraction—identifying with an individual again. You once wrote of 'three recognitions'. Did these happen at once, or was there time involved in that evolution? This may be too much thinking! Any help with this would be greatly appreciated.

John: Descriptions are framed in words, which tend to come out in a linear fashion, as steps and stages. So you need to take such statements as provisional. I do not speak in terms of 'meditations', which can seem like events that happen in time. As many have said, all experiences have a beginning—and an end. The point is to be clear on the basic facts of what you are. Because your being is a given and you already are whatever you are, there will never be an attainment or 'experience' of your true self at any time. Your being does not happen, is not an event and does not appear as a result of meditation, trust or any other factor. Why? Because it is all much simpler than that! Nor is this to be achieved in time or as a process. Why? Because what you are is already fully present and beyond doubt. That is why absolutely no liberation is called for. So the first 'step' is to have a straight look and be clear on this ever-present self that you already are. Whatever comes and goes is not the essence of your abiding, doubtless nature. So all the objects and appearances (perceptions, feelings, thoughts) are not what is being

pointed to. What is left? Only that awake, aware sense of being. That is all that remains. It is so simple, we overlook the obvious. This awake-presence is 'no thing' that can be grasped by the mind, but it cannot be denied. It is clear, doubtless, ever-present, ever-attained, beginningless, endless, unconditioned and naturally shining at all times. That is the simplicity and finality of what you are. Again no realisation is required, as your real self is doubtlessly real. You are that here and now, so full stop!

Overlooking this simple point, the mind represents who we are as the thought 'I' in the mind. This is really the reflection of pure being as a representation in thought. Nobody was ever the 'I' notion. However, this point is not noticed due to a basic, innocent ignorance. This conceptual representation of the self in thought is the ego, person or entity, which we have assumed to be what we are. The interest and belief only goes to that notion as long as the basic truth of our nature is not seen as it is. What drives the return to the individuality is a lack of certainty and clarity regarding our natural state of being. Once you see that you are not a concept but the non-conceptual reality itself, the identification with the 'I' notion in thought fades naturally. How can you return to identifying with something clearly recognised as not what you are? This is what cuts the identification conclusively.

Also, the 'I' thought is only a notion, a mere word or image in the mind. What reality does a word have? Can that be what you are? And what actual person or entity is referred to by that notion 'I'? Where is this actual separate person? Direct looking shows it is not present. The curtain rings down on the whole spiritual quest when these basic points are seen.

The perspective I was sharing in the writing you refer to was that:

- All objects appear in space.
- Space appears in consciousness.
- Consciousness and unconsciousness appear in what you are.

- Therefore, you are the primordial source, the stateless state, prior to all concepts.

This is not a meditative achievement, but just a pointing to the facts of experience. You have never been an individual or any other concept appearing in the mind. It is as simple as that. The notion of having meditations as experiences is still in reference to the assumed identity as a defective individual in need of meditations! You are not an individual, which is only a notion coming and going in thought. You are that supreme reality itself. Do not let anyone tell you differently! Non-duality is not a progressive achievement in time. It is timelessly present and ever-attained, ever-realised as your natural state.

You Are Here Now, as Clear as a Bell

Questioner: I am having an interesting time looking into things. The question I am exploring is: 'Am I the thoughts or the thinker?' I can see that neither is the case. I can see a subsistent layer that is previous to, underneath and after thoughts. That I can only call being. It is an energy, a force that supports and is a background to thoughts, if you will. It is clear. When I forget myself, there is peace, even love and compassion as a default mode. As J. Krishnamurti put it, 'There is love where there is self-forgetting'. So often in my life I have identified with thinking. But the thinking is not under my control. It happens. If you asked me, 'Can you with certainty tell me what your next thought is going to be?', honestly, I cannot tell you. It appears that all this simply happens. To what? Something that is here now. Where?

John: This is direct and clear seeing based on experience. The 'proper' place 'to go' at this point is: 'full stop'. See what is present in this pause, this background. After all, the thoughts are coming and going, so whatever you are must be in the background. At this point, you are off of the conceptual mind track and must proceed, so to speak, by non-conceptual immediate experience. As you say, 'When I forget myself there is peace, even love and compassion as a default mode'. Where else do you need to go from there? Get familiar and friendly with this, your natural state prior to thought. The pointers are only to bring you to this point. They have done their work to get you to see what you are seeing. The point has always been to clarify your identity. As you say, up till now you have identified as thought. This belief cannot be sustained.

Q: But there is a brick wall at this point. I can only say at this point : 'I do not know'. I cannot see beyond this. Am I the body? Well, cut off

my foot and am I there? Do I cease to be? No. Cut off both legs and both arms. Do I cease to be? No. Cut out my nervous system. Pull out the brain and all the nerves. I am not certain, but I do not think I could posit anything but silence with no awareness. Where am I then? Where is that which is referred to by the pronoun and thought 'I'?

John: This is all thoughts or concepts. It is also bringing in time ('then') and you are no longer looking at immediate experience. This is a sure sign the looking is drifting into conceptualising. Everything, including bodies and all appearances, come and go in what you are. Even now the body and its states are constantly coming and going. What of it? You still are. The body is really just a concept anyhow. It is a label for an ever-changing flux of sensations that are coming and going in that prior-to-thought presence of what you are. See how, even now, that flow in its arising and passing is not touching what you are.

Q: John! I cannot with any certainty say that I precede the body or go on after it because the very mechanism of seeing and perception of sentience is in the central and peripheral nervous system. We talk in non-duality circles about seeing happening. Cut out a brain and nerves and how exactly am I to see anything?

John: Of course, you won't. You will not even be conscious. But consciousness itself comes and goes out of what you actually are.

Q: I repeat. How I can with any certainty say that that which I am comes before the body? The brain and nerves are part of it, and that is where the seeing happens. I guarantee you that if you did a CAT scan on a brain that was looking into the space between the thoughts, looking at the false premise that I am the thoughts, looking even at that which I am before and after thinking, etc., there would be a physical or chemical reaction taking place.

John: How could that which is prior to or between thoughts be measured by some objective instrument? It could show a relative a

gap between brain waves or whatever, but it could not describe or capture what is actually in the gap.

Q: Something is happening because the brain is happening.

John: Yes, but your being is not happening. That is the key. You are equating being with brain function, perception or relative consciousness. What non-duality is pointing to is not at the level of appearances.

Q: The brain is part of the body and sentience seeing itself is registered in it. They have done brain scans on monks piercing the mind of emptiness. Guess what? The brain changes as they deepen their meditation. In fact, the prolonged years of seeing into emptiness changes their brain chemistry. It is evident on brain scans.

John: Yes, that may be so. But what you are advocating is pure materialism. You are neither proving nor disproving non-conceptual, non-objective reality. By definition, that cannot be measured by instruments.

Let us take stock for a moment. What you are doing presently is a lot of conceptualising! What has happened to that clear 'peace, even love and compassion as a default mode' in all of this? Do not lose sight of the purpose of this whole endeavor.

Q: I have seen people die many times, as I work in emergency rooms. When a dead body is before you, the brain is dead, the heart is dead and the lungs are dead. The animating principle, the being, is no longer apparent. Furthermore, you cannot demonstrate in any way that being is still there.

John: Nor are you disproving it. But the bottom line is that you are here now, as clear as a bell. That is what is being looked away from once discussions like this get rolling!

Q: If we are told that we can see what preexists and survives the body, I say that such a thing cannot be demonstrated nor honestly seen.

John: Look at your own doubtless existence right now. Is that a 'thing' you can grasp, measure or define objectively? You are assuming that your being is an object, somehow tied to the body. Is it? Remember, we are not talking about perception, thought and brain-based consciousness. Those are clearly coming and going and tied to bodily functioning. There is no question of that. However, there is a question about whether or not the identification of your being with those things is warranted. So far, you have neither proved it nor disproved it. Keep in mind that the instruments you are attempting to use to prove it are the body and mind themselves. So you are arguing in a circle. In fact, there is no answer at that level. That is why the answer is not in the mind, assuming there is a mind (that is a different discussion!). Still, there is no doubt about your existence, so you are going to have to approach that recognition in some more conclusive direction.

Q: That which we are is supposedly before the body comes into existence and after the body has died. I realise that I cannot honestly say that being does not preexist the body nor go on after it. However, I can say I do not believe that can be seen. But that does not mean that what the non-duality teachers say about being coming before and after physical existence is, in fact, untrue.

John: Exactly. At least we need to be honest and not dogmatically assert something that is not proven.

Q: But what I am saying here is that no matter how much we talk about mind not being able to grasp 'no thing', we can intuit, sense it, and know it even. But that is taking place in the tissues of the body. There is no certain way to say it comes before and after the physical existence.

John: That is why you will never find the answer at the level of thought. So basically, you are looking in the wrong direction. You are trying to use the mind to understand what you have already admitted is prior to the mind.

Q: I am in the middle of a big fat 'do-not-know mind' about these questions.

John: Compare this to your prior experience of 'when I forget myself there is peace, even love and compassion as a default mode'. There was no doubt about that! But when the looking and questioning returned to the conceptual mind, you ended up in doubt. The path is clear: love or doubt. Your own experience shows the way.

Q: Although I have asked 'Who am I?', I can only say, 'I do not know'. It only opens a book of mystery.

John: But only if you try to grasp it in the mind.

Q: I do feel peace at this moment. It is so strange.

John: Being is not an object to be grasped or framed by the conceptual mind. Doing so leads to confusion and doubt. Pausing the thought reveals doubtless peace and love. In that, questions about the fate of some ephemeral 'food body' dissolve into irrelevance. Love could care less whether some bag of bones tucked away in some remote corner of the Milky Way galaxy is animated or not. As if the primordial substance from which the universe emerges depends on the fate of one body!

Q: I have hit a brick wall with the pointers. I cannot honestly get around it.

John: Pause the thought and abide in that doubtless clarity and peace that cannot be denied. Or go back into the mind for one more spin around the track!

Q: I am not going to pretend that being and awareness are separate from the workings of the central and peripheral nervous systems in conjunction with the organic whole of the human body. I simply cannot demonstrate it nor see that fact. Therefore, I cannot say that. Likewise, neither can I say someone is wrong for saying it is so.

John: Still, you have never contradicted your being in all of this speculation.

Q: With all respect and courtesy, I am just trying to lay it out as I see it. And I do not see it.

John: You do not see it, because it is your being and your being is not a thing. It never was. It will never be seen by the senses or mind. On the other hand, it cannot be doubted either.

Q: An ironic thing is that this discussion leaves 'me' quiet. All this comes down to 'not knowing'. And all things seem possible.

John: Knowing or not knowing are only modes coming and going in doubtless being. Being can never be known or unknown as an object. It is the basis or ground of all experiencing, but it is not limited to the experiencing either.

Decisions, Decisions

Question: I think what ties me up is the idea of decisions. Do I make decisions? If so, who is this 'I' making a decision? Is the decision just an illusion? In other words, whatever occurred simply occurred. Because it appeared as something I did or did not do, I call it a decision, and I am caught in the subject-object dualism. Bad decisions bring about a bad feeling, and good decisions bring about a good feeling. It may sound like I am overcomplicating things, but it is hard to see clearly that decisions, occurrences, causes and effects are just happening without any influence from my mind, body or even my consciousness.

You mentioned that you dropped some weight at one time. When I brought it up, you said you were still looking to drop a few more pounds. There was some sort of motivation there to lose weight and then a decision was made. What drove the motivation and who made the decision?

John: You say, 'It is hard to see clearly that decisions, occurrences, causes and effects are just happening without any influence from my mind, body or even my consciousness'. Wrong interpretation! Of course decisions are happening and all of those things contribute to them. What else? And none of that is a problem—ever! Who is having the problem? Who is pinned in the conflict? Who is taking responsibility? Who is unhappy with the outcomes? Only the 'I'. So the 'I' notion is at the root of the issues, not the mere happenings of events and activities. That is why the 'I' is the root of conceptual troubles, not the events or activities themselves. So, who and what is this 'I' thought? That is the question. There is the assumption that there really is such an entity, and that whatever that is is what you are. In other words, you are that 'I'. But are you? What are you in

fact? And what is this 'I' entity in fact? These points need to be looked into.

You say, 'What drove the motivation and who made the decision?' Why is a 'who' needed? Who is breathing, growing your hair, blowing the wind? Does it have to be attributed to a 'someone', some independent controller? There is no need for a 'who' in the equation. If you look closely, you will see that there is no entity looking out of your eyes. Seeing is happening. The notion 'I am seeing' is added in later by the mind. The 'I' is notional. But your being and the activity are not notional. The main thing to be clear on is what you are, because what you are is not having any of these conceptual difficulties! Look at the mind. Are 'you' doing the thoughts, or are they appearing in consciousness spontaneously? This looking completely clarifies what we are talking about.

Look Directly into the Sense of Existence Itself

Question: There is barely a moment goes by that I do not look into what I am. I do this the first thing in the morning, last thing at night, several times on waking during the night, between each call and task at work, driving in my car, and on and on. And, yes, I know I am. I know I exist, that I am alive. But if there was no body, there would be no knowing of aliveness. Although what you seem to say suggests otherwise. Why do you think that you remain as you are even in deep sleep or death? Do not deep sleep and death point to non-existence of any knowing? I am not standing on the sidelines with this and merely philosophising. It is the very kernel at the heart of my questioning. Without a body that is alive, how could you know that you live or exist? It seems to suggest that you know something that is beyond the body. Yet how could you know that if your experience is the same as mine, that is, that you are alive and living only as a body and mind? Anything that you know comes through being alive as the body and mind that is labeled John Wheeler, as the expression of life as John Wheeler.

John: What is knowing or registering the presence of the body and even the knowing that arises based on the body? In none of this speculation have you ever denied your existence. Look directly into the sense of existence itself. That is not a thing or object at all (nor is awareness, by the way). What you are doing is continuing to favor the objects and assuming that they are all that is in the picture. That is simply not true. Even now existence is not an object. Talking about deep sleep, death, you, me, etc. is all speculation and conceptual activity. It is looking away from the sheer fact of your doubtless existence. Stick with present evidence and stay in present moment examination. Yes, there is perceiving, thinking, knowing, etc., but are those what you are? Can you equate your actual being with those

activities now? What you are doing is *thinking* about your true nature, not actually looking at it non-conceptually. Thus there is always some doubt or incompatibility in the equation.

I do not have, see, or know anything you do not have. Nor are you missing anything that any sage or prophet ever pointed to. However, you are still favoring the mind as the instrument of investigation, whereas they had realised that the mind is not fit to understand or recognise that which is prior to the mind itself. Even now your being is prior to the mind, and not in the domain of thought at all. Why? Because thought is coming and going to what you are. If you start to speculate about a future time, etc., you are moving back into conceptual thought and back to the mind. Hence your difficulty. Stay with the recognition of your actual existence here and now. Get to know this fully as it is, and the other questions and doubts will resolve themselves naturally.

You say, 'Anything that you know comes through being alive as the body and mind which is labeled John Wheeler, as the expression of life as John Wheeler.' This only applies to objects of consciousness. In those cases, what you say is true. But what you *are* is not an object of consciousness. Your assumption is false in this case. To be what you are, you do not find yourself as an object. If you think so, look again! Do not turn your existence, which is what this is all about, into an object in the appearance. This is the basic error. In truth, what is being pointed to (your actual essence) does not come within the domain of knowledge at all. So to attempt to grasp this as some experience in the domain of objective knowledge is like searching for water in a mirage. It cannot be done.

What will emerge through this looking are the following facts. What you are is not an object. What you are does not fall into the domain of knowledge at all. All such experiences are still appearing to some prior source that is forever non-objective and prior to knowledge. Keep in mind that we are not talking of some esoteric, mystical thing, but actually your present existence itself. Even now, the body-mind instruments are not utilised to establish the fact of your being. You do not use your senses or mind to be what you are. It is not even about knowing what you are, because knowing implies

a knower and known. Being what you are does not depend on knowing it as some experience or appearance. It is so simple we miss it. The body, mind, the act of knowing, etc. are all appearances arising to what you are. That has absolutely nothing to do with any of the appearances.

It is something like the figure you assume yourself to be in a dream asserting that without the dreamed body, mind and consciousness expressing in the dream, there is no existence or awareness outside of the dream. All along, in such a case, what you truly are is not confined in the dream at all. So the dream figure's assertions are groundless. His very being or essential awareness is not located in the dreamscape at all. The dreamed figure and his dream world end, but you, as that non-conceptual source, remain.

As an interesting 'exercise' you may ponder on how you would convince the dream character that his existence or true essence is not confined or defined by the dream. That is what I am attempting to do for you now.

Is There Any Suffering at All in Your Being?

Question: There seems to be something missing in this understanding.

John: This is not an understanding. It is the non-conceptual fact of awareness or being itself. That is the foundation of everything, not to mention the source of everything. It is hard to conceive of what would be missing in that.

Q: Maybe I was just hoping to get some relief from suffering by recognising the fact of my being.

John: Is there any suffering at all in your being? And who is this 'I' who is hoping to recognise some such thing as 'being'? You are in clear duality at this point! See how the mind is starting to conceptualise, based on the initial reference point of 'I'. Suddenly there is a lack, something missing, etc. It is all due to the concepts arising, nothing else. See this.

Q: I am the fact of being aware.

John: Full stop.

Q: This is obvious, but there is tension whenever I investigate this.

John: Because the notion 'I investigate' is not needed in the recognition. It brings in the 'I', time, dualism, etc. No wonder there is tension coming in. It is coming in due to the concepts. Once you have gotten the point of what you are, the investigation has done its job. There is no need to paint the rose red.

Q: I still seem to investigate this, however.

John: You do not need to investigate to be. Do not over-medicate.

Q: I have been listening or reading a lot of non-duality pointers.

John: Not an encouraging sign! Once the map has led you to your destination, what is the benefit of reading more maps? Once the meal arrives, do you continue to search the menu? Doing so would be, in fact, to miss the meal.

Q: I do not have a particular question. I can feel some sort of unresolved question. I do not know what it is, but it is there. I am sorry to be vague, but maybe there is something I am overlooking.

John: Yes. Be clear on how the conceptual mind is spinning up the dualistic thinking and generating suffering out of thin air. This must be seen. With a bit of looking, the energy of belief in it withers.

Q: That good feeling that arose when we once talked about how this awareness is everything has gone.

John: But has the awareness gone—actually? That is the point, not some ‘good feelings’. Such will clearly come and go.

Q: I cannot say I know that being aware is being everything I am aware of. I cannot say it is, nor can I say it is not. I do not know.

John: Yes, but this is only coming at it from a mental level. Mental knowledge is always doubtful. See this limitation, and realise the answer is not in the mind. It never was.

