

John Wheeler

Awakening to the Natural State



"Our true nature is that simple and undeniable presence of awareness in which all thinking, feeling and perceiving occurs. Always present and radiantly clear, it is never obscured by time, circumstances or thoughts. You are not the limited person you have taken yourself to be. Seeing this, suffering, anxiety and confusion effortlessly drop away, revealing your own innate happiness and freedom. Understanding who you are is immediate and always available here and now."

John Wheeler met Bob Adamson (a student of Nisargadatta Maharaj), on a trip to Australia in 2003. In short order, Bob cleared up John's doubts and questions and pointed out to him the fact of our real nature, which is self-shining, ever-present awareness. Bob Adamson has encouraged John to share this understanding of 'who we really are.'

The articles contained in this book cover some of John's experiences with meeting 'Sailor' Bob Adamson and various aspects of the understanding which subsequently unfolded. Interspersed with these are chapters of email correspondence with questioners who have been drawn to this understanding.

John is currently hosting talks in the United States in Santa Cruz, California. A second volume of writings by John Wheeler, entitled 'Shining in Plain View' also published by Non-Duality Press, is now available

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John Wheeler

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Preface

The following articles and correspondence cover some of my experiences with meeting 'Sailor' Bob Adamson and various aspects of the understanding that unfolded for me after meeting him in Melbourne, Australia, in 2003. The material is primarily drawn from e-mail correspondence. In some cases, additional comments have been added or editorial changes made in order to clarify the topic being discussed.

It is important to note that there really is no teaching, as such. Words and concepts can only point to the ever-present fact of your own being. Your own being is the teaching. So in regards to the material that follows, take what works and discard the rest. Most importantly, know the true nature of the one reading these words right now.

Many thanks to all the spiritual friends who contributed to the ongoing discussion of this that we are. My deepest appreciation goes to 'Sailor' Bob Adamson. Without his living example and clear expression of non-duality in no uncertain terms, this book would have never been written.

*John Wheeler
Santa Cruz, California
July 4th, 2004*

Foreword

John Wheeler has written these articles, which are a clear, simple and direct expression of his own innate understanding or knowing. He continually points to the obvious and evident fact of being, just as it is – unaltered, unmodified, uncorrected. If there is a resonance with these pointers but still some doubts, then contact him to have these doubts resolved either by e-mail, phone or a visit. John will certainly give you a direct and immediate insight to your natural state prior to all concepts, images and erroneous beliefs.

‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson

Meeting 'Sailor' Bob Adamson

I had been on the spiritual path from my teenage years. For about thirty years I had been involved in various paths and practices, including Christianity, Theosophy, the teachings of J. Krishnamurti (I went to his talks in Ojai in the 1980s), Buddhism, Hinduism, and yoga. There were other paths and teachers, too numerous to mention here. In my mid-twenties, I was introduced to Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj (through books on their lives and teachings). Something about those great Indian teachers of non-dual spirituality seemed solid and unshakable. I found myself returning to their teachings over the years, even though I can't say I fully (or even partially) understood or experienced what they were talking about.

Along the way, I did the circuit of many of the contemporary teachers involved in non-dual spirituality. There was undoubtedly a benefit, but I was not fully satisfied for some reason. Either it was my confusion or something was not fully clear in the teachings being presented. Most likely the former! For some reason my destiny was to meet 'Sailor' Bob Adamson, one of Nisargadatta Maharaj's Western students.

What I found was that there was only so much I could get from books and meditating on my own. The growth was there, but it was often slow, and I was not getting much direct experience. I vaguely felt that I was progressing, but if I honestly looked at my experience, I did not fully understand what the teachers were pointing to. Most importantly, my day-to-day life was not free of suffering. I knew the seeking was not over; something was missing. Had I not met Bob Adamson, the seeking might have gone on for decades, or at least until I met someone with a real understanding. Who knows who that might have been or when, but, barring that, I am pretty sure the seeking – and suffering – would have continued for a long time.

At one point, I met some Ramana Maharshi followers who had been on the path of self-inquiry for twenty or thirty years (and still working at it, I might add!). I was nowhere near their level of devotion, so it was pretty much out the picture that that approach would work for me. As I look at this now, it is not so much Ramana's teaching that is at fault, but the mind's inevitable tendency to turn any teaching into a practice. Practices, as I eventually learned, usually are interminable. This is because they are often based on false premises.

Intuitively, I felt that it was important for me to meet someone who had realized their true nature, someone whom I could trust, someone whom I could talk with in order to share my doubts and concerns. However, I was unsure which teachers were authentic; none seemed to resonate fully. I used to read Nisargadatta Maharaj's dialogues frequently. I could not understand his teaching fully, given all the Hindu verbiage and translation issues (he originally spoke in Marathi), but I felt intuitively that he was a free being. Many spiritual seekers, through reading his words, can sense the genuineness of his realization, even if they do not always experience everything he talks about. I used to wonder if there was anyone still living who had met Nisargadatta Maharaj and had really gotten the experience of self-knowledge. After all those years of searching, I eventually stumbled across Bob Adamson. Something resonated strongly. Even when I read the pages on his website, there was a strong feeling of 'maybe this is it'.

Just prior to discovering Bob Adamson, I had a vivid dream of Nisargadatta Maharaj in which he was encouraging me not to give up the search for spiritual understanding. Shortly afterwards, I learned about Bob Adamson. Not wanting to miss the chance of meeting an authentic teacher (having missed the chance to see Nisargadatta Maharaj while he was alive), I decided to visit Bob in person in Australia. You can imagine my motivation (or perhaps desperation!) in going to Australia on the chance that he might be able to clarify my doubts and questions.

What I have found is that the understanding of our true nature almost never comes from reading books or thinking about it. The best books are primarily the records of dialogues

that took place between a seeker and a teacher at some point in the past. In reading such books, we are trying to understand an experience that took place in the past (through words and concepts on the page). A book is like a map pointing to something real that was experienced in a dialogue between living people. Usually, we do not have a clear understanding of what is being revealed (at least I didn't) and we are trying to figure it out in the mind. This is a noble attempt, but as Bob Adamson pointed out within a few minutes of talking to him, 'The answer can never be found in the mind'. The experience of spiritual understanding and freedom is not forthcoming, so we naturally assume that we are not 'there' (wherever 'there' is). We think there must be some technique or path involved to get there. But somehow we are not quite sure what it is! The result is that the mind keeps generating the same old bondage and suffering. This is a frustrating cycle, because we intuitively feel a glimmer of light or truth in the readings, but the actual experience eludes us. The majority of seekers that I have met have had a similar experience. Many are driven to try to find a living teacher, in order to get some guidance and assistance on the spiritual path. This was what happened for me.

I met many teachers, but it wasn't until I met Bob Adamson that I was convinced that I was dealing with someone who had fully realized his true nature. Something radically shifted for me because I came face-to-face with the vitality, the confidence, the energy of that understanding. It was a remarkable experience and quite different from anything I had encountered in my years of seeking. The first day after I arrived, we had a chance to meet and talk. As we sat together, he looked me in the eyes and said point blank, 'Do you have any doubts or questions? Is there anything you need to know?' It was somewhat disarming because I realized he was free of doubts and was essentially offering me a chance to have the same experience for myself right then and there. The implication, it seemed to me, was 'The seeking is over, the reading is over. You are here. Are you ready to go for this completely here and now?' Fortunately, I jumped at the chance. I cast aside my theoretical knowledge and got down to getting off my chest my real doubts, questions and problems.

Surprisingly, things cleared up very quickly. Being face-to-face with that clarity – coupled with my own desire to be free – allowed things to shift quickly. The basic teaching is very simple, almost too simple. It is so simple that the mind overlooks it. What I didn't realize was that it has nothing to do with reading, meditating, doing something, working something out, stilling the mind, and so on. All of these techniques are looking in the wrong direction. Nisargadatta Maharaj used to say, 'Understanding is all'. In essence, Bob was saying, 'Right now in your direct experience see what your real nature is. What are you right now? What have you always been?' The thinking mind is useless for this because seeing or looking is not a conceptual function at all. It is more like seeing an apple in your hand. You just look, not think.

Right now, as you read this, you exist and you are aware that you exist. You are undoubtedly present and aware. Before the next thought arises, you are absolutely certain of the fact of your own being, your own awareness, your own presence. This awareness is what you are; it is what you always have been. All thoughts, perceptions, sensations and feelings appear within or upon that. This awareness does not move, change or shift at any time. It is always free and completely untouched. However, it is not a thing or an object that you can see or grasp. The mind, being simply thoughts arising in awareness, cannot grasp it or know it or even think about it. Yet, as Bob says, you cannot deny the fact of your own being. It is palpably obvious, and yet, from the time we were born, no one has pointed this out. Once it is pointed out it can be grasped or understood very quickly because it is just a matter of noticing, 'Oh, that is what I am!' It is a bright, luminous, empty, presence of awareness; it is absolutely radiant, yet without form; it is seemingly intangible, but the most solid fact in your existence; it is effortlessly here right now, forever untouched. Without taking a step, you have arrived; you are home. No practice can reveal this because practices are in time and in the mind. Practices aim at a result, but you (as presence-awareness) are here already, only you don't recognize it till it is pointed out. Once seen, you can't lose it, and you don't have to practice to exist, to be. This is, in

essence, what Bob pointed out to me in the first conversation I had with him.

Once I saw this, I felt very clear and free immediately. Later, some thoughts came up, some old personality patterns, some old definitions of who I thought myself to be. I seemed to lose the clear understanding of my nature as presence-awareness. The next day, I talked to Bob about it. He said, 'Let's have a look. Do you exist? Are you aware? What is illuminating the thought that you have lost it?' Then I realized that thoughts of suffering were only passing concepts being illumined by the ever-present awareness. I hadn't lost anything at all. The awareness that we are is never obscured! Suffering seems real because we don't have a clear understanding of our true nature. Instead, we believe the passing thoughts, such as 'I am no good,' 'I am not there yet,' 'I am stuck' or whatever the thought may be. Eventually we understand that we are not those thoughts. Once our real self is pointed out, the suffering loses its grip.

Bob pointed out that there is no person here at all. The person that we think we are is an imaginary concept. There are thoughts and feelings and perceptions, but they are not a problem. They just rise and fall like dust motes in the light of the presence-awareness that we are.

The closest that the mind can come to representing who we are is the thought 'I am'. But that thought is not who we really are. Whether that thought is there or not, we still exist. We know the thought 'I am'. That thought is the start of the false sense of an individual, a separate 'I'. Because we didn't know any better, the mind attached other labels to this 'I' thought, such as 'I am good,' 'I am bad,' 'I have this problem,' and so on. But those thoughts don't have anything to do with us, because the very 'I' thought itself, the sense of separation, is not actually who we are. Once you see the falseness of the 'I' thought, that what we are is not an individual person at all, the identifications and ideas of a lifetime all collapse because they are all based on a false premise.

There is no practice to overcome suffering. It is simply a matter of seeing that the false 'I' is an assumption, that the whole mechanism is a conceptual house of cards. Then a life-

time of suffering evaporates. As Bob says, without the cause (the 'I'), can there be any effects (psychological suffering and bondage)?

As I sat on his couch at one of his talks listening to him say 'There is no person,' suddenly it hit me. I looked and saw that right now and here, there is not a separate person in the picture at all. In that moment, all my doubts and confusion evaporated. I realized that all problems and questions stem from the sense of an 'I' that was assumed to be there at the center of my life. Upon actual looking, I discovered it was not there at all. Fifteen years of meditating could not accomplish what occurred in a few moments of direct looking. In that recognition arose a direct and immediate sense of clarity and peace. I intuitively felt that the searching was over. I recall raising my hand and asking Bob, 'So when you see yourself as the ever-present awareness and that the "I" that we imagined ourselves to be is really non-existent, then there can be no more doubts, questions, or problems. Is that it?' He confirmed that this was so. From that moment on, I have not felt any serious difficulty or suffering, nor felt the slightest desire or urge to seek, meditate, or pursue any particular spiritual path. The whole landscape shifted and I intuitively knew the seeking was over. The 'I' upon which everything was based was not there. However, the shining presence-awareness was still there without effort, the simple fact of our own being.

Finally, Bob pointed out that all things arise in awareness and never exist apart from awareness. It is all one substance, all one light; it is all that; it is non-duality. There is nowhere to go and nothing to obtain. Everything is resolved. We 'live, move, and have our being' in that one ocean of light and never, ever move away from that.

This was the understanding that came to me, courtesy of Bob Adamson. It is all words, but maybe a glimmer of something will come through.

Why I Use the Term 'Natural State'

I use the term 'natural state' because this true nature that we are is effortlessly present, spontaneously available and requires no pursuit or acquisition. To me, 'natural' implies something outside the influence of, or not a product of, conceptual thought. It is easy and natural. This terminology is by no means original. I just happen to like it. 'Natural' is also the meaning of the term 'nisarga' (as in the name 'Nisargadatta'), so there is for me a remembrance of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, whom I admire and who was Bob Adamson's teacher. The term 'natural state' also appears in other traditions, so it seems like a good non-denominational term.

Whenever you use words, you have to pick something, so the term 'natural state' seems as good as any. There are many good ones: presence-awareness, cognizing emptiness, the clear light, the Self, consciousness, the one mind, God or reality. They are all pointers. The word is not the thing, so there is no need to get hung up on the words.

Enlightenment in the Future?

Right now you exist; you are aware. Without taking a thought, you are absolutely sure of your being. That is the essential reality being pointed to. All of the Buddhas and sages of all times are fully present at the core of the one who is reading these words right now. You will never attain this, never find it and never know it as some object of thought or experience. Why? Because the very awareness that you are and have always been is fully and completely that now!

We never become 'enlightened' tomorrow because tomorrow is imagined in the mind. You always exist prior to the mind. At some point, you turn back and notice the fact of your own being. Then you are home, even though you never left home. This is not a result of some fantastic ability or spiritual prowess. It is just a matter of simple looking.

How This Understanding Unfolded for Me

The way this understanding unfolded for me was through the following insights. Bob pointed out to me the truth of our nature as presence-awareness or cognizing emptiness. Somehow that clicked for me. It was not so much the words, which I had read countless times before. It was the energy or vitality coming through the words that was potent and impactful. I sensed he was not only saying the words, but also living from that realization. This enabled a resonance to occur. To meet Nisargadatta Maharaj in person and partake in a living dialogue with him would likely have been more potent than reading his book *I AM THAT*. There was a huge difference between reading the words on paper 'You are awareness' and having a direct disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj tell me in no uncertain terms, 'You are awareness!'

After having seen this, and feeling some sense of freedom, I still seemed to lose it when contradictory thoughts arose. Bob pointed out that this is, in fact, not possible. You cannot lose your true nature, because it is the substratum of any thinking and perceiving. I realized that we can never leave this. Even if the thought 'I lost it' arises, the awareness is there knowing that thought. So the thought is patently false.

The 'knock-out blow' was seeing the absence of a person. There is no such entity in the machine. There are only thoughts, experiences and objects arising and subsiding in awareness. There is no one controlling them and no one affected by them. Once this is seen, everything happens just as before, but the imagined person is removed from the film. The film goes on but there is no person starring in it. There are thoughts, but no thinker; actions, but no actor; choices, but no choice-maker. Basically, there is no difference from before, except the sense of separation is gone, along with the psychological suffering, confusion and doubt that appears along

with the belief in a separate 'I'. There is no one at the controls. Life is happening; thoughts are arising; actions are occurring spontaneously. You, as a separate person, are not doing any of these things. You don't choose your thoughts, feelings or sensations. As Bob says, 'You are being lived'.

As a final tying up of loose ends, it was helpful to see the fact that all experiences are just movements in awareness. They are like waves arising and falling in the awareness that we are. It is all one substance. There is only one energy, one substance, one taste. Past, future, there, here, I, you, this, that, and so on, are all just conceptual distinctions. Even concepts are that awareness. So you can't win.

So what is the result? As the writer Wei Wu Wei once wrote, 'The only problem is that 99.9% of everything you think, say and do is for yourself – and there isn't one!' Coming into alignment with the true state of affairs means that the usual strife, struggle and suffering based on wrong understanding vanishes. Life goes on. It is like a dislocated limb popping back into place. You can hardly say what happened, but suddenly everything feels a lot better! Nisargadatta Maharaj said something to the effect, 'You can only put it negatively: there is nothing wrong anymore'. There is a distinct recognition that the searching is over. You may read books or visit spiritual teachers but you have the experience that they are saying what you already know.

In actual practice, while this understanding is sinking in, the seeker is often plagued by vestigial doubts, questions, and concerns, in spite of however advanced the intellectual understanding may be. I have seen many (including myself) able to converse on all this with the most incredible precision and verbal acumen. The only test is in day-to-day direct experience at the gut, emotional level. Is there any sense of suffering, separation, anxiety or fear? Am I feeling doubt or metaphysical uncertainty? Is the knowledge of my true nature unshakable? If not, the understanding is not complete. The best course, it seems to me, is to find a living teacher and get your doubts resolved directly. Nisargadatta Maharaj used to say, 'I am not interested in what you have let go of, but what you are still holding onto'. A good teacher can help us

resolve any remaining doubts. Then the understanding simply remains clear and steady and beyond doubt.

For me, this understanding was triggered by my association with Bob Adamson, who in turn had realized this through contact with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in 1976.

All Problems are for the 'I'

All problems, issues, concerns, questions, dilemmas and so on are for the 'I'. For example:

- I am happy / I am sad
- I know / I don't know
- I had it / I lost it
- I was born / I will die
- I am good / I am bad

These are just a few examples of self-centered thinking. As you can see, all these binding thoughts revolve around the sense of 'I'. Nail down the identity of the 'I' and all problems resolve. The imagined sense of being a separate 'I' is the source of all problems. Because the 'I' as a thought is really very intangible, all types of other ideas get wrapped around it, in order to give it some semblance of solidity. All the self-definitions, identities and apparent conditioning hinge on the unexamined sense of 'I'.

The most direct teachings set aside all philosophizing and theorizing and go directly into an investigation of the import (real meaning) of the word 'I'. This, I believe, is Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry. What is this that I call 'I'? We are constantly saying 'I,' 'I' all day long, all life long, but what is it?

If the cause ('I') is seen to be non-existent, can all the effects (all the definitions built on the 'I') survive? I had read about this idea for years, but my entire view of life was radically altered when I actually investigated this for myself. The moment I saw that the 'person' I thought myself to be was not there, that it was a false assumption, I directly experienced a profound freedom from all problems, doubts and suffering. It was remarkable. I did nothing at all. There was just a

looking and seeing that the person, the separate 'I,' was not there. There was not a trying to be free or solving of any intellectual puzzles.

That is about all I can say. You can never find the answer in the mind, so it is useless to look there. No amount of thinking can free you from the riddles created by thought.

The problems, if there are any, are only created by the mind. They are a product of thought. But you don't have to do anything with thought, such as get rid of it, modify it or suppress it. Just see that what you really are, right here and now, is that presence-awareness that is the basis on which thought is happening. That which is knowing all your sensations, feelings and emotions, is radiantly aware. It is effortlessly knowing and being. It is simply the clear, spacious presence of awareness, or as the Buddhists say, 'cognizing emptiness'. Get a feel for this. Have the willingness to look at this. Sense it, feel it, be it, relax into it. Know with assurance that you are not a limited person bound up in thought. You are the sky-like presence-awareness in which the whole universe is appearing.

The next time you think, 'I am this or that,' 'I have a problem' or whatever, just drop the apparent problem and ask 'Who is this "I" that I think I am? Is this what I really am?' You can even investigate and try to find this 'I' in your direct experience. Is there a sensation, a thought or a feeling that you can call 'I'? We say 'I' but precisely what is it? Then it will dawn on you, 'Hey! Am I not aware? Am I not present? Is not the presence of my true nature here, perfectly untouched, unsullied, like the sun shining above the clouds, completely unaffected by the appearance (and disappearance) of thought?'

This kind of looking will pull the drain plug out of the sink of the mind, and all problems will be sucked into the void of non-existence. I do not exaggerate when I say that a lifetime of problems will evaporate. As they say, a cave may have been dark for thousands of years, but when you bring a torch into the cave, the light instantly obliterates that darkness.

Understanding, Awareness and Thought

When I came across Bob Adamson's book and CDs of his talks, inner changes started to happen. I didn't consciously do anything, but the grip of the conceptual thoughts began to loosen. Things began shifting and falling away. I could not even articulate what was happening, but there was an experience of freedom. I sensed it was right. When you come across a good, clear teaching, it is the wisdom and the clarity of the teaching that is liberating, not necessarily anything you do to make understanding happen. Ultimately, it is your own innate wisdom that is functioning in response to the clear pointers of the teacher.

The 'you' trying to understand, who (seemingly) gets it and loses it, who struggles and so on, is not who you actually are. It is just a play of thoughts, of concepts, of unexamined assumptions about yourself and the world. You innocently picked them up in the course of living. It is these thoughts that create the perplexity and confusion. Notice that when you are asleep or absorbed in some interesting activity your problems disappear. It is a key point to see that all problems are just created in thought and nowhere else. This is fundamental. All problems, doubts and confusion are generated in thought. Not being clear on our true nature, we believe the concepts and stories in the mind and they take us for a ride. Your living awareness, who you really are, is utterly present and not affected in the least by thoughts. You are aware of the mind, just like the sun shines on the clouds. You are utterly free of thought. Whatever thought says about you is untrue. You are prior to the mind.