Q: I am just back to this fact: I am aware.

John: Stay with this. As Bob Adamson says, ‘What is wrong with right now if you are not thinking about it?’. See the trap of the

conceptual mind and do not step in it!

Pointing Out a Few Blind Spots

Question: Thanks for your wonderful pointers. It is like going to a good movie. I do not expect to come away from it more wise, but there is always something there to entertain, nourish and enjoy. You wrote:

You know you are. That fact cannot be denied. All experiences and states come and go, but this 'you are' sense remains. As it is the constant backdrop of everything else, it must be what you are. So the real issue in all of this is to have a clear and solid sense of what this is. You can only get so far reading about this. No amount of studying the menu is the same as eating the meal. It is the same with this self-recognition. No amount of reading about your true nature can be a replacement for looking for yourself at what your real nature is.

I myself had written the following last week:

Trying to find oneself through thinking is like trying to get dry by swimming. No matter how good of a swimmer you are, or how deeply you dive, dryness will elude you.

Then, after reading your paragraph above, I had to add an addendum this morning:

But even while swimming, surrounded by water, the dryness is there, merely covered by the water.

All of this followed a night of conflict and confusion that had me writing this last week:

If a dream character knew it was a dream character, and also knew that if the dreamer awakened it would mean the dream character would cease to exist, it would do all it could to keep the dreamer asleep, and thus prolong his own survival for a while longer. But the dream character only exists in the mind of the dreamer and has no inherent existence apart from him. The dream character has no control over whether the dreamer wakes or sleeps or continues to have him in the dream.

This followed my confusion over having what appears to be a clear insight into being the consciousness that sees this whole play, and the idea that this little 'me' that appears to be who I am takes the lead and tries to cover over that knower. Yet I do see what knows all this as well. But still, the little 'me' tries to take the forefront of who's who in this physical state. The little 'me' is this dream character mentioned above.

This made me remember a phrase I used to say a lot in my college years. While others were saying, 'You are a figment of my imagination', I found myself saying, 'I am a figment of my imagination'. Taking LSD made me question a lot of things. Experiences made me forget a lot, get attached to a lot, and drink the community Kool-Aid, so to speak. And, yes, through all of that, the one thing that was always there to watch it happen was awareness—unchanged, untainted, unaffected and unattached. Knowing this is true is self-evident. Forgetting it is habit and conditioning, which is humorous and laughable. It is pure entertainment.

John: Have a look and see what this 'little me' actually is, assuming you can find it!

Q: At best it appears to be a thought, a concept, a construct of mental habits and accruing of ideas. It is mere vapor that clouds clarity. It is only a dreamed figure that seems to the dreamer to have substance. It is a persistent thought. An analogy I previously wrote about this 'explains' it as follows:

Some time ago, after having read dozens of times in dozens of books that this was all just a dream, I had a lucid dream of climbing a ladder on the side of a building that went to the roof. As I was climbing the ladder in the dream, I was quite firmly aware that I was 'in fact' in bed; I felt the covers on me and the mattress below me. I was moving both in the dream and in the bed and aware of both of these figures. It was quite entertaining. The amazing part came when I got to the top of the ladder and there was a small tilted platform hanging over the edge of the building. It appeared very stable. Someone was asking me to walk onto it. I had 'butterflies' in my gut over the idea of trying to get there and falling, because the very thin and short skewed platform was, to my estimation, not capable of holding me. All the while I—in the dream—was talking to I in the bed. Myself in the bed was insisting that the dream 'me' do it, as there was absolutely no chance of anything happening since it was 'all but a dream'. And yet the dream 'me' was totally incapable of taking the risk, for the sense of fear was too great. There was at once a realisation that even though one might 'know' this is but a dream in consciousness, the habits and proclivities that are part of the program can be still quite alive. Although it may be obvious that this 'I' is not merely this ever-changing body, nor the ever-changing mind, nor the decider, doer, thinker that I was unquestioningly certain I was for over five decades, yet that program runs and begs to be believed. Or else it pulls the veil of that belief over the eyes so covertly that it takes over as the experiential truth. All in all, it is quite entertaining, even with the fictitious 'snake in the rope' scaring the hell out of me at times!

And yet I know the 'me' that gets frightened is as much a part of this mind stuff as the mind stuff it is scared of. What a crack up it all is.

John: So the 'me' is a thought. It is a word. All words (chair, table, man, cloud, etc.) are symbols or ciphers that point to some concrete thing. What is the concrete thing the word 'I' points to? The word 'I' cannot have a problem. How can a word have a problem? So the recipient or owner of the problems is that entity to which the word 'I'

refers. So what is that and where is it? What keeps the mind stuff in spin is the assumed existence of the 'I' entity and our identity as that. It is very liberating to look right into that assumption. Who is this 'I' who is the recipient of all the self-centred thoughts that generated any seeking, suffering and doubt?

Q: The only thing I can honestly say that the 'I' points to is the consciousness or awareness that sees this show going on, or at best makes the seeing of this show possible. But that is not the 'I' spoken of here, is it? I have looked into this a lot and found that the only entity I can find is a mind-made one. (And I am not certain what sees that concept either.) I understand there to be between 50,000 and 100,000 cells in the human body that are continuously dying and regenerating anew. So that which appears to be me physically is ever-changing and not, obviously, me. Every seven years all those cells have changed. Thoughts come from wherever they do, and concepts form from those. These too are ever-changing and certainly not a 'me'. So I have a very clear knowing, if you will, that this 'I' is neither this body nor any of the previous ever-changing forms I have called me for fifty-eight plus years. The thinking that has gone on in 'my' mind has gone through radical changes over this time, and yet there has still been a perception of one constant sense of 'me'. This consciousness seems unaffected by all the changes and turmoil of the body-mind. If this is the 'illusive obvious', it makes me smile. But feelings and emotions are powerful stimuli, and that makes the movie seem more real than the screen it is projected upon, metaphorically speaking. The 'I' that has these confusions and problems is quite obviously non-existent. Yet there is still an attachment to those feelings and emotions, as though there were really something substantial to be attached to.

John: Well, do not leave it as 'consciousness seems to be unaffected'. Have a look and nail it either way. It is or it isn't. Also do not leave it as 'consciousness'. That is really a pointer to you, your being. There is no division between you and that, is there? Be very clear and direct on what your nature actually is. No hedging or

fudging! I can ‘tell’ you what that is, based on my view, but you should be clear on it, based on your own looking.

From that position, what you are dealing with are appearances that make no change in your natural state at all. Clouds, lightning, wind and rain do not affect the sky in the least. The energy of thoughts, feelings and emotions, however intense, do not touch what you are. And they are not a problem either—ever. They are only a problem if a label or interpretation is put on them by the mind, and in that labeling they are referred to ‘me’. If they are not yours, who is it that cares? They only matter if they are for the self-centre. You now know the self-centre is a fiction. There is no self-centre present all. So who is present to whom the appearances can be referred? The appearances are not personal. They are not a problem for anyone—because there is no entity to have the problem!

If you find this approach is not fully ‘working’, then the odds are that the labeling is still being put on the appearances and creating the problem through the interpretation. That needs to be understood clearly. Many jump to the conclusion ‘there is no I’, but have not really understood the intervening steps. Briefly, suffering is only thoughts and concepts generated by way of interpreting and labeling. This cannot be a personal problem unless referred to ‘me’. So that reference point is the necessary link that generates the binding experience. Why? Because your unbounded nature is being limited to some concept (such as, ‘I am *this*’, or ‘*this* is happening to me’). Without this step, there can be no suffering at all, because whatever is happening is only happening, but not to you. See this very clearly. This is when the ‘no me’ insight really takes off. You see that what the thoughts and concepts are referring to does not exist. It is not ‘your’ problem, because the ‘you’ in this case is a conceptual phantom, not your abiding nature.

If the content still creates a problem, then the above should be thoroughly confirmed. Often, some of the critical links have been glossed over. This is why the seeking, suffering and doubt continue. Fortunately, a bit of looking unravels the whole thing.

[Follow up.]

Q: John, needless to say, that was spot on. What seems amazing is that none of that is a mystery to me—except when it gets covered by the clouds of habit. Nothing I can write contrary to any of that has any meaning or reality to me. It is all seen to be a story. Yet it does get told, occasionally, nonetheless. Deep thought has left me believing in a deep thinker. When that thinking slows down, it is so very clear. Many thanks. I can see how beneficial it is to sit and talk with someone directly about this.

John: See how you do with things. In one sense, there is nothing we have not heard before in any of this. But sometimes a few clear points can resonate in such a way as to expose an unexamined blind spot or two, leaving us amazed at the simplicity and availability of this.

Q: John, you have succeeded in pointing out a few blind spots that were there. Now I will look more deeply into those. This, I assume, is why I continue to look forward to these pointers of yours.

A Butterfly in a Hall of Mirrors

Question: I hope all is well with you. Thank you for your weekly pointers. They are so valuable. Once again I am stuck at the place of not being able to investigate the assumed reality of the separate self. Because I am unable to investigate it, I am unable to see it as false. How does one do the investigation? What is the process of the investigation? What are the questions one asks that lead the investigation to the realisation that this 'me', this 'I' thought that subjectively feels so real, does in reality not exist at all?

John: Before getting into all that, how are you feeling about the clear recognition of what you are? Are you convinced and clear on that? Are you absolutely sure and certain about the characteristics and nature of what you are? If that is not solid, any amount of other looking or discussing is just more fodder for the mind. If that is clear, then if we talk about the 'I' concept appearing and disappearing as an image in the conceptual mind, it is very clear and immediate that that is not what you are, that you cannot equate that with the positive nature of what you know as yourself. There is no 'how?' involved at that point, as it is just direct looking based on experience. The question 'how?' is really only conceptual. That is why I am encouraging you to be sure that what is being pointed to as your actual nature is actually clear.

You say, 'Once again I am stuck at the place'. This is a concept that is referencing the 'I' thought. This 'I' is only an image, an idea in the mind. But what are you actually? That is the point. When your real nature is clear, it is easy to see how these concepts keep looping and spinning like a butterfly lost in a hall of mirrors. These thoughts, concepts and beliefs have *nothing* to do with who you truly

are. Make sure that the positive truth of your being is clear and beyond doubt. Everything else is a footnote to this basic issue.

Be What You Already Are

Question: I have really enjoyed your book Right Here, Right Now. Your pointers in the book and on your website have removed many misconceptions about the search that I have been doing for the last eight years. Now there is a constant coming back to the looking for the one who is seeking or meditating. And this is happening on its own without much effort. Looking at thoughts, feelings and sensations in this way has reduced the identification with them as a 'me'. It is becoming apparent that they all arise and subside within awareness.

John: The awareness is what remains and is, in fact, what you really are. That is the point. That undeniable 'no thing' may be clear and empty, yet it is the source from which all appears and into which it returns. That is what you actually are. The search for the 'I' entity reveals that nothing can be grasped or attained objectively as what we are.

Q: I still do feel there are some false ideas in play, because there is still an expectation for something to happen.

John: Yes! This very idea is a false idea! It is entirely mistaken. What needs to happen to be what you are? Full stop.

Q: The understanding is there, that what is being pointed to is the listening, the seeing, the act of knowing. When listening to a sound, there is only listening, not one who is listening. I still feel something needs to happen for the awareness to come forth.

John: This idea is still being given a bit of belief. Why does awareness need to 'come forth' when it is already present and

undeniable? Let go the idea and realise that you are already that which is present and aware.

Q: I feel I have to clear up any residual beliefs. For now, the focus is on a sense of beingness. I feel that I have to be with awareness.

John: There are too many dualities in the equation! Who is this 'I' you are talking about? Do not keep the dualistic belief that there is 'I' and 'awareness'. You have already seen that this is what you are. Focusing on being or being with awareness are both dualistic notions and will lead nowhere! Pause the thoughts. You are what you are seeking.

Q: Any effort I make is just a movement in thought, and that brings in frustration, because I am using my mind to figure this out.

John: This is a good insight. Now you know why the answer can never be found in the mind! See the false as false and let it go. You do not need to do anything to be what you already are.

Q: Even though I see the frustration arising, the 'I' cannot be found. When looking within, there is only the looking. But I am still searching, trying to figure things out.

John: Use the points I just made to dismantle the dualistic notions. The net result is just being what you are. There is no shift, attainment, moment or great enlightenment needed. You have been what you are right along. That is the essence of it.

The Mind and Body Are the Wholeness Itself

Question: I read a book in which the writer says that we are already whole, but ...

John: 'But' implies a duality. We are either whole or not!

Q: The writer states that we are whole, but because the mental, physical and emotional are not integrated, the mental is constantly working on integration and drawing us out of our experience of 'wholeness'. This is my summary and understanding of his book.

John: There is a lot of duality in this view! Who is this 'us' getting drawn out? And what is this seeming 'wholeness' that can allow us to be drawn out from it? I guess it is not so whole after all. The mind and body are the wholeness itself, not separate from it. There is no separate 'you' or 'me' to be drawn out of any imagined wholeness. You are that.

Q: But even though we realise there is only experiencing and no one experiencing, will we still be incomplete unless we work on the energies we are supposed to change?

John: No. I entirely disagree with the viewpoint you are referring to. It is going back into a dualistic perspective. Reader, beware!

Q: Also, I realised something interesting about 'other' people. I was thinking of someone else and wondering what they were up to, but then I realised that if there is only consciousness or pure experiencing going on, there is actually no 'other'. That it is actually the same consciousness looking out of 'my' eyes as the eyes of the 'other'. Does this make sense?

John: Now, this sounds right on target. Stick with non-duality. Do not accept dualistic doctrines that leave you in need of patching everything back together!

The Present Waking Dream

Question: There is a riddle I cannot solve. I do not seem to be able to see through the identification with the body. Although I see that it is only another appearance in awareness, yet it is always localised. I mean, it sees through 'these' eyes and not any others. It feels with 'these' hands and not any others. If I have to go somewhere, it is 'this' body that is going along and not any other. Even if I do not think about it, it is still present there and not in any other place. If I have an appointment with a friend, I will meet him, and there is 'this' body that is meeting 'another'. Sorry for putting it together so clumsily, but it is really a problem here. If I am this awareness, then how can it be stuck in just one body, if it is 'everything'? I still have to take just 'this' body around in the appearances. Likely, I am missing something here. Thank you for your help.

John: Objective experiences are localised. There might even be a good case that perception (the perceiving process) is local, or relative to the sense organs. But in terms of awareness, which is really synonymous with your being or existence, the case falls apart. Being (or awareness) proper is not a thing, an object. How can something entirely non-objective be localised? Where is being, for example? All perception, all knowing, all states of consciousness are within what you are, which we are pointing to as 'being' or 'awareness'. Keep in mind that those are only pointers, mere conceptual signs. Those are not actually what you are. That is the point. People hear the words 'awareness' or 'consciousness' and assume we are talking about some relative bodily function. That is absolutely a misunderstanding.

An interesting way to think about this is to look at the case of a dream. Where are 'you' (your actual being, which is present and

clearly aware) located within the dream? If you went looking for your being within the dreamscape, could you find your actual self anywhere in the dream? Is your innate consciousness nature, which is cognising the dream, to be equated with some conditioned act of perceptions of a particular character in the dream? Even when the dream ends, you still are. You are present to cognise the non-existence of the dream. So, clearly, your fundamental being is not locatable inside the dream appearance, is it?

Note that in the dream there are apparent others, apparent acts of consciousness, seeming separate minds, etc. But looking more deeply, you see this for what it is—appearance. Nothing in the dream has ever happened outside of consciousness. And even that consciousness in its manifestation of the dream comes and goes to your innate, actual self. That is why Nisargadatta Maharaj and others have pointed to your natural state as 'prior to consciousness'. This is also the classical Buddhist position. This gives some sense of how this might be so even within this, the present waking dream.

Your Real Nature Is Never Obscured at Any Moment

Question: I feel so much gratitude to have met you, even if we have barely talked. Sitting in the circle at the meeting last week is definitely a profound form of meeting. The clarity you present is just unfathomable and incredibly exciting to me. I have also been reading your first book. A few questions arose that I did not get a chance to ask in the meeting. Sometimes people chime in so quickly and dynamically that I do not manage to get a word in. Or I do not find the question emerging until later. I have heard teachers whom I respect say things like, 'When you are deep in the presence ...' or 'When it is really still ...'. It seems as though they are describing presence as a variable state.

John: This kind of talking is entirely dualistic and misleading. Who is this 'you' who can be deep in 'presence'? And what is this 'presence'? There is a subtle concept of duality being perpetuated by such pointers. Furthermore, what many call 'presence' may not even be what is being pointed to as our actual nature. Such teachings can get one back into a dualistic framework in which one is pursuing some state or experience in time and from which one is assumed to be separate. Even something as seemingly benign as the suggestion to 'rest as awareness' (which is a popular pointer currently) suffers from the same pitfalls.

Q: Even the term 'the natural state' is slightly confusing to me, because isn't that which is being pointed to prior to any state?

John: No word is what you are. Natural state just means what you innately are, nothing more nor less than that. The point is to follow

the words, then drop them. Some pointer is given, but the pointer is not what you are. If you are keenly following the spirit and intent of what is being communicated, you will quickly surpass all the verbal pointers anyhow.

Q: While the word 'natural' makes great sense to me, how is being a state? Why that word and not another? Is it because there is nothing in language that points more clearly to that?

John: Yes. There is no adequate word for what you are.

Q: Going back to the notion of being 'deep in presence', can presence be deeper at times or less noticeable at others?

John: Absolutely not! And this is the great error and problem with such ill-considered formulations.

Q: Is this anything other than putting attention on the screen of thoughts, emotions, sensations and identifying with them, so that the presence seems to be temporarily obscured?

John: Even 'presence' is not what you are! Presence, whatever it might be, is an experience. You are not an experience. That is why chasing 'presence' and other subtle experiences is looking entirely in the wrong direction.

Q: Can some beings be more present or have a greater emanation of presence than others?

John: No.

Q: It seems that this is comparable to a cloudy day or even an eclipse. The power of the sun goes nowhere. It is not diminished in any way, but rather it is simply obscured based on perspective and point of view.

John: But your real nature is never obscured at any moment. It is constant, ever-present and invariable. That is what people miss. In ignorance, it is turned into some state or experience, which becomes variable (as all experiences are). Then you are back in duality chasing experiences in the future again!

Q: But a thought arises that says, 'As clear as presence currently is, it could be even clearer'.

John: Presence is not what is being pointed to. I would drop this phrasing entirely. Talk about your actual being, what you are. That is here now and always. It does not become anything. It is what it is. Remember, this is about being, not becoming. That is why most presentations available are not non-duality. They are generally dualistic doctrines that make some reference verbally to a few non-duality pointers.

Q: I see that such notions are the mind trying to bring time and limitation back into the equation. It sows a seed of doubt, and, to be honest, there is a certain compelling quality to the doubt. The only recourse I have been able to find is to inquire into what is aware and comes before the doubt, and also to see that, as strong and compelling as it might be, the doubt is only a passing appearance.

John: Exactly true. There is no doubt about the fact of being. So stick with the basics, and you move completely beyond doubt immediately.

Q: It also occurs to me that a 'human being' is only a concept. When I look I cannot find that a human being is actually what I am. The idea of a person is just that, an idea. The closest I come is finding a body, thoughts and emotions. But clearly there is something animating the body, something aware of it that makes it quite different from a cadaver. At the same time, there is occasionally the thought that 'I do not understand this fully', which seems to be the mind trying to reassert the sense of a separate 'I' as being who I am.

John: Even that doubt is simply a passing concept in what is entirely doubtless, your aware, natural existence. That is not in doubt at all and can never be. Because even having a doubt implies you are present to have the doubt.

Q: One final question about pointers. I read the chapter in your first book about bliss not being the best translation of the word 'ananda', and I was greatly reassured. Peace or quiet joy seem to be much truer pointers, at least in terms of my own direct experience. Bliss is something that seems either transcendent or related to a passing experience, especially when you consider how the concept of bliss is used to sell almost any product or experience in our culture.

John: Bliss is a translation of a Sanskrit term. A better translation is 'peace' or 'serenity'. This is directly what your being is, as it is changeless, non-dual, non-conceptual reality.

Q: However, flipping through your book I came across another description of the recognition of awareness as being 'immense peace', and was thrown into a bit of doubt as a result. It seemed that perhaps there was more to discover than I had found in direct experience. Perhaps the peace was a bit wimpy in the light of that word 'immense'. My own best sense is that this, too, is the mind introducing a doubt into what was clear and immediate.

John: Do not try to conceptualise this too much. The mind can never grasp or experience this. The mind is the wrong instrument for what we are talking about. With the focus off of dualistic conceptualising, there is no suffering, no doubt, no problems, nothing wrong. That is what is being pointed to by peace, serenity or any other term.

Q: It is just odd to see how strongly the mind will come in with the idea of not being there or not being good enough.

John: All erroneous concepts are passing in what you are—your doubtless nature!

Q: They are two of the mind's long-time trump cards. As such, I just wanted to share these perceptions with you and see if you would confirm them or perhaps point out things that are not being seen clearly.

John: The mind can raise endless doubts. But there is no finality in that. So instead of looking into the mind for confirmation, look at what you are. You are to whom the mind appears. That is the doubtlessly present, naturally cognisant and invariable clarity or space of knowing. It is utterly undisturbed by any content of experience. This is what you are. You are not a separate person in need of reaching that. That is the imagined duality. You are that here and now. There is no deepening into or approaching what you already are. All doubts and suffering are unfounded because you are already that unconditioned absolute true nature, even now.

Q: Thank you so much for your clear teaching and incredible passion for truth.

Doubt and Conviction

Question: It is funny how simple this is. It is so simple that the mind cannot believe it! Awareness is present and evident in doing a little looking. Even the looking is happening in awareness. The stories of the past are only thoughts arising now. Before, there was a lot of anxiety about the future. It is no longer there to that extent. Some residual beliefs might be at play, but the natural intelligence is taking care of it. When doubts arise, the answer springs up naturally. Who is having it? In what are the doubts arising? The awareness that was yesterday is also here today. But none of the feelings, thoughts or sensations are the same.

John: Precisely clear and true. This is the essence of it.

Q: Thank you for your conviction, resulting in trust in your pointers. Like Nisargadatta Maharaj used to say, 'You should be earnest'. Earnestness has to be there. Before, I was trying to create earnestness. The trust shows up as a result of looking and finding the pointers to be valid.

There is one point I would like your views on. The answer is here in awareness; however, considering your words in dialogue is more potent than only reading the words of others in books. You mentioned something happening at one moment upon pondering a certain statement.

John: Conviction is not derived externally from reading or hearing something, nor does it arrive at a certain moment of time. This would put us back into a duality or process of becoming. The conviction is from the doubtless sense of your own existence itself. There is no doubt about that fact, is there? That is where the conviction comes

from. A particular pointer may have pointed this out, but make sure to focus on what the pointer is pointing to, which is the undeniable fact of your own nature. That is the point.

Q: At this time it feels that such conviction is lacking.

John: But is your very being lacking in being present? Is there any doubt of this, even now? That is the conviction.

Q: Another question that came up was, 'Who is this that is going to have the conviction?'

John: This is also very clear. The statement 'at this time it feels that such conviction is lacking' is simply a passing thought in that which cannot be denied. Doubt only comes from overlooking the obvious fact of your actual nature and focusing on some passing concept based on assumed dualism and the reality of the limited 'I' entity. Still, you remain what you are. Never forget, you already are what you are seeking. You are that.

There Is No Duality or Separation

Question: I believe it is grace bringing me to you. Thanks very much for keeping me in continuous communication. Your comments are highly appreciated. Now I can see that knowingness is our nature, and surely the knowingness is untouched by any kind of psychological sufferings. But apparently the body-mind still has suffering.

John: Knowingness is the space or ground in which all arises. Without knowingness, you can have no other experience. This is what is to be seen. The body-mind may experience anything, even painful sensations, but this is not suffering as I am using the term. Even Buddhas and sages have to deal with physical aches and pains. When I talk of suffering, I am talking of the psychological fears, doubts, worries, problems, etc., caused by confusion about who and what you are. Your real being or essence is not subject to these limitations at all. These conceptual limitations arise through taking yourself to be something you are not. They are based on wrong understanding and are cleared up with right understanding. Note that even 'knowing', as an experience or state, is coming and going in what you truly are. Your fundamental state or nature is not to be identified as knowing, although that may be a useful pointer to start with.

Q: It seems to me that you have radically uprooted sufferings in your body-mind.

John: No. Only the needless suffering created by ignorance and generated by erroneous conceptualising.

Q: What is the relationship between realisation of our true nature and sufferings in the body-mind?

John: Clearing up the confusion about your identity cancels the root of the false identity and all the needless concepts built on that. These are what generate suffering.

Q: Sometimes I am afraid of missing the meaning of your direct pointers.

John: I am only pointing to your being. You cannot lose that. So there is no need for fear of missing anything, because what I am pointing to is your own natural being itself. The pointers are only to show that. See that, and you can let the pointers go.

Q: In recent days, I usually talk to myself in the simple way: 'I know the body. Therefore, I must be present right now. I and body are two things. The body is apparently an object, but what am I? Is there anything that can be what I am? The only thing that can be what I am is the knowingness itself. "I" is the knowing presence. Do not confuse the knowing this or that with the knowingness itself.'

John: This is very good. Have a good look at what you are, and be clear on what that is. You will see that what you are is not a limited, defective person at all. You are not an objective, limited 'thing'. The body and mind come and go, but they are not what you are in essence. Your real nature is unborn, unconditioned, free of limits, beyond all experience. Yet all experience is contained in what you are. Everything is an expression of consciousness. Therefore, all is that consciousness. Even that conscious presence arises from what you really are. You are the unborn, uncreated source of everything. That 'everything' is only an expression or manifestation of your own true self. Therefore, there is no duality or separation between you and everything else. This is non-duality, oneness, unity or love. You are that.

There Is Really No Separation or Duality

Question: What I am, as a state of non-conceptual presence, is experienced prior to the experience of body. This sense is fleeting on waking. And during the course of the waking state, in the state of being, I am simply present, and thoughts appear and subside. In this waking state, there arises the concept that this 'I am-ness' could not be experienced if not for the body. So, what is the first element required for this body to be, and in which sprouts the sense of being? This is the question. Or is this question merely a concept, a story occurring as do all the other stories? If so, does it require any answer, which would be another concept to occupy the mind?

John: You are that to which (or to whom) the principle of consciousness or presence (also called knowingness, beingness, or 'I am-ness') appears. That is the first experience. The easiest example of this to recognise is the experience of waking up in the morning. All else (everything objective) arises in this consciousness or state of wakefulness. The point to see is that that initial flash or sense of 'knowing that you are' is also a temporary appearance to your abiding nature. Seeing this brings you to a 'full stop', really. Any theorising about 'how' this happens is coming in at the mental level. The mind, or thinking, is an appearance in the consciousness. So all the discussions are bound to be inconclusive. This is why the answer is not in the mind. Otherwise said, that which is prior to concepts, and even knowing that 'I am', cannot be grasped in a concept.

Assuming the presence of the consciousness and the subsequent display of elements, etc., in consciousness, the body is a creation or play of the elements. Some people talk about consciousness arising from within or in dependence upon the body. On the other hand, the elements and body also arise in consciousness. So there is a

circular or mutual dependency there. No consciousness, no body. No body, no consciousness. There is no final answer as to what is the cause of what, because they are mutually interdependent. Things which are mutually interdependent do not have any final or ultimate reality. They cancel each other out as independent, self-existent realities.

Still, in all of this, your own ultimate being or presence in the equation has not been lost or contradicted. You still are, as that which is aware of being and being conscious. That is why the 'sense of being' or 'sense of knowing' are still appearances to your ultimate state or real nature. Actually, it is entirely impossible to clearly articulate this in language, because we are pointing to something (yourself) that is non-conceptual. So, basically, you follow the pointers to where they are pointing and drop them. In the 'full stop' is a clear and immediate non-conceptual knowing (for lack of better words) of your actual nature as it is, unadorned by concepts.

After all this is looked at and understood, you see that there cannot be any consciousness apart from its source. So they are really the same. Also there cannot be any elements or manifestation apart from consciousness, so there is really no separation or duality in that. Therefore, it becomes all-inclusive. The appearances appear, but they are appearances of the one essence, or that reality, which is your essence also. That is why it is said that you are that; all is that; there is only that, etc. The initial investigation and analysis is helpful for us to shed the unexamined concepts, but they finally lead to non-duality, non-separation or 'one without a second'. That is as far as the words and pointers can go.

Teachings, Books and Lineages

Question: I am interested in writing a book about this teaching. I have several questions for you in this regard. The book I have in mind would not detail historical facts. My questions are not about lineage in the sense of biography. The book would be about the content of the teaching. I am interested in tracing the ideas that are truly essential, and my questions have to do with the different ways that the different masters present or point to the one truth.

John: Well, like they say, 'Truth is one; sages call it by different names'. It is never the ideas or pointers that are essential, but what is being pointed to. In the end, however this is discussed, it is about the innate nature or true essence of the seeker himself or herself. What I found in my discussions with those who really understood this was a relaxed and fluid use of language and lack of fixation on the words.

Q: I am very interested in the question of 'orthodoxy' as it relates to non-duality.

John: Non-dual traditions basically put across a couple of key points. There is a core or fundamental reality. Your nature and that are not different. Seeing otherwise is the root of all seeking, suffering and doubt. Clarifying one's true identity is the solution. All that appears to be is only appearance of that (reality). Therefore, all there is, is that. I would consider that the 'orthodox' or basic view. How that is communicated or pointed to will vary depending on the teacher, the listener and the circumstances.

Q: I am very much in favor of an orthodox approach, as I feel that it gives the aspirant a sense of continuity. This is important, in my

opinion. Unlike some commentators, I do not feel that to be orthodox it is essential to stick to the tried and true terminology and the traditional methods of unfolding the teaching. What is necessary for a teacher's presentation to be orthodox, in my view, is adherence to a (fairly small) set of core principles and to present those principles with the appropriate emphasis and with the right degree of importance.

John: Yes! The presentation must also be in tune with the capacity of the seeker. Non-duality will never be a one-size-fits-all solution. In fact, it cannot really be packaged and marketed without turning it into a conceptual system, which defeats the purpose. This often happens with conceptualised versions of Vedanta, Buddhism, etc. It looks good 'on paper' but loses all force. That is why most of the 'great ones' did not come from within the fold of the pundits and scholars.

Q: For this reason, I have always regarded the teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj and Ranjit Maharaj to be entirely orthodox in all essentials.

John: On the other hand, many Vedanta traditionalists do not share this view of these teachers. I happen to agree with you, though.

Q: On the other hand, I do not regard the teaching of Ramesh Balsekar as orthodox, because he changed the emphasis of the key concepts in a 'personal' or 'subjective' way. I have myself been criticised for being unorthodox, which is understandable. But I am (in my own estimation) only unorthodox in a peripheral or exoteric manner and not in the essential, esoteric core of ideas.

Anyway, to move on to specifics. Over the weekend, one of my questions was resolved, and that leaves only one question that I would like your opinion on. The basis of this question is something that I feel sure must puzzle many seekers. How can we account for the huge difference between the talks by Nisargadatta Maharaj in I Am That and those in his last talks (for example, those in the books edited by Jean Dunn)? It is almost as though we are listening to a different person.

In I Am That, the message is about method:

Concentrate on the 'I am-ness' to the exclusion of all else. (This is an essential method of spiritual practise in all religions.)

The remembrance of God. (This may be given an overtly religious form, as in the Christian prayer of the heart; or a non-theistic garb, as in the exercise of self-remembering in the Gurdjieff system.)

Or simply the practise of being here, now.

John: He still talked about this very much in the later years also, in my view. I really do not see much difference between *I Am That* and the later books. Nisargadatta Maharaj's message is more urgent later, it seems, and he deals less with relative matters. But if one reads carefully, the core points are already covered in *I Am That*.

Q: In his last talks, Nisargadatta Maharaj completely abandons talk about method and emphasises the nothingness of the world.

John: This is not an accurate assessment. He was still giving all types of advice and recommendations to particular seekers, depending on their capacities. The books are only snippets of the reality of what went on in practise around him. If the seeker had the capacity, Nisargadatta Maharaj would point directly to reality and skip the formalities. But to others, he prescribed devotional songs and meditation, etc. Having realised his true nature, he stood as the absolute itself and 'dished out' the pointers spontaneously as and when needed, based on the situation. If you consider what he was pointing to over the years, there is no difference in that, surely.

Q: In these last talks, consciousness itself is an unwanted appearance.

John: That was always his basic teaching. Of course one needs to understand the way in which he used the term 'consciousness'. He was saying this in *I Am That* also.

Q: He tells his visitors to look at how this consciousness arose and understand that, in relation to the absolute reality of self, it is accidental and unnecessary. My own feeling is that this form of expression reflects his state of mind as the end of this role approached.

John: I do not agree with this. This is really just a statement of the nature of reality itself. This is the basic message of all the non-dual traditions. Of course, again, one must understand the particular usage of the terms. For example, the subtle pointer of reality beyond consciousness is often not appreciated in lower, or popularized, Vedanta. But it has always been the essential message of Buddhism and non-dualistic Vedanta.

Q: While remaining orthodox in essentials, the emphasis he places on the accidental nature of the arising of consciousness and the identification solely with the transcendent absolute seems to me to be specific to that state in which he has very little connection to the empirical reality of his questioners. Hence, also his refusal to entertain questions about that level.

John: It depends on the capacity and tendencies of the seekers. There are cases in which Nisargadatta Maharaj stressed (for a particular seeker) the higher value of devotion over wisdom, for example. Do not read too much into the fragments recorded in a few books!

Q: It seems to me (and this is where the question comes in), that it would be a mistake for an aspirant who was not in the same state (for example, one who was very much younger) to try to take these talks as a guide to their thinking or actions. I think that many do try to do so. But they simply do not apply.

John: No teacher worth his or her salt is going to give teachings en masse. Each questioner is different. That is why real non-dual presentations are rarely, if ever, delivered as canned lectures, as Vedanta pundits do. The teacher will adjust the message. Nisargadatta Maharaj did that constantly. Keep in mind that any particular book is only a dialogue with some specific seeker at that moment. Even to talk of a genuine sage as having some set teaching is false. Pundits have teachings (bodies of conceptual knowledge). Those who are sharing a genuine, lived understanding have no teachings per se, but are engaged in pointing to reality. That is why there is a vast difference between someone who is teaching non-dual philosophy and someone actually functioning from the natural state, like Nisargadatta Maharaj. This is not always appreciated by the scholarly minded! I call it the difference between studying the menu and eating the meal.

Q: For myself, I regard his final talks as inspiring, in the sense that they indicate where one might be going, if the body lives that long.

John: The reality he is talking about has nothing to do with the body or its life span. Why turn this into something dependent on the body? You are what you are, regardless of the body, mind or consciousness. I think there is a bit of misunderstanding creeping in here.

Q: On the other hand, I am not sure whether I should include material from these talks in a book that is intended to provide the essence of the teaching as it comes down from ancient text and teachers to the present day. What do you think?

John: In my view, this is not about writing books! Reality cannot be fitted into a book. These sages were not interested in passing on systems of pointers. They were engaged in pointing to the reality! If we miss this, we are drifting away from the essence of it. Leave it to the pundits to pass along conceptual knowledge! Then we can appreciate what Nisargadatta Maharaj indicated when, at the end of his life, he reportedly said, 'Forget me and my teachings. Piss on my

corpse and throw it in the sea. Look into yourself and all the teachings will spontaneously sprout in your own words!' The essence of the teaching is not in any book.

Q: I apologise for being so verbose, but as you can probably tell, I am working out what I really want to say as I go along, trying to be precise, but not always succeeding by any means. I would much appreciate your sharing any other thoughts you may have on this question.

John: My advice is not to be overly concerned with pointers and teachings. Speak from direct understanding of what you are. Show that directly to those who seek you out. In my view, that is carrying on the heart-essence of the teachings. It is up to you to use whatever expedient methods and teachings may seem appropriate, but that cannot be regulated or fixed anyhow. Each one who points will use whatever teachings and pointers come naturally in the circumstances.

The Nature of Objects

Question: Your pointing at the ever-present reality of my being has helped me a lot in getting clear on that point. These days I am exploring the nature of things that arise in this space-like awareness and its relationship with them. It is said that the appearances (concepts, thoughts, feelings, solid objects, etc.) that arise in this awareness are in a way 'identical to', 'of the nature of', or 'made up of' this being-awareness in which they arise. What is your approach to this issue? I do have all your books, so if there is some place you have discussed this, you can refer me to it. Otherwise, I would love to get your response to this.

John: The exploration of the nature of objects is only a footnote to this investigation. With the knowledge of what you are, the root of all suffering and doubt is addressed and life in freedom naturally glides into view, never to be lost again.

In looking at objects, you can start with thoughts. Consider the following:

- In what do thoughts arise?
- Does the coming and going of thought alter or change that essence?
- Can you have or experience a thought at any time apart from that?
- In other words, can we even speak of thoughts as having any separate existence apart from that?