There is knowing, hearing, seeing and sensing going on all the time, spontaneously. This primary awareness is present. It is prior to any conceptual activity. There is a fundamental difference between awareness (or the direct experience of

knowing) and conceptual thought, which is just words and labels. We take the words and labels to be real. Can you drink the word 'water'? Is the thought 'I see' the same as actual seeing? Do the eyes say, 'I see'? Or is there simply seeing and later the thought comes up, 'I see'? It is the same for all the other senses.

Try to see the difference between awareness (or non-conceptual knowing or direct knowing) and the labelling activity of the mind. Of course, thought is also directly known in awareness. Thought is happening in awareness directly, spontaneously. Later the thought comes up, 'I am thinking'. That 'I' is spurious. It is not really present, except as a concept.

You shine as the living light of pure awareness at all times, never touched by thought or its definitions. Out of ignorance we tend to focus on the thoughts and labels, the stories and the 'person' imagined in thought. A subtle shift brings you back to the simple recognition of the fact of your true nature as presence-awareness.

The mind can never grasp it (your true nature) because it contains thinking. However, you can know your real nature for certain at any moment because you know you are aware, you know you exist, even without taking thought about it. Normally, this is overlooked because it is so simple. The mind is apt to minimize this pointing, but it is utterly profound. If you have the good luck to meet someone living in this direct understanding, he or she will point you back to this relentlessly, until it is as plain as the nose on your face. It is useless to struggle to get this. Just let the pointing draw you in. Feel the resonance. It will get you.

It Can't Be That Easy, Can It?

Questioner: Ha! Ha!

John: Glad to see you get it! Many is the seeker who has laughed when they finally got it, including Buddha. It is a cosmic joke.

Q: If that is enlightenment, I have been enlightened forever without knowing it – all the while desperately searching for it!

John: I am not sure you see how profound your words are! But, basically, yes! What you are seeking, you already are. Just think over the core expressions of the great teachings:

- You are That
- Your own mind is the Buddha
- I and the Father are one
- The eye by which I see God, is the eye by which God sees me

... and so on. This is the core insight at the root of all deeper spiritual teachings.

A clarification may be helpful here. It is not exactly precise to say 'I am enlightened'. An essential aspect of the understanding is that there is ultimately no separate 'I' to be enlightened or unenlightened. Nevertheless, recognition of your true nature is possible. It is just that an individual cannot claim it as an experience.

Q: You are kidding here? That's all there is to it? Is that what self-realisation means? To simply know, feel, experience and be the source of the thoughts about what you are (which never are and

never can be what you actually are, because the real 'you' precedes these thoughts and causes these thoughts)?

John: Yes! Don't underestimate this understanding. The mind, out of habit, will want to dismiss this. It will say, 'This can't be it; it is too simple'. And then you are off around the track again. If you see yourself as that which stands prior to thought, you are outside of time, the universe, duality, birth or death – you name it. There is no bondage to speak of.

Q: I am the projector of images and not the images? I am the very thing/being/presence/awareness that wonders what the hell it really is? I am the life that is trying to figure out what life is all about? I am the medium of awareness out of which these thoughts emerge? Is that it?

John: That is you. You are timeless, ever-shining, presence-awareness. You can never lose it and never find it, because the one searching is that for which he is seeking.

From this point on, thoughts, feelings, actions and decisions will spontaneously arise as they always have. There is no separate individual at all at the helm. The mighty universe unrolls in the vast light of your true being. Because you are not a limited person at all, there is no more room for questions, doubts and problems or all the rest of the conceptual apparatus that pertained when you imagined you were a separate 'I'. You are the timeless ground of being.

If the mind should arise and say, 'But what about this and that?' simply notice the ideas as passing thoughts that have no relation to you at all. All thought, feeling and perception appears in awareness. They have no existence apart from awareness. Just like waves arise and set in the sea, so do all thoughts arise and set in you. Thoughts are only vibrations in awareness; they are made of awareness. There is only one substance, one essence. There is only radiant, cognizing emptiness shining in all directions. That is all. You are that. There is only that. If you grasp this, the course is run.

Q: There must be more to it than this. I mean, if this is it, the search

is over right where it began!

John: Yes. I couldn't have said it better myself.

Q: *It can't really be that simple. (Can it?)*

John: Yes! But I don't have to confirm it at this point, do I? Your question shows that the façade is beginning to crumble and the recognition is already dawning.

Dealing with the Mind

It is key to see that the mind simply cannot get this understanding. The doership, the practicing, the meditating and so on are all at the mind level. But your knowledge of your existence, your awareness, is here immediately in direct experience. The reason the mind cannot get it is because the mind appears in that. You are present whether the mind is there or not. Sensing, thinking and functioning are happening spontaneously and quite effortlessly without the conceptual activity having much of a role. You are seeing right now, but are your eyes saying 'I see'? 'I see' is a thought, but seeing is happening.

The mind is like a key hole. You go up to it and look into it. No problem. But then you imagine that your whole life is taking place in the view within the key hole. If you just step back, you notice there is an entire universe outside of the key hole. There is no practice or activity within the view of the key hole that can take you beyond it because you are beyond it already.

Just listen to what is being pointed out. Feel the resonance. Your inner wisdom awakens, and you begin to sense the truth that is being pointed out. That is all. You cannot do anything as a separate doer to understand who you are. If you want to do anything, at least question, 'Who am I, anyway?' 'I have taken myself to be the mind, to be bound by the mind. Is that really true?' Till this questioning occurs, we take the beliefs in the mind to be the reality. The mind is not an enemy, and there is nothing in particular that we need to do with it. It really does not have any momentum, but until it is questioned, we remain fascinated with the show. It is our own interest that fuels the momentum. Once you begin to glimpse your true nature as the awareness in which the mind and all else appears, you are out of the game. No effort or struggle is

involved. The effort and struggle are part and parcel of the conceptual mind. If you find yourself struggling or fighting with the mind, you have taken a wrong turn. You have overlooked the presence-awareness and have jumped on board the train of thought. Realize you don't need to do this. There is nothing compelling you to do it. Just see that this is all taking place in thought, but awareness, the real you, is free already. It is that simple. You do not become free; you notice your present freedom.

The binding thoughts in the mind all have their root in the initial thought of separation, the 'I' thought. Until that is clearly seen, the mind will continue to give trouble. Nail that down, investigate that one thing and the entire lifetime of concepts and self-centered activity, the bondage of the mind, is resolved. I say this from my own actual experience. This kind of seeing completely undercuts the mind without any personal effort. The cure for ignorance is wisdom, which is just clear seeing. Initially, this may be pointed out by a teacher, but then your own seeing kicks in and you can take it from there. Soon the knowledge is unshakable, and the need for a teacher is done.

The wisdom or recognition arising in you is the response to recognizing the truth being pointed out. Your own innate wisdom is awakened and leads you to what needs to be seen. There is an innate intelligence within you that is much greater than the thinking mind. You intuitively know this. Just have a little faith in that. Stay with the pointers. Let them resonate. All will unfold naturally. You will verify it in your own living experience and confirm it by the freedom from suffering and limitation that ensues.

What About Reincarnation?

Question: It seems like many people are curious about life after death or everlasting life or reincarnation. (I also agree that what we truly are always will be.) If I am 'That', what do you think transpires to 'That' when the fragile phenomenal experience of the human mind-body organism comes to its inevitable demise? I understand any answer is only conceptual speculation at best. I understand we should be concerned with who and what and where we are now, and not speculate in or about the future or the hereafter, because doing so sets the stage for our own suffering. But I am curiously optimistic!

John: I don't claim to be an expert in metaphysical doctrines such as reincarnation and so on. Within the realm of appearances, and while one takes oneself to be a seeker, there are endless theories and doctrines. Ultimately, they are all products of thought and imagination. They seem compelling to the seeker because they provide reasons to explain his (seeming) separate existence.

At the level of the mind, there are endless theories to explain the 'whys and wherefores' of the individual person. They are largely speculative and never have any finality. But was your real nature ever born? Do you have any evidence that it dies? Is it in a body? As a point of fact, when pressed, both Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj, the paragons of Indian spirituality of the last century, stated that reincarnation did not exist. Bob Adamson once said to me, 'See the subtle trap trying to analyze what someone has said and what they mean. In doing that, presence is seemingly lost. Looking for a state or no state, a knowing or unknowing or anything at all, can only be conceptualization'. This was in a different context, but you might find that in trying to unravel metaphysical conundrums in the mind that you overlook the

obvious fact that you are free right now. Awareness is the changeless presence on which the universe appears.

At a more relative level, we can descend into the realm of thought and metaphysical theories, but at that point, one theory is as good as another and they are all speculative. Stay with fundamentals. The answer is not in the mind.

Even if one takes reincarnation seriously, who reincarnates? Investigation reveals there is no separate 'I'. In the realm of appearance you (as an individual entity) don't exist; the 'I' is absent. How can the absence of an 'I' reincarnate? If physical elements recycle, so be it. If thoughts recycle, so be it. But you remain as you are. The space-like awareness that you are is timelessly present as it is. Either way you look at it, reincarnation looks rather tenuous.

I am not attempting to deny the theories and mechanics of reincarnation, but it seems more direct to me to notice that there is only one awareness and everything is that. If waves reincarnate into other waves, so be it. The waves may be tremendously fascinated with where they came from, but the sea is not concerned. From the point of view of water, it is all one substance anyway. With your focus on your true nature as consciousness, you see that all theories are just movements in the mind. Awareness is real; thoughts are shadows. The dream of reincarnation is a passing cloud before the blazing sun of awareness, which you are now.

In my experience, it is more liberating to stay with solid facts, like you exist and you know you exist, rather than to engage in metaphysical debates, which are interminable. Instead of wondering what one was in a former life or will be in the next life, why not investigate what one is right now?

When Beliefs Drop Away

When you are first exposed to this understanding and life-long beliefs get challenged, it can be slightly disorienting. The reference points that we took for granted for so long start to drop away. We have built a life upon the concepts and beliefs of who we are. For years, the focus has been to shore up the person, to accumulate, strengthen and solidify its beliefs and concepts. As you begin to see through the false ideas, the tide turns. Initially, it may feel disconcerting or unusual. But at the same time, you feel immensely freer and lighter.

Too much thinking and analyzing all of this just brings in the mind. Ultimately, words are only useful in their function as pointers to your true nature. The attempt to clarify things at a conceptual level or articulate the understanding in words can generate a mild sense of confusion. At some point, you just see that the mind appears in this that you are. You know thoughts, but thoughts can never know you (as that presence-awareness). Knowing your beingness, your actual existence as that space-like awareness is non-conceptual and immediate. It does not require a mediating agent, like the mind or the senses.

To the mind, your true nature is no thing (that is, not an object). The mind cannot grasp no thing. This is baffling, as long as there is a tendency to keep grasping for something objective. Fortunately, there is no need to do this. However, the old habits to do so may continue to arise for a while.

If thoughts arise such as 'I feel lost' 'What do I do now?' and so on, just question, 'Who is this "I" that is lost or wants to know what to do?' This 'I' is just an empty assumption. The thoughts are only whorls of energy spinning in the light of awareness. There is no 'I' at their center. The thoughts move on, but awareness remains, free, luminous and untouched. There is no one lost, no one who needs to understand, no one to do or not do, no one to be afraid.

The conceptual 'I' is the cornerstone of the person, with all of its problems, doubts and suffering. As the sense of identity shifts to your real being as presence-awareness, the life of suffering dissolves like mist before the rising sun. There is no need to struggle to be what you already are. You are that now. Complete freedom is less than a step away.

11

The Bottom Line

The following is an excerpt from Bob Adamson's book *What's Wrong with Right Now, Unless You Think About It?*

Questioner: Bob, what is the bottom line?

Bob:

Right here, right now
You are present and
You are aware of being present.
Realize that you are that
One-without-a-second,
Pure presence-awareness
And be what you are.

From Theory to Experience

What you are right now is awareness or the sense of beingness. It is totally free, completely at peace and utterly and finally attained, even at this moment. Not being clear on this that we are, the mind has imagined separation and built a set of beliefs and identities upon this unexamined concept. When you get exposed to this type of teaching, several things begin to happen.

First, you get a glimpse of what your true nature is. It is pointed out, perhaps repeatedly, until you see it and know it for certain. This is the most important insight to start with. Your actual being, which is radiantly present and alive as that which is knowing your thoughts right now, is the truth that is pointed out. There is no other understanding or realization beyond this. In fact, you know this now. You exist and you know that you exist. All a teacher does is assure you with the greatest conviction that this is it.

Most of us have had a lot of baggage in the form of beliefs about what this understanding is, how it is supposed to happen, and so on. This type of teaching helps to expose those erroneous beliefs, not to mention the beliefs we have about ourselves. It is only these unexamined beliefs that generate our suffering and our sense of being apart from the peace we are seeking.

Everything happens as it happens. It is only from the limited view of the mind and its beliefs that we judge 'right' and 'wrong'. All evaluations are in the mind. From the point of view of what we are, everything is simply a manifestation of the deep harmony of what is, just an arising and ceasing in the light of awareness, which is ever at peace and free. This is true for you right now, once you clear up the confusion about your real nature. This does not take time; there is no path to this; and no practice is required. It is just seeing the truth of things.

Everything arises and sets in the light of your being. Nothing is separate from that. Forms appear and disappear, but nothing is ever lost or gained. Everything that appears arises from that, exists upon that, and subsides into that. In spite of the appearance and disappearance of people and things, there is a luminous, ever-present background that sheds a fragrance of perfection that permeates everything. That is your birth-place, your true home.

Know yourself clearly and all of this begins to make sense. It becomes your direct experience. If you are resonating with this type of teaching, then this understanding is already opening up for you. Just follow your heart and let the understanding unfold. Your own deeper being will lead you where you need to be and will reveal to you what needs to be known. Then you will realize that life is perfect here and now and that you have never left the peace and truth that you are seeking.

Stay with the pointers. Savour them like fine wine. Let the pointing unfold within your own heart. Most important of all, see your own true nature as it is. All the pointers are only to reveal this.

The Spiritual Search

Question: The question I keep asking myself is, 'Does this dream of a search and a person who is searching have anything to do with the appearance of grace and realization?'

John: It depends on what is meant by grace and realization. To me, grace and realization are just other terms for your true nature, call it Self, being, awareness, presence, God or spirit. That never appears, as it is the basis on which all appearances arise and set. From the point of view of the one who imagines himself to be separate and a seeker, there are many questions that seemingly need to be understood. From the point of view of your actual nature as awareness, everything is simple, direct and clear. Don't worry too much about the questions and issues that the mind raises. The answer is not in the mind. The grace and realization you are looking for is the ordinary awareness shining at your core right at this moment. Understand this and you understand everything.

Q: Is the motive to be free coming from that which is beyond? Because it seems to me to be part of the dream, too.

John: That is not beyond. It is here and now. Having apparently forgotten your true nature and identified with unquestioned beliefs in the mind, your innate wisdom simply moves to restore clarity. Some appearances turn back and realize their source, some don't. But it doesn't matter, because no one has ever left that. Pure awareness is a brute fact; it is undoubtedly present and intuitively obvious. Questions appear at the level of thought and mind. As long as the existence of the separate 'I' is not questioned, questions – even apparently cogent spiritual questions – will go on. Once you see your nature as awareness, you will find there are few, if any,

questions remaining. You are home; you are at peace; there is a sense of oneness. The desire to seek, to know and to do falls away because the root driver of all of this – the separate person – is not in play any longer. Losing, finding, awakening and so on are all just appearances in the light of being-awareness, which looks on with affectionate detachment.

Q: Is there even a point to the search?

John: Who is asking? Instead of trying to answer questions like this, you might find it is interesting to investigate who is asking. There is no ultimate finality or answer to questions as long as the sense of separateness survives. Whether the answer to this question is given as 'yes' or 'no', you still need to know yourself and resolve the core fundamental metaphysical question, 'Who or what am I?' All questions are just different ways of asking, 'What is real?' 'What am I?' 'What is my true source?' Clear up the fundamentals and the other issues resolve themselves automatically.

As far as whether there is a point to the search, I would say, if pressed, the answer is both yes and no. From the point of view of the seeker who imagines himself to be separate, there is no more relevant undertaking than to resolve the question 'What am I?' From the point of view of awareness (your real essence) the search is pointless, because you are already what you are seeking. Awareness is already free and completely present in all its fullness. The questions go on because the seeker is not clear on his true identity. See yourself as that awareness, see that the separate seeker is not really there and the entire search comes to an end, because, as mentioned above, you are what you are seeking.

Before this became clear to me, the sense of seeking had gone on in various forms for about thirty years. Afterwards, there was and is a distinct sensation that the seeking is finally and completely over. It is not a mental assertion but a core gut-level sense.

Q: What has been your experience with this? I'm guessing I'll need to find out for myself.

John: You certainly need to see all this for yourself, or else it remains just an interesting story. None of it is particularly relevant unless something in you resonates. I have a sense that you are deeply interested in all this, so I am sure the unfolding is happening for you already.

Thinking versus Knowing Who We Are

Questioner: If I experience reality through the mind, how is it possible to go beyond it, other than by changing the thoughts?

John: I am not precisely clear on what you mean by 'experiencing reality through the mind'. Your sense of being and awareness is actually unrelated to thought. You don't need to think to be and to be aware. It is not necessarily intuitive from a mental perspective, but once you see this, things fall into place. Like you, I had read Nisargadatta Maharaj's books for several years. Yet in all the verbiage and trying to understand things (with the mental perspective of looking for it as an object or experience), the obvious got overlooked, until Bob Adamson threw me back relentlessly upon what is here and now.

Q: For example, now, today, after reading the articles on your website, I catch myself thinking, 'Yes, but I read Nisargadatta twenty years ago and it resonated then, but I still identify with the mind'. These are the types of thoughts that go through my mind. I can come back to asking myself if I exist, which is undeniable, and maybe there is a feeling of being closer to the truth, but then mind rushes in again and I am back in it again. For you or Bob there must have been some fundamental change in viewpoint or perspective, and now you (even in mind, for your thoughts support your realization of what you have perceived) sense that intuitive truth.

John: The bottom line is that you are that presence or awareness now. When you first get exposed to this, the mind and all the concepts want to rush in with 'What if?' and 'But ...' and so on. Then you are pointed back again and again to the fact of your own being. Through force of habit, we instinctively look to the thoughts as a gauge of where we are, but it is looking in the wrong direction. Thoughts appear in awareness, which is

what you really are and always have been. It is like being above the clouds and then looking down at the clouds searching for the sun. You say, 'Look at all the clouds. They keep arising. Where is the sun?' But if you turn around, you notice that the sun is behind you, and it is illuminating the clouds. It is even what is allowing you to see them. The sun really has nothing to do with the appearance or configuration of the clouds. It is a subtle shift, but has profound effects. We have been looking in the wrong direction, and this can be quickly remedied once this gets pointed out. It is not really anything you need to practice. You just notice it. The answer is not in the mind.

If you ask most people to look across a room and say what they see, they will usually name the various objects. Few will say they notice the space. But once this is pointed out, you notice that everything takes place in space. It is the same with awareness. Once you get a feel for it, the center of gravity starts to shift from fixating on the thoughts to just relaxing into your true being of self-knowing awareness.

Q: How do I get there (or here, as the case may be)?

John: You don't get there. You are there now. Your existence-awareness is here and now always. If I can make a suggestion, don't be concerned at all with thoughts. The rising of thought has nothing to do with any of this. Be more interested in what thoughts appear in and on. That is the direction to explore. Dealing with thoughts is interminable and there is no freedom forthcoming from doing that. I know from experience, believe me!

Know your true nature and thoughts take care of themselves. Just as a heads up (in case you are wondering), thoughts will continue to arise for the rest of your life, just as they did before. But, knowing your real nature, you will not be concerned like you were before. Peace does not lie in a peaceful mind, but in establishing your identity in that which is deeper than the mind. You are that even now. It just takes a little looking to clarify this.

When Thoughts Rush In

Questioner: Thank you for taking the time to write about the natural state and things that happen when exposed to this teaching. I have Tony Parsons' book As It Is and I love the chapter 'The Park'. Actually, I love the picture before the chapter. When I look at that picture (or any landscape from my car or porch, for instance), I can notice that for a moment that I see, but the person seeing is not there. But then thoughts rush in. I have this concept that the 'me' will eventually disappear, that this story of me and my life that is ongoing much of the time in my head will just dissolve into seeing. I know I can't make this happen. Is it grace or the big 'Ah-ha'?

John: Don't worry too much about 'When will I get enlightened?' See the paradox in that? Who is that 'I'? You, as the awareness, are fully present as the one knowing the thoughts. It doesn't matter if thoughts rush in or anything like that. I finally realized that so-called 'awake beings' have just as many thoughts, emotions and experiences as anyone else. Nothing objective changes necessarily. Let that sink in.