- What then are thoughts made of?
- What is their substance?

All of these considerations will clearly demonstrate what is the source and substance of the seeming independent thoughts. Basically, thoughts are reduced to their substance or source and vanish from the equation. In other words, thoughts have no substance or independent nature at all. Thoughts are appearances of the substrate. The substrate *is*, while thoughts are only appearances of that. Once you get a feel for these points, you can extend the understanding to feelings, sensations, perceptions, etc. The world or objects are really the summation of particular thoughts, feelings and perceptions that we experience. Basically, all is seen to be what you are, your true essence or real nature. All duality is cancelled and resolved. This is one line of approach to consider.

A Vision of Truth

Question: Something amazing is being noticed in this awareness. This realisation of oneness seems to be happening as a flower unfolds its fragrance. It is so interesting, so gradual, that the happening is almost imperceptible. I was at a gathering the other day. There were a few hundred people there. As I walked around the room, I sensed something odd. I saw all these people, and I felt (this may sound strange!) like I was not one of them, that I was not a person at all! I thought, wow, that is strange. What is this, that I am not one of them? What are they anyway? Then I realised that they were within me, and I was within them. Very interesting! Somehow, there is no more resistance to the things that happen (or appear to!). There is no more judgment as to 'this is good' or 'this is not so good'. Things happen, and there seems just to be a noticing of it. And there is a sense of gratitude that there is experience. It is like gratitude is meeting everything that arises. There is a gratefulness for everything just the way it is. Amazing! With this realisation, the most amazing silence is here. It is a beautiful silence, a silence that seems to be noticed when there is no resistance to that which is. Thank you, John, for sharing your wisdom. If you have any comments or thoughts to this, I would love to hear them.

John: This is your own direct expression of your insights, wisdom and experience. It is the perfume of the flower blossoming in your heart. All I might add is that the way things are in ultimate truth is how they have always been. This 'vision' of truth appears new because it was not noticed. But what we are noticing about ourselves and the world has always been so. There is nothing gradual about what you are, in truth. The amazing silence you speak of is the constant space of life or being in which all appears. It includes silence and sounds, activity and stillness. It is not a state of

appearances but the invariable heart of reality in which all appears, whether moving or unmoving. It is like a shining mirror in which reflections arise and set. It remains as it is and bears no relation to the presence or absence of the reflections. But the reflections have no substance or independent nature apart from the mirror. The mirror is not fighting or resisting the reflections. As you say (speaking from the perspective of the mirror), 'They are within me'. The strange and wonderful thing is that this is the way it has always been. It is as if the mirror mistook itself for one of the reflections. But this gets pointed out, and the true perspective is restored.

You Are What You Are and Nothing Else

Question: With great joy I read several of your books and the pointers on your website. Thank you for that. I also wrote some emails to you some time ago. I have a question about one of your pointers. You wrote:

In deep sleep, you are not conscious in the normal sense of the word. You were there, but not self-aware. You could say that awareness was there, but not aware of anything other (awareness unaware of itself). It is non-dual. At some moment 'you' became conscious of being. You knew 'I am', 'I am present'. That experience was not present in deep sleep. You were, but you did not know you were. That event or occurrence (of knowing 'I am') is an appearance, experience or state. All other objective appearances arise in that or following that.

Yes. I fully understand this.

John: Good!

Q: Then you go on:

Sometimes you are conscious (waking, dreaming), sometimes not (sleep, unconsciousness, under anaesthetic, etc.).

Yes, this also corresponds with my own direct experience.

John: Good!

Q: And you go on:

The experience of being conscious or unconscious is registered by your primordial natural condition which, properly, cannot be termed conscious or unconscious, as it transcends (and includes) both.

Well, this is difficult for me. What should be this primordial natural condition? Isn't this only a construction?

John: No. We are talking about you! Are you, your undeniable being itself, a mere construction?

Q: In my experience, unconsciousness in deep sleep and the consciousness in the dream and waking state are both manifestations of it.

John: That 'it' is what I am pointing to. However, that is not something the mind can conceptualise. It is what you are here and now without the concept or label. Call it pure being or pure awareness. Those are labels, but they are about the closest you can come in words. Nisargadatta Maharaj used to say, 'You are the pure awareness that knows the coming and going of consciousness'. That is about the final word on the subject.

Q: I cannot see something that registers both states. This would suggest a separation.

John: Exactly true. Because that is what you are. It is your natural essence doing the seeing itself. It is just like the eye that cannot see itself, but sees all else. Pure awareness, or your natural state, cannot 'see' itself, because, as you say, it is non-dual. But you cannot deny your being, nor the fact that consciousness and unconsciousness are clearly registered. Otherwise, how can we talk about them?

Q: I mean, if there is no thought about 'non-duality', there is no question and no answer.

John: Exactly. That is why 'silence' is the best speech, as some have said.

Q: I have asked so many questions and found so many answers over the last years. But no answer satisfied me, and they led to more questions.

John: That is because you are being led to the brink of the conceptual but not 'stopping' there. Therefore, full stop. What is wrong, or what doubt do you have, if you are not conceptualising? Learn the art of the 'full stop'. What you are doing at this point is returning to concepts, which of course generates duality and doubt. Realise you do not have to do this any longer. You are already what you are seeking.

Q: So this 'primordial natural condition' is a problem for the 'me'.

John: Yes. But that 'me' is only the concept of you, not your real being. Your real being has no problems. There are only problems created in conceptual thought for the imagined 'me'.

Q: What is here if there is no thought?

John: You. If you pause thought, you do not fall apart or disappear. You are still present and aware, but not as the conceptual 'me', which is only a thought construct.

Q: It is impossible to describe this presence if there is no thought.

John: Yes. But you do not need to. You do not need to describe yourself to be what you are. So give up the hopeless endeavor to do so.

Q: Nevertheless, I am here. And there is no problem, if there is no thought.

John: Perfect. That is the final insight. Now, if you refrain from going back to concepts, you are fine. The search and seeking is all over.

Q: In deep sleep there is no awareness of being. Yet I am there.

John: Precisely.

Q: But what registers this?

John: Non-conceptual, primordial awareness beyond mind and consciousness.

Q: I do not know that.

John: What 'I' are you referring to here? That is only the conceptual 'I'. Your real being is not asking any questions, only the mind is. But you must see the point that the mind cannot ever know what is being pointed to. You are getting hung up because you are expecting the mind to be able to grasp what is beyond the mind. You cannot find water in a mirage, nor can you grasp what you are in a concept. See this and you will cease trying to do so.

Q: My question leads only to more thinking for me. And thinking is the false direction.

John: Excellent. So full stop!

Q: I mean, whatever is, is it. Deep sleep is it. Dreaming is it. Waking is it. What is, is it.

John: Yes. Non-duality! All appearances are only appearances of that, which is pure non-conceptual reality itself. Call it any word, but that is never a word. Words only point. See what we have covered here and the seeking must be over, not tomorrow, but now. Everything needed is touched on in this exchange.

Q: There is no death. Death or deep sleep are only two words for the same state. And out of this, the 'I am' emerges. Then all the other things follow. And then it disappears again. These are two sides of a coin. What is aware of thoughts? I do not know. It is an artificial division. The thought and the awareness of the thought are the same thing.

John: Once you see what awareness is, you see there is nothing else except awareness. It becomes all-inclusive. There is no duality in non-duality. The final statement (from the Dzogchen tradition) is: 'All there is, is non-conceptual, self-shining, ever-fresh presence-awareness—just this and nothing else. There is nothing other than this'.

Q: I am surprised about your immediate and detailed answer and your kind words. Thanks very much for that. I have to think about it. No, I should not think about it!

John: Yes! Do not think too much about it! In the end, *you are what you are and nothing else*. It is a perfectly tautological statement with no real content, but it is the clearest thing one can say. You are not a concept. Yet your presence is perfectly clear and obvious. You are present and aware, but nothing perceivable or conceivable. Some sages called it 'cognising emptiness' or 'emptiness suffused with knowing'. It is no thing that can be grasped, but it can never be doubted. Even the doubt presumes your aware presence. Without a concept being laid upon it, it is perfectly complete, full and adequate. Seeing yourself as this, there is nothing wrong anymore.

See the Trap and Do Not Step into It

Question: Intellectually, I understand when you say that I am the ever-present awareness that is unchanging and within which everything (including the idea of 'me') is arising.

John: Drop the idea of intellectual understanding. This leaves it too fuzzy and lets the mind run riot. Is awareness intellectual or a present fact? Establish that now, and be done with the doubts. Then see if awareness is something apart from you or if, rather, you are that which is present and aware. Establish that now and be done with the waffling. Waffles are good breakfast items, but are not a foundation for metaphysical certainty!

Q: And, of course, I can feel it is true when I simply ask myself if I know that I exist.

John: That is where you must 'full stop' and appreciate that what is being recognised is it. There is no duality or separation at that point. There is not even a concept of a 'you' 'there' to do anything.

Q: But, what can be done to live in and from that ever-present awareness, rather than from the concepts that arise within it?

John: This is stepping back into the concepts and following them. Drop the doubt. You are that! There is no one present to do anything, anything at all, unless you begin to follow the concepts. The only answer is to see the trap and do not step into it.

Q: Is there any specific inquiry or 'exercise' to assist in being more fully, or more often, in the natural state?

John: Absolutely not! You are that. Who is asking the question? The false imagined, separate 'I'. See the falsity of the trap the mind is leading you into here.

Q: Intellectually, I realise that one could respond with, 'No exercise or method is needed, because you already are, and always have been that'.

John: Not intellectually! This is factually the case. See, and be done with, the doubt. You are still cherishing the doubts instead of seeing and being what you already are.

Q: But, for me, that understanding is only occurring within thought.

John: Who? That particular 'me' is the imagined, separate 'I'. You are the one to whom even that thought appears. Drop the 'me' idea and where are you? You are here as that undeniable present awareness itself. Finis! Therefore, throw overboard such worthless 'understanding'. What is the thought appearing in? Doubtless presence-awareness. You are that.

Q: I am wanting to move into what you characterise as the 'ease and natural flow with what appears'.

John: You are falling hook, line and sinker into the false concepts of duality or separation from what you truly are. You *are* the natural flow in which all appears.

Go On Direct Experience

Question: The following is a quote from the Gilbert Schultz website:

Witness the disappearance of thought, and observe the absence of the witness.

That is what I meant when I wrote to you recently. You said that I was creating a 'false duality'. The news here is a seeing of everything being an appearance in 'what I am', even such notions as 'I get it' or 'I do not get it'. Can you offer any comments on 'the fourth state', or 'turiya'? This state seems to arise here every time I contemplate or meditate.

John: The concept of a 'fourth state' (beyond waking, dreaming and sleep) also appears in what you are. Before any concepts, you are. Full stop there, and what is wrong with your natural state without following any concepts, even spiritual concepts such as the 'fourth state'?

Saying 'I meditate' is clearly a self-oriented concept. Then that assumed reference point may have all types of experiences. But this is all in duality and in reference to the false identity. Who is this 'I' that presumes to meditate? What is the reality of this concept? And how does it relate to your abiding and doubtless nature? The so-called 'fourth state' basically refers to the consciousness in which all appearances rise and set. Seeing yourself as this conscious presence is one pointer used. Eventually, you see that even this conscious presence is rising and setting in the absolute reality that you are. Pause all concepts and what else can you be other than what you already and ever are? Do not intellectualise this stuff. Go

on direct experience. You do not need quotes and fancy Sanskrit jargon to see and be what you are.

The Only Authentic Experience

Question: Thank you for the opportunity to communicate with you. It is nice to have someone to share these experiences with to ensure they are authentic. I have to admit, I did fall into 'I have lost that profound experience and need to get to get it back' trap yesterday. This was accompanied by stormy emotions and mental overload. I found myself trying to get the experience back, trying to eliminate the painful emotions and unwanted thoughts. I then realised that the only true separation is the belief of separateness, which is nothing more than a thought. Also, thinking that I am stuck on thoughts is merely just another belief, which in turn is just another thought. Since then, the dream state has become more apparent. I feel it takes much honesty to not grasp to any experience and attribute any sense of attainment, pride or identity from it. This is because all that is just a dream and dance in awareness. That resonance that I am that awareness is sinking in much more deeply now.

Although emotions and thoughts are not real, how did you handle the really stormy aspects that seem to completely overcome your whole being? How did you handle that period of time before the realisation of 'I am that awareness' truly resonated with you? I sense that it must be by simply allowing every experience and thought to be. From this allowing, the emotions and thoughts naturally wake up themselves. It is so easy to fall back into a mind trap, though, into the thought of 'I am enlightened' or 'I am dreaming'. The thought that 'I am awareness' seems to make no difference, until such a time that awareness becomes so clear and vivid throughout my entire being.

It is as if I need to constantly bring my 'bodily awareness' back to that true awareness to remember I am that. But when I remain in true awareness, things seem really dry until I let go and fall back into consciousness of the dream. I could be making too much of this, but

it does seem that where I position my 'bodily awareness' brings different types of experiences and sensations. I really appreciate any assistance you can offer as 'I' navigate this.

John: The basic fact of experience is that all experience only occurs within awareness. The content is only appearing and disappearing in that. Even the concepts, the ideas like 'I have it' and 'I do not have it', are all simply appearances coming and going in your natural state. That is the essence of it. It is as simple as that. The 'I' in 'I have it' and 'I lost it' is the conceptual self-centre, not your real being. The 'I' navigating 'this' is also merely the concept of 'me'. Your real state or natural being is not navigating anything. It is what it is.

The focus of attention may generate different experiences, but the being that you are remains constant. Reality is going nowhere and is unchanging. The changing element is the coming and going of interest in the content. This arises from the old perspective of identification with it. So, stay as you are and everything settles down quite easily and naturally. Let the content and experiences play naturally. You are what you are, perfect being and clear awareness itself. Experiences are not authentic or inauthentic. They are displays in and on the natural state of your innate being. That is the only natural and authentic 'experience'.

An Account

Question: I feel a great desire to thank you, and to make you aware of what your work has done for 'me'. I have no doubt that you get a lot of similar responses from people who claim that while they have read any number of books on non-duality, it was your teaching that allowed direct recognition of that, which is ever-present, ever-aware and ever in the absolute state. This is the alive, formless entity that has no beginning and no end. 'I' have always been that. Or, rather, the 'person' or mind-body formations appear in that. I am that.

I have read everything by Nisargadatta Maharaj, everything by Ramana Maharshi. I looked to other teachers, who bridged some of the understanding for a time, like Adyashanti or Eckhart Tolle. Despite having realised a reduced degree of mental suffering and prolonged periods of the complete absence of time, 'I' still did not believe that I understood the real nature of the self, or my true nature. It was not until I read your book that I fully grasped the obviousness of that. The other teachers all say the same things, but the mind hears Nisargadatta Maharaj's references to an absolute state, and he is that. But 'you' refer back to your state and see nothing absolute about it. You see the same person with thoughts, feelings, etc. Ramana Maharshi teaches self-inquiry, but as you said in your book, the mind tries to make it into an approach, into a practise, and it compares 'you', whoever that may be, with a person who possesses knowledge or clarity that the present 'I' does not. A sense of seeking still takes form, as the mind tries to attain this absolute, yet still imagined state.

Your teachings are by far the most clear and direct that I have ever encountered in my three years of desperate seeking. I say desperate, because three years ago, this body-mind came down with a condition called ulcerative colitis. Prior to this condition, this body-

mind was actively engaged in songwriting and singing. Three albums have been created to date. The work, relatively speaking, is good. But when the illness came, nothing helped. I lost weight. I could not sing anymore. The elated high, which was essentially a kundalini-like uprising as a result of the singing, could not be sustained. I was forced to go on long-term disability after being briefly hospitalised.

Everything fell apart. Everything. I felt that time was not a commodity that I had in abundance, and I sought relief from the overwhelming suffering that was a product of my mind. Music was only a temporary aid. I found no real help there. All the spiritual 'knowledge' that I gained over the years did nothing to ease my mind. There I was, a shadow of my former self, residing in a body that was weakened. I was forced to co-exist with a mind that only made things worse. There was a period of great despair.

As anyone who looks for this knowledge, from a place of great need, or earnestness as Maharaj would say, it found me. I read everything by every author, yet it did not create the direct recognition required to see what is. Adyashanti has endless discourses on this subject and talks about how any effort is pointless, how you cannot force enlightenment, etc. Gangaji speaks of giving up all efforts of seeking. And while these may be aspects of what transpires, their teaching does not help the 'person' to 'see' it for themselves. Not in the way your work does. They have changed their names and conduct satsang. Some charge quite a bit to supposedly 'awaken' the seeker. It is only after having read your book that I see how utterly false their approach is. They are trying to market and mass produce this teaching to profit from it. This is not entirely honest. The truth of one's being should not be hidden, and should not be something that someone has to pay through the nose for, in order to attain. Nisargadatta Maharaj did not charge anyone and openly taught all who sought his wisdom.

It was not until yesterday that there was direct recognition of that which is. Your work is profoundly clear. It forces the 'person' to look exactly where one needs to look, to see that. I understand now that awareness itself is always in the absolute state. I understand that the person appearing within the field of this alive, formless awareness

can never hope to attain enlightenment. Awareness itself is already that, already in the absolute. The body and mind are not qualified, as mere appearances within that, to realise anything except their utter redundancy in this understanding. I see that I am that, and that I have always been that, or rather, that whatever that is has always been present. 'I', as the person, have appeared, changed, moved this way and that way, yet all within this unmovable field of awareness.

To say that I have gained self-realisation is not fully accurate. There is clear, direct understanding that recognition of the nature of self does not arise as a result of some gradual process or practise. Your work clearly points this out. For months there was a ripening process, but there were still doubts, and your work washed them away.

My intent is to thank you, from the deepest place of being, for the gift of clarity and understanding that you have provided 'me'. As I look upon my life over the last two years, during which I gradually began to improve physically, I find myself in an interesting predicament. Understanding this teaching, though immediate, certainly did not unfold that way. It took a long time before it was fully realised. I see that this is not necessary, and I agree with you when you say that a teacher who is very clear on this, and who knows how to point this out, is needed.

I am not now physically ill, nor have I regained the former physical shape I used to have. My mind is sharp. The only topic that interests me is abiding in the self and, if possible, helping others. When I consider what capacity I have to help people, I see only that I understand the nature of that which your teachings point to. And I have the capacity to point it out to others. The last two years, I had gone to my father's place almost every evening. We would speak of this subject of non-duality, and he too gained the fruits of staying with pure awareness. He saw the grasping nature of the mind. This all helped to ease his suffering as well. But it was only when 'I' got it, explained it, and pointed it out directly, that I see he got it as well. He is very clear on this, as am I. Your method, or approach to understanding, is by far the most reliable and practical.

I doubt that I will go back to work. Only time will tell. But having gained this understanding, I feel that I am able to help others who have sought but need this firm, direct pointing and seeing in order to clear away doubts.

I have no intention of writing a book on this subject. Your books already point more clearly and are more useful than anything out there. All I have to offer people is the clarity and certainty that I have gained in knowing that for myself. I do not pursue the music anymore. That person and his dreams are in the past. All that remains is a healthy, clear-minded, articulate body-mind, which has the capacity to help others see their own self. If I can help in any way by using your clear approach as an instrument of helping seekers to find the already present clarity within themselves, then that I would do so wholeheartedly. With gratitude and joy beyond words....

John: This is a detailed and heartfelt letter, in which you share your background and experiences with the points being shared. Clearly, the basic points of what is being communicated are there in your direct experience at this point. There are no hierarchies, no levels, no stages nor steps to being what you already are. However, if this point is not clear to someone who is interested and earnest, it can be pointed out simply and directly. The net result, as you know, is that you are left free, undeniably and doubtlessly free, as what you are and have always been. This was pointed out directly by Nisargadatta Maharaj to Bob Adamson and he pointed it out to me. Now the essence is clear to yourself as well. Such is the power and effect of the simple, direct and unadorned communication free of concepts, even spiritual concepts.

While there is nothing inherently wrong in supporting the message at a relative level, once the teachings are bought and sold as in a marketplace and the focus drifts onto the 'unique state' of the 'special teacher' and the business of collecting students and selling teachings, many dualistic and erroneous concepts are bound to slip in to alter the message. Ever-present being, which is here beyond any doubt, cannot be packaged, sold and turned into a system or commodity. Such attempts, however noble, only obscure the basic

truth. That is why such presentations generally lose the ability to help others and often devolve into gradualistic, hierarchical systems, however much the founders deny it. So, in essence, I agree with your analysis and experience.

Be that as it may, I have felt for myself that it is a natural outgrowth of this recognition to share the pointers as and when the opportunity presents itself. If you feel drawn to do that, I encourage you to do so. My only suggestion, which is really hard to avoid once you see the reality and directness of this, is to keep with the basic points and keep the emphasis on the actual truth that is the listener's own immediate existence. In this 'approach', it is not really about the messenger or the message, but what is being pointed to in the listener. That is really the power and uniqueness of this. As you are well aware, in the 'spiritual marketplace' such direct communications are the exception rather than the rule.

It is good to see many different people expressing this, because each expression is unique and may resonate with some who would not otherwise hear it. You can and will express things in ways different from myself. Nisargadatta Maharaj did not sound like his teacher, nor did Bob Adamson sound like Nisargadatta Maharaj. Again, it is not the outward form of the expression that is the key, but what is being pointed to. We cannot simply parrot what others have said. If we do so it becomes a dead concept anyhow. So you will need to speak from direct experience and use the words and pointers that naturally come up for you. In general, I find that the essence gets down to a heart-to-heart sharing with those who are sincerely interested in looking for themselves. With the basics of this clear, opportunities for that naturally present themselves.

Non-Duality and Social Reform

Question: I hope you are well. Thank you for the wonderful conversation we shared last night. Some questions have come up since. There is a fear of not being able to help the world evolve, because my friends and newer acquaintances, such as yourself, appear to not want to make 'big splashes' in the world. I have enjoyed the fruits and freedoms that our democracy and our growing social equality offers. I am so grateful to people like Alan Watts, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ken Wilber, because they have spoken to my vital essence and inspired my recent abandonment of all else for 'this'. This has brought me to guys like you, who shock my idealistic mind with the most enticing message of 'it is already here'. It feels like this fear of losing interest in the world is perhaps blocking my surrender into my true nature.

John: There is no contradiction here. The very specific focus of non-duality is to clarify in direct experience the real nature of what you are. This is important because all seeking, suffering and doubt can be ultimately traced to confusion on this point. What that body-mind does in the world depends on the natural causes and conditions that manifest. Some who 'know who they are' are very active in the world; others are not. Once you see who you are, there is natural and spontaneous functioning. There is no implication of leaving the world or inactivity.

Also, this is not about 'surrendering' into your true nature. That implies a dualism. The true nature is present. We are simply having a look to see what it is.

Q: There is always 'ego watch' going on, especially when I write or say 'me', 'mine,' etc.

John: Ego, as I use the term, is the notion of being separate from reality. It is a false notion. The point is to see this, not watching and judging thoughts.

Q: Also, there is a tendency to want to be liked by you and, really, by all people, but especially by those who have awakened to and abide unbroken within their true nature. I see in other 'students' as well this longing to be liked by the teacher. I wonder if this is a hindrance?

John: I would not worry about this. The point is to get down to the essence of things. Have a look and be clear on what you are. There are not really 'those who have awakened'. This is a projection and imagination. It is based on the belief in the reality of separate persons. Then we think some have it and some do not. This is a wrong concept. You are that reality. Make sure the meaning of this is clear.

Q: Last night I was relaxing into 'I am-ness'. There was a point where all of a sudden I was falling, and there was no ground. Terror, clenching and ultimate contraction occurred.

John: Saying you are relaxing into 'I am-ness' is not what this is about. That is still a dualism, really. Who is relaxing into what? This implies division. Your being *is*. You are *that*. We are looking at that fact, not turning it into an attainment.

Q: It reminded me of a dream I had a few weeks or months ago. In the dream, Ken Wilber gave me two large white feathered wings, and I went outside alone and closed my eyes and let myself fall. I was spinning and spiraling and, to my surprise, I never hit ground, even though I was standing on ground when my fall began. In the past I have heard the phrase 'enlightenment is an accident, and meditation makes you more accident prone'. Would you agree?

John: No. Who needs enlightenment, when you are that reality? Your being is reality presently, not as a result of an event that happens in

time. Seeking enlightenment again implies duality. As it says in the *Hsin Hsin Ming*, an ancient Chinese Zen poem, 'Even to be attached to the idea of enlightenment is to go astray'.

Q: Would it be wise to simply rest in 'I am-ness', in the simple feeling of being, as the complete meditation?

John: Again, this implies duality. Trying to rest in 'I am-ness' implies an entity to do that. The term 'I am-ness' comes from the teachings of Nisargadatta Maharaj. It would be important to understand the meaning of that term, which is generally misunderstood.

Q: By the way, this teaching of non-dual, pure awareness would be illegal in some countries. Perhaps those interested in it would be persecuted in places like China.

John: The message is generally resisted by authoritarian power structures. To teach 'you are reality' completely undermines the ultimate value of external hierarchies and is often conceived as threatening. This is not to deny the relative, practical utility of organisations and institutions at their own level. Non-duality is the final message of spiritual traditions and philosophies, but is generally not promoted openly in the exoteric versions of the teachings.

Q: Yes! I want to write and create art that pushes the envelope, ruffles feathers or even simply offers simple truth in service of cultural evolution that would help till the garden for more adequate and widespread growth of non-dual schools, classes, teachers and students.

John: This all happens spontaneously. Just make sure you are clear on the basics; that way what you point to is clear and free from needless dualistic conceptions. Otherwise, you will just put people back into conceptual boxes and perpetuate your own blind spots and misinformation.

Q: It is the same love that makes you drive to Santa Cruz once a week to point out our true nature to us and to write and speak so that people who want liberation can awaken.

John: I do not support the model of people awakening, etc. It gets back into a dualistic position. However, a natural desire is there to help anyone who is interested to be free of needless suffering. This can only be shared with those who are genuinely interested. It is not an ideology to be foisted on groups or populations.

Q: I am grateful for the human rights movements that moved children out of the work force and into schools, because I myself now know how to read and understand bigger words like 'consciousness' and 'non-duality'. We owe it to hearts and minds that have done the work to make all of this so. But it appears that this evolutionary and revolutionary drive falters within the 'realised' such as Bob Adamson and his friends.

John: Not at all. This is a huge misunderstanding and misperception. These kinds of teachings are the fulfillment of the evolutionary drive, the capstone of all seeking and human aspiration. You are speaking at different levels of discourse. Social service, education and human rights are all worthy goals. But these are not the same as knowing who and what you are. You cannot legislate or impose that. It is a deeply interior quest that only comes alive within the individual when the sincere question to know who and what I am dawns.

Q: Do you think the fear of this loss of drive for beneficial change in the world may be a hindrance for some of us when it comes to truly experiencing our true nature?

John: Again, these are not contradictory, so do not make a duality of them. Find out who you are and naturally serve your allotted function in life as it comes up to do so. In the final non-dual view, there are no individuals nor any external world to help. Even viewing this way is a product of dualistic conceptualising. So again, you are mixing up different subjects or levels of discourse. There is no conflict between

knowing who you are and the other admirable goals you are mentioning. The conflict is coming in within the mind, which is imagining them to be antagonistic.

Q: My own work and passion is in trying to take a 'Hanuman leap' over the proverbial line of what is acceptable and showing the nation or world that it is psychologically abusive to tell a child they will burn in hell, because firstly they are not only impressionable in these early stages of development, but their experience of Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, and even cartoons are so vivid that, to them, this is all absolute reality. This is how a child translates the world in general, because life experience has not yet taught them to doubt or distrust.

John: This is all praiseworthy, but the actions will be most effective if you are clear and solid on who you are. That way you will not introduce false views and dualistic concepts into the reforms you advocate. Most social reforms fail on this point, because they do not offer genuine freedom but only modified ideologies (conceptual systems). Real non-duality sets us free from all dualistic concepts and hence delivers us to lasting freedom, not merely social reforms.

Q: My fear is that experiencing non-dual awareness, and thereby abiding eternally in this blissful liberation, would cut 'me' off from the same drive that makes you and Sailor Bob take the time to point out true nature to those who want to be in this absolute and genuine self. Can you follow this mild conundrum I speak of here?

John: This is far too much conceptualising and duality! The mind is creating all kinds of false problems here. 'Non-dual awareness', 'abiding', 'blissful liberation', 'me', 'you'. Nothing of the sort exists, except conceptually. This is how the mind ties itself up in knots. In all this, the natural state is being overlooked and missed.

Q: Another part of me feels like we are most effective when we are completely self-aware.

John: This is egoistic and individualistic. Who is this 'we'? You are making a dualism between ourselves and awareness and imagining it to be some state or attainment. This is not true. So again, the mind is generating its own imagined problems.

Q: So perhaps my fears are erroneous?

John: Yes, they are founded on false assumptions.

Q: I am grateful to you and the teaching you share. And I know it is true, pure and genuine. It comes from only love. I know that you can never see anything outside of yourself that does not exist already within yourself. However, I doubt myself so much.

John: Only the false identity can be doubted. But what you really are, your real nature, is present and beyond any doubts at all. This is the beauty of it.

Q: I want more than anything to be released from the fear of death. And it is obvious that awakening to my true nature is the way.

John: Yes. The fear of death is based on taking the body as our identity. This is a wrong concept. Knowing what you truly are cancels the erroneous concepts and ends the fear of death conclusively.

Only the One Substance

Question: What is referred to as 'awareness' or 'knowing' also rises and sets, right? The common example of awareness being present even in deep sleep (proven by waking up on hearing an alarm) is really an assumption, is it not? Because the hearing of the alarm and the awareness that hears it both arise simultaneously. Prior to the alarm ringing, there was no awareness. Something either is or is not. I cannot assume on waking that 'Ah yes, awareness must have been present in deep sleep because the alarm was heard'. The fact is that this theory is cooked up only in the waking state. No such assertion can be made in deep sleep state. So, on direct evidence, 'awareness', as commonly referred to, does not exist in deep sleep. But I did notice the arising of this so-called awareness clearly and undoubtedly, with one hundred percent certainty. The rising of so-called 'awareness' was evident. So I now infer that I am really something that precedes awareness itself. I also infer that I exist even when so-called existence (appearance) is not manifested. But that is inference only.

At this point it hits me like a hammer that all I have been trying to do is experience what precedes experience but still doing so within the experiential domain! That is the whole crux of this so-called search, is it not? Once one truly sees, acknowledges and understands the impossibility (and actually the stupidity) of it, what is next? Is this 'giving up trying to get there' all there is to it? I mean, if you know for certain that it is not comprehensible in this domain, what else is there to do? What can you do?

John: These are good insights. You can see that the mind can only push the envelope so far before it hits a blank wall. That is why it is said repeatedly that 'the answer is not in the mind'. In other words,

the search objectively in the mind implodes. Still you are there! But not as a concept. What you truly are, even here and now, is not appearing within the level of concepts. This is not an inference, but a bold fact of incontrovertible experience.

You say, 'I mean, if you know for certain that it is not comprehensible in this domain, what else is there to do? What *can* you do?' See the folly of the question! Who is this 'you'? And is not the question only another attempt by the mind to find reality at the level of concepts and even within the domain of dualistic consciousness, which, as you rightly surmise, is itself a phenomenal appearance? Think very carefully about your comment: 'I mean, if you know for certain ...'. This 'you' stands at the borderline between this domain and the context in which the domain appears. When you say there is a knowing that it is not comprehensible in this domain, that implies a knowledge beyond, or prior to, the domain itself. The knowledge that consciousness and all phenomena appear to you, to your innate being, is a fact, not an inference.

You are actually standing in and as the 'prior to consciousness domain', but you are not quite appreciating that fact. There is still a slight interest to find yourself in an appearance. You are not an appearance! However, your questioning and looking has 'put the question' to the blind faith in the previous position. The house of cards is falling down. The reality of the conceptual structures is crumbling! The best thing to do is: full stop! Any 'doing' would be from the point of view of a false phenomenal entity, which is only an appearance, not a reality in itself.

Keep in mind that in all of this, you have not disappeared. You have not denied your being. Nor have you ever contradicted that there is a principle present that recognises the coming and going of consciousness and all else. That is what you are. That is what is being pointed to. It is actually the one unalterable constant, the ultimate necessary ground of all possible experiences, even of the experience of consciousness, which many confuse as the primordial source.

Hopefully, all this is going to deter you from any longer searching in the mental realm. Turn the looking one-hundred-and-eighty

degrees away from the mind and gaze directly into the heart of being itself.

There are different ways of talking about and pointing to this stuff. In some traditions, like Buddhism and with Nisargadatta Maharaj, consciousness refers to the manifesting dualistic consciousness. The prior source is left as unnamed. Sometimes, the source is called 'pure awareness' or 'non-conceptual awareness'. That principle is not the phenomenal consciousness, but the substrate. In other traditions, the term 'consciousness' is used to refer to the substrate. It is all a matter of context. Such are the difficulties when trying to discuss in concepts that which is not a concept!

There is another approach that points to the present knowing as non-conceptual reality. That knowing is clearly phenomenal. However, if you think of it as waves undulating and erupting into phenomenal experience, then the substance of the waves is, in fact, the non-dual absolute. The waves are the ocean in essence, but their forms are ever-changing. That is why it is said that the names and forms are the reality in essence, but not how they appear. Still, that essence is what is really there. Grasp a wave and what do you come up with? Only the one substance (the ocean water). So if you look into the heart of any present act of knowing, you find only the non-conceptual source shining there.

After the Death of the Mind-Body Instrument

Question: When the dream of this life has been seen through and there is no separate self sense, life goes on as before. After the death of the mind-body instrument, does not the dream continue into higher dimensional vehicles or bodies, independent of whether or not the separate self sense has fallen away?

John: The deepest view on this is that all there is, is that one, non-dual source. What appears, if it appears, is only the appearance of that. In being that and realising that all there is, is that, and that the appearance is only a conceptual appearance, the questions about appearances fade, as they lose all meaning. Waves may be constantly appearing on the sea, but the sea is all there is. From the strict perspective of the sea, the waves are not any independent reality at all. Even the notion of a future time is a conceptual assumption appearing in the reality of now. So we are talking of dream stuff, mere suppositions. What is real now, and all that is really here, is the non-conceptual presence of pure being itself. The seeming appearances are only that. All there is, is that and nothing else. From that angle, there are no separate appearances and no questions to speak of, nor are any answers needed.

Granting the appearance of body and mind (which is really a concession of an unfounded dualism), the question, 'Does the dream continue?', can be countered with the counter question, 'To whom?'. If we pursue that line, we again arrive at the non-dual, one-with-no-second, and the question fades. Realise that there is no dream without the dreaming subject. If we grant the reality of the body-mind and the dreaming subject, then the issue of future states for the dreaming subject may be allowable at a phenomenal level of 'seeming to be'. For body-minds and seeming subjects, there are

seeming appearances and seeming future states. All the dualistic religions and philosophies are aimed at this level and are meant for those who have not risen above the dualistic perspective (but only apparently!).

So the main thing is not to follow such questions, but get to the heart of who and what you are, in order to arrive at non-dual experience. From this perspective, there is nothing else but that. There is no time, space, duality, future, past or individuals. There is only that. Even the question or doubt is that! If we grant the validity of the duality and reality of the seeming subject and object, there are several plausible 'explanations' for how the manifestation unrolls. Any of them may have some relative usefulness at a makeshift level. None are fully accurate in all aspects. The mere fact that there are competing 'systems' belies their provisional nature.

Even to talk of 'future states' implies we are taking time at face value, as real in itself. But time itself is only a mental concept. So the question of future states implies the assumption that some inherent reality is available in mere conceptual mind stuff. The appearances have no inherent reality or independent nature of their own. The appearances are 'empty', only seeming. The purpose of the pointers is only to pacify or deactivate conceptual thought. In the 'full stop', which is here and now, there is unconditional, non-conceptual peace. It is the resolution of dualistic conceptualising, which is at the root of all seeking, suffering and doubt. At death, the phenomenal universe resolves into your inherent natural being or real identity, just as it does currently when entering sleep or even in the gap between two thoughts.

What You Are Is beyond Any Question

Question: Last time we spoke, we were talking about seeing how concepts keep wanting to assert what is real. But I expressed that I was starting to see them as concepts. At the time, I was wondering what I would find once I stopped going to thought to evaluate whether something is good or bad. If I could sum up in a single phrase what I found, it would be, much to my surprise, a mysterious sense of well being, a sense that everything is OK.

John: Excellent. This is the point of it all.

Q: I now feel more relaxed about everything. I used to feel that life needed to be controlled. Now I do not see the need to control anything, yet things get done regardless, and even with more focus and attention than they were in the past. Suddenly, experiences that were very different in my mind (for example, working over the weekend versus spending the weekend at the beach) do not feel that different anymore. I find myself enjoying them both about the same. So many regrets about the past, so many worries about the future are all gone!

John: Beautiful!

Q: My question is this. I still read every once in a while about non-duality....