Right now, you exist and are aware. There is a light within you, a knowingness that enables all your perception and thinking. It is fully present and luminous. It always has been present. We just overlooked it. When we pursue spirituality, we imagine all kinds of grand occurrences and events like 'enlightenment', 'grace', the 'great moment' or whatever. Why not? It is innocent enough, but it is based on a false assumption, the assumption we are apart from that and that we are a separate 'I' that needs to get there. I encourage you to question your assumptions and notice what is real in your experience. That is all that is required – just a simple noticing of what is here at this moment. It will dawn on you that your nature is just this present awareness. It does not depend on thought. It does not come and go. It just hits you that you are there

already. And you are! No grand experience is needed because you already are that.

Q: When my students (I teach high school art) finally see (conceptual clarity) what I'm saying, they get that 'baby bird' look with the little 'Oh' mouth and big eyes. It is like the light comes on. Suddenly, they know inside what I've been describing. This is how I envision awareness to be.

John: Yes, just a childlike recognition. But you don't need to envision what awareness 'would' be. Aren't you aware right now? There is no need to envision what is already there.

Q: A sudden and complete understanding that was always just below the surface ... However, this light has not dawned for me yet. I sense it there, but the lack of joy and ease in my life indicates to me that I am not awake. There is still the longing to be free.

John: In one's experience this is how it feels. This is exactly how it was for me. You will be drawn to these teachings because there is an innate sense that you need to know yourself clearly. You intuitively start to realize how shaky is your conception of yourself. It manifests in doubts and suffering at some level. So life draws you where you need to be to have this pointed out. Then it becomes your knowledge and experience.

All I can suggest is not to take too seriously your questions and beliefs, such as 'The light has not gone on yet' or 'I am not awake yet' or whatever. Instead of taking these questions at face value, question them a bit. Make it an interesting inquiry. What is the light that has not gone on yet? Where is the switch? What is the relationship of that light to me? Or, OK, I am not awake, but what am I? Am I so sure I am not awake? How do I know I am not awake? What am I anyway?

You will find that the assumptions that we make are the very things that keep us seemingly bound. We think 'I am not aware'. Then we jump on that thought and start to suffer. But wait! What is aware of the thought 'I am not aware'?

The teacher, or whoever it might be, just keeps pointing to

the fact of your true nature. You are that, even now.

Q: I would love to talk with you on the phone about this, but right now I don't have control of my emotions and cry easily. When there is less turmoil and I feel calmer maybe we can discuss imagined beliefs and identities and beingness.

John: Just have full faith and trust that, in spite of any thoughts and turmoil, you are free now. Is the sun affected by passing clouds? The clouds may be black and full of thunder, but does the sun care? It does not matter what your thoughts and feelings are doing. They are just dancing in the light of your being. Don't worry about the appearances. They will change and move as long as you live. It is not a matter of 'prettying up' the appearances. First see what you are. Then you realize that what is going on in the appearance does not touch you. Thoughts and emotions may be calm or active, but awareness remains steady and immovable, absolutely unshakable. Let the focus relax back toward that rather than upon the thoughts and feelings.

Feeling Clear, Feeling Dull

Questioner: It's odd how things can seem so utterly clear one day and then that feeling seems to be replaced with denseness.

John: It is natural for a period of 'back and forth'. Then you just settle down into the understanding. There may be a few things floating around that you might need to clarify. That is why I said in one of my articles that 'vestigial doubts are bound to arise'. This is why talking to someone who has a solid understanding of this is good, if you have the opportunity. It tends to speed the process up; at least that is my view of it.

Q: I think that I woke up yesterday with a kind of grasping, thinking that I had to keep that same meditation going. It is like I objectified the previous experience and turned it into something to hold on to.

John: Again, that is pretty natural. I wouldn't worry too much about it. Just notice it. Also notice that the awareness actually doesn't waver at all. The mind tries to describe the experience in words or thoughts; then we tend to start looking in the mind for some kind of confirmation. Just realize you don't have to do this. It is the old habit of the mind trying to gauge things. The interesting thing is that even while you are doing this and seemingly losing it, nothing has really changed. This is all just a play of thoughts dancing around in front of you and does not really touch you.

Basically, don't bother with the thoughts and the evaluations; stay more with the basic insights, which are the presence of awareness and the absence of a separate person. These two insights will completely undercut the tendency to look in the mind for an answer. At some point, you just notice that it is not necessary to look at the mind or really be that concerned

about what is arising in thought. Once the energy stops going into thought, it doesn't give that much trouble.

Q: This morning I started from scratch, so to speak. First I permitted all thoughts to appear without resisting them. There truly is no thought that lies outside of consciousness, so why attempt to control the mind?

John: This sounds like a clear approach. It is all one substance; just appearances arising and setting in awareness. It is all the same stuff. So what are you going to grasp or resist ultimately?

Q: This evening I slipped, effortlessly, back into the previous meditation of looking for the ego. All else was irrelevant. In our group discussion people were talking about their insights and delusions. Very interesting to hear, because I could see that what they were saying was perfect and wonderful but at the same time totally false because they all contained the notion of a real self and a false self. It was almost as if they are both real and there's a subtle battle going on between the two.

John: You are seeing that the dualism, the resistance, is based on false premises. Once you see that, the game is up and you just can't believe it any more. The old habits may come up for a while, but they eventually settle down because there is no feeding them. At some point further along, you don't really even care if they come up, because in the final analysis thoughts never really touch you and are more like shadows. To me, that is the ultimate freedom from the mind – when you don't care any more what comes up. You stop fighting it, manipulating it or even watching it. Basically, you are not fascinated by it anymore. That really takes the wind out of the sails of self-centered thoughts

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you about. I notice that the sense of presence tends to vanish when I go to sleep at night. Sometimes it carries through, but usually I wake up in a fairly dull mental state. I wonder if I'm grabbing onto some concept just before going to sleep the night before. Can you shed any light on this?

John: Fundamentally, presence never vanishes. It is key to grasp this. A sense of dullness does tend to arise from following thoughts and getting wrapped up in the story of the mind. You would have to say if or when that is happening for you, which you can do by looking at your experience. You can watch your own experience upon getting up and see if you tend to get back into some unexamined beliefs or assumptions, that is, whether or not the old world gets reconstructed shortly after waking up. This is how my experience used to be. I would usually wake up clear, but then slowly start thinking about my day, my issues and so on. Then the dull grey cloud would come in. But once you start to see all this, you realize the awareness itself does not alternate between dull and clear.

However, I still sense a tendency on your part to be looking at the mind and the status of what is going on mentally as a subtle gauge of where you are spiritually. The mind goes up and down, in and out. If you build your foundation on that, it is shaky. See if you can start to notice, instead, your real nature as that ever-present awareness. That is brilliant and clear and always with you. Begin to notice that more and more. Notice how the thoughts only exist, only appear because you are there to perceive them. You are prior to thought. So what is more important, your being or short-lived, passing thoughts?

As the nearness and clearness of awareness becomes more noticed, the issues and problems with thoughts get reduced considerably. You do not really have to do anything to make this happen. You do not have to work with the mind. The wayward mind and self-centered thoughts are a product of not being clear on what is real. As you get in touch with what is real in you, this removes the ignorance. The root of the ignorant thoughts is cut off and exposed.

I don't really analyze my dream states. Basically, I just sleep and don't philosophize too much about it! You exist before sleep and after; so you must have existed during sleep too. The mind is not fully present, and the relative subject may have subsided, but as soon as thoughts or dreams appear, that presence of awareness is right there illuminating it all. Whether thoughts appear or not, you still exist.

Being Wholehearted and Fully Involved

Questioner: I can see that my grasping usually centers around the issue of competence. It sounds like what you are saying is that I should not be concerned about whether or not fear or anxiety arises with respect to my work and accomplishments.

John: Once the sense of separation arose in early childhood, we all developed certain strategies to compensate (being assertive, passive, competent, helpless or whatever) in an attempt to regain wholeness. These are just conceptual attempts to find security, wholeness and completeness. But ultimately, the strategies are bound to fail, due to the falseness of the initial conceptual basis – that I am a separate ‘I’. Grasp the fundamental premise that if the ‘I’ is seen to be false, the effects cannot remain. There is still the seeming appearance of a person with seeming abilities and preferences, but the bondage is totally removed.

Q: After reading your last e-mail, I saw the idea arise ‘How to prevent the fear from coming up?’ At that moment I realized that this was a perfect example of what you were talking about. Thought and emotions still don’t have the power to affect my basic existence. So I need not use them as a gauge of my spiritual progress. Existence doesn’t progress; it just is.

John: Yes, there is absolutely nothing to do or fix – ever. Doing and fixing are outgrowths of imagining a separate person and a ‘doer’. Is there really any entity in there doing anything, making anything happen at all? Or are thoughts, feelings and perceptions spontaneously appearing? If so, then all is happening as it is bound to happen, and there is no basis for imagining ‘doership’.

Q: I guess that even if dullness or tension seems to be coming about because of grasping, ultimately, it’s not going to be productive to analyze that behavior. Better to just lose interest in the story and pay more attention to the basic field of awareness.

John: Yes. Ultimately, you have no control over the mind states, so let them be. Lose the concern that there is something significant about the mind and emotional states. They are simply passing states. End of story. They don’t mean anything about you at all. As you clear up your real identity, the mind will take care of itself.

‘Who’ is there in you to pay attention or lose interest? There can creep in the subtle idea that what you are is someone who is a separate person with the ability to choose or pay more attention. This is not really the case. You are always what you are, presence-awareness. It is perfectly whole and complete now. There is no improving it, getting it or losing it. There is no person in the machine whose attention, lack of attention, competence or whatever is a critical factor in understanding your true nature. This idea subtly keeps the idea of a person going. Who or what is there to do or to get, to be competent or anxious? As long as this idea of being a separate ‘ghost in the machine’ survives, everything in life is bound to give some sense of trouble. Fundamentally, this ‘I’ is not tenable and cannot survive close scrutiny.

So instead of being concerned with the states or actions, realize that the real existential problem, if there is one, is the subtle sense of being a separate person that can tend to creep back into the picture. Even when this happens, it does not in fact change what you really are. You are actually free and unaffected all the time. But there is the apparent sense of suffering due to fixation on the false idea.

Q: The downside of losing interest in the story is that the mind can misinterpret this as a pulling away from or aversion to activity.

John: Who is pulling away? Who has aversion? Can the mind really do anything except produce words and memories of past events and label things after they have happened?

Living, perceiving and feeling are fully happening all the time, without reference to the mind at all. With the emphasis off of thought, which is just a small slice of everything going on, you are more fully alive and present with what is. It is the going into the mind and thoughts that is pulling away from life as it is happening. All aversion and resistance is based on ideas and concepts about how things should be or should not be. Without that focus, you are much more fully energized, present and alive.

Q: It seems that it is still a good idea to be wholehearted and fully involved in daily activities. At least in my experience, I have found that to be the case, because my job demands that I be fully engaged at all times.

John: With the emphasis off of the mind and the conceptual story, you will be much more present, because there is no filter. There is no person with all of its preferences and partialities trying to negotiate every experience. But who is the one who is going to try to be wholehearted and fully involved? It would only be the separate person who would try to make an attempt to become something. Awareness, the light of life that you are, is always wholehearted and fully involved, because it is the factor that informs and supports all experience. There is no need to try to become something, even a more present and engaged person. This will subtly emphasize the sense of separateness, under the guise of trying to become something.

The real clarity comes from seeing the absence of the person. It is the person that gums up the works and creates all the problems and supposed solutions. Just keep coming back to the fundamentals. Your nature is luminous, ever-present, radiant, perfect, being-awareness. This is fully realized and complete right now. There is literally nothing you need to do or practice. Just notice what is here and see that. It is actually completely present. We just overlooked it due to the old concepts and habits.

Instead of getting wrapped up in the states and doing this or that, question who is the one who imagines that the states and actions are so important. You will find that it is the sense

of being a separate person, something apart from the source (which is the reality, the presence, or whatever you want to call it). Question that till you see that there is no separate person there. See this deeply, and all the issues will resolve with no additional effort. It is almost unbelievable, but it is true. All problems are for the 'I'. See that there is no 'I' and all problems must resolve. There is a logic to it that you can confirm by direct experience.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Very interesting. After making that statement about trying to be wholehearted, I went to work and discovered that the same old stuff was starting to come up. For some reason I remembered what you were saying about losing interest. Then the stuff just came and went, and I did indeed lose interest in the story. And, yes, you are right, all the energy I needed to do my job was there automatically. No need to try to be wholehearted. Since the story was not running, there was no tendency to want to get away from what was happening, and my focus was very naturally on my work. I worked from 8 am till 7 pm with seemingly no effort at all. It is truly amazing that people come up with so many different methods and techniques but fail to address the real issue.

Awareness – Not an Experience or Practice

Questioner: In the past few days things seem to be taking a new course. I'm finding that concerns, worries and even eager anticipation arise at times, but there doesn't seem to be much energy to pursue them.

John: Yes, this sounds right. Don't expect thought to be any particular way. Do not use thoughts as a gauge of where you are at. (Basically, do not define yourself with thought.) It is not that thoughts or emotions, even intense emotions, do not come up; it is just that you are abiding at a completely different level, the level of the ever-present being-awareness. Let thoughts come or go however they please. They mean absolutely nothing about you or anything else really.

Q: Sometimes I feel intense awareness, other times not so much, but generally there is an inner knowing that there is no point or need to be concerned about it.

John: There is a subtle unclarity here. You do not 'feel' awareness (as if it were an experience), and it does not really come and go, although it may appear that way. Awareness is fully present and absolutely clearly known at all times. Just ask yourself what is knowing thoughts or even the absence of thoughts? When you are not 'feeling awareness', what is knowing that experience? How can that experience even arise unless you are there knowing it? Just get really clear on the fact that you are that presence of awareness that is constantly and ever at the basis of everything that you experience. Don't look for awareness to be there or not there, to be clear or not clear, and so on. This will create a subtle imagined dualism. Your experience will seemingly shift as you latch onto conceptual definitions.

So, what is in you right now that is present and aware? Does that ever leave you? Is it ever dimmed at any time? Even when you are totally in a cloud and in the pit of conceptual despair, you never lose your being. The awareness is completely present and free. Awareness is subtle. It is so clear that we tend to overlook it and pursue the thoughts because they seem more tangible and real somehow. Ultimately, they are just fleeting appearances arising and disappearing in the light of awareness. You are completely and fully that now. No practice or meditation is necessary, nor could it help to make the awareness any more clear than it already is. It is a matter of looking and seeing. It is pointed out again and again until it just hits you: 'That's what I have always been'.

Q: Yesterday I tried to foster a heightened awareness, but it just gave me a headache!

John: You cannot make it into a practice. If you try to, it won't work, as you discovered. Practices are in the mind. And the answer is not in the mind, so at some point, you just stop looking for it there.

Q: It was like the contradiction that is built into any attempt to make awareness come about was so great that it hurt. I had to back off and continue to let the process unfold at its own rate.

John: Discard the subtle concept that there is a process. You don't approach awareness. You are awareness. There is no process to take you to your own being.

Q: It can't be forced; it can only be allowed.

John: Just notice your ever-present nature and just relax easily into that. There is really nothing you can do to enhance anything because it is already your experience. You have just been looking in the wrong direction. So, be convinced that the answer is not in the mind and that anything you try to do to approach it is from the point of view of a separate person trying to get something that he doesn't have. Just see that that is all untrue.

Q: So, I definitely cannot do any kind of meditation except for self-inquiry. And the inquiry can't be expecting an answer.

John: It is tempting to try to turn self-inquiry into a technique or practice. Then you are off to the races again as a person who is now doing self-inquiry and (hopefully) getting closer and closer to something (yourself, I presume!). To me, self-inquiry is just looking to see if the imagined separate entity at the root of all seeking is really present. So, who is that one who cannot do any meditation? Who would or would not be expecting an answer? Does the ever-present awareness that you are need to meditate or inquire in order to be, to exist? Does the awareness that everything is appearing in and on need any answer? Just see that all actions, techniques and answers would only be at the mind level.

You do not need any techniques or answers to exist and be aware. Nor do you need any techniques or answers to know conclusively who you are. It is an intuitive and direct perception (for lack of a better word) that looks right at the core of what you are right now. You sense the presence of the life, light, being, spirit or whatever you want to call it. It is just a presence shining at your core. Once it is pointed out, you get a taste of it. You cannot grasp it as an object, so the mind is befuddled by this. It is completely outside the reach of the mental subject/object way of looking at things. Yet it is not difficult, because you are constantly knowing that all the time. If I ask, 'Are you are aware?' or 'Do you exist?' you instantly fire back 'Yes!' without even thinking about it. You do not need thought for this. So you can relax the attempt to use thought to know your true nature. Just see that right here, right now, something is shining within you, knowing these words and everything else. That is it.

Q: I think that the main thing that has changed is that I'm not chasing thoughts around. I am not sure why. It may be that I am slowly being convinced that there really is not anything to do.

John: Yes, that sounds right. As you see all this more clearly, you will lose interest in thoughts and stop seeking

the answers there. It sounds like that is becoming your experience.

Q: Previously I would have a really great meditation and then think, 'This is it. This is the great meditation. Just keep it up!' And then when the intensity would fade, I would get concerned about it.

John: Once you take the focus off of the mind, this kind of thinking and experiencing fades out of the picture. But awareness-presence never fades. If you see that, or rather be that, the fading will not be an issue. And even if it does fade, how would you know it is fading? The experience of fading would be something you would be experiencing in awareness. Awareness is fully present and knowing that, so you are right back in the awareness, which you have never left, because that is what you are.

Who is concerned? Only the imagined separate person. Look to see if it is there. When you look, you cannot find it. In seeing its absence, the concern fades out of the picture because if the cause is seen as false, can the effects remain? To me this is real inquiry. It is not a practice. It is just looking out of a sense of natural curiosity to know what is real. Instead of getting wrapped up in the states and conditions, look directly into the supposed person who is having the states and conditions. That will clear up things quickly. But even so, nothing has really happened because you still are what you always have been, that untouched presence-awareness.

Q: Now, I'm not really expecting to find the great meditation. I am just kind of sitting back and watching it all unfold. Whatever happens, happens.

John: That is the way it has always been. Whatever happens, happens. There is no person in there making things happen. It is all spontaneously unfolding in the light of awareness. There is really nothing to do (or that you can do) because there is no one in there to do anything.

You do not need to have the great meditation. That would be some future event that would hopefully deliver you into

enlightenment or something. That is a projection of thought. Even though it appears to be a valid or even noble spiritual idea, it is still just a projection of thought. It is better to question the very concept itself. Questioning an assumption like this and discarding it, leaves you in the state you are hoping to achieve in the future. This is just seeing that you do not need time or meditation experiences to be what you already are. This exposes the falseness of the conceptual cage of limitations we have built around ourselves. You do not have to do anything. Just see the false as being false. The rest takes care of itself.

Limitations of Spiritual Books

If your exposure to this understanding has come mainly through spiritual books, there are some possible pitfalls. I speak from experience. I read the best and clearest books for years, but there was a radical shift for me in meeting someone with a first-hand understanding. For what it is worth, I personally never met anyone in the last thirty years who conclusively realized this through reading books. It seems to me that people tend not to get this through reading books. But then again, maybe some do. I just haven't met them.

By approaching this understanding through books, you can tend to overlook the obvious presence-awareness. It is so simple, really, that you can make it complicated by reading too much about it! If you are going it alone, so to speak, you can have some blind spots that you are not even really aware of. Talking this over with a living teacher can quickly expose some of the subtle conceptual definitions that you may still be living by.

One reason I value Bob Adamson so highly is that, in spite of my having a pretty good understanding of all this (from reading books and seeing a variety of teachers over the years), it never really came home to me completely until I met him. Because he was so utterly clear on all this, it enabled me to see it for myself relatively quickly. I had never had this type of experience with other teachers. Like I said in one of my articles, it was probably due to my own confusion! I have to admit that to this day, I have a preference for the way the pointing was done by Nisargadatta Maharaj and Bob Adamson. There is a penetrating clarity and energy that really worked for me. I found most other teachings to be mixed with non-essential topics. That is not to say that there are not other excellent teachers who are pointing to this same understanding!

Traditionally, this understanding has usually unfolded

by meeting someone with a living understanding, getting the core of the matter pointed out in no uncertain terms and engaging in dialogue to clear up any remaining questions or doubts. One way or another, this gets pointed out and you see it. That is pretty much what it comes down to.

It is a peculiar thing, but reading about our true nature usually does not seem to trigger a deep recognition. Witness the thousands upon thousands of books on Buddhism, Vedanta, non-duality and so on that people are exposed to. Very rarely, if ever, do you hear a case of someone understanding their true nature by reading about all this in a book. However, this is not a rule, and there are cases of people spontaneously recognizing their true nature. But it seems comparatively rare.

Our true nature, although ever-present and exceedingly obvious, seems not to be present due to simple ignorance. Our whole mental functioning is geared toward seeking something external. Also, we are trained to use the mind as our primary instrument to understand just about everything. However, these approaches to understanding our true nature fail lamentably. This intrinsic awareness that we are is not something external and it is not something that you can grasp with the mind or by thinking. It is too simple and clear, too basic, too easy, and so we overlook it. Even when we read the clearest most obvious pointers to this, we are apt to read complicated and far-fetched meanings into the words, and, amazingly, we continue to overlook the obvious.

Another way of looking at this would be to imagine you are dreaming. You find a book in the dream, a book that describes your true nature as something beyond the dream. But the book itself is in the dream, the act of reading is in the dream and the mind trying to understand is also in the dream. It is almost impossible for the dream subject to visualize anything outside of the dream. Even if the book states emphatically that the answer is outside of the dream, the dreamer does not (apparently) have any foothold outside the dream. So he continues to imagine that the book is pointing to something within the dream. I am sure many people can relate to reading the clearest books on non-duality and still feeling like the understanding is elusive. Perhaps this is the mechanism at work.

If you happen to meet a living teacher with this understanding, he or she will relentlessly point you back to the core of things. Also, he or she will expose any of the mind's habitual attempts to conceptualize this understanding. Most importantly, his or her words and presence are infused (for lack of a better word) with a direct knowing of this. The energy and clarity is unmistakable. It is not something mystical, really. It is just a sense of confidence that comes from knowing firsthand and for certain. It is contagious. Once you get a taste of this for yourself, things open up quickly, because not only are you being told what the truth is in no uncertain terms (your own present awareness), but you are able to feel this in the moment of the clear pointing. This combination is an irresistible force that overcomes any remaining tendency to overlook the obvious.

Who Identifies with Thought?

Questioner: I just wanted to drop you a note and let you know that I re-read a lot of your articles and pondered the sense of where my awareness was. You wrote:

You do not 'feel' awareness (as if it were an experience), and it does not really come and go, although it may appear that way. Awareness is fully present and absolutely clearly known at all times. Just ask yourself what is knowing thoughts or even the absence of thoughts? When you are not 'feeling awareness', what is knowing that experience? How can that experience even arise unless you are there knowing it? Just get really clear on the fact that you are that presence of awareness that is constantly and ever at the basis of everything that you experience. Don't look for awareness to be there or not there, to be clear or not clear, and so on. This will create a subtle imagined dualism. Your experience will seemingly shift as you latch onto conceptual definitions.

This is exactly what was happening to me. I was all caught up in my thoughts and feelings and wondering where my awareness was. Of course it is there all along, and it is just a matter of shifting one's identification with what you are.

John: Yes, that about does it!

Q: Do you think that this confusion has to do with people constantly having to be the doer of everything and, therefore, because there is seeming action in thoughts and emotions, we latch onto the movement and identify that as 'me'?

John: Keep in mind that the idea of being a doer is an imag-

ined concept. Awareness does not do anything. (Or, alternatively, you could say that awareness does everything. Either way, the key insight is that there is not a separate individual who is responsible for actions.) We are so used to imagining that 'we' do everything, that when we take to the spiritual path, so to speak, we immediately assume there is something we should do, not realizing that the real import is to understand that there is no one present to do anything. There is not really anything to do but listen to the truth being pointed out and directly see the facts as they are. It goes against the grain of everything we have been conditioned to do, but it is not difficult.

Q: Thoughts come up and it seems easy to identify that as 'me' rather than realizing that the 'me' is behind that and ever present and unchanging.

John: If you want to go to fundamentals and really clear things up, ask who is there in you that would be there to identify or not? Who latches on to thought or not? When you go to the root and try to find the 'I' in the machine, you find it to be absent. There is only the presence-awareness that you are. There is no separate entity to do anything, to be stuck, to identify, and so on. Then the game is up, and you stand permanently in your innate freedom, which you can never lose.

Just watch thoughts and notice how the subtle sense of being a separate person apart from awareness can slip in, in various guises. Once you see it a few times, you catch on to the game, and then you cannot be fooled anymore.

Questions, Questions, Questions

(In response to a questioner who brought up a variety of metaphysical questions and issues...)

John: I feel it would be worthwhile at this point to get back to basics. A fundamental to understand is that the answer is not in the mind. Questions can be endless. Ultimately, all questions stem from a sense of separation. All questions are rooted in the sense of being a separate person who needs to know something in order to reach clarity or be at peace. You may notice that questions tend to bring in a subtle sense of separation and the presence is seemingly lost. Questions are created in the mind and only exist at the level of thought. But before, during and after all questions, you are.

From my experience, peace or direct knowledge does not arise as the result of a series of mental questions and answers. These are dealing with the level of appearances. Any explanation is only a provisional explanation that may or may not be true. The approach is likely to generate more and more doubts, instead of greater clarity and certainty.

The awareness that you are is ever present. All appearances rise and set upon that awareness and are not apart from it. It is all one substance – non-duality. There is only one power, one presence, one awareness at the root of everything. You are not separate from that, so there is really nothing to seek or know or do. If you see this clearly, and if you see that you are not a separate entity apart from that, all questions will resolve conclusively.

If you do not get clear on the fundamentals, the questions and doubts will go on. There are endless concepts, theories and scenarios. At some point you will realize they do not lead to certainty. The answer you are seeking is not to be found in the mind. It is natural for questions to arise

for a period of time. But ultimately, you will find they all collapse.

In the final analysis, awareness is all there is. There is nothing beyond it. There is nothing to achieve or know or understand with the mind. The mind is just a passing wave on the ocean of awareness that you are. All thoughts are only that same awareness. Conceptual thought is pure imagination and only leads you into the smoke and mist of metaphysical doubt. Awareness, which is your true nature, is a blazing sun of radiant light that makes the mind and the entire world possible. So, turn away from the dim shadow of thought and embrace that in you that is doubtless and eternally free right now. If you must do something, try to find out if the 'I' that you think you are really exists. Give up all other questions and pursuits. Nail down your identity and all questions are answered.

Your questions are all good and well conceived. But notice that even if we methodically work through them and supply plausible answers for them, there will still remain a sense of metaphysical lack until the issue of identity is resolved. All questions and doubts are for the separate person, the imagined 'I'. They are all at the mental level. See conclusively the absence of the separate 'I' and all possible questions get answered. Awareness, the truth of who you are, has no doubts, questions or problems. Do not pursue the branches and leaves, but go for the roots. Abandon all questions except 'What am I?' Everything else is futile speculation.

Got The Punch Line

Questioner: Wow. I got the punch line to the greatest joke of all. It is just seeing that this is it. There is no story behind it. This, this! Ha ha! It is so simple and natural: the typing of these letters, being the awareness of all perceptions (of which I'm not), just the awareness of it all. Whew! No words can describe the gratitude. There is no one laughing. Ha ha!

John: This is good news. There is nowhere to go, no one to be. There is just what is, ever present, ever fresh and untouched. It is never lost. It is the basis of everything that appears and disappears. You have seen what needs to be seen, and you are what you have seen. Simply abide as that. Live in and as the spontaneous and effortless joy of your innate nature. No matter what you say, do or think, it never leaves you.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Thanks for the reply. Yes, abiding in the present awareness of what is – and I am that. There is no 'I', really, just that. Serious seeking and doing falls way in realizing that the seeker is the sought. All seeking takes one away from what one really is. It is so funny! I see what all the sages say: the past and future exist as a dream and awakening simply is. The giggle erupts, the dream shatters and wakefulness explodes. Laughter abounds in what is! It is all natural and simple. Home. Yahoo!

A View from the Satsang Trenches

Questioner: I had been reading stuff like Krishnamurti for many years. Everything he said rang true, but I didn't know what the hell he was talking about, if you know what I mean.

John: I had the same experience. I really liked Krishnamurti at one point, back in the 1980s. He was still alive and I was able to hear him talk.

I had been interested in Theosophy and things like that. I was attracted to colorful and romantic spiritual stuff, like mysterious yogis in inaccessible Himalayan caves and such. It was great fun for a teenage boy! Krishnamurti said that was all useless. You needed to inquire into truth for yourself. That hit home, and I lost interest in those other things. But real understanding eluded me. Other than that, no real lights went on.

Q: From there I went on and read other things – some Zen, some Buddhist, some philosophy.

John: Ditto. I read the *Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, which is the story and teachings of one of the founders of Ch'an Buddhism in China. I really enjoyed it, but didn't really understand what he was pointing to.

Q: I stumbled onto satsang about two years ago. This has rung the truest, but still there has been something unclear, unfinished, unsatisfied. I have had many cool experiences in satsang, including that clear, spacious awareness. But still, there has not been that knowledge of my true nature that is unshakable.

John: Contemporary satsangs have a lot of clarity and promote a sense of peace, but for most people (at least from what

I have seen), the experience does not last. They are slipping into states almost by accident, but the understanding is not communicated in a decisive and clear way. In other words, there is an element of doubt or lack of knowledge. The roots of ignorance are not fully exposed, and you keep cycling back into old patterns.

I had the same experience for years, until I met Bob Adamson. What he was presenting was at a different level than what is usually happening at a contemporary satsang. What he was sharing was more direct and concentrated. It didn't get into the spiritual paraphernalia, like trying to be spiritual, be quiet, meditate or anything like that. Plus it was coming from a living tradition in a very direct manner, straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

Q: When I read your articles, they make me feel spacey and big, and I find myself feeling 'yes' to the words instead of the usual 'yes, but...' No internal fight is going on.

John: When you come across something clear and obvious it tends to undercut the mind and the old views in a very direct way. It is not a practice of being still or trying to assimilate someone else's experience. It is the direct looking for yourself as to what is true within you now. Meeting a teacher with a living understanding of all this can be immensely helpful because he or she can help you avoid the irrelevant issues. With a good teacher, the emphasis is never on the teacher, as such, but on the revelation of your true nature.

Even refined attitudes and practices of spiritual seekers are often based on subtle ideas of being a separate, albeit more spiritual, person. So the fundamental issues go uninvestigated. However, it is all part of the growth and the unfolding. You seek out the best teaching that you can find and stick with it till you experience what it has to offer. Then you move on. Like we all do. If you are lucky enough to come across a Nisargadatta Maharaj or a Bob Adamson, 'the buck stops here', because you are finally encouraged to take things right to the roots. It is a notable shift of focus. You sense the difference in your own experience of clarity and freedom. It comes

swiftly and directly, because all the veils are removed. There is simply a direct pointing to that which is clear, radiant and present in your actual experience. The idea of separation is clearly exposed as a false, unexamined (till now) assumption. The seemingly separate person is fully exposed and the roots of bondage are cut decisively. For someone serious about freedom, this is the 'ultimate medicine', as Nisargadatta Maharaj called it.

Q: Maybe I am just worn down and I am giving up the search for the big bang that I have grown to expect from reading so many awakening stories. Still, I would like to have that unshakable knowing.

John: Even searching for awakening becomes another adornment of the separate seeker hoping to attain oneness. There is no future awakening event, attainment or experience. Consider this deeply.

Simply look into what you are right now and see what is present. If you get into the 'When will I attain it?' type of thinking, just notice that that is a passing thought appearing in the living light of your awareness. That awareness is with you right now. It is not apart from you. You do not need to seek it, because you are it. See that whatever comes up, you stand always as that awareness. There is no meditation or path or satsang or reading needed. If such things are legitimate, they only point to what is present right now. So all you have to do is look for yourself and see. You can do that right now. It is key to see that understanding alone is needed. Everything else is preparation to bring you to the point of looking for yourself. There is no substitute for your own direct seeing.

The teacher repeatedly points you in the direction of your ever-present awareness until you see it. What the best teachers are pointing to as 'that' is your actual being-awareness. You never gain or lose it. It is innate. At some point you just start to notice it. The old habits may kick in for a while, but this approach does a really good job of exposing them, and they simply fall away of their own accord. And the truth that you see just shines all the more clearly. Then you see that this is what you are and always have been. It is not a month – or

year – long practice at all. It depends more upon your interest and earnestness and the clarity of the pointing. At least that is my view of it.

Q: Any additional advice you may have would be most welcome!

John: If you are responding to this, then you are ripe and ready, so just follow your heart and your own deeper wisdom and everything will unfold as it is meant to do for you. You need not have any doubts about this.

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Nisargadatta Maharaj – In His Own Words

Here are a couple of quotes from Nisargadatta Maharaj. The first is from a pamphlet he wrote entitled 'Self-Knowledge and Self-Realization'. It is referenced in the book *Godmen of India*, by Peter Brent.

Nisargadatta Maharaj: The ever-awaited first moment was the moment when I was convinced that I was not an individual at all. The idea of my individuality and welfare had set me burning up to then. The scalding pain was beyond my capacity to endure. But there is not even a trace of it now. I am no more an individual. There is nothing to limit my being now. With the disappearance of the evil signs of individuality, and the accompanying defects, the ideas of acquisition and renunciation have automatically dropped away. The ever-present anxiety and the gloom of the smoldering heart have vanished, and I am all beatitude, pure knowledge, pure consciousness.

My present experience of the world as the divine expression is not for any profit nor for any loss, but is the pure, simple, natural flow of beatific consciousness ... It is the unique, blissful experience of the primal unity ... Every object in the universe has lost its objectivity ... He that once meditated on bliss and peace is himself the ocean of bliss and peace.

The next quote is from *Godmen of India*, by Peter Brent.

Nisargadatta Maharaj: See, the Guru and the disciple are like two kernels in one jack-fruit, one raw, the other ripe. The raw one wants to be ripe; the ripe one is ripe and wants nothing more. While the raw one feels different it will continue to demand, to want something. But there is no difference – it is all one jack-fruit, all the same stuff. The difference is only felt by the unripe. When I met my Guru, I experienced the ripeness in him. Now that ripeness is in myself; I am one with my Guru. There is no separation; everything that I am is my Guru. At the start, I used to ask myself 'What is the Guru?', 'What is the disciple?' But now I no longer ask myself such questions because they are meaningless. There is no separation, so there can be no answers, no explanation – there is only being.

Going Deeper with the Inquiry

Questioner: I'm sitting down to write, but it seems kind of silly to talk about myself and what has been happening. So, whatever I am going to say will surely contain some contradiction.

John: There is no need to worry. Talking and writing are limited, but that doesn't mean you have to restrain yourself either. Thinking and talking are just a natural part of the flow. Personally, I think it is part of the process to dialogue about this. It is just a way to clear the undergrowth and can be a help.

Q: One thing is really clear: I have never, ever seen the ego. There is absolutely no evidence that it exists, only hearsay, only assumptions. So, if I only accept what I can actually witness, it is awfully hard to go on believing that the ego exists.

John: This is really a key thing to see and consider. It undercuts the core of all separation and limitation. Just because you start to see this or consider it, the habit of thinking the 'I' is real may not die down overnight. There is just an inertia to it from assuming it to be there for many years. But just keep coming back to that insight and look at it in different ways, just out of a natural sense of curiosity. Try not to turn it into a practice, method or technique, with some specific imagined goal. Who would practice it? Who would pursue a goal? Only the imagined separate 'I'. It starts to become really interesting to see how that idea can pop back into the picture in various ways. But then you start to see it more and more, and you are not taken in by it. At some point it is almost humorous. It is fascinating to see how this non-existent 'I' had been the focus of so much mental and emotional activity.

I just want to stress it is not a test. Think of the common things that come up: 'When will I finally see this and be

enlightened?' 'When will the ego drop away?' 'I'm not there yet' and so on. These are all purely imaginary dilemmas. This is the very ego sense at work. Just ask, who? Who is not there or whatever? Only the false idea that I am a separate 'I'. But there is no 'I'. Bingo! One way or another you have seen this, so it is all shadow boxing with an imaginary opponent.

Then take a few moments to ask, 'What am I really? Am I not the awareness now? Do I need to attain that? Is there any problem with that?' Then you are right back in the clarity, which has always been there. You just forgot it, through getting engrossed in the imagination. Still, you never actually left who you are. You do not have to make the thoughts or imagination go away. It is more just the seeing what is happening. Once you see the mechanism, it may continue, but you do not care. It does not affect you.

There is a subtle dualism in expecting the thoughts to change or go away. It makes no difference to awareness if thoughts are there or not. So who cares? The imagined person again! It is a great relief to see that you don't have to do anything at all with the mind.

Q: Yet, the habitual thought process continues to conjure up the notion. When I notice this, the question simply arises again, 'Is there an ego, and if so, where is it?' Not being able to find it, the question subsides.

John: Yes, you just notice it. The old momentum, like I said, is there for a while. But you cannot really get fully embroiled in it any more. It is an obvious fact that there is no ego in the machine. At first you investigate it and check it out. At times the old habits pop up, so you look again, perhaps repeatedly. At some point it just sinks in at a gut level and you are convinced. Then the investigation drops away naturally. For example, your name is 'Bill' or whatever, so do you have to go around thinking 'I am Bill' all the time? At some point it is just your constant knowledge. It is the same with seeing that there no 'I'. You investigate for while, looking and seeing for yourself. At some point, you see it conclusively, and the looking is done. There just is not a separate 'I'. It is a fact. That is the end of the road. You cannot really do much with a fact. It just is.

Q: That is the crux of the issue, it seems. What appears in consciousness has little relevance. Sometimes there is mental lucidity, other times mental dullness. Sometimes the body feels good, other times not so good. It does not really matter too much anymore.

John: It looks like you have come pretty far along with all this. Not that there is anywhere to go! To me, there are two facets to all of this. First, there is the presence-awareness that is the clear, constant base of all appearances. This is your real identity. Second, there is the absence of the separate person or 'I'. This is the illusory or mistaken sense of yourself. To me they are both key. Some Buddhist approaches have a good handle on the absence of an 'I', but it seems dry somehow, kind of empty (no pun intended). Some approaches focus on the absolute, but do not really expose the mechanism of the false 'I'. It keeps popping back into picture. So, even as you take time to explore the absence of the 'I', which is key, also continue to sense and explore that everything is appearing in that radiant, lucid, free and untouched awareness. Contemplate what it means to simply be that. The looking into that may come and go, and you may need to check in on that, but there is also a point where you just know that for certain, too.

If there are knotty or thorny issues that keep popping up in spite of seeing all this, it is good to get them out for a look. I did that with Bob Adamson. It was just a clearing up of some mental flotsam and jetsam. I found it to be a great help to undercut places where I would tend to cycle back to sometimes, in spite of seeing the basics. Seeing that the separate 'I' is not there is hugely important because all the other self-limiting ideas are rooted in that. If the root is taken care of, the other issues take care of themselves. So keep coming back to the basics.

Q: Anyway, that's my latest report.

John: It is nice to hear how things are unfolding. Everything sounds good.

Really Question the Sense of 'I'

Questioner: I received Bob Adamson's book and first CD approximately two weeks ago. I was familiar with the terms used, so I listened to the CD immediately and started the book as well. Bob's direct approach is very effective. He has a way of being very blunt and to the point. He cuts to the core very quickly and effectively. Very few words are wasted. It is really refreshing and helpful to hear someone actually speak about non-duality and the natural state rather than just reading about it. As you may well be aware, there are no teachers or non-dual gatherings in this area. South Dakota is America's outback!

I am rereading the book and listening to the CD whenever I have the chance. I feel my understanding has been there for four to five months, but what remains to be done (for lack of a better way of putting it) is the total dropping of the 'I'. Somehow the 'I' is hanging in there by a thread, in my opinion, and still wants to be in charge. However, this is not a strong feeling anymore, due to frequent investigation and looking for the 'I'. Also, your article All Problems Are For The 'I' is very good and has been helpful. The sense of 'I' just seems to be lingering in the background. I have found that continually coming back to presence-awareness is surprisingly effective. It keeps me within – here and now – where I should be.

Intuition tells me that I just need to stick to it and eventually it will dawn on me, and there will be an understanding. This is not an anxious sort of sticking with it, but an 'effortless effort' of coming back to presence-awareness and investigation of the 'I'.

John: It looks like you are experiencing Bob's unique and powerful style, for lack of a better way of saying it. I can appreciate that. That was exactly my position on all this as well. I found his website and something resonated. Then I went to the book, and the experience continued and deepened. Then I got the CDs and listened to them often. I also re-read the book

at intervals. It was all just a reminder, a pointing back to that which is ever present.

You are right to see that this is not an anxious endeavour. It is just being drawn into the clarity, naturally and effortlessly. I found no more clear pointers in my search than Bob's materials. I also began communicating with one of his students by e-mail. Things continued to shift and I knew I was really onto something. And so are you, so just stay with the unfolding. Whatever is to happen, happens. Now that you have a taste of your true nature as presence-awareness, there is a natural drawing to the clarity, and the contrary ideas get exposed. Whatever you need for that to happen, will happen. For you have never been running the show anyway. The deeper intelligence within will have its way with the imagined you that you may sometimes think you are.

So, let's get down to this issue of the separate 'I'. Point blank: there isn't one. It is a fiction. There has never been any such thing. It is a subtle trap (if you can say that) that there is something to drop. That presupposes that it is there and needs to be dropped. There is only an assumption that the 'I' is there. You already have a sense, through investigation, that the 'I' is not, so do not let it in the back door by thinking you have to drop it, and that it is still hanging by a thread. That is too much drama! If you see these types of thoughts coming up, do not believe them! Use them as an opportunity to investigate. If you catch yourself saying something like 'The "I" is hanging by a thread' or even 'I need to stick with it' or whatever, really look at that. What is the 'I' that is hanging by a thread? Who needs to stick with anything? That is 'I'. What is this supposed 'I'? Can you find it?

Am I an imagined 'I'? Or am I the present awareness, which is already here, complete and needing nothing? Am I really a separate 'I'? And if so, where is this thing?

You are actually completely free now. There is nothing to drop, nothing to wait for. It is only the unexamined beliefs that give the appearance that something is wrong. But what is wrong if you don't think those thoughts? They are only assumptions. They are not true. Like I say, even if the thought 'I am not there yet' appears, what is that appearing in or on?