John: All the pointers are only meant to get you to understand what you are already experiencing. They are all dead concepts, fingers pointing to the moon, as they say. If you find them helpful, use them. If not, forget them!

Q: What I find in some authors is a certain clarity about things that I do not have.

John: The only experience worth having is the clarity that comes in seeing your true state as it is, which is 'nothing wrong anymore'. So do not assume they have something you do not. In most cases, that would not be true. Skill with juggling spiritual concepts is not the same as clarity!

*Q: Here are a few points I have read about that I do not understand
....*

John: Before you begin, let me say that there are endless provisional pointers. If you start trying to get clear on them all, that would be an endless undertaking. Like I said, they are all only for encouraging you to see your natural state. Beyond that, merely studying for intellectual clarity is not worth too much. In other words, what you are doing is likely a needless undertaking.

Q: Here goes. 'Realise that you are emptiness'. This really does not make any sense to me. I have not realised that I am emptiness, really. I feel an experience of well being. But what I am, I really cannot tell. Something mysterious is all I can say.

John: You are. That is fact. It is simple and clear. That is not an object. It is 'no thing'. It is empty of names, forms and concepts. Emptiness is one way to describe that. You are that.

Q: 'You should rest in awareness'. I do not get this either. Am I resting in awareness? I would perhaps say that we are always resting in awareness.

John: Yes. So this is a useless and false dualistic concept. It is not that you are always resting in awareness. You *are* awareness itself. There is no duality!

Q: 'Non-duality'. I come from a very Catholic educational background. I remember when I was a child that I thought that something had been misunderstood, because the separation between God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, and you or me could not possibly exist. In essence, we all had to be one and the same. So non-duality is something that I feel to be true. I can even make an intellectual argument for this, because all separation seems to arise in thought. But experientially, this is something that I cannot confirm. Yet I read about people seeing clearly that they are the space around them and everything contained in it.

John: Non-duality means whatever you are and whatever reality is (being, awareness, etc.) are not two. There is no division. Next, all that appears is not independent, separate or divided from that. You cannot have any thought or experience independent of awareness, for example. Awareness is all there is, really. You are that, but so is the appearance. This is not about some 'you' becoming one with 'everything'. That is still duality.

Q: Truthfully, I do not think that the answers to these questions are that important.

John: Very true!

Q: Yet, the questions have come up many times, and I am curious about this. So I might as well ask them.

John: You might as well ask them and get them out to be dismantled. Questions can be endless, but what you are is beyond any question. That is the main point.

All Troubles Are Based in Concepts

Question: I can experience myself as unbounded awareness, but only when I remember that fact.

John: This is too many moving parts and variables. Clearly implied in this view are the concepts of 'I', 'time', and reality being a 'state'. Awareness is. No one is experiencing it. It is the heart and constancy of the experiencing itself. See this fact. Do not turn it into some experience for some imagined person. That is the core of the problem! Remembering and forgetting are both being registered within the non-conceptual, pure knowing itself. That is all that needs to be seen. There is no 'I' as a factor in this at any time.

Q: I do realise that even in such an experience there is someone who is remembering or experiencing.

John: Exactly. It is all conceptual. Pure awareness shines without break in all of it. The subtle reference point or belief in the presence of the separate 'I' is the blinding concept. See that this is only a concept and not your innate true state at all.

Q: The sense of myself as an individual is my usual state.

John: Most assuredly not! It is only present when you think about it. It is therefore temporary and variable. You (your natural being) are the constant invariable factor, not the notion of individuality.

Q: Mostly, I live as this individual with all the usual problems. It is a lot better than it used to be. But this is definitely not a case of 'nothing wrong'!

John: As long as there is any belief in, or identity with, the individuality notion, the root of the seeking, suffering and doubts is in spin. But only while you are believing it!

Q: It is almost as though I really understand this. It is as though I 'snap into' that understanding often. But I do not remain in that experience.

John: You are still giving a bit of belief to the concepts. They are fictional, and the root of them (the 'I' notion') is completely non-existent. This needs to be seen.

Q: I have this idea that it should happen faster than this.

John: This is going headlong back into the conceptualising. Happens for whom? What happens? Being or awareness is. It is neither fast nor slow.

Q: What do I mean? When you went to 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, you spent a few days with him and then you were 'finished'. At least I think so. The resolution did not happen months or years after your visit. I really do understand that there is nothing to happen and no time in which it could happen. But this quagmire here goes on seemingly forever.

John: Only as long as the interest goes into the concepts of imaginary separation!

Q: My sense is that I have to keep 'remembering' the truth of who I am on an ongoing basis. There is reminding myself, bringing myself 'back to' this state. But this is just practise disguised as non-duality. There is a person practising something so he will disappear.

John: Exactly. This approach never ends because it is based on a false premise. The best solution is to examine the reality of the person once and for good. You may give some lip service to the idea of 'no person'. But the concepts are all rooted in the continued belief

in someone separate from reality! Do not just say 'no person'. Make sure you see that there is, in fact, no person at all. You are the non-conceptual reality itself. These points must be very clear.

Q: Perhaps I have tied myself in knots with concepts.

John: The concepts have tied up themselves. Again, there is a reference to the 'I' hidden in your statement. How can the 'I' be tied up if it is not there? You have to catch the subtlety of this!

Q: There is suffering over this, and yet I have seen the joy of my being. I know my being is always and now. But it seems to be all a crock of knowledge because mostly it is not alive.

John: Being is the reality. It is here and now. We seemingly look away from it due to some residual belief in and identification with the concepts. It is imperative to understand this 'mechanism'. Just do that and it is game over. All troubles are based in concepts. In truth, the being, your innate nature, has never gone anywhere in all of this. Has it?

Q: How to stabilise this truth?

John: Wrong question! Truth, your innate state, is ever-present. You are that. Why do you need to stabilise in what you are? Practically speaking, you need to understand the nature and root of the suffering. Then examine the root and see if it is real. This removes the basis of the suffering. Then there is no problem. You are what you are. And that is enough!

Game Over

Question: I have an observation to share concerning the 'basics'. It struck me as quite funny and revealing, in all its simplicity. If there is no personal 'me' or separate I, then certainly the search is over!

John: Touché! This is the culminating insight. The assumed 'I' is the root of all other limiting notions. If it is not (does not exist), the basis of all troubles is found to be not present. This is what I always point out. It is good that you are seeing it for yourself.

Q: There is no one left to do the searching, and what is searched for (the present awareness) is what is left! If I am the present awareness, then there is no separate 'I', because they exclude each other. These two basic ideas seem to presuppose each other. They are the two sides of the same coin.

John: Correct.

Q: Certainly this is no news for you, and it may only look like playful logical semantics. But it actually struck me quite deeply. It is not a final realisation or something like that.

John: For whom? Who needs final realisation if there is no one present to have such a thing? And if you already are that 'present-awareness'? Full stop. The statement is falling back into the dualism which your seeing has just undermined. See this point!

Q: But the insight helps me to stabilise my certainty.

John: Who!?! This clearly falls back into the dualism. You just cancelled the 'me', and now you are talking about it again. This is the subtlety of it. See this and be done with such sophistry!

Q: It allows me to trust that the final realisation lies within these basic thoughts or pointers.

John: This is all useless conceptualising. Throw it overboard. It is totally bogus. It is all predicated on letting the 'me' notion back into the discussion. If you are consistent with your original insight, you will see this inconsistency. Nail this down. Is there a personal 'me'? Yes or no? If not, the point is final, and there can be no more discussions involving such a non-existent phantom. How far are you from 'present awareness' now? Are you anything other than that now? If not, full stop. Where else do you need to go beyond being that unconditioned reality? See these points right now, and it is game over.

Being and Thinking about Being

Question: What you say really resonates with me. I have followed the 'not this, not this' approach, and I have come to realise that I am the consciousness that is conscious of everything but itself. But, as you correctly say, I have not negated my being. That is the point! How can I negate my being? I am here and I know that I am here. How can I negate this?

John: Excellent. Now you are onto something!

Q: My direct experience is that as far as I am conscious, I am here. But when there is no consciousness (as in deep sleep), I am not so sure to be here anymore.

John: Now you are speculating and going back into mental interpretation. Stay with actual being rather than thinking and speculating about it. This is where you go astray.

Q: If I try to go deeper in my observation, I can admit that even in deep sleep I must be there, because if some kind of thought appears I am there to witness it. However, my experience is that I am not aware until I wake up.

John: These are all wonderful guesses and concepts! Your being is here now. Look at that. That is the point. Your experience tells you that consciousness comes and goes. To whom? To you, to your innate being. Therefore, you are prior to consciousness. But that innate being of yours is also here now. So stay with present moment experience, instead of speculating about sleep. In sleep you have no doubts or worries, so that is already a non-issue.

Q: When you say to observe that I am present and I am aware, it works for me if I am conscious. But if I am not conscious it does not work anymore, because in that case maybe I am present, but I am not aware of being present.

John: In none of these concepts and doubts has your actual being gone anywhere. However, by following the mind, you are missing that simple fact.

Q: I do not perceive myself as never-changing, eternal, without beginning and without end. I perceive myself as something intermittent, something that switches on in the morning and switches off in the night.

John: You perceive that. That fact is known. You are missing that subtle point. You observe the coming and going of consciousness. It is that simple, nothing more. So you can drop all the doubts and get back to having a look at your actual being. Mostly, what you are doing now is *thinking about* being.

Q: I know that what I am talking about is consciousness, which is just a 'state' that comes and goes in the simple presence that I am. I know that something unchanging must be there to witness the appearance and disappearance of consciousness. But I do not perceive myself as that presence. That presence is for me just something that logically must exist.

John: Does your being 'logically' exist? Or is it a fact? Currently, the mind is entirely hijacking the looking, and you are discounting your actual experience. This is the trap. Get back to looking at being. Being is a fact. You are not looking at it. The mind is thinking about it. You are following the mind into doubt and not going by direct experience.

Q: I also want you to know that with your clarity and your patience you are really helping me!

John: I have been down this road myself, so I may be able to share a few pointers based on my experience.

Your Own Experience Has All the Answers

Question: I find myself very involved with my thoughts, especially around the idea of seeing and feeling this presence that I am.

John: This is needless. It is adding in an unnecessary layer of complication. Who is trying to see, feel, etc.? This is only conceptual. Pause all this and realise that you simply are. Be willing to pause the habit of returning to the mind and concepts. Notice the simple and natural state of being. It cannot be seen or felt. It is. Seeing or feeling have to do with objects. So the mind is trying to turn reality into an object. Naturally, it is failing, because your being or natural state is not an object.

Q: I remember you said that the best thing is to always come back to the basics. Yes, I exist! Yes, that is true without any conditions!

John: This is direct experience.

Q: This truth is not totally rooted. But I do see 'I' and ponder on it.

John: This is following concepts and looking away from your direct experience. See how you are going into needless complications here by following the doubts and thoughts.

Q: But then what am I?

John: This is the mind asking. This thought is not really needed. You are before thoughts. Being is not to be grasped in the mind.

Q: Yes. I see that this question is raised by the mind, and it makes the mind restless.

John: Yes! See this point. So why go there? The being, your own being, is clear and doubtless. Try letting it be without feeling compelled to return to thoughts about it. Such thoughts do not lead to any clarity, but only to doubts and restless thinking!

Q: Even if I know that the mind will never, ever give an answer, I cannot help this movement to the mind!

John: Why not? If you really see there is no answer or possibility of any answer in the mind, there is a natural pause. You will not stick your hand in a fire once you know it to be hot! Why return to thought if it brings no clarity or peace?

Q: Argh! But I do not yet see it this way.

John: Just understand the mechanism of it. That is enough. We follow the mind because we are interested in it. It is not some independent power or force beyond our control.

Q: It feels as if my eyes are looking, scanning the world to see if there has been some change yet in my experience.

John: This is an erroneous concept and not needed at all.

Q: There is a sense of looking for something.

John: What are you looking for? Being, your true nature, is here as plain as day. It need not be searched for. This 'searching habit' is an old concept you are still giving some importance to. You are not yet fully convinced that your own being that is right here and now is the only reality there ever was, is or will be. Just know that simple being is the only reality. All else only comes and goes and has no substance or final reality.

Q: I guess the understanding of my nature is not complete then?

John: You are still following the mind a bit. Being is full and complete already. It is what you are.

Q: What to do at this stage in which I want to figure out what I am?

John: Be very clear on why being is the final reality and how you are that. It is the most grand, magnificent and world-shaking thing. But we overlook it! Also be very clear that your experience is showing you that looking in the mind and following thoughts in order to 'find' reality does not lead to any lasting peace or understanding. Your experience is telling you this, but you are ignoring it a bit.

Q: I can sense that I actually want the trouble!

John: The 'I' thought is the trouble!

Q: I hesitated to bring all this up, but I feel it is important to clarify things with your help and insights.

John: Your own experience has all the answers you ever need. Just make sure you are seeing the lessons being shown to you. A key point for you to understand is that being is not to be searched for. It is already present, already attained, already known. You do not need to follow the doubts about this any longer.

Circular Problems

Question: I bought your book You Were Never Born. I have now read most of it. It has been great reading. I very much appreciate the tone of your presentation. I will continue to keep company with this book. However, at some places certain questions were evoked.

John: That is the problem with reading books! The point is to be looking at your being, not reading books about it!

Q: Since in the text there are recurring reminders about what is essential (namely, being and awareness), I first thought I should just let these questions go. However, precisely because this book resonated so well with me and seemed to 'resound' with truth, the questions were formulated. They are questions that have come up before in relation to other texts I have read, as well as certain experiences.

John: The point is not to be following the mind's doubts, which are endless, but acknowledging the fact of your own doubtless nature.

Q: I have recently undergone two surgical operations. The evening before the first of these operations, while lying at the hospital, I was trying to read John Greven's book Oneness. Difficulties arose when it came to questioning my non-identification with, or lack of relation to, what in that situation so strongly appeared to be 'my' body. In the interview contained in You Were Never Born, I found references to physical pain. You affirm that you, like the interviewer, have dealt with physical pain. You do point out that pain can be appreciated differently as more 'impersonal'. But this is part of what confuses me, because when you refer to a pain, you have experienced it is not essentially tied to some particular body. In the interview, there are

references to Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj and their respective illnesses. True, 'they' are both said to have 'resided' elsewhere, but still it seems like the illnesses are referred to 'them' separately.

John: Bodies appear in consciousness. Bodies have pleasures and pains. At the level of bodies, they appear as separate. Still, they are all appearing in you, your own conscious presence. That is all that you need to see. Then you can drop these questions and return to being clear on what you are.

Q: Now, I do not know if you have said something similar some place, but I have seen so many examples of exponents of non-duality who first say that they are not the body. But then some paragraphs later they assure that of course they would not be stupid enough to step out on the street before an approaching car. Or, it is pointed out that, of course, even if we need not identify with an illness of the body, we should take due care of it in case we are ill, consult a doctor, etc. Such statements are sometimes prefaced by the qualification 'on the relative level'.

John: There is some confusion in these statements. Bodies appear in consciousness. So be it. Let the body-mind function naturally. Things will take care of themselves anyhow. Your abiding being is not to be equated as a mere body, as such a body is simply coming and going in consciousness. In addition, consciousness itself is coming and going in what you are. Saying 'I am the body' and taking appropriate steps to care for it is from the conventional point of view. There is nothing wrong with that attitude, but it is provisional. In truth, the body, world, consciousness, etc. are only conceptual divisions anyhow. The point is not to get lost in these makeshift distinctions, but rather to be clear on who you are.

Q: Reasonable as this sounds, it seems confusing to me. There seems to be an implication that there is 'someone' who has a very particular relation to a particular body in contradistinction to other bodies.

John: This is bringing in a misplaced 'ego' or separate self concept. The 'I' itself is only a conventional, makeshift label. As you are well aware, the separate self is fictional, a mere assumption. Once that is seen, the questions dissolve. The 'who' is only a provisional reference point. See it as it is, and there is no problem.

Q: If person X is careful not to step out before a car, it seems to be implied that there are after all different, separate selves somehow located 'with' particular separate bodies. (One sometimes finds the formulations that we are 'more than' our body but still the owner of it. This does not seem to answer the question, however.)

John: There is a natural intelligence in the body-mind, and odds are it is taking care of itself. Saying 'I did this and that' is only conventional truth. In reality, there is no separate self at all.

Q: It does not get less confusing when it is (oft) repeated that, in fact, there do not exist any persons and that all seeming 'action' on the part of the seeming persons is taken care of by itself (that is, without the need for a controlling 'I'). The picture then suggested is rather that 'persons' are just 'images', as such not really living, but rather like 'objects' being pushed here and there by the ungraspable totality of life's conditions. But again, who is in that case the one declaring him- or herself not stupid enough to step out in front of the car? Who is, as it were, stepping out or not stepping out?

John: If you see the point that the 'who' is merely conventional, you will not keep raising the question! Just admit the fact that the 'I' is conceptual. There is no separate 'who' in the mix. The fact that you keep raising this issue confirms there is some doubt that the 'who' is non-existent. Otherwise, there is no need to keep trying to pin it down. There is no separate entity at all, never was, and never has been. There is seeing, hearing, thinking, acting, etc., but it is not being done by some separate person in the machine. Buddha observed this long ago. Apparently, you are not convinced of this fact. So investigate the truth and see what is what.

Q: Would it be more correct to say that it is a pseudo-problem?

John: All problems are pseudo-problems, because they all make tacit reference to the assumed reality of the individual. Until that point is nailed down, the questions and doubts go on. So the thing to do is look and see if this reference point is valid.

Q: In texts I have read there seems often to be an oscillation between, on the one hand, saying that one's real identity is totally apart from any particular body (the latter just being an image in 'oneself as awareness') and, on the other hand, presupposing that one after all in some sense 'is' one particular body more than any other particular body. This again, of course, makes sense in a conventional context. But what if the very separation is questioned?

John: It is very similar to dream bodies in last night's dreams. If you look at that, you will understand your real position in regard to this body also. All the bodies are apparently separate, but are all only appearing in a common consciousness. However, that consciousness is also an appearance in your real being.

Q: I know that metaphors pointing in the right direction at the same time do not 'cover it all' and in some aspects are misleading. However, what confuses me also comes out very well in the metaphor of the wave and the sea. It is said that insight means that a mistaken belief, a misidentification is let go, which can be compared to when the wave realises it is in fact just a movement of itself, where 'itself' is the sea. Unbounded, open wholeness has as it were deluded itself into thinking it is just a part. Given that misidentification, it can 'look' out over the surface of the ocean, seeing 'others' (other waves) at various distances.

John: It is best not to stand back and theorise about this. Is the actual misidentification let go at this point or still being assumed? This is the practical issue. Try to get out of theory.

Q: But what about statements implying that one has or has not realised his or her true nature?