Isn't it the awareness? So, the idea is false.

You can be totally free now. You *are* totally free now. The teacher will ruthlessly throw you back on this point again and again. Do not imagine it takes time. It does not. All time is useless delay. You will never attain any deeper understanding in the future than what is present and fully here now.

I think you are about as close to this as you can be without falling completely into it. The last little push I can give you is that there is nowhere to go, nothing to do and nothing to get. You are already where you need to be. All else is imagination. And even that does not move you from your real being. There is no one who needs to have the final understanding, because that one who needs the final understanding is not there! The last illusion is that there is someone there who needs to be free or get it. Right here, right now, there is a clear, luminous, center of pure being-awareness at your core which makes all thought, perception and feeling possible. Everything arises and sets within that. You are that now. See that. Be that. Let that resonate.

What are You Looking For?

Questioner: I appreciate all of the extra time you spent speaking with me last night. I still don't really connect with the idea that there is something truly much deeper about who I am. I still connect with my body very much and all of the pain and suffering that I experience being Tom. I get overwhelmed sometimes by the demands of my work, and the feelings of inadequacy that arise when my creative skills are challenged. It keeps me from taking risks with the level of work I am willing to accept.

John: There are several aspects woven into all this that can be looked at. But basically, your issues revolve around your experiences as a person in the realm of apparent life and daily living. What you are describing are the normal experiences that people go through before looking deeply into themselves. It all centers around the concept of being a person, which was picked up and has been developed since childhood. These issues clear up pretty easily through knowing your true nature, which is free of the personality.

Q: Maybe what you said about it not being some big mystical thing is part of the problem. Maybe I can't relate because I don't see it for what it is, something very straightforward and accessible right now. I don't yet see how this simple truth can cause a shift that would remove the types of worrying and anxiety that is currently part of the experience of being me – Tom.

John: Why is a shift needed? Do not set up goals and expectations and then measure your failures based on the self-imposed limits. Self-centered activity (like worrying, conflict, anxiety, fear and so on) is rooted in the belief in ourselves as isolated, limited personalities, localized and identified with the body. This stuff continues to plague you till you investi-

gate the whole notion of being a person and a body. You need to put some solid inquiry into the question 'Who am I?' You can't assume some statement as an ideal and expect your daily life to shift. You need to do the homework, cover the basics.

Q: I think the biggest issue is my belief in separation. Does that disappear? Or do you go right on being a body, but with a different understanding?

John: Separation disappears once and for good. The body continues. There are no problems with that. You cease to imagine that you are the body and limited by its limitations. You cease to imagine that you are the person with its limitations. The mind and body continue as before and function just as they always have. Your exclusive identification with them snaps, and immense freedom and peace follow. And you do not lose them.

Q: Last night I asked a question about purpose. Why are we here experiencing this? I know the simplest answer is 'Why not?' But that is not quite satisfying for me. What do you believe on a daily basis that addresses, for yourself, the question 'Why go through all of this?' This question has come up for me several times in my life at a time when there really seemed to be no answer. My thought was, 'Then why not end it?' Of course, that was a thought in a severe depression, but I have occasion to have that thought when life just seems to be too much for putting up with this existence.

John: These are all insoluble riddles as long as you are not clear on your identity. Who is asking? Who wants to know? Who is depressed? Who is putting up with this existence? It is the imagined separate person. If you resolve the core question and see through the false concept of being a separate person, all of these questions and problems get resolved directly in experience. They simply cease to exist.

You may not be able to see this now. Then take it on faith and give it some time. Give yourself a chance to go into all this deeply and see if you see a change in your life. Otherwise, you are a victim of ideas and assumptions which might not be

true. Of course any action you take based on false premises is not going to lead to freedom.

Q: I may be way off track, but this is what appeared as I was writing you. I believe in the possibility that this is just consciousness appearing moment-to-moment, and that I have no control over appearances or my thoughts. But I have the need for it to have some sort of benefit, to provide me the opportunity to relax into myself, to stop all the worrying and feelings that I'm not good enough, that I'm not talented enough or I am overwhelmed by something that I can't manage.

John: This all just shows that the understanding of what is being pointed out has not really sunk in yet. There is no need to stop the mind. There is nothing wrong and nothing that you have to do. Do not create an extra burden. This is not a test with some goal that you are trying to get to. You have read a lot, but now you need to go more deeply into the core of things. You have been skimming over things at an intellectual level, which is fine, but you do not want to end up there.

At this point, you do not really need more reading of all and sundry books and pursuing the next teacher. Whatever inspiration you have gotten, it must lead to your own first-hand inquiry. What is my true nature? What is real? What do I want? What is the cause of my suffering? Do not be satisfied with words and platitudes, but do some real inquiry. For any answers to be meaningful, you need to find answers that are relevant to you.

Q: What do I need to do at this point? What is missing? Or, more appropriately, what needs to fall away in order to be free from all of this?

John: You need only look deeply to see what you really are. Are you just a mind in a body or are you the eternal, birthless, deathless awareness in which everything is appearing and disappearing? The resolve is to conclusively discover your real identity.

Basically, I would say don't despair. Many have found

a way out of this impasse and so can you. Before you jump to any conclusions, give things a chance to unfold a bit. The mind crafts a series of paradoxes and dilemmas and then gets frustrated because it can't extricate itself from its own imagined limitations. If you cannot quite see it, then take it on faith and at least give it some time. All I can say is that it is undoubtedly possible to find the type of peace and fulfillment you are looking for.

If you are looking for purposes, then here are some: to find happiness, to realize your true Self, to be one with God, to be free of suffering, to know what transcends death, to know what is real, to be truly at peace. If you must have a goal, any of these will do. They are all variants on a similar theme. If you pursue any of them resolutely, they all have a way of bringing you back to the same core understanding. But, what is your goal? What are you looking for? Do not make this into some abstract pursuit. It means nothing if it is not the pursuit and fulfillment of the deepest longings of your own heart and being. I get the sense that maybe you might be trying to adapt to the words and experiences of others. But what is it that you are really searching for? It has to relate to something that is important to you. Otherwise, it is trying to fit into someone else's shoes.

Do not get your head in the clouds by reading all the non-dual stuff and trying to assert your way into something that does not really move you at a gut level. That is the classic experience of asserting 'I am that', while the rest of your personal life and relationships are in chaos. So, I would say, set aside the books and non-dual theories and really give some thought to what you are looking for. What is it that would give you the fulfillment you are seeking? Is it peace? Love? Knowledge? A harmonious life? Knowledge of the purpose of existence? Try to latch onto something with some 'oomph' that makes sense to you, and gives you motivation and that you can relate to.

Tearing through boatloads of non-dual books is one thing, but what is it that you are really seeking in that and other endeavours in your life? Try to get that out into the field of awareness. Then the seeking has more meaning. It is not very

meaningful to leap to the heights of someone else's agenda if the longings in your own heart are not being tended to. Like I said at the beginning, there is definitely a resolve for all of this. Many have found peace, and you can too.

Nothing Needs to Change

Questioner: The message about myself comes through momentarily, but not yet in an impactful way. I have been experiencing a bit of anxiety, and it's tough knowing that there is a way out of this, but I just can't see it yet. I have a sense that I will get it one day. I look forward to seeing you again.

John: Hang in there. It is not as tricky as it seems. Just remember that all difficulties are created in the mind. All problems are just problems imagined in the mind in response to unexamined ideas and assumptions about what we are. The great liberating factor of this is that nothing needs to change in the activity of the world, the body or the mind. It might change as a result of seeing more clearly what your true nature is, but then again, it does not have to either. Anxiety and fear are really just a response to a sense of threat to who we take ourselves to be. Once you clear up the matter of your identity, the emotions and reactions take care of themselves, and whatever comes up is fine. You are not fighting or resisting things. But it is not a matter of cultivating non-resistance or anything like that. You literally cannot do anything to provoke this understanding. A little clear seeing and investigating and everything falls into place straight away.

Just remember that knowing who you are is not a future event to be obtained. If you approach it that way, it just pushes it out and you overlook what is here now. Right now you are present and aware. This awareness is what you really are. It is completely free of your personality, thoughts and experiences. And if you look deeply into your present experience, you will find that you are standing in and as freedom itself. There is no enlightenment beyond looking deeply into what is present right now and simply abiding as that.

Faith, Trust and Confidence

Questioner: I have to say that this is the first time I feel I can truly take someone's (your) word on what I'm hoping to understand – that it is achievable and real. Something in the background reassures me (however faintly) that I will have this understanding. My mind tries to grasp it and then has to recede for a lack of understanding. I think what I might need help with is the investigation. I've always been one to delay gratification, and I think that conditioning is something I bump up against. After forty years I feel I am close to the truth. Putting off that discovery sounds like a ridiculous thing to do, but self-inquiry isn't something I am able to stay with for very long. Thank you for your continued support.

John: From my experience, the understanding really comes more through faith, trust and confidence than due to anything else. I had been involved in various spiritual pursuits for about thirty years. When I met Bob Adamson, he simply assured me this understanding was possible, based on his experience with Nisargadatta Maharaj. His utter confidence in his own experience, along with his encouragement that I also could see this, was probably more impactful than anything else. In fact, I know it was.

The actual substance of the teaching is simple and can be pointed out directly. It literally is not a mental process or any technique at all. It is just noticing something that is actually present, the principle of awareness. It is also seeing that the person that you think is there – isn't. No amount of thinking can be equated with the actual seeing of this. To use a simplistic example, is thinking about an apple the same as tasting a real one? It is the same with all of this. The books are just maps bringing you up to the brink of the actual direct knowing. It is like reading guide books about trails to the top of Half Dome. You can read them all day long, but by just

reading, you are not actually moving out of your armchair, however profound your knowledge may be. So what is going to get you out of your chair? Faith, trust and confidence in what is being pointed out. For most people this seems to arise through personal contact with someone who has realized this and can speak from first-hand experience. It is really key to get the basic point involved in this.

Anyway, this is all possible for you. There is no need to doubt it. If it worked for me, it can work for you.

Nothing To Do

Questioner: I wanted to give you some feedback on our phone consultation. I can't put into words what is different, but for the most part searching mostly stopped. I was meditating one to two hours a day and reading two to three hours a day. Since we talked I have not meditated at all. I tried once, but it only lasted about one minute. There is just nothing to do. About the only thing I read is your website, which just keeps getting clearer and clearer.

My wife said that I seemed a lot more content over the past couple of weeks. Again, I don't really know what is different other than a sense of being near the end. I am certainly still identified with my thoughts and mind, but they have for the most part lost their punch.

John: I am glad to hear things are clearing up. It is a good sign that your wife is noticing some changes. Something is working! Of course, the final test is always your own direct sense of freedom. It is just a relaxing into something that is intimately present and well-known, but it just went unnoticed till now. Once you get a taste of who you really are, it takes the wind out of the sails of the mind. All the straining, struggling and seeking start to evaporate. Even the age-long quest for spiritual understanding, meditating and all the rest start to fall away when you sense yourself at the goal, which is simply being yourself.

Is This for Real?

Questioner: You must understand that I cannot help but ask you, 'Is this for real?' My spiritual search has only intensified over the years, though I keep it mostly very private these days. I spend the majority of my free time alone reading Ramesh Balsekar, Nisargadatta Maharaj, Wei Wu Wei, Wayne Liquorman, Tony Parsons, and so on. I am deeply immersed in this teaching pretty much constantly, though I'd say probably not a single person in my life is aware of this consuming passion of mine. I have read several of the pages on your website and the words you write seem legitimate and in keeping with what I have come to recognize as true non-duality, but I am also cynical beyond all description by now. Is it so? Have you reached this understanding? If it is, what have I missed? What is the piece I am overlooking? Can you tell me? It is quite clear to me that there is nothing more I need to understand, but it is also clear to me that I have missed the thing entirely.

John: The articles on my website are about the best I can communicate in words my experiences. Most of the material was written in sharing with people by e-mail. The best way to share this, though, is through talking and meeting in person. Even talking on the phone seems to be better. But e-mail and written words are at least an attempt to provide some hints and pointers.

It sounds like you have been moving in some pretty good company, as far as the teachings you have gravitated towards. This reminds me a lot of where I was prior to my meeting with Bob Adamson. I eventually sought out Bob Adamson because I had a strong resonance with Nisargadatta Maharaj and was hoping to meet someone who had been with him. I had a strong desire to meet someone who I felt could talk from direct experience about this. I saw many contemporary teachers, but most, if not all, did not really seem to be living in

the full experience of freedom. There were elements of clarity and freedom, but also other non-essentials mixed in, which was confusing. I knew intuitively that if anyone had truly realized their true nature beyond all doubt, Nisargadatta had done so. So meeting one of Nisargadatta's living students and talking about all this was an incredible experience.

In meeting Bob, there was a dramatic shift, and it seemed to be just what I was looking for to bring me across the 'final mile', so to speak. This is just a way of talking. You eventually see that there is literally nowhere to go, because your true nature is here and now. Nor is there anyone who needs to get 'there'. Bob was able to make the understanding very immediate and accessible for me. In a few conversations, things that I had read and thought about for years were suddenly clarified in a direct way. Literally, there was more understanding and growth through a single conversation with him, than several years of reading and meditating on my own had been able to generate. Much to my amazement, I found that different aspects of the non-dual teachings were unfolding in my own experience and first-hand understanding. And it was much simpler than I had imagined!

The books and teachings can tend to obscure the immediacy and simplicity of this. The mind, even in its most noble attempts, tends to make things more complicated. That is why it is so valuable to be sitting face-to-face with someone who really knows what they are talking about. It cuts through all the irrelevant issues and brings you back to the immediacy and availability of understanding your true nature fully in the present moment for yourself.

After about a week and half with Bob, I discovered the spiritual quest was over, that knowledge of my real nature was clear and solid, that there was no possibility of losing this understanding. Bob's teaching definitively exposed the roots of ignorance, bondage and limitation in a profoundly clear way. Once the mechanism is exposed and is seen through, it is over; and you can't really go back to the old point of view. It is all about direct, first-hand experience. Once you see all this for yourself, the search is done. The need for books, retreats and teachers is over. They are all pointing to this

understanding of who we are. Once that is your experience, you do not need the pointers anymore. I myself had come to a point where I almost didn't believe it was really possible to reach this understanding. Fortunately, I was wrong!

Bob said that Nisargadatta put him beyond the need for further help. Bob did the same for me. And so it continues. Bob mentioned to me later that if what I had discovered through his teaching was meaningful, I might consider talking about this with others. That has resulted in my attempts to share this.

I just want to emphasize that this is all much, much simpler than we ever imagined. You can definitely and conclusively know your true nature and experience freedom from suffering and doubt. It is not a matter of time or effort or waiting around for it to drop out of the sky. It just takes a little bit of clear seeing. It is really a combination of the clarity of the pointing and your desire to be free.

Here are some key points to consider, by way of review. Your own sense of existence-awareness is immediately known and available at all times. It is not an attainment. There is no technique or process involved. You cannot gain it or lose it. It is here now. Knowing this fully is all the understanding there is. You just need to see it clearly.

Thoughts and experiences never obscure your true nature. It is always completely free and available. We just did not see it because we were looking in the wrong direction. Once it is clearly pointed out to us, we can see this directly and with no effort. Once you see that who you are is constantly with you, you do not have an experience of moving in and out of peace or clarity. It is only due to contrary concepts that we seem to lose it. In fact, the thoughts are mistaken. Once we see this, the thoughts lose their grip.

The belief that you are a separate person is the cause of all ignorance, suffering, anxiety, doubt, fear and so on – that is to say, all self-centered thinking. Have a direct look to see if you can find the person you have imagined yourself to be. Ask yourself questions such as, 'Am I really separate from my nature as presence-awareness?' and 'Does the assumed separate person that I imagine myself to be really exist?' This is

not a practice or technique. You just have to look directly and clearly. Once you see that there never has been a person, all problems are resolved conclusively. All problems are for the person, not for your real nature. You just get clear on what you really are and that is the end of the game. This does not take time really. It is more a matter of clear seeing.

As long as there is a remnant of belief in separation, the separation seems to continue. But it is all imagination based on a lack of investigation. A few well-placed questions dismantle the whole façade and you find yourself easily and naturally in your natural state of clarity, presence and freedom. And it does not leave you. You cannot lose what you are.

Talking directly about this helps to make it clear. Your own doubts and questions get undermined and the living experience becomes your own. That seems to be how it works for most people.

'That' Being Like A Camera

Questioner: Thank you for sending out Bob Adamson's book and CDs. I listened to CD 1 and started reading the book. One comment struck home deep within. It was the equation of That being like a camera, always recording, both sight and sound. Once a thought enters the picture, such as now in this message, something has been added, appearing like an overlay, but the camera is still recording. This camera is silent, silent, silent. Bob mentions a slight, subtle vibration to that silent recording. There aren't more words to add to the description of That, because the mind cannot add to nothing. As a silent reminder an old camera has been placed on the counter in the kitchen.

John: I am glad to hear you got the materials. It sounds like they are triggering some good insights. Good news. It is interesting to notice what is registering everything. Is that concerned with what is appearing? Is that dividing, conceptualizing, labelling anything? Or is there just seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, knowing everything as is?

Sometimes they talk about it using the metaphor of a mirror. All the reflections – good, bad, indifferent – appear in the mirror. But is the mirror concerned or affected in any way? It is the same with the awareness that you are. It is silent, luminous, bright, clear, empty, and yet the foundation of all that appears. On one of the CDs Bob talks about this presence that you are as 'cognizing emptiness'. That is one of my favourite terms for it. Right at the center of you is a silent, lucid, clear and sky-like presence of awareness. It is totally empty and yet utterly existent and aware. That never leaves you, and you cannot get out of it. Just notice that. It is what you are, and it is never affected by thoughts or appearances. It is always radiant and clear.

All the words are just pointing to you, to your present nature. So simply enjoy all the names and descriptions for what they are – pointers to the one essence, which is with you all the time.

Just Seeing

Questioner: OK. Let me say something that seems clear (right now!). This sense of aliveness, beingness, presence or awareness is here. Following that is awareness of something, whether body, thought, trees, emotions, safety pins, other bodies, etc. But the sense of beingness is primary. Even the 'I' is a thought. Emotions, thoughts and experiences come and go, but they come and go in this simple awareness-presence. There is no problem with any of it until 'I' begins thinking there is a problem, that something should be different: 'I want something, 'I' am confused, 'I' am upset, and so on. In fact, even then, there is no problem because all of it is just passing in the clear space of awareness, including the thought there is an 'I' who has a problem. It's just about seeing this (and there is 'no one' to see it; there is just seeing). All of it is happening on its own, including the activities of this body-mind.

John: You are getting the hang of this! As things start to sink in, the insights trigger shifts in your direct experience. You just notice that things that were previously troubling you fall away. They do not have the same effect as they used to. The roots of ignorance, limitation and suffering are exposed once and for good. The present clarity, which has been here all along, just gets clearer and more obvious. This is what you have always been seeking.

The thoughts and ideas that we have about ourselves are the only bondage there really ever is. The bondage is only apparent, though. It is not real. Our seeming problems and daily experiences become doorways into an inquiry that takes you straight to the heart of things. The seeing is completely present and available now. It is never a matter of time, but only of simply seeing, looking and noticing what is in your own direct experience.

What you are seeing and saying is good. All the books

and teachings only lead you to a certain point, but then you must see it for yourself. Now it is your turn to live the understanding for yourself. Once you start to see all this, nothing or no one can take it away from you. It becomes your own. Enjoy the unfolding.

(Follow up ...)

Q: It really hit me while driving yesterday that what you said was so necessary. It is critical that I look at my own experience and let that seeing guide me as opposed to my thoughts about what others report. When I just read the words of others, what is happening is that I'm reading about their thoughts. It can have the effect of just giving me more concepts as opposed to direct experience. It really is finally about the looking itself, isn't it?

The question that I had about consciousness or awareness arising from the body or the body existing in it is really just another path back into the intellect or concepts! From this perspective now, it looks as if all questions are very tricky and sticky in that they can quickly lead one back into the intellect rather than this openness. However, it also looks like each question points in two directions: one direction back into concepts, thinking or the intellect and the other direction towards seeing who has the question or who is aware of the question. Is this what you are suggesting when you say daily life can be the doorway into inquiry?

John: It is great to see you are really looking into all this and seeing it for yourself. That is what needs to happen. Your insights are clear. If you keep up this investigating and looking, you are going to see some profound shifts in how you view and experience things. Your actual experience is always the acid test.

It is not that the questions are tricky or sticky, really. We just never examined them clearly and have been living under false assumptions about what life is and who we are. That was tricky and sticky! A little bit of reasoning and questioning is all it takes. Or, as you say, just seeing. Suddenly, the whole house of cards begins to fall apart. The questions and doubts that have been plaguing us lose their hold because we

see that they are based on flimsy assumptions. That is what I mean by using your actual problems and daily experiences for the inquiry. You watch the mind and start to notice how the sense of separation arises and how the ideas in the mind lead us into confusion. At some point, it hits home that the answer is not in the mind. The mind cannot get this. Nor can the mind solve basic life questions, the deeper issues. So you stop looking to the mind to provide the answers and you stop being concerned about its conceptual problems, which are only manufactured out of thin air. They have no real substance. Once you see it, you simply stop going there (to the mind), and you save yourself a lot of confusion and grief.

But still you are. Life is. Awareness, intelligence, reality are here, shining in the middle of everything. Your innate happiness and peace come back into focus, because they were only covered over by the sense of separation and all the false ideas we used to believe. The child-like wonder and openness of our clearer moments unfolds and widens. Then you notice that this is just the natural state of things.

Stay with all this. It will continue to unfold and the insights will deepen until they become your own. Then you will know for certain and you will not need any books or teachers to point all this out. You will see it for yourself. From that perspective, books and teachers can only confirm what you already know.

Question the Person and Its Stories

Questioner: Being, awareness, freedom is shouting: 'I am here, this is my natural state, how I really am, my real way of being, the real me'. At the same time, I feel a limit on being free and awake. This limit is uncomfortable.

John: There is not any limit on your real nature. You are present and aware. This true nature that you are is – right at this moment – fully present. This approach is just looking deeply into what is here and now and realizing that what you are is, in fact, already absolutely free.

The limits are ultimately imagined and not true at all. The mind creates and imagines limits and then suffers. But the suffering is only due to the fact that we have not been clear on what we are. We take the self-created limits to be true and real. This gives the feeling or experience of limitation, but it fades when scrutinized. For example, you are convinced there is a ghost in the room and are in a fright. But when you search for it, you do not find any ghost, and the experience of fear drops away. It is based on a wrong understanding. A little bit of investigation and clear seeing clears up the mistaken ideas, and the feeling of limitation is replaced by the natural freedom of your true nature.

Imagining a ghost in the room is uncomfortable. This continues until you question the truth of it. Basically, we imagine we are separate from our own deeper truth and suffer under false assumptions. The moment you fall asleep or the mind forgets its problems, the limitation vanishes. This just goes to show that the limits are produced in the mind. They do not really exist, except at a conceptual level.

Q: Being unawake is uncomfortable, unnatural. The limit or block to awakening has the flavour to me of a being-heart issue. It is almost

like I recoil from my natural state, like the blossoming truth is threatening and thus resisted. Thus simplicity or oneness is prevented. So I don't get the rest in simple being that I so crave. It feels like this recoil response is unnecessary, but it arises compulsively. It seems like it arises prior to the mind, at the level of a body-emotion-heart response that is then reflected in the mind. It seems to me that the healing needs to somehow happen at the level of body-emotion-heart to be effective.

John: This all may seem to be true. But really it is hypothetical. From within the 'cage of imagined limitations' and using the mind, which is the very source of the problem, we imagine escape routes and explanations.

You are the natural state. You never deviate from it. There is no separation or problem. But you do not see it yet because you have not looked deeply enough into the root of the issue, which is the assumption that you are a separate person apart from your real nature of awareness. You say, 'Thus I don't get the rest in simple being that I so crave'. What is that 'I' you are taking yourself to be? That is the imagined separate person. You, as awareness, are fully here and now. You cannot get out of it. There is no one to rest and nothing to rest in because that is what you are. You must deeply question this idea of being an entity apart from presence-awareness. All the difficulties are for the 'I'. And the difficulties continue as long as the 'I' is not deeply questioned. Once it is questioned, the 'I' is found not to exist, and all the imagined troubles are resolved once and for all.

You have created a lot of conceptual distinctions among heart, body, mind and so on. You also have the idea that there is a problem and the need for healing. The mind is spinning, trying to work it out. But the answer is not in the mind. You cannot use the mind to get free of the problems and riddles created by thought. It is a noble attempt, but bound to fail.

This is really more of a non-verbal looking into the fact that you are not the imagined, separate person. Neither are you a victim of all the imagined problems and solutions that are based on that assumption. Even searching for a solution is just another layer added on by the person. Who else is in search of

freedom but the person? Better to question the person. This is the sword that severs the head of the apparent hydra.

Q: The wound smiles at me knowingly, holding the key to freedom, beckoning me to fully rest in love, to be loved, to recognize and laugh, to trust, to accept, to be perfectly kind, to allow myself as I am. That is what I most want.

John: This is still too much! First, you told a scary story. This one is a prettier story, possibly a noble and spiritual one. But notice how, woven into it, there is a subtle assumption that you are a separate person apart from presence-awareness. There is nothing you, as a person can do, to find freedom because the person is the very cause of the problem. Whether the person steps backwards or forwards or paints himself as a sinner or a saint, he is still there. And he remains apart from the deeper truth, that he longs for. The only adequate approach is to entirely dissolve the person and awaken to what you are and always have been, which is being, presence, awareness, consciousness or whatever else you want to call it.

Until you see this deeply, you are like a dreamer lost in a dream and no matter what you do, you are still locked in the confines of your imaginary bondage. What you really need is to wake up from the dream of imagination and conceptual thought, which has you convinced that you are something separate from what you really are.

This investigation will ultimately dismantle all your false assumptions and beliefs about yourself. You will find yourself stripped of your ideas and concepts, including your ideas of yourself. Then you will stand naked, yet utterly free. You will attain nothing which you do not have right now. Only, the veils will be removed, and you will notice what is present at the core of your being. It truly is here right now. Without the least struggle or effort, you are naturally aware and present. That presence-awareness has no separation, bondage, limits or problems. Just look deeply into this. Question every idea, thought or belief that tells you your nature is anything different than this.

This Freakin' Awareness, Only This!

Questioner: I gotta tell you, but you already know! It seems too obvious to even mention, too simple: this freakin' awareness, only this! Something that 'Sailor' Bob said really struck me: Just start with plain old awareness, this waking awareness. That is this 'I', this Self, yet no one or no thing at all, no self or not self. All these images that I've named, sorted and evaluated are just appearances, movements of this that never moves. The ramifications are mind boggling.

Not that there aren't arisings of doubt, apparent forgetting, but to who? Oh my God! I think there is a goldmine of a book to be written: Waking Up From The Dream of Individual Awakening.

John: What you are seeing is good. Things are starting to take hold. The proof is in the pudding. As Nisargadatta Maharaj said somewhere, 'You will know when you have found the philosopher's stone, when you yourself turn to gold'. So, in other words, it is all about your direct experience.

(Follow up ...)

Q: I got Bob Adamson's book today. I've only read a little bit, since I sort of just am today (!). But what I read is sizzingly alive and affirming. I can see what you meant by 'working with it'. As thoughts and associations of those thoughts arise there is a seeing of them, rather than identifying, at which point they are released into this clear, fresh and vibrant I-am awareness. And instantly there is the realization that they apply to no one. There is just being. I'm walking around like I have the best, most magnificent secret in the world, that I'm bursting to tell, but there's nobody to tell!

John: I am glad to hear the news. You are no doubt hitting on

all cylinders, and the seeing is clear. When you are not there to do or not do, things unfold spontaneously. You just do what comes up to be done. All the while you remain in the clarity of your ever-present nature. There is nothing to seek, nothing to know and nothing to do. As you settle into this, ways will come up to express and share it. You cannot keep the light under a bushel. It just shines of its own accord.

More Clear, But More Frustrating?

Questioner: It is becoming more clear and obvious, and also more frustrating. The mind is still trying to turn it into something!

John: The frustrating aspect will clear up pretty quickly. It is just an old remnant of viewing all this as something to get or attain. When you see this is not what it is all about, and how near it is, the frustration evaporates.

You can go right to the core of things by asking, 'Who is frustrated?' Use the experience as fuel for the investigation. Frustration is one of those self-centered states generated by the concept of being separate and cut off from the essence, in other words, the idea of being an individual. It is a perfect opportunity to put the investigation to work. Once you get the hang of it, all of the problems rapidly collapse. You will see all this, if you stick with it.

Saying There is No 'I', What Good Does it Achieve?

Questioner: When I feel fear, panic and pain arising in my field of consciousness is this not real? Behind or within all these arisings, consciousness may be untouched, but I still appear to suffer. Is not God living through all these feelings and emotions? By saying there is no 'I', what good does it achieve? This being, this body-mind machine still suffers, even though I can realize it is happening to a part of me that is not me (in the higher Self sense). Who am I? Please give me the core of all this. I really want to know. I need clarity.

John: You may want to review the articles on my website. Everything I can say about this is there, in the clearest way I can say it. Of course, it is always best to talk in person, because this is not intellectual. It is a direct understanding, not a theory.

You are that presence of existence and awareness that is always here. In truth, it never suffers. You have not yet seen this fully and so various doubts and issues are arising. They feel real, but they are based on imagination. It is like imagining a ghost in your closet. The fears seem real, but are they? Once you see there is no ghost, what happens to the fear? Fear and suffering never touch this sense of existence that is here. It remains clear, radiant, untouched and free. It is your very heart and life, the core of beauty, light, love and joy.

So, what is the source of suffering? You are imagining yourself to be separate and limited. This is the crux of the issue. But are you a separate 'I'? If so, where is it? What is it? You live as if it is real, but have you really investigated to the roots as to what is the cause of suffering? You seem to want all the suffering and doubts to go away without really

understanding the cause. If you look and see that the separate, limited person is not you, and that you are the ever-present light, life and love, all problems will be resolved. This is the final solution. All our doubts arise because we are confused about what and who we really are. So, drop everything else and investigate what is your real nature.

When you see that the false 'I', which is the cause of ignorance and suffering, is not real and cannot possibly be who you are, suffering and doubt cease. The old habits of thinking may continue for a while, but they have no bite or sting. You are wrong when you say that seeing there is no 'I' does not do anything. You have not seen the truth of it, so you make a quick reply without doing your homework and seeing it. God, truth, the Self, the eternal or whatever we call it is here and now, shining as your very sense of presence and awareness. See that no matter what you think, say, do or feel, you cannot negate your presence and awareness. Do not underestimate this. To understand the meaning of what is being pointed to is really the core of all of the deeper paths and teachings.

You suffer because you imagine separation, that you stand apart from truth, peace or God. As long as you continue to think this, there is suffering and doubt. You must investigate to see what is true. In some traditions, they say that reality is existence-consciousness-bliss. You can find this existence and consciousness here and now right in your own life, mind and heart. Truth shines in your heart waiting for you to see it. It is nowhere else. When it is seen, there is a natural happiness and peace that you feel in your direct experience.

Gods, heavens, paths, practices, techniques, ethics and so on, are all created by the mind that is under the impression that reality is far away. For the one who sees this light in himself, there is no law or rule – just love, which is the natural expression of your heart when ignorance and suffering are no more. Even that is too much, really. There is just what is, as it is. Everything just shines in the light of awareness and everything is settled.

All ethics only exist to diminish one's pride and sense of ego. The direct route, which fulfils all ethical teachings, is to live without the ego. How? By seeing if it is real. Is there re-

ally an 'I'? Or are you the changeless background of awareness, which is never a mere person but the ground on which all appearances rise and set? There is one reality, one truth underlying the universe of appearances. It shines in all and as all. It is also the light and life that is your own heart. You have no existence apart from this. Our only 'sin' (that is a loaded word) is to imagine separation. You must discover for yourself whether or not the separation is true.

Just remember that the existence, awareness, presence or spirit that is here with you right now is birthless, deathless, eternal and ever-free. So how can there be suffering, once you see this? Whenever you suffer, just see that it is based on the idea that you are a person, limited, separate and bound. But is this what you are really? When you answer this in your direct experience, you will know it for yourself and the questions, doubts and suffering will be over.

It is important to mention that the desire to get rid of suffering is also part and parcel of the individual. For, who wants to end suffering? You do not need to get rid of suffering and doubts as a special undertaking. It is just that when you get clear on the source of the confusion, then doubts, suffering and confusion naturally fall away of their own accord, without any special effort. They are really just a side effect of a basic ignorance. Go to the root and clear up the basic issue and everything takes care of itself.

I Still Don't Get It. Any Suggestions?

Questioner: You know, I still don't get it.

John: A basic mistake is trying to think this all out and attain something, as if there is some understanding that the mind will come up with and suddenly everything will become clear. You are simply proving in your direct experience that the approach you are taking does not work and ends in frustration. This is proof positive that the answer cannot be found in the mind. I see you have been doing your homework and testing the basics out in direct experience! Good!

Q: No matter how much I look, it still looks like awareness arises from this body-mind.

John: My sense is that you are turning this into an intellectual or philosophical conundrum and tying yourself up into knots. I admire your tenacity, if nothing else! The body, mind, feelings and thoughts are objects known or experienced by you. Take a general example. You are sitting at ease and at some point a thought appears in your mind. The next moment it subsides and another comes up. The thoughts appear and disappear. But what in you is aware of the arising and disappearing of thoughts? There must be some presence of knowingness there. Otherwise, how can you speak of being there to know the experience? You actually cannot think about this presence, know it as an object, track it down or run after it. All that is just more thinking. What is being pointed at is in a completely different direction all together.

You cannot seriously assert that you do not exist or that you are not aware, can you? Even if you do, you have to be present and aware to make the assertion that you are not present and aware. This is not meant to be a matter of debate

and intellectual analysis, which, in your own experience, you have found to be fruitless.

The mind can be no arbiter for that which is beyond its jurisdiction. But do not get the idea that this is tricky or difficult. You are present and aware. You know this. Awareness is present. Wherever the philosophical conundrums may seemingly take you and however many doubts or riddles arise, they are simply created in thought. They could not be known or spoken about if they did not appear in your actual being-awareness. What is happening is that you are giving all your focus to the thoughts, but overlooking the obvious presence-awareness in you that even makes thought possible.

The ideas of the body, the mind and the world are just so many thoughts also. Even the question 'Does awareness arise in the body-mind or vice versa?' is itself just another idea appearing and disappearing in your present awareness. You cannot think your way into awareness. You are awareness. It just gets pointed out. You notice something so basic, simple and obvious that it went overlooked (till now).

No matter what you think, say or do, can you deny that you exist and are aware? Notice this. Everything you think after that is just theory and mental speculation. Maybe it is true, maybe it is not (whatever the theory may be). You will notice, though, that if you move in that direction, doubt and uncertainty come in. Just see something very basic here: thinking itself is generating the problem that leads to the doubt and uncertainty. It is coming from nowhere else.

This is a very gut-level type of approach. What is certain and doubtless in your immediate experience? Philosophical speculation is a rat hole. If you go down that path, you are (seemingly) lost. Actually, you are not really lost, but it feels that way. If nothing else, at least do not go down a path that by definition leads to confusion. There is a Zen poem that says something like, 'Give rise to a single conceptual thought and heaven and hell are set infinitely apart'. This is another way of saying that the answer is not in thinking or the mind.

Q: I really don't know how to get past this.

John: This gets to the heart of the issue. What am 'I'? What do I take myself to be? What is the goal I think I am seeking? What is preventing me from seeing that or being that? Your question exposes the core issues. It would be highly productive to give some deep consideration to discover what exactly is this thing we call 'I'.

Q: I know what the 'right' answer is, but it sure looks like thinking and the awareness of thinking are both just functions of the brain.

John: Maybe, maybe not. It could go either way, from a philosophical standpoint. But what are you now, the one who is aware of this line of thinking? Are you a theory? Is your existence and awareness a matter of debate? At a mental level you are raising various intellectual questions, which is fine. But at that point, you are jumping on board thought and ceasing to notice the light in you that is knowing. This is a perfect example of trying to get it in the mind.

Q: To me, if there is no brain, there is no thinking-awaring.

John: It seems like you have made up your mind on this. But are you completely sure? Are you willing to bet your life on this? Also, we need to be very clear here. You are lumping thinking and awareness together here. At the level at which we are speaking there is a vast difference between awareness and thought. Awareness is that principle which is aware of thought. Awareness knows thoughts, but thoughts can never know awareness. You need to be very clear on this distinction if you are going to make much headway with this approach.

Q: Very disappointing!

John: There is an idea here that there is something that you do not have that you need to get. You have used the mind to attempt to ferret out a solution. Because it is not forthcoming, there is a sense of failing and so on. But this is only a confirmation of what is being pointed out. The mind must always be disappointed when you try to use it to know who you are.

From another level though, this is incredibly liberating – to see (at last) that the answer may lie in a completely different direction. The energy is freed up for looking in a new way, a way that can lead to more clarity and certainty.

Of course, we are not even getting into the question of ‘who’ is disappointed. The core issue always gets tackled last for most of us. In any case, the presence-awareness is here, as always.

Q: There is something I'm not seeing, because I know I'm no different than you, or Bob Adamson, or Nisargadatta, for that matter.

John: The last part of the sentence is absolutely true. The first part is false, because it is based on a series of unexamined assumptions. You say, ‘There is something I am not seeing’. This implies that there is a ‘you’, something that you are supposed to see, and some act of seeing that has yet to occur. Of course, once you buy into this framework, you invariably feel that it has not happened yet. (Funny how that works!) This all spins around the idea that we are some kind of separate entity, apart from the source. So it gets back to ‘What am I?’ Am I a separate entity, apart? This is just a call to do our homework. Before jumping to conclusions, we need to examine the basic assumptions, at the very least. So what is this ‘I’ we refer to? Exactly what are we talking about here? It is imperative to take this inquiry to the roots. You can see that everything – all our doubts, questions and disappointments – are hinging on the idea that we have about ourselves. Can you see this?

Q: Why can't I see it?

John: What are you trying to see exactly? The awareness is here. That should be obvious enough by now. If there is an idea that you need to see something, then see if you can find this ‘I’ that is the basis of all the problems. You cannot gloss over this.

Q: I do understand that the ‘I’ is a thought.

John: In reality, the ‘I’ is not even a thought. It is actually just an assumption. But assuming that the ‘I’ is a thought, is that thought what you are? Is the thought ‘I’ really you? Aren’t you here whether or not you are thinking the thought? It is easy to say that the ‘I’ is a thought and move on quickly. But the real issue is: what do we believe ourselves to be? How do we live and act at a gut level throughout the day? That is the crux of the matter. We can verbally say ‘I am not the ego’ or whatever, but our daily life and actions are the real test, rather than a fragmental mental assertion.

So, what is this thing I call ‘I’? This is the core issue. Everything hinges on our understanding of this matter.

Q: But this body-mind is real enough!

John: Fair enough. At its own level, this is so. But where is the problem? The body and mind carry on quite well. The problem comes in when we imagine that what we are is limited to the body and mind alone.

Q: I understand that there is awareness seeing all this, but the awareness sure doesn't seem like it's in this computer or desk. There is awareness of the computer and the desk, but this awareness is occurring in this body, right?

John: No. The body is an object arising in awareness, just like everything else. Could there be a body if you were not aware? You cannot take my word or anybody else’s on this. You need to discover if this is true for yourself. Ultimately, everything arises and sets within awareness and has no independent existence apart from awareness. It is all one awareness appearing in diverse forms, without, however, ever deviating from its own essential nature as awareness. Just like waves can never exist apart from the sea, objects, including the body-mind, can never exist apart from awareness. Because they cannot be separated from it, they must, in the final analysis, be one with it. There is only awareness.

Q: If I close my eyes, there is no computer, no desk. So they must

be registering in this body-mind. Otherwise closing the eyes would have no effect, right?

John: Even a child knows that if you close your eyes, you cannot see an object in front of you. Whether you close your eyes or not, you are still present. Who is watching the seeing or the absence? You close your eyes. But who is registering darkness? You cannot deny your existence or awareness at any time. There is confusion here between perception and awareness. Granting the existence of appearances, perception is limited in time and space and by the capacities of the sense organs involved. Awareness, though, stands beyond.

Q: If awareness exists beyond this body, why is it that I have no memory prior to the birth of this body?

John: Speaking relatively, the body-mind is the instrument of perception in the waking state. There is no reason to think that it should have memories of experiences that occurred before it ever appeared. That is like saying that the roll of film within a camera should have images on it of events that occurred before that camera was manufactured. The mind has thoughts and memories, which are limited in time and space. At the level of awareness, there is only awareness and nothing separate from it. There are no instruments available, nor anything for it to know.

The mind can push and push down every track, and yet it always winds up empty-handed. It is like being thirsty and using a sieve to scoop up life-giving waters. No matter how diligently you work at it, you never get any refreshment to your parched lips.

Q: I really don't get it, and I don't even think I know how to work with it anymore.

John: Good news. You have hit the end of the dead-end trail. No need to despair. The end of the false is the beginning of the possibility of the true.

Naturally, you are present and aware, always. Before

the mind throws its net of unexamined assumptions over our immediate experience, every perception, feeling and thought is bathed in a spontaneous joy and light. There is no problem, no doubt, no confusion and no separation until the mind starts to weave its web of concepts. The web spins out because we are not clear on what we are. A simple act of seeing exposes it all, because this presence-awareness can never be denied. Thought and all of its problems never touch your true being in the least. In truth, you never leave this. You can never see it, because you are it. And you can never doubt it. In fact, this is the one thing you can never doubt – the fact of your own being.

The mind is a useful servant but a poor master. Through all of this looking and seeking do not forget the simple light and joy in the eyes of a child, the natural beauty in a tree or a flower, or simply how good it feels when you are not thinking of anything in particular. These are all more direct pointers than the mind can ever provide.

Q: Maybe it's just not going to happen in this lifetime. Any suggestions?

John: Give up the concept that you need to wait for something to happen. Question the very concept of time itself, for where is time when you are not conceiving it? He who waits, waits forever. You do not need to wait to become what you already are. Even now, you are 'non-conceptual, self-shining, ever-fresh, presence-awareness, just this and nothing else'.