John: This is wavering quite a bit. The point is that the individual is a phantom. So do not go back into talking about what 'he' or 'she' does! The problem is that you are speaking about this speculatively and trying to align different levels of discourse. It is like trying to integrate illusion and reality and trying to find how it all fits together. The real question is, what are you? All these 'what if' scenarios are inconclusive.

Q: Then there is talk about how one can 'actively' help others realise. Or even that his or her 'presence' will affect others in the direction of realisation.

John: This is all at a provisional level of speaking.

Q: But which others?

John: Exactly. So the issue drops.

Q: If 'I' have realised that 'I' am in fact unbounded wholeness, then the 'mis-identification' is gone. Therefore in referring to the metaphor of water and waves, 'other waves' will not anymore be seen as 'others', will they?

John: Correct. But it is not 'I' that has realised, as this brings in the false reference point. The false reference point is seen and naturally discarded, but not by an individual. For the individual is the false reference point being discarded. All questions end at this point.

Q: 'I' know I am the whole sea and have no particular vantage point from which to see other waves as apart from myself. So how can there be any 'others' to be helped?

John: Very true.

Q: In a piece by Wolter Keers, called the 'The Rabbit in the Hat', there is a series of questions and answers. The answers centre partly around the idea that there is no active person, because, as it says, 'the person is only imagination'. No one can attain 'because the one who wants to attain is a complete illusion. A fantasy image can never attain anything. Only if the fantasised "I" disappears with everything that belongs to it, does the immeasurable reveal itself'.

John: This sounds fairly good. But the immeasurable does not reveal itself. It is the ever-present reality that is the sum and substance of all that is, even now.

Q: However, two paragraphs further below in the text, it is suddenly said that, 'In this room there are at least four people who have completely seen what they are and what they are not'.

John: This is the kind of talk that misleads. Some duality is being supported in such statements. Talking about who 'has it' and who does not leads to insoluble difficulties because it assumes there are individuals present to 'get it' or not. This plays back into the root misunderstanding.

Q: Yes! A host of characteristics typical for the conventional notion of a 'person', a separate someone, are invoked.

John: That is why it is best to challenge this type of talk.

Q: What has been said to be 'only imagination', that is, the person, is now endowed with the capacity to see or not see completely, for example. This combination of a denial of the reality of persons together with descriptions that endow them with capacities which normally are associated with the concept of a person are legion. One writer states, 'Can you still live a life? Well, it is not "you", but life happens automatically'. I think this is the hard part for most people. They think that if they stop re-inventing the 'I', that they will stop going to work, etc.

John: This is a wrong notion. 'You' is only a makeshift label applied by the mind to the natural functioning. 'You' are not growing your hair, breathing, digesting, replacing cells, generating thoughts, etc. Yet it all goes on quite naturally and intelligently.

Q: So people 'invent' (and 're-invent') the 'I', which again seems to imply they have some kind of 'autonomous' mind capacity. That is to say that one can let go of re-inventing the 'I'.

John: No. The 'I' concept is slipping back in here. Realise what Buddha said long ago. There are thoughts but no one thinking them. It is quite simple, actually.

Q: On the last page of your book you state that Buddha gave out various relative teachings 'to address the conceptual position that people imagined themselves to be in'. These teachings are said to be only a 'stepping stone for someone who is totally committed to the idea that they are some kind of entity'. Huh? Non-persons that 'imagine'? And to whom is this imagining a stepping-stone? I see that constantly putting the term 'others' in quotes can make awkward reading, but then what are these 'others'?

John: Only convenient fictions! If the questioner wants to talk about 'others', there will be various expedient teachings to expose the falsity of this concept. But the real problem is the questioner sees himself as a separate entity. Until that is questioned, the doubts will go on.

Q: I realise that there is of course something paradoxical in my very questioning! So maybe the only thing is to not bother about these formulations and rather think about them as images of 'possibilities' pointed out in a play that could be called 'the awakening game'. So basically it could be a matter of the present subject's reluctance to let go of his own identification with a certain image.

John: Yes. Who are you? What is your identity? That is the real issue. If you see yourself as limited and separate, there will be

doubts and questions. If you see that you are the whole and perfect absolute here and now, there are no questions to speak of. So your comments indicate that you are grappling with this fundamental issue. Be clear on that and deal with it directly instead of getting into too many side issues. Is the nature of what you are clear for yourself? That is all that matters at this point.

Q: What about the issue of so-called 'conditioning'?

John: This is a dead end. It assumes there is a 'me' who is conditioned. Put the inquiry there instead of looking for causes for an entity that may not be present.

Q: It is, quite often, pointed out that we (by upbringing, parents and society) become conditioned to identify with an 'image' ('thought', 'idea') of a separate self. I do understand the idea in a conventional context. Professionally, I have worked as a sociologist. But in this context? This way of putting the idea of conditioning seems to presuppose the validity of a 'me' as a separate being conditioned by 'others' or a (pre-existing) society apart from this 'me'. But does not this very idea about 'how' we come to misidentify presuppose the 'validity' of the very misidentification?

John: Yes, it is a circular problem. To break the circle, examine the root of it, the 'me' itself. All the theories of how 'we' got there are clearly provisional. At best they are meant to get us to see the root. If this is missed, all the speculation just adds to the conceptual bondage.

Q: So many non-duality teachers deny reality to a personal history and sometimes also to 'experience'. As there is no 'experiencer', how could there be experience? I am aware that some use 'experiencing' in the present tense as a synonym for 'being aware' or 'knowing'. And then come so many presentations of a story telling how 'this teacher' 'realised', and also references to the particular way this or that teacher understood and taught.

John: That is why talking about how 'this one' or 'that one' 'got it' is misleading. No one 'gets' being! Do not get lost in such pointers. Again, see yourself for yourself. Your being is here in all of its clarity and existence even now. Be clear on this point. Are you something separate and limited, standing apart from the unconditioned reality? If not, then you have no further problems. Only the assumed separate 'I' has troubles. If the 'I' is investigated and seen never to have existed, the game is up.

Pause all the doubts and questions and realise that the clear and present reality of being-awareness is self-evident and shining in all of its nakedness and glory now. You are that. The seeming world is only an appearance in and of that. It is that. There is only that one-without-a-second doubtless reality. There is nothing else.

Pause the False Search

Question: You point out that the answer is not in the mind. You are unrelenting in bringing the seeker back to the fact of being again and again.

John: Yes. You are present and already know this fact. That is the simplicity of it. The being, your being, is already attained. This is why looking for it goes astray. It makes it too complicated. The assumption might be that the being is not present or not known, but this is not true. So do not miss the simplicity that what you are seeking is already here.

Q: You spell out clearly that this is not an intellectual discussion for the mind.

John: Yes. Being comes first. The mind is an appearance on the being. So once you engage the mind, you are already looking past the immediacy of this.

Q: You essentially give the content of the questions no attention at all, while seeing the bigger picture and directing from there. It is all very beautiful.

John: I am happy to hear that you that you resonate with this.

Q: OK. Here is my dilemma!

John: The dilemma comes when you try to make being into an attainment and go looking for it. Then you miss the fact that it is already what you are!

Q: I can only seemingly be aware of the doubtless ever-present sense of being or existence for short periods of time.

John: You cannot be aware of being. Nor do you need to be. This is the error. Being is. Pause and appreciate this fact. Being is not in time nor is it an object, so the attempt to be aware of it is not going to work. Your statement that you are aware of it for short periods of time is actually false! You are present and aware always, already. Again, trying to find it is the error. You already are that. Being, your very existence, cannot be known in the mind because the mind works in objects and what you are is not an object. It is better to drop the attempt. Still, being is not denied nor unknown at any moment.

Q: I can sense it is clearly changeless, but it is accurate to say that that sense only exists peripherally and is, therefore, deemed not important.

John: In all this activity has your existence vanished? Do not try to find it, see it, sense it, feel it, etc. Just pause and acknowledge its given-ness. Before any thought appears, you are already there as the one to whom that thought appears.

Q: Perhaps my sense that it is changeless is nothing but an intellectual understanding.

John: Your being is. It is not intellectual. It is a doubtless fact.

Q: The fact of awareness being present is viewed as ordinary and commonplace. Thus it is not really worthy of investigation, it seems.

John: A-ha! But this is the mind's opinion! However, your being is what is always being pointed out by all sages and traditions as the final reality. Surely, there must be more to it than the mind's knee-jerk opinion!

Q: It is almost as if its stunning reality is not seen or suspected, because I am looking through the lens of concepts.

John: Yes. But you do not need to look through any concepts to know you are. So drop the attempt. The being is here in all of its doubtless presence now. Even for you, in spite of what your mind may say!

Q: Trying to look without the mind just adds to the gunk of concepts I have amassed. So I miss it.

John: What I have said above answers this. As one Zen master said, 'Once you begin to seek for what you are, you go astray'. Why? Because it is already present.

Q: Sometimes I 'check in' on being, as it were.

John: This is too much duality. It is not really like this. Even before that thought or attempt, you are. That being is what is being pointed to. The 'I' that is checking in is only a thought construct. The premise is that being is not present, but it is there already, illuminating even the attempt to 'know it'. Full stop. You are already what you are seeking.

Q: It all comes down to having the intention on doing it and hoping that is enough to keep the 'checking in' as an ongoing activity.

John: This is utterly false. Nothing of the sort is implied. You do not need to check in to be. You are! Drop the attempt to check in, and see that, before all else, being is already the necessary precondition. It is so simple, we miss this point. Checking for being or awareness is looking for the answer in the wrong direction. Your own experience shows this is like seeking for water in a mirage. It is better to pause this false search. It is all being done at a mental level anyhow. If you pause the mind, you cannot deny your being, can you? A big light bulb should go off about now, when you realise that you already are. Everyday ordinary being is it.

Q: For some reason I continue to keep missing the essence of what is being said. And I see the futility of the whole question-and-answer game. I have been there, done that, as it were.

John: Good! Drop it all. Still, being-awareness is here beyond all doubt, even before the next thought appears. After all, to whom does it appear? To you! There you are. Being has never left at any moment.

Q: I really do not know where I am going with this. I get the point is just to look, keep looking, just keep at it, keep investigating.

John: Absolutely not! Once you realise that being is already present beyond doubt, you drop the search. Being is here. All of the qualities of it, like being changeless, doubtless, aware, non-objective, the space of appearances, etc., are also naturally evident.

Q: Needing someone to tell me what I need to do so I can have this recognition is utterly beside the point.

John: You do not need anyone else in order to be. No one else has your own being. That is why no one else can give you what you are. All they can do is point. Still, such pointing is done until the complete simplicity is acknowledged! Then the need for pointers is over.

Q: Thank you so much for the clear pointing.

John: You would not know it was clear unless you were strongly resonating with it.. So it is your own wisdom that is being activated here. Let these points clarify the basics of this.

With or Without Questions, You Are

Question: I heard some of your audio interviews on the internet. I love the directness in them. It is such directness which attracted me to Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings a year ago. That was a year after embarking on my spiritual quest. For the past year, I have been voraciously reading all of Sri Ramana's teaching, and I eventually landed on 'Sailor' Bob Adamson's web site, followed by yours. I know it is the 'self', 'Ramana', 'Jesus' or 'Krishna' that is guiding me all along. I try to be 'myself' in meditation, but the mind is overpowering in my day-to-day activities.

John: There is a reason for this and you need to get to the root of what is driving the interest in the mind. It has to do with lack of clear and firm recognition of one's true nature. With that clarified, the power of (or rather interest in) the mind settles down.

Q: I am 'cognisant' of the awareness that is witnessing everything, such as my body, thoughts, etc. I realise that my true essence is not a mental mode and is pure non-objective awareness.

John: This is a good insight. This 'awareness' is, in fact, the final reality itself. So it is important that this not only be an insight. Otherwise, the interest will return to the mind whenever the doubts arise.

Q: Is meditation on self necessary to experience non-duality?

John: This question shows that there are still some doubts about the real nature of this non-dual awareness. It is not an experience, really. It is a constant fact or reality that is so obvious we overlook the simplicity of it.

Q: All my knowledge is indirect so far.

John: But your being is not indirect. It is a present, doubtless fact. This is what is to be appreciated.

Q: I investigate the nature of my self every day and try to abide in that self (or rather be my self).

John: But this is still driven by the mistaken assumption—that you are *not* the self.

Q: How can I experience the direct knowledge, even though, right now, I know the one who is asking the question is the one 'I am'?

John: The one asking the question is the illusory assumed individual! You are that which is aware even of the question. With or without the questions, you *are*.

Q: Why am I in this quest? Purely to seek the truth of my essence. Enough of this ignorant, false identity!

John: But *who* is in the quest? Is your very being on a quest? Or is it the assumed limited person? Ramana's pointer is perfectly valid. It is to investigate the validity of that reference point. Are you that notion?

Investigate the 'I' Who Is Raising the Questions

Question: We are already that (reality) and many of us, perhaps occasionally and unknowingly, abide in that. But the ignorance still persists. This is true even if I allow myself just 'to be'. Why does not abiding in that remove the ignorance? Why do I not recognise and be the oneness that is natural to that, in spite of the abidance? What am I missing if it is as simple as 'you are that' or 'I am that'? Am I expecting too much from the natural state and probably not understanding what it is?

John: There is a trick going on in all this, which you should be able to spot. Each and every one of these questions and doubts is a thought. These are all issues being raised by the mind. Correct? This is not too hard to see. The being, your being, is still here, is it not? That is not in doubt. If you look at what that being is, even here and now, it is present, changeless, unlimited, non-dual, above the mind's doubts and worries, etc. And you, in fact, are that doubtless being. It is actually perfectly whole and complete, if we would have a look and see it as it really is.

The problem comes in by seeking for reality in the concepts and thoughts of the mind. In fact, that very motion is suffering or lack of peace. Why do we do this? Because we still hold out some belief that what we are exists at the level of the mind or is defined by the concepts of the mind. That is why this aspect must also be understood very firmly. If not, the tendency will continue to return to thought again and again in the belief that it can tell me what I am. Therefore, the feeling of limitation and suffering will go on. The only real resolution of this is knowing clearly and for certain what I am. If that is in doubt, I will always be victim to each and every doubt that the mind generates. Make sure these points are very clear. It is very

simple and straightforward, really, but we must be willing to 'listen', 'ponder' and 'experience' the meaning being pointed out here.

You say:

Why do I not recognise and be the oneness that is natural to that, in spite of the abidance? What am I missing if it is as simple as 'you are that' or 'I am that'? Am I expecting too much from the natural state and probably not understanding what it is?

But you are missing that these are all concepts for an 'I' notion, not for you. Who is this 'I' that does not recognise? That is missing something? That is expecting something? Do not follow these doubts, but investigate the 'I' who is raising the questions! That is the fictitious 'I' concept. You are ever here as the clear, real, doubtless being. Do not just leave that as some 'non-duality' concept. See, really see, for yourself what is the actual nature, here and now, of this being you cannot deny. You will not be disappointed, for this being is the final reality.

In truth, till now the mind has been hijacking the proceedings and dominating. Therefore, the real inquiry is not being done. You will not find water in a mirage, nor will you find the 'peace that passes all understanding' by following the mind. Get more into the positive truth of what you are, rather than succumbing to the mental doubts. You will not be disappointed, I assure you.

See Who and What You Are

Question: What I understand about awareness is that it is the one constant throughout my life. This I can see. It is also limitless and present. All appearances arise in it. This seems clear to me.

John: Do not leave it at this only. It is also the source and substance of all that is, beyond suffering, the space in which the world appears, the final reality pointed to by all sages and scriptures, unconditioned, peaceful, the source of life, love and joy, etc. This recognition should have you hopping for joy and walking with a spring in your step every moment. It may also leave you happy to share this wonderful news with anyone who may be seeking and suffering. If not, then look a little deeper at this wonderful treasure of birthless and deathless being-awareness that you are.

Q: I think where the problem lies is in the appearance of the separate 'I'.

John: It is a mere thought, a shadow, coming and going in your beautiful existence. What of it?

Q: I seem to have a mental understanding that there is no separate 'I', yet I continue to experience my life from the point of view of a separate 'I'.

John: More important is to be experiencing your life from the 'point of view' of reality, your natural being. This is the part that may be a bit weak at this point. I really do not recommend investigating the 'I' if the marvelous and wonderful truth is not solid and clear. Otherwise, it is all a bit mental and lifeless. So how is it going with the positive

realisation of the truth of your being? The separate 'I' aspect takes care of itself quite naturally as a little footnote to this.

Q: But there is still some belief in the separate 'I', and I am not sure where the root of that belief lies.

John: The root of the problem lies in not being clear about the truth of who you are. That is what propels the mind to continue to seek reality, identity and happiness in concepts.

Q: When I look, there is nothing I can grasp onto.

John: Yes, but this is still looking away from what you are, your actual nature. So the looking you are describing will be unfulfilling and dry. It is like looking for water in a mirage. That is clearly fruitless. Then you may start looking for the absence of water in a mirage, that is, trying to find the absence of an 'I'. That is also only useful up to a point. It is great to find the absence of water, but you are still dying of thirst! That is really the problem. It is still focusing on the wrong end of the stick. Turn the whole consideration around one-hundred-and-eighty degrees from where you are presently looking. Instead, see who and what you are.

Q: There are many moments during the day when that 'I' is not present, but there linger those thoughts that there is something wrong with me, that I do not get it, that my wife and I still have occasional conflicts.

John: These are only self-centred thoughts. The mind is still trying to find who you are in concepts, because that positive truth of who you are is not radiantly clear and appreciated. So, full stop! Reset. Turn back around to the positive truth of who you are. Knowing that, being that and appreciating that annihilates all residual interest of seeking for who we are in the conceptual mind.

What the Investigation Uncovers

Question: This morning I had a moment of direct understanding of the powerlessness of the mind in these matters. I could see that the mind could go off on its merry way, spinning its little stories, while I remain exactly as I am.

John: Yes!

Q: This was followed by an immediate arising of a conceptual objection, but I forced myself not to follow it and to turn back to the basics. I suppose that, like anything else, one can learn not to follow the mind in these situations until doing so becomes natural.

John: It is just a matter of seeing what you are already seeing—that the activities of the mind do not really affect what is being pointed to, to your natural state. Saying ‘one can learn’ brings in a whiff of a doer and future attainment. It is better to avoid turning what you are into a future achievement.