Unfolding, While Solidly Present and Aware

Questioner: Last night got real intense. I had just heard [on the Bob Adamson CD] Bob talking about there being no center. Then I read the same thing in the book. As I looked at that, for that, there was an intense joy, sort of like being asleep and awake. All things started breaking up. There was no cause or center! It was like an old dish-washing liquid commercial where they put a drop of grease in a bowl of soapy liquid and immediately the drop begins to break up into little drops and dissipate and disappear. There really is no thing anywhere. There is no cause or reason, no thing or not thing, just is-ness 'is-ing'. Then I thought of what you said on the phone the other night, 'You don't even understand the ramifications of what you have seen'. That was just before I sort of 'came back in', before I exploded all over my living room. My God, is this cool!

John: It just unfolds. The circuits may do a little rewiring. But really, you remain always present and aware. It is natural and no big deal, in some sense. Everything goes on smoothly. Once it sinks it, you just kind of settle in and, 'Oh, it's always been this way'. You just notice the old pain and suffering is not your experience. It does kind of dissolve things, basically, all the old ideas. Things shift and change, and yet you are completely present and solid. In another sense, nothing changes. At long last, you notice the ever present obvious. It is unusual but, at the same time, totally normal.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Unfolding, definitely unfolding, while solidly present and aware ...

There seems to be a sticking point here: the apparent 'I'-dentity that arises and needs seeing into. I understand that is not true, but that seems to be where it's at, this left over vestige of a 'one'

who gets and does not get. What I previously misunderstood as 'me' having direct glimpses is now considered to be glimpses of indirect reflections in the mind, an experience. And that's OK, too.

John: The rising of a separate sense of 'I' is where the apparent problem starts. You have seen that what you are, really, is this shining, ever-present sense of being, awareness, presence, is-ness or whatever. The thought 'I' or the sense of being a person or 'ego' is only a thought or idea appearing in awareness. Just see that all the other binding thoughts and ideas spin around that idea of an 'I' – not your actual presence. You are present and aware and free always. Presence-awareness is not a limited person at all. It is the vast, mirror-like, awareness-space in which everything arises. This is you. This is your home.

The idea of an 'I' may pop back in for a while, due to the long-standing habit of the mind. That's OK. You just see it, and notice it. It falls away, because you are no longer feeding it by believing in it. You can also question directly as to what or where this 'I' is. Can you find it? Track it down? See it? Locate it? If it exists, you must be able to find it. But can you?

And is there ever any doubt that you exist and are aware? This kind of looking is like throwing turpentine on an oil painting – everything dissolves. Still, whether an 'I' thought arises or not, you are present. There is nothing to do or attain. Before, during and after all thoughts, you are ever that. Just relax in that.

Q: Thanks. I'm sensing that this kind of thing, this reinforcing of the understanding or reiterating this, is important.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Something clicked when I read your e-mail, the part about never being able to doubt or deny my own sense of being-aware (that I am). It seems like there has been a shift in identification. The habitual rising 'I' tries to solve itself, endlessly loop-de-looping. The appearance of an apparent problem 'I' attempts to realize (make real), fix, solve or know the appearance of the 'I'. But that 'I' is the problem itself.

Then it's off to the races in time (and the races are endless) because the problem has no actual beginning or real cause or substance other than awareness, which it already is. So there is no real problem or solution other than seeking it. I know these are just words, but they come from an awareness of what was held as 'me' a moment ago, instead of vice-versa. Am I making sense?

John: You are doing well to keep up the looking and questioning. The attempt to fix, solve or know is added onto the pure presence-awareness by thought. It is not a problem really. It is just an old habit. You do not need to fix, solve or know anything in order to be. Just see this and the old habit drops off on its own.

Just Tell Me What I Am!

Questioner: I have been trying to let go of all the words and concepts that I know and just look and see what is there. When I search for what I think I am, or what I identify as, what I sense in the most elementary way is movement. The thoughts are in essence a kind of movement – often very intense and compelling, other times less so – but nonetheless just a kind of movement or stirring. Again, I try to let go of all the words and concepts I have about all this (and what a truckload that is) and ask myself, 'Is this movement what I am?' I really don't know. It appears that I live my life as exactly that, the constant involvement with this movement. But is that actually what I am? Is there something that is aware of the movement or in which the movement occurs? And if there is, what the hell is that? Is this a useful line of inquiry, John? I am pondering this, feeling it out, and the question seems to follow me all day. I feel for the first time like I have to look for myself for the actual reality of my own living experience.

In reading 'Nisargadatta Maharaj over the years, he states a number of times that in his own experience, his Guru simply told him what he was and Maharaj believed him, and that, in effect, was that. For all of my fool's gold intellect, I am really very simple and childish. Would you please just tell me what I am? If you could just write and tell me directly exactly what I am (or am not) there is a good chance I will simply believe you. Do you know what I mean? This feels foolish and ridiculous, but it also feels genuine.

John: It all gets down to seeing for yourself what you are. No one can do this for you, but here are a few pointers. It is very simple, but in the end it all gets back to this. It is all about seeing this. All the rest of the words and talking are just ways to cut off the roving mind and bring you back to seeing this.

Right now, in this moment, are you present, do you exist? Right now, in this moment, is there a sense of knowingness or

awareness in which everything is happening? This presence or existence is aware. This awareness is present. So the presence-awareness is really just one thing, as the hyphenated word implies. This (what is being pointed out, and which you can sense and know immediately without effort) is it. There is no enlightenment, awakening or liberation to get, nothing to become, nothing to understand, nothing to do, nothing that needs to fall away, nothing tricky, nothing difficult, nothing to maintain. This is utterly beyond the ability of the mind to understand. Yet it is completely obvious in direct seeing.

The mind is only thoughts and ideas. Thoughts and ideas arise in the light of this presence-awareness. This is utterly baffling to the mind. And yet, if I ask you, 'Are you present and aware?', it is the most obvious thing in the universe. There can be no universe, no perception, no thought, no past, present or future unless this is here illuminating it all. It is this which is 'en-lightening' (that is, lighting up) everything and which always has been.

From what I can gather, Nisargadatta Maharaj's teacher just told him that he was this and this alone. Nisargadatta had no reason to doubt his teacher, so he inquired and discovered that what his teacher had told him was true.

This presence-awareness that is with you right now, effortlessly present, naturally present, is all the enlightenment there is. Even though I speak of this as presence-awareness, it is really just talking about you. This presence-awareness is another name for you! This never leaves; it is never obscured. It is silent, clear, radiant and luminous. Being the source of all, it is the heart of all love, peace and happiness. All else just dances in the light of this that you are. All is one because nothing exists apart from the light that you are. Even you don't exist apart from this! You are home, because you never move away from your true nature, even for an instant. However many words are used, it all gets back to this.

There is Nothing More to Know Beyond This

In my first conversation with Bob Adamson, the very first thing he asked me was (as I recall it), 'Well, do you know what it is? Do you know what Nisargadatta Maharaj understood and what he was pointing to? Is it absolutely clear yet?' I remained silent. All my former concepts and acquired knowledge were utterly useless. After a pause, he asked me, 'Do you exist right now? Are you aware right now?' I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'That's it! That is what is being pointed out. It is your own being and awareness. You know it already. It is just recognizing this. There is nothing more to know beyond this'.

In the course of talking with Bob, it became clear to me that all the things that we normally do in the name of spiritual seeking take us farther and farther away from the heart of the matter, the essential understanding. The direct understanding of who we are requires no time, no effort, no practice and no maintenance. In fact, all of those things are based on wrong ideas. As a result, they only obscure the direct seeing of what is clearly present. There are no levels of understanding; there is nothing to maintain or cultivate; there are no levels of awakening; there is nothing to bring into daily life; there is nothing which needs to deepen. All of these things imply time, which is simply a mental concept. They also imply a separate individual to traverse through the various stages and experiences. None of these things exist in the presence-awareness. Existence can never become more existent. Awareness can never become more aware. The absence of a separate 'I' can never become more absent. It is all about seeing clearly what is present.

It is not to say that all those states and experiences do not appear to occur for one who takes himself to be a seeker. But they only carry on as long as the essential understanding is not clear. Some people call insights that occur along the way

'awakenings'. In that case, another word is coined for the 'final' understanding. Some call that 'liberation' or 'enlightenment'. The spiritual verbiage often obscures the heart of the matter, which is the clear seeing of what is present, here and now. In the recognition of presence-awareness, as it is, it is clear that all talk of 'awakening versus liberation', 'levels of understanding', 'embodying the understanding', 'going deeper', not to mention all forms of practicing, striving and seeking, only arise from a lack of clarity and are not ultimately real. They only arise at the level of conceptual thought, when the essence is not understood.

Teachers who uncompromisingly point to the essential understanding and refuse to support any conceptual positions, even spiritual ones, are comparatively rare. They are like bright mirrors that reflect your own true nature without the least distortion. In some sense, you experience this by the amount of clarity you feel and how clearly the understanding unfolds for you. With this kind of uncompromising pointing, your understanding is swift, powerful and lasting. You see profound changes in how you view and experience life. You no longer need to wait for the next awakening, the next book, the next satsang or the next retreat in order to 'get it'. There remain no unanswered questions and doubts. You no longer struggle with conditioning, getting and losing it, falling back into ignorance, dealing with unresolved states and so on.

From the start, you are shown that: 'It is your own being and awareness. You know it already. It is just recognizing this. There is nothing more to know beyond this'.

There is No Need to 'Wait for the Bus'

Questioner: There is this thought that 'I am there', but I need to keep reminding myself (all day) that I am there by reading (only the clearest) spiritual material, stopping often to notice this, looking around and telling myself that 'this is it', spending lots of time watching sensations arise and disappear, so that I can see and drop the conceptual self, continue going to as many spiritual talks as I can fit in to 'feel the resonance' (not to hear anything, of course, just to feel the resonance). So there is never a complete full stop that takes me to silence and being. There is a 'busy' full stop that keeps me enormously involved in doing.

The traps are so darn subtle! I feel very tired now, realizing how much effort I put into this! Whew. V-e-e-e-e-ry tired!

John: You have hit the nail on the head. The subtle idea that you need to work on it, get it, relax with it, notice it throughout the day and so on keeps you spinning. Of course you are tired and worn out! But now the difference is that you see it. Till now, it was not obvious what you were doing to yourself.

Still, that presence-awareness is here in its totality now. You can never get it, and you can never move away from it. It may (seemingly) take time for this to sink in. But as you start to get a sense of it, the old seeking and struggling begin to fall off, without having to do anything. However, if the old thoughts and ideas come back, look at them clearly. Question them, and see if what they are saying about you is true. And how do they relate to this that you are? If you feel like you don't have it or it is not here or there is a problem, then question that. Look at those ideas. What is it that I don't have? What is it, anyway?

This is where this approach differs in style and emphasis from other approaches. I am particularly referring to those teachings that maintain that there is nothing to do, that

everything, including suffering, doubt, confusion and even the dreaded ego, are simply an expression of what is, that is, the perfection itself. In fact, they have a very specific cause, which can be dealt with directly through clear seeing and investigation and uprooted at the source. This approach hearkens back to the spirit of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, that is, to directly, relentlessly question and discard the false. In my experience, the approach of saying that all suffering and separation is part of the oneness so just let them be there is not particularly liberating.

Remember, all problems are for the imagined separate person. There seems to be a problem, but to whom is it occurring? What is this 'I' that I am taking myself to be? Is that real? Or is that just an idea arising in the ever-present awareness that is fully here, now?

There is no 'enlightenment' in the future. There is just a looking and seeing what is already present. If there seems to be some camouflage in the way, then use some clear seeing and questioning to expose it for what it is. The seeing will bring you back directly to that which is, here and now. In spite of what we think, we never leave this, ever. Just remember that you are already home. Before the next thought, the truth, in all its radiance, is here as that which is present and aware in you. This awareness is the basis of all that appears. Nothing stands apart from it. So ultimately, it is all only that, oneness or non-duality.

There is no need to 'wait for the bus' (that is, the great enlightenment). You just notice the obvious. You boarded the bus long ago. You were only staring out the window, day-dreaming of the moment when the bus would arrive. Then the 'beloved', in the form of a kind stranger, taps you on the shoulder and says, 'You are here'. You snap out of it, take in the situation and have a good laugh. If you need to do a little questioning on the way, that is fine, too. Such questioning is the expression of the wisdom within you. That will not settle for anything less than the clear and unshakable understanding of what is real within you.

Always Bright and Clear

Questioner: It has been an interesting few days, as all of my scary monster thoughts have come to the fore, the thoughts that produce the highest levels of anxiety in me with regard to finances, health, etc. I'm sure you know what I mean. There seems to be considerable momentum to these thoughts, but I have been able to remember what you said, that not a single one of these thoughts could exist without there being awareness of them. And thus they seem to lose a bit of their potency. Also, I am able to occasionally remember that these thoughts (and all thoughts, really) are just a repeating pattern in the mechanism, for lack of a better way to say it.

I really see that this is not a process; it just takes a single moment of seeing. So what am I waiting for? Permission, maybe, from the great authority, whoever that is. But the need for permission is just another repeating pattern of the mechanism, isn't it? Your comment that I cannot rest more in that which I always already am was quite useful to me.

John: There is a level where it seems like we are fighting with thoughts. The freedom seems to be in the future – if and when we overcome the mind. Freedom really lies in a totally different direction altogether. Remember the analogy of the sun and the clouds? What does the sun need to do with the clouds to be free of the clouds? Do the clouds ever obscure the sun, really?

So, it is not so much a matter of doing anything with thoughts. It is exploring and seeing that in you which is already completely free of thoughts. It is taking the focus off of thoughts and sensing a deeper level that is already present and never affected by thoughts. This has nothing to do with thoughts. Even if your current thought patterns never change, you can still be free. It is incredibly freeing to see that this has nothing to do with quieting thought, changing thought,

improving thought and so on. Isn't that wonderful!?

Thoughts are troubling no doubt, but that is only an effect of not being clear about who we are. The thoughts are fueled and sustained by a lack of clarity as to what is real about ourselves. By getting clear on the fundamentals of who we really are and exposing ignorance and confusion at its roots, the thoughts take care of themselves. However they appear is just fine, just like the sun does not care if there is an empty sky or a thunderstorm. From the perspective of the sun, everything is always bright and clear. It is the same with you, in your true nature of ever-present awareness, spirit, beingness or whatever else you like to call it.

Freedom Dancing with Itself: A Poem

A poem and comments shared by Michael Weintraub.

Freedom Dancing with Itself

each instant is another divine gift ...
on this clear spring morning ...
the mountains ... so close you can almost touch them
and between the green fields and the blue hills
there is a communion, a love song ...
and each blade of grass is a perfect poem ...
an anthem to the Divine ...
in the white purity of beauty's cleansing fire
you are the only one
and you are as numerous as the sparkling waves
dancing on the back of joy's golden ocean
the whole world is this ... unknown joy dancing
in our hands and the branches of trees ...
who writes these love poems ... to Love?

Love calls to itself ... Does it need a name?
look how life creates itself ... as living spontaneity
untouched by death and time and separation
— Freedom dancing with itself

Dear John,
Thank you for showing me (no one) how simple it really, really is in that space. It is so simple. The seeking is just dropping away by itself, as it is seen that the separation never actually happened. In that Awareness, Michael.

Is Awareness a Thing?

Questioner: Is awareness a thing?

John: Awareness is not a thing in the usual sense. You cannot see awareness as something apart from you as an object, sensation, feeling or thought. It is that principle that is knowing those things. Though it is not an object, yet it is known. Sometimes it is referred to as self-knowing or self-luminous. You cannot deny that awareness is present. It is obvious, but not in the way we usually think of things. That is why we tend to overlook it. It is like asking, 'Can the eyes see themselves?' You cannot literally see your eyes with your actual eyes, but still they are present and make all seeing of objects possible. It is similar with the awareness. It is present and making all knowing possible.

Q: Awareness is aware of awareness?

John: It is not a separate object apart from itself. In other words, you cannot be aware of awareness as an object appearing in the awareness. Yet we know intuitively that we are awareness. Or, more impersonally, there is without doubt the presence of awareness. The language gets tricky. Understanding it is easy, but the language is confusing because language is based on subject/object thinking and expression.

Q: So this is what we are?

John: We are always the presence-awareness. There must always be this for anything to be or to be known. You never stand apart from it. It is you. Not you as a person or separate being, but the essence of you and all else.

Q: Even if my mind, which is the tool of awareness, can recognize it being aware without the 'I', the essence is still an awareness coming through the mind, or consciousness, or presence?

John: I am not completely clear on what you are expressing here. The mind is just a tool of the awareness. The thoughts appear in the awareness. However, whether the mind is present or not, the awareness still remains. For example, when thoughts are present, there is a knowingness of them. And when the mind is still or non-active, there is a knowingness of the absence of thoughts.

Even if there is no thinking about an individual 'I', there is still the awareness. Awareness just silently illumines the thinking, perceiving and all other kinds of relative knowing. Like I have said elsewhere, it is like the sun constantly shining above the clouds no matter what is happening below. That is your true nature. There are no clouds in your real being. It is always fair and clear. No chance of rain.

Is Presence-Awareness Ever Obscured?

Questioner: Sometimes I get a sense of this presence-awareness or true nature that you are talking about. But then at other times it seems to get obscured, clouded over or dimmed by conditioning or thoughts. Why does the presence-awareness become obscured?

John: It is never obscured or covered over at any time! It is always fully present and clear. It never wavers and is never disturbed by thoughts or anything else. It is simply that clear, constant sense of awareness shining out from your core at all times. Even in the most dense, confused state of mind or feelings, it is fully and clearly present and not affected in the least. It is the unchanging essence that runs right through all experiences, good, bad or indifferent. It is the existence that supports all appearances and the awareness that infuses all knowing. It is completely present and radiantly clear in every-one at all times.

Q: Then what is enlightenment or awakening?

John: 'Enlightenment' and 'awakening' are just words or labels floating in the awareness. As I see it, if there is such a thing as awakening, it is simply noticing this presence-awareness, which has seemingly been overlooked for so long. Seeing it is immediate, and there are no levels or stages involved.

Q: Then what about all the paths, practices and exercises that people are pursuing in the name of getting to awakening?

John: Such activities only go on until the obvious is seen. In my experience, all paths, practices and exercises only tend to delay the essential insight by promoting the idea that you are not there yet and there is something to get.

Q: What happens when you see or understand this presence-awareness?

John: Nothing at all!

Q: Well, there must be some difference. Otherwise, what is the use of realizing all this?

John: Yes. I would say that there is an inner shift in perspective. Metaphysical doubt, uncertainty and anxiety based on not knowing who we are is no longer a factor. This translates as a sense of lightness, clarity and ease. The sense of being a limited separate individual no longer dominates the mind and emotional functioning. Everything goes on pretty much as before, but it is just a spontaneous arising in the clarity of the presence-awareness.

Waiting for the 'Final Recognition'

Questioner: I notice quite often that I am aware, simply aware; and that awareness and the content of awareness is all there is. Most of the doubts are gone. I often experience the arising of joy or peace; and negative emotions arise too, but without much bite. And sometimes I get lost for just a little while in the content but never do I forget that I am the still, spacious awareness in which all of this happens.

I am very grateful to have been in the presence of a few very clear teachers for the last few months and feel that the 'blood and bones' connection with them has made the difference in the (apparent) unfolding that is occurring. But I will have to leave these teachers soon and while there seems to be a lot more clarity, the final recognition has not yet occurred. My question is this: Is it necessary or helpful to maintain physical presence with a clear teacher until the final recognition occurs?

I appreciate so much your website and your sharing with me about this matter. It has helped to bring it all into sharp focus for me.

John: Waiting for a final recognition is a subtle concept. If you take that approach, you will wait forever! It is just mind stuff, really. There is no future event at all. This is the mind perpetuating its old tendency to look for something 'out there'. Present awareness is totally present, totally free, totally clear in this moment. You can never deny your being and awareness. It is here. It is now. Everything, including concepts of recognition, is just thoughts appearing in this. Those thoughts are totally irrelevant to the vivid, living actuality that is being pointed to.

There is no such event as awakening. There is only seeing the fact that you are already awake, as that undeniable presence-awareness. It is only the vestige of a separate one who continues to dream of the final seeing. Question that concept thoroughly. What are you waiting for? Who is waiting? What

is the truth that is being pointed out? Is it something that is not here and now in all its fullness?

Continue to question and challenge these subtle beliefs. They are the only things that appear to keep us bound. Our interest drifts into these conceptual positions and we overlook the essence. The essence is always here.

It can be helpful to be around someone pointing to this. It brings you back again and again to the obvious. But that should not be the focus. Make use of the presence of clear pointers while they are available. But, more importantly, come back to the seeing for yourself. No one can do it for you. There is no chance of loss or gain because this clear truth is always shining right at your center. All doubts and questions spin out from the imagined 'I'. See for yourself if you ever have been a separate 'I' and you are left with the understanding of your true nature – presence-awareness. That never leaves you, because you, as a separate entity, are not. That presence is all that is.

If there is anything like 'final recognition', it would only be seeing that there is no need to wait for anything. The one who is waiting does not exist. The presence-awareness is here as the essence of the seeker and all else.

The Energy of Mental Grasping

Questioner: Here are my latest ponderings, which I'm having some difficulty verbalizing. Anyway, here is my attempt. Toward the end of last week, I noticed an increase in the energy of mental grasping. Each time I speak with you I feel incredibly clear for a few days, and then the mental preoccupation seems to return with a vengeance. This time the grasping was about the seeking itself and trying to come to some conclusion with my mind.

When that got painful enough, I took a good hard look at it all and thought, wait a minute here. Am I still present and aware? Well sure, but that is simple and obvious. Then what are these seeking thoughts all about? It occurred to me that in this habit of the mind grasping, there has always been for me the sense that either the grasping must come to a conclusion by finally getting hold of the seeming object I'm grasping for, or that the grasping must be stopped. But the grasping doesn't really matter at all, does it? The grasping will never succeed and cannot be stopped by more grasping. In fact, I guess the grasping is unrelated in any way to the presence of awareness or the beingness that I am, and it doesn't matter if the grasping continues for the rest of my life. The beingness that I am cannot be attained or lost by any mental grasping. It's completely irrelevant! Does this make sense? I still feel pretty wobbly on all of this, but it is beginning to feel real to me in a way that it never has before. I'm still afraid I'm deluding myself. Anyway, that is it for now, I think.

John: From what I have seen, it can be normal for a certain amount of 'back and forth' sensation as the recognition deepens about this presence-awareness. As you see it and feel the clarity, it undercuts the old habits of the mind to seek and grasp. It is not a problem and there is nothing wrong! We have built up a lifetime of thinking and memory that is all geared toward looking outward and grasping. Trying to stop the grasping will definitely fail! It is always better to just see

clearly what is happening, the mechanism of it. Both grasping and trying to stop grasping are mental approaches. Seeing clearly always brings in the awareness aspect. This is more in tune with your true nature. Doing emphasizes the imagined doer or illusory self.

What you are doing (that is, just noticing what is going on) is really about all you need to do. If you try to get rid of grasping or judge it as being a problem, that thinking is only coming from the old perspective, the mind's old style of viewing things. Just continue to notice that it is all based on memories and old ideas. It is just the images based on the past. But you are vital and present and alive right now. And what you are, this livingness, is quite distinct from the thoughts. Seeing that undercuts the tendency to move into thought to find a resolution or an answer. It is not a test, so do not evaluate yourself by any of this. It makes no real difference to what you are and your intrinsic freedom if any of this old thinking is going on. If you seem to get caught up in it, just come back and notice that it is only mechanical thoughts and tendencies arising in something that is bright, fresh and clear. It is all just old tendencies in the mind, habits that were developed during the period of ignorance, if you can say that.

Fighting thoughts or judging where you are by what is appearing is an old trick that you do not have to succumb to. As your center of gravity shifts back to your sense of presence and it becomes absolutely clear to you that you are never really affected by thoughts, then you get out of the gripping feeling of all this. A thought, no matter how intense it is, is only a thought. If you can see it as just a thought, that is good. Or you can use the thought as a reminder that you must be present and aware for the thought to be there; and this brings you back to the awareness. Or if you feel you can muster it, notice that the thought is really an attempt by thinking, to say something (usually negative) about your identity. In other words, the concept of being some kind of limited person is being perpetuated by the mind. So you can have a look to see if whatever the mind is saying is true. For example, 'That is an interesting thought. What is it saying about me? Interesting. Is that really true? What am I anyway?'

Usually when these thoughts come up, they kind of hit us in the gut and we instinctively react to whatever the thoughts are saying, without really questioning. We are dancing to the tune of the thoughts and trying to correct ourselves or get rid of the thought, or just taking them to be true and then feeling bad. The slightest amount of questioning and looking and the wind goes out of the sails of the mind.

If thoughts come up, they come up. You cannot really do anything about them. You do not choose them. They just happen. So in a certain sense it is not really your problem. If you could choose thoughts, why would you ever choose an unhappy thought?

There is often a tendency to try to evaluate ourselves by the activity of the mind. Can you see that you do not need to look to what is going on in the mind in order to evaluate how things are going? I know this is the total reverse of how we usually approach things. Does the sun care if the clouds come up? Does the awareness really care if thoughts come in or not? The more deeply you see yourself as this awareness, the less of an issue the thoughts are. If you try to gauge your state by thoughts, you will be strung out forever, because you never have any control over what may come up. So that cannot be the way to lasting peace. A better approach is to recognize your identity as presence-awareness. When that is completely clear and certain, then you are home once and for all. That is what it really all boils down to. The clarity of mind and freedom from grasping, is really just a side effect of knowing what your true nature is. It is not like you first free yourself of grasping and then you discover freedom. Instead, first you discover freedom. Then you notice that from the experience of freedom the other problems fade from the picture of their own accord. Since meeting Bob Adamson and talking to him, I have never really done much with the mind. Once the essence is clarified, the interest in the stories of the mind just evaporates. It was the complete reverse of what I had imagined.

Anyway, I think you are on track with all this. Just let your deeper knowledge be your guide. If you come back to your real self as your touchstone, you can find your way through

whatever comes up. Don't worry! Everything just unfolds. It is different for everyone, and there is no right or wrong about any of it.

Enough Said. I Am Done

Questioner: Thank you for your articles and e-mail dialogue postings. They have been very clear and concise and it confirms what 'I' (present awareness) see now.

However, 'I' see an inaccuracy with your use of the word 'exist' in a recent e-mail response you gave. You said, when answering the question, 'What is this basic intrinsic awareness?' that 'It is the root existence supporting all appearances ...' and then later you said, 'You not only exist, but you know that you exist'. I looked up the word 'exist'. It means to 'out' (ex) 'stand' (sistere) – to stand out.

John: No matter how precise you try to be with words, they all fail. Some people like to say being or existence or consciousness or whatever. No matter what you say that is not it! They are all pointers. This is not intellectual or linguistic analysis, however noble those pursuits might be. There is nothing wrong with being precise with language. But this is not the most important thing. The word is never the thing.

The word 'being' is also not it. However, if that one resonates better with you, then use it! You can never under any circumstances deny the fact of your presence, being, existence or whatever else you call it! The bottom line is, is the freedom from suffering born of knowing your real nature your direct experience? Nothing else matters, really.

Q: Point taken! Got it!

(Follow up ...)

Q: I resonate with all that I've read and heard about this (non-duality or present awareness). But there is something that seems to be missing, something that I cannot quite articulate. I think now that the only thing missing is to be in the presence of someone who knows and

is this with certainty. I do not have any questions. I am this. This is it, but ... ?

John: What is being pointed to is so obviously present and clear, but we overlook it due to an apparent blind spot. I looked into all this for years and never seemed to get anywhere till I sat face-to-face with Bob Adamson and talked this over.

(Follow up ...)

Q: OK, John, I get it. I am the present awareness in which everything occurs or arises. Present awareness equals no-thing equals everything equals who-I-am equals ... this! Simple!

John: Looks like you are catching on!

(Follow up ...)

Q: Enough said. I am done!

Time is Not a Factor, Just Clear Seeing

Questioner: I just read your first article and it resonated with me. I have been reading this stuff for a couple of years now, and within the past two months some sort of urgency came over me. Recently, I attended several spiritual events. I definitely had an awakening with this process. It started with my first weekend event, and it just got stronger and deepened through the other events I attended. This was followed by a major breakthrough at a subsequent week-long retreat. I have also felt that it is some kind of grace pushing me along, and that 'I' don't have much to do with what has been happening.

I think I am in the same place you were right after you had your first awakening with Bob Adamson and then some thoughts came up and you felt that you had 'lost it'. Although I don't feel like I lost it so much. It is just that my thoughts of irritation, mostly at work, seem strong, even though I still feel the presence.

When I first got out of that week-long retreat, I felt as though a huge part of my mind had just fallen away, like a lot of my ideas were still there at some level but they had a charge of about 1 compared to 100 before the retreat! Now these thoughts seem strong, but so also is the presence. My question is, is it possible to be awakened to the presence and have the mind-body organism going through stress and irritation? This seems to be the experience here now. Or is it that I am still taking my 'I' seriously enough to be affected by its thoughts?

John: Thanks for the note. You are going to quite a few teachers! I am not sure what to add! All I know is what I was able to see with Bob. It was at a different level than what I had experienced before. Maybe this will come across in my articles, who knows? I don't resonate with the 'multiple awakenings' style of talking about things. There is a core, essential understanding. It is the direct revelation of your actual nature, not a stringing along over time or deepening. Once seen thoroughly, the spiritual search drops away.

So I would say, check out my articles, and if you still feel a resonance in how I am talking about this, let's continue the dialogue.

Q: Yes, I will continue to read them. However, it did seem to me when reading your first article that you had the core understanding and you felt you had lost it, and then had the clarification. So there was a time period, if brief, involved there. Yes?

John: Do not worry about time! Just get back to the basics. You are here; the presence is here. You are totally free right now. It is all about seeing what is fully present right now. There is nothing beyond seeing this truth, which is fully present now. As you begin to look in this direction, everything becomes remarkably clear. Time is not a factor, just clear seeing. Don't emphasize time or the mind. Instead, come back to what is utterly clear and doubtless for you right now. That is the direction to go. All the other doubts and questions come up when the essence is not clear. Like I said, I do not support the idea of multiple awakenings or gradually getting there.

Q: Yes, I hear you. This resonates. It is right here right now, isn't it?

(Follow up ...)

Q: Once the falsity of the 'I' idea is seen, then there are no longer any problems. They melt away because there is no longer a foundation for them. This resonates perfectly and undercuts teachers who say that trauma from the past must be experienced by your true nature, by presence, in order to be removed from the system. The question would be 'whose system?' Especially, if you realize you don't exist anymore! And it seems more true that if there is no 'I', then who is there to be affected by past trauma? The 'I' who had the trauma is gone. So where is the trauma? This seems like the most direct teaching.

John: This is how I see it. The gradual approach seems to go on forever. At least I have never met anyone who ever reached a definitive understanding that way. The basic core insight seems to remain unclear.

Q: I hear you. Even though there doesn't seem to be anything to talk about at this point, I still look forward to Bob's stateside visit! Because I still think that my 'I' exists at some level.

John: If you think there is an 'I' in there somewhere, then have a serious look and see if you can find it. That is the only way to get that resolved. With the issue of the 'I' resolved once and for good, the understanding of your true nature as the present awareness becomes clear with no possibility of obscuration. It is never obscured, even now, but the idea of separation, that is, being a separate 'I', appears to make the obvious doubtful. Have a good look for the 'I' and see what you can come up with.

Basking in the Message of Simplicity

Questioner: In the past couple of days I've been reading the articles on your site. I have read maybe a third of them. I've really been enjoying them. You express yourself clearly and simply. Lately, I've been influenced by Tony Parsons and Leo Hartong. I guess you could say I've been basking in the message of simplicity. On more than one occasion it's struck me as quite amusing, all this fevered searching for what is here now. I'm starting to get clued in to the joke.

John: Eventually I ran across Bob Adamson and things became incredibly clarified for me. It sounds like you are moving in good company. One way or another we keep on the move until someone points us back to the basic simplicity in a direct and clear way.

Q: I'm very happy to hear Bob Adamson was the 'open sesame' for you. And I've found your site to be very useful right now. Your essays seem to be sticking like a burr under a saddle blanket. I really start to understand why it's referred to as an 'open secret'. Thanks again for the website. You may get a question or two from me as things bubble along.

John: If any questions or comments come up in perusing my articles, fire away. They contain a lot of words, but the basics of it are pretty simple.

(Follow up ...)

Q: I've gone through almost all your articles. Like I said, they are clear and simple. There is not much room for asking questions. I've been experiencing what may be 'glimpses'. Like yesterday, driving the car, it seemed like there was no one driving. But it happened so fast. It's like I wonder: 'Did that just happen?' Well, it was a neat experience whether it happened or not!

John: There is a natural sense of presence and awareness, which, it turns out, is what the most direct teachers are talking about. Some teachers like to turn it into something more complicated. Hogwash! Once you get it straight from the horse's mouth, you realize how simple it is. All the spiritual talk is a smokescreen, really. Everyone is looking for some amazing awakening or mind-boggling experience, something 'ultra subtle' to talk about, get confirmed or whatever. Too much! You cannot build a spiritual organization or course of study on this that is ever present. When people talk about awakening and then bringing the understanding into life or whatever, it really clouds the issue. Nisargadatta used to say that you should be able see the basics in a week or so. End of story! And I found it to be true. No one really believes it, but then most of us never really met a teacher like Nisargadatta in person, so we have had a lot of preconceptions.

The actual sense of being aware right now, naturally present and without effort, is the truth that is being pointed out. At some point it just hits you, 'I was looking for something completely different from this'. But then it all starts to make sense. It is like awakening from a dream. If you are gradually awakening, working on it, embodying the understanding and so on, you are still viewing things within the context of the dream. Somehow it just goes on and on and on.

But somewhere along the way this gets pointed out. You understand that it is about this sense of awareness that is here right now. It is not something to be attained or cultivated. It is a recognition of what is ever-present but was overlooked. Seeing that this awareness is what you are and always have been, you see that the idea of a separate individual was never true. The awareness is the impersonal ground of the whole manifestation, even now. It is simply a fact that is pointed out. Seeing this, the individual evaporates and there is no separate person left to do anything more. There is nothing to deepen or embody or cultivate. Awareness is shining like a beacon right at the center and always has been. We didn't notice it. We didn't understand that this was it. When people talk about awakenings, they have not yet seen the immense simplicity and availability of this. As I see it, there is really no such thing

as awakening, except seeing that this awareness is what you are and always have been. There is no time or progress in this, because time is just a concept appearing in the awareness. States and experiences change and deepen but the awareness that you are is complete and full and has no levels or degrees. As Nisargadatta says (a rough paraphrase), 'It is a solid, homogeneous block of reality'.

Perhaps a taste of this is coming through. It is all about getting a clear pointing to this in no uncertain terms. It hits you in the gut. Then all the pieces fall into place. You can see all this quickly. It is not really about time, but just seeing the crux of it. Somehow, the simplicity and availability of this gets overlooked when the essence is not clear.

Clear Seeing Has Not Yet Occurred for Me

Questioner: I am very clear on the fact that the clear seeing has not yet occurred for me.

John: Who is it that is very clear that clear seeing has not yet occurred? This is the kind of thinking that can hang you up. There is a subtle misunderstanding as to what the seeing is or is supposed to be. It is the very awareness knowing that thought is the clear seeing! It is actually fully present. You are aware now. You know this awareness; you are this awareness. You have always been this awareness; you will never be anything other than this awareness. A teacher once said: 'Realization is simply becoming aware of the fact that you have never been in bondage'. So do not pick up the thought that clear seeing has not yet occurred. And more importantly don't believe it. It is these kinds of thoughts that seem to obscure this ever-present realization. What in you knows that thought? In what is that thought arising? This is what is being pointed out. It is already realized. We were simply thinking about and looking for something else.

Q: (Talking about spiritual experiences, prior stages of awakening, and a subsequent stage of liberation where there is no longer a 'me' ...)

John: Amazing experiences are not it. Before we are clear on the basics, we are often enamoured of so-called spiritual experiences. Experiences come and go in this that is aware. Mystical experiences, lights, energetic experiences and so on have nothing to do with this, really.

This whole subject of the 'me' is interesting. People talk of the 'me' dropping away, as if that is some kind of experience to look forward to or a sign of 'awakening'. That is just the mind taking this pointing and turning it into a path or

projecting an event in the future. What is really being pointed out is that, even now, the 'me' is a total fiction. There is nothing to drop away. It is the false supposition that what you are is a limited entity apart from the awareness-presence that you truly are. That 'me' is really not there. So there is nothing that needs to drop away. The one waiting for it to drop away is the fictional 'me' itself. So you keep spinning in thoughts and concepts about a 'me', even while you are being a noble seeker trying to get rid of it. The essential message is that the 'me' does not exist and never has. The quickest way to tackle the 'me' is to try to find it. Seek it. Question it. Look for it and see if you can find it. Waiting for it to drop away perpetuates the idea that it is there. There never has been a separate me. Period. This is just a fact that is pointed out. It is not a path or practice. It is not something to turn into a future event for which you are waiting.

In this moment – for you, right now – there is a clear light of awareness in which everything is appearing. It is what you are. You are that! It is free, totally unobscured, full and complete. Christ said, 'I am the light of the world'. You, as that awareness, can say the same thing. Separation from that is a total illusion. It never happened, except in imagination. It is based on a 'me' that never existed. It is just a wrong idea. If you try to find the 'I', you cannot find it. When you look and cannot find it, you see that you never were a separate one, and all problems and doubts have no foothold. Presence-awareness has no doubts or problems. You stand utterly and completely free in this seeing. Why? Because the presence-awareness is completely free. That is what you are.

If there are any remaining doubts, come back to the basics and verify them in your own experience, until you are absolutely sure about what is being pointed out. You need to verify all this for yourself. No one can do this for you. If you stick with this and let it resonate, it will work without fail.

Why is Awareness Only Linked to Sensations in This Body?

Questioner: I just found your website. I stayed up late last night reading most of your articles. Thank you for the generosity. The teaching comes through with warmth and clarity. Because you are able to get right to the core of things, I was hoping you could answer this question that keeps arising: Why is my true nature (awareness) only linked to the sensations of this body and mind? There is awareness of this stomach gurgling, but not of the body next to this body. This body's hand can be willed to move, but not the cat's paw. There is awareness of a sore throat sensation in this body, but not in others. The thoughts of this mind are apparent, but not the thoughts in other minds. It appears that there is a purposeful duality within non-duality. This question keeps fuelling some residual doubt and confusion, so I would appreciate any light that can be shed on it.

John: There is often a subtle confusion between sense perception, thinking and awareness. However, it is not ultimately necessary to ferret this all out. What is arising for you is an intellectual question. It is generated in and by the mind, that is, at a conceptual level. The fact is that you exist and are aware. You cannot deny this at any time. All sensations, thoughts and feelings – and any objective experiences at all – appear in this awareness that you are. The objects come and go. They cannot possibly be the essence of you. The concept of being a person, an entity in the appearance, is a fiction. This is the source of all suffering. Once this is seen through as being untrue, you experience – directly – an immense peace and inner certitude, which is basically the result of clear self-knowledge. The resolution of intellectual conundrums and philosophical questions does not really lead to any direct peace or deep knowing, which is the real core of all this. However, I will hazard a few observations that may (or may not!) be helpful.

Granting the existence of appearances, the sense organs

are necessarily limited in space and time. A set of eyes in one location cannot see what another set in another location can see. Within the appearance, sense perceptions arise and are known in the brain. Like sense organs, brains are separate in time and space. Thus each brain can only know sense perceptions from the sense organs with which it is linked. It would be absurd to expect 'your' brain to process information from someone else's sense organs. So, one immediate statement that could be made is that sense perceptions appearing in some other body don't arise in 'your' body because your brain is not in that other body! So, within the appearance, sense organs and brains are localized in time and space.

Ultimately, however, all sense-perceptions and brain functions are just thoughts or mental phenomena, that is, appearances in the mind. Even the brain is a concept appearing in thought. So ultimately, everything is just a series of ideas appearing in awareness. Even time and space and the entire manifestation of apparently separate objects are just appearances within awareness. All of the so-called 'others' are just appearances in thought. It is similar to the case of a dream, in which all appearances, including other people, bodies, time, space and so on, are in a single awareness.

So, why does awareness seem to be localized in one body in the appearance? Basically, it is not! Is awareness localized to one figure in the dream, or is it the support of all the dream appearances and characters? Surely, the latter must be the case. It is the same with the waking state. However, at the level of appearances, every experience is necessarily an appearance in time and space. Every such experience, by definition, must be localized because it is bounded by time and space. Awareness, however, is not in time and space, which are only creations of thought. Thoughts appear in awareness, so time and space are imagined within awareness. So, in the question 'Why is awareness localized?' there must be a subtle mixing up of awareness with something objective. Pure awareness cannot be localized because it is not an object in time and space and it cannot be referenced in relation to anything objective.

Why, then, am 'I' only aware of objects connected with a particular body? Because the 'I' that is asking the question is

the mind, which is an object in awareness. The mind asking the question is in the appearance. Therefore, its experiences, as with all appearances, are localized. The confusion results from the mixing up of the mind or the 'relative subject' with awareness.

Why is awareness not aware of everything going on in everyone else's body? It is! There is only one awareness, just as in the case of the dream. There is only one awareness that illumines and infuses the whole dreamscape. Why cannot 'I' know it? Because the 'relative subject' asking the question is localized in time and space. You could as well ask, why does the dream subject not know all the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of all the characters in the dream? The answer is because, within the dream, he is only a limited part of the picture. A limited part cannot know the whole. The thinker, questioner or doubter is not awareness, but rather, a mentally fabricated 'pseudo subject'. This, in fact, is the heart of the metaphysical dilemma – the confusion of one's real nature of presence-awareness with an imagined 'I' or independent entity. A close examination of this reveals that the supposed individual entity is a myth.

As I see it, bodies, thoughts, minds and appearances are all swimming in one bright, vast and unbounded awareness, just like every molecule of the dream is arising before the eye of a single conscious presence. In the appearance, all instruments of perception are limited by time and space. And so their field of relative knowing is also limited.

However, all of this is just a series of musings in thought! It is speculative and provisional. In any case, you cannot