Q: I turned back to stay with the understanding that the mind’s churnings do not affect being. The thoughts that came up at that point had more of an intentional, I-based, volitional flavor. I have always known conceptually that all thoughts arise on their own, and that the apparent fact that some were willed and others spontaneous is bogus. Since these thoughts were of the apparently willed kind, I paused to see if I could continue to understand that the mind could be let go to do its thing. Suddenly I think I understood even more than that. I think I understood directly that thoughts can go right on without needing an ‘I’ thought to claim them. The words ‘holy shit’ actually escaped from my mouth at that moment. It seemed the supposed ‘I’ that made the thoughts willed and not spontaneous

disappeared. More accurately, the 'I' was seen to be nothing more than a spontaneous thought in its own right.

John: Yes. This is clear seeing. This is not an attainment, but just the way it is. We simply notice this point, which had been overlooked all along. Even saying 'we' is a bit of a concession, but you get the point. The actual state of affairs is seen as it is. So the basic misconception is overcome. There is no need to even personalise the seeing, because the point of the seeing is that the person concept is fictional.

Q: I am hesitant to accept that I truly understood.

John: But the point is that the 'I' is a false reference point. So there is no need to walk into this conceptual booby trap. If the 'I' is conceptual, who is to understand or not? Being is. That is what is undeniably present. Full stop.

Q: I am becoming aware of how tricky the mind is. I wanted to stay with this insight a bit longer, but I had to get ready for work.

John: If there was an 'I' to stay with it!

Q: Thank you so much for your willingness to communicate and share. I hope I will not be too much of a burden in continuing a dialogue with you.

John: I enjoy seeing this understanding settle in.

Q: All doubts are for the 'I,' aren't they? And the 'I' is a fiction! What an unnecessary and non-existent mess!

John: Yes. This is what the investigation uncovers. Still, you are what you actually are. That truth or reality shines as bright as the sun always.

Your Being Is Neither a Concept Nor a Pointer

Question: I was handed a copy of your book You Were Never Born at a gathering of friends. You and your work were entirely new to me, though I have been reading along these lines for about six years now. I have had some slight contact with teachers and other inquirers. The message is beginning to get through, and your work is wonderfully clear and practical. But here is my problem. Knowing that there is spacious awareness in which everything I experience arises seems very clear to me based on direct observation.

John: The awareness or existence nature is clear and beyond doubt. Even the mind cannot deny what is being pointed to by these pointers.

Q: But my sense of being inside a body, a node of consciousness separate from other nodes, is very strong on the energetic level, not just on the cognitive level.

John: But what you are talking about here is shifting the consideration to a dualistic or 'appearance' level. Yes, bodily consciousness, sense perception, thinking, etc. are local and specific to the body-mind. But being itself or non-conceptual awareness (both being pointers to the same fact) are not. Think very deeply about the dream experience. The dreamed figure's cognising activity is localised, but actual being or the awareness cognising the dream as a whole is not contained in the dreamed figure at all.

Q: Paradoxically, the only way I seem to be able to entertain the idea that I am 'not separate from source', as you put it, is by a concept. It is an idea I entertain.

John: All the pointers are concepts. But your non-conceptual awareness or being is neither a concept nor a pointer. That is why the point is to follow the pointers and then drop them.

Q: I also have a powerful resistance to what feels like the solipsism of the notion that what is happening in my head—this clear awareness—is somehow the truth itself. How can the entire world rise and fall within my head?

John: Again, you are making the false equation of awareness and localised consciousness. This is why it can be useful to make the nuanced distinction between consciousness and pure awareness.

Q: In other words, I am stuck inside my own head with this spacious awareness! And so far, no inquiry I make can show me that this is anything other than private experience, perhaps repeated or replicated in other minds.

John: But this is not really the case. The world, body, mind, head and even the fact of being conscious is appearing in a greater context. Do not equate a mere body-mind or its consciousness with what is being pointed to by the terms 'non-dual awareness' or 'pure being'.

Q: I realise that all of these things are experienced by me as arising in clear awareness. But to posit awareness as something greater than, and independent of, the mind (my mind and hence my brain) in this case—well, I cannot get there.

John: Of course 'you' cannot, because that 'you' is itself an appearance. The natural awareness is already beyond the trap.

Q: It seems to me that this sense of awareness needing a mind, being a function of my mind, is deeper than a concept.

John: Again, this is from falsely equating consciousness in the body and non-dual reality. They are not the same at all.

Q: To abandon this sense of where my individual consciousness is located—in my head—does not, so far, feel like heading toward an obvious truth. Rather it appears to be falling into a solipsistic abyss, or into an illusion. How can this perceptual/cognitive apparatus, with its limits of position in space, be the background against which the entire world arises?

John: It is not. It is also an appearance. But the universe, world, body, mind and consciousness are also appearances in what you are.

Q: I realise that I am deploying mere concepts here. But you understand, I am sure, that it seems to me that these feelings of individuality and separateness are backed not by mere concepts, but by quite powerful practical observation, like the observation that the brain is in the skull. And consciousness seems unlikely without a brain.

John: Exactly true. No brain, no consciousness. But again, something is being pointed to that is outside the duality.

Understanding Desire

Question: Various teachers, such as Ramana Maharshi, or even spiritual texts like the Ashtavakra Gita, indicate that desire is 'maya', and suggest that one who has recognised the non-existence of the separate self is desireless. My experience has been that desires still seem to arise. They appear, attention goes to them for a time, and then they vanish from awareness, like everything else. However, for a time, there seems to be interest in them, and there are ongoing thoughts on the subject of the desires. I am not speaking of the desire for basic things, like wanting food when you are hungry or sleep when you need to rest. I am talking about other desires, such as for material objects, and that sort of thing. Does this indicate that the basic understanding is not clear?

John: The pointers are contextual, and it all depends on the circumstances of the given case. If the simple truth of your being or natural state is clear (seen as it is), then you are not going to be seeking reality, identity or happiness in apparent objects anyhow. In fact, the notion that there is anything 'other' to be desired collapses in the recognition of non-duality or non-separation. Not only are 'you' that reality, but all apparent things are that also. There is only that. Desires and aversions are due to conceptual differentiation between subject and object. Desires and aversions are various 'stances' the assumed separate individual takes in relation to the object he assumes as different or apart from himself. With the collapse of that viewpoint, the basis of the desires and aversions collapses. Then there is no more concern or evaluation of desires (or anything else) based on the dualistic view. Also, there is no more discussion of subjects, objects, individuals, world, realisation or any other such thing. This is because in the final analysis these are notional.

Coming down a bit, for the sake of discussion, if we grant the assumed reality of the appearances then everything that appears, including desire, is simply the play or expression of the one source or energy. At a fundamental level, desire is simply energy or activity. It is neither right nor wrong, nor does it indicate whether some realisation has occurred or not. This view is the basis of the typical quotes that say the sage plays in the world with 'as if' enjoyment. He desires with those who desire, etc. This is because the appearance and all of its expressions are viewed with equal (non-dual) vision. Nothing is discriminated or divided from the absolute reality. Everything, including desire, is that in essence.

Coming further down, so to speak, we can see some desires rooted in the assumed reality of separation and the independent existence of the individual. These desires are a product of such unexamined views. Clearing up any lingering belief in such concepts undermines the source of these desires and aversions. They are only an outflow of the stand or identity that is assumed. So the key is in the stand or how one views oneself. Everything else naturally flows from the view one holds of oneself.

Rather than analyzing desire per se, I would recommend making sure that the basic point of who and what you are is clear for yourself. With that, all the seeking and doubts are resolved, and you are no longer searching for reality or happiness in apparent objects. Then there is peace in whatever appears or not, be it desire or any other appearance. Without that, the issue of desires is always troublesome for the mind.

You have hit the nail on the head when you say: 'They [desires] appear, attention goes to them for a time, and then they vanish from awareness, like everything else'. Because you remain as you are and nothing has really changed with that, the issue is moot, really. As long as there is a body-mind, it will have its actions, desires, etc. If you are clear and solid about what you are, there is no problem. Desires come and go like all else. But your true being has no desires at all. So if you see yourself as what you are, you have no desires, even if they appear phenomenally. Even if thoughts, desires and actions appear, your true being has none of those. It is not defined or

confined by them. That is the real freedom. This is unconditioned and already the case. If we do not see it in this way, then we are trying to translate the unconditioned nature of who we are down to a phenomenal level, assuming that 'no desires' means actual absence of desires at the level of appearances. Then we try to have no thoughts, no desires, etc., phenomenally. But that is duality and gets one into an endless and untenable position.

Why Is There Still an Underlying Belief that I Am Something?

Question: I see what is being pointed to. However, in the flow of things, the belief is so strong that I am a person. For instance, when I am at work and someone yells at me or criticises me, there is an instant reaction coming from what seems to be a belief that 'I' am being impinged upon. This feeling only subsides when the thought arises that what I really am is this being. Then there is a looking at who I am, and there is no problem anymore.

John: Well, that is fine. What is the problem? That is why the sages advise meditation, inquiry, etc. It does not go on forever, just until the basic position or view is solid. Basically, per the famous slogan, just do it.

Q: So why is there still the underlying belief that I am something?

John: Because the positive truth of what you are is not fully solid. Also the investigation of the unreality of the basis of belief is not thorough. Like Nisargadatta Maharaj said, you cannot skip doing the basic homework.

Q: What does it take for this belief to be seen through?

John: Thorough investigation. It is the same as with any other belief. However, you are mostly focusing on the wrong end of the equation here. It is better to be clear, *really clear*, on what you are. Then what you are *not* is clear by default. From what you are saying, the positive truth of what your true nature is, is not one-hundred percent

solid, because you are still having doubts about this. This is the real source of the trouble presently.

Q: When you pointed it out to me previously, it was clearly seen. And when it is looked at it, is clearly seen. However at all other times during my interactions, especially with other people, it looks like it is still believed here that I am this person. This appears to be entirely unconscious. If the interactions are in some way threatening to this persona, then there is a programmed reaction.

John: Yes, but in all of this, you are losing sight of the positive truth of what you are. What is happening to your real being in and through all of this? This is what is being lost sight of. In other words, the interest and identity is being put on the mind and its concepts.

Q: In all of this discussion there is a nagging question. Am I only programming myself with just another concept?

John: This shows some real and basic doubts about who and what you are. Do not skip this 'step'. If you do, the results are as you are seeing. There are continued doubts. There is a lingering potential to get drawn into the mental concepts and identification with the body-mind. The beauty of all this is that it is precisely highlighting the source of the problem.

Q: Is it really as it is being pointed out? I can totally see the pointer in the answer to the question 'Who am I?'. That is, I can see what is being pointed to when we say 'I am'.

John: Get more into that aspect. What is the actual nature of this, your very being, which cannot be denied, even by yourself? It seems you still have a few doubts about it!

Q: One other nagging question is: how do we know that this 'I am' sense is not just another artifact or product of our complex brain function? I do not think there has been anyone who clearly saw anything (including their being) without a brain.

John: Of course the 'I am' sense is a product of the brain! But even that sense is appearing to you, your innate state. You are getting a bit hung up in mental doubts generated by thought. But your actual being is not in thoughts. Thoughts are coming and going, but your real being is not. The following statement by Bob Adamson may be worth considering at this point:

I am not speaking to any body.
I am not speaking to any mind.
I am speaking to that I AM that I AM,
To that presence-awareness,
That expresses through
The mind as the thought 'I am'.

Note that the 'I am' in the last line is the expression at the mind level of the innate being or reality that you are. This reality is indicated by the term 'I AM' in the third line of the statement. In other words, there is the actuality that you are. And there is the representation of that actuality as a concept in the mind. All troubles are rooted in the confusion between these two.

Being Is Effortless and Natural

Question: I have got to talk myself back into what I feel or intuit is the witness or the 'big show', so to say. But there are a lot of gymnastics or maintenance required in order to feel an appreciation for this allness.

John: Yes, but the fact of being remains with or without the mental gymnastics. That is not something being maintained. On direct evidence, the being is doubtlessly present, effortless and natural. So what we are really doing is getting familiar with that. All the other 'stuff' is coming and going, therefore not what you are. So by default the being is your nature. When you start to see what you are in this way, there is a natural interest and curiosity to know this more deeply. You are not fighting with the mind, but genuinely interested to know what you are.

Q: Unsatisfactory experience arises because I seem to have to do mental gymnastics to talk myself back into what I intuit is real.

John: No! The unsatisfactory experience must be already there. Talking to yourself is trying to assuage that. But it is not working too well. The real root of the problem is not being clear on one's identity. This causes the mind to step in with a false, claimed identity and the associated self-centred thoughts. The interest and identification with those thoughts is basically what suffering is.

Q: The cause appears to be the lingering notion of a self that gets referred to more than any other concept.

John: Yes! But this is sustained due to lack of clarity and confidence in what we really are. The solution is through clear self-knowledge.

Q: There are thoughts of having to do a process. I must be involved in an unfolding or a development in the explanation of this all-ness to myself. And I somehow must do this while experiencing shitty moods and unwholesome states. But that cannot be correct, unless even that is just another impersonal appearance. Be that as it may, I am taking the appearance as my identity. That comes and goes and generates good and bad states. So it seems I am back to square one.

John: Yes, but now you are seeing it. That is most of the solution. The question naturally arises, what are you in fact? Are these concepts and moods for, by and about a seeming separate self what you truly are? Inquiring minds want to know!

Q: Anyway, after careful attention to this sense being clouded over by mental activity, I am not clear about this fixation on myself in order to know who I am. By definition, is this not more self-centred activity, in that I have to put effort into getting back on track, etc.?

John: It is better just to go for a positive resolution of the matter rather than getting drawn into speculations. See your doubtless being as it is. That resolves it all without a fight.

Q: I could go on and on and try to articulate stuff about bad habits and 'unconscious' material that seems to arise. Perhaps all of this material would be transformed more by bringing attention to it in the light of this awareness. Perhaps that would bring a feeling of freedom. I am also troubled by believing in a body-mind and wondering how it relates to the notions of dying and death.

John: But these are all conceptual thoughts appended to the 'I' notion. If that 'I' is you, the issues may pertain to you. But if not, then they do not apply. Are you the 'I' notion or are you that which is aware of it? This is a basic point.

Q: It is definitely not crisp and clear here! Yet there is something in the background that has shifted. It is more or less obvious at times. But I do not feel my nature should have to be a maintenance task.

John: But you are not maintaining your being, even now!

Q: There is still a lot of referencing back to the small 'I' or mind. I do not know who is supposed to identify with this awareness.

John: That question is false, really. The 'who' is itself notional. Be clear and emphatic on what you are. With that identity solid, there is no more belief going into an 'I' notion. So the root of the problem is resolved. Fighting and struggling are just mind stuff. So they are putting the accent on the mind. Drop all of that. Being is clear and evident. Get interested and curious and notice it for what it is (what you are).

All You Need to See

Question: I have read almost all the sages, you included, and I understand that I am awareness, but still I keep returning to the little 'me'.

John: The little 'me' is only an idea coming and going in awareness, correct? Be very clear on this. Awareness is a present fact, not an attainment. It is already 'done'. You are that, in practise and in fact—now. When you say, 'I keep returning ...', that 'I' is also the false 'me'. You are not returning anywhere. You are that awareness. So do not fall for these little mind games, in which one idea is chasing the tail of another. All these ideas are coming and going in the ever-present awareness. Awareness is only a term; synonyms are 'being', 'spirit', 'truth', 'reality', 'God', etc. We return to the 'I' thought due to a lack of confidence in being the awareness itself. So be clear on this. It is not that 'I' am 'awareness', if there is any implication of separation. Awareness is. And that is what I am, because that is all that is truly existent. Everything else is merely appearance.

Q: I know the final seeing is still to come.

John: This is a false assumption. The awareness is the present seeing itself. Time is only a mental concept. So drop this notion completely, and realise that you are what you have been seeking—now. This is the simplicity of it. We miss this because we are still prone to follow the erroneous concepts. I will not let you do this any longer!

Q: At the same time, there is an understanding that there is no time and no place.

John: Yes, because these are only presently arising notions in reality. There is no thing, no place, no time and no one outside of reality. In theistic terms, reality is the presence of God, for God is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent truth. You and he are not two. All of the biblical pointers make perfect sense from this point of view (I am that I am; I and the father are one; before Abraham was I am, etc.).

Q: There is also the understanding that consciousness and the content of consciousness are one.

John: Simple and true.

Q: The character 'Rose' (me) is simply consciousness playing the story of a 'me'.

John: Well, that is an expedient pointer. You can drop that also! The notions of 'Rose' and 'consciousness' are also coming and going in reality. The final reality is prior to even consciousness, for consciousness as a state is still coming and going in your natural reality.

Q: Can you help me see through the veil?

John: That which is aware of the notion of a 'veil' is already the awareness. And you are that. There is a famous Zen story. The monk asks the master, 'Can you help me cross the river to freedom?' The master replies, 'You are already on the other shore'. The monk did not realise the shore he was standing on was already the side he was hoping to reach. It is the same with us. As Bob Adamson likes to say, 'What is wrong with right now if you are not thinking about it?'. Pause the thoughts and notice that the unconditioned awareness is present beyond doubt, and you are that here and now. This is all you need to see. The false thinking and doubts come from overlooking this point.

[Follow up.]

Question: Thank you so much for your comments. You speak from oneness, and what you say moves me to tears literally. It is so simple and easy and yet so often missed.

I would be very grateful if you could clarify this sentence:

We return to the 'I' thought due to a lack of confidence in being awareness itself.

How can we deepen in this confidence that we are awareness?

John: Simply by considering with deep earnestness the fact that this is so. All experience presupposes your aware existence. Even the doubts and questions must show up in awareness! We miss the simplicity of this. So we get this pointed out and consider the truth of it.

Q: You said, 'Awareness is. And that is what I am, because that is all that is truly existent'. This statement had a very strong resonance here.

John: We assume awareness is some attainment or state for 'me', but it is not. It is, in fact, what you are. So the point is that we are undercutting any tendency of the mind to dualise the already present oneness.

Q: Too many years of conditioning make me fall into the old patterns of thinking, Please be very firm with me so that I do not fall into these patterns again and again.

John: But this is itself a presently arising false notion making reference to the fictitious 'I'. You have no conditioning. You are the perfection itself. 'Time' is a concept. 'Conditioning' is a concept. The very 'I' is a concept. All you have is whatever present thought is appearing. And that is appearing in your pristine, uncompromised nature.

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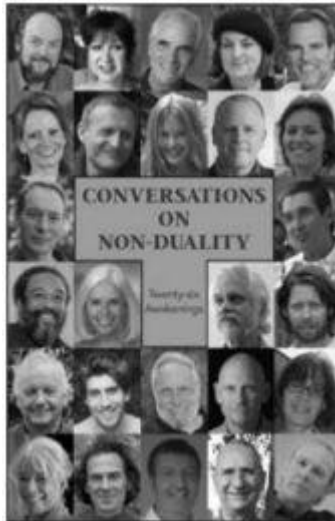
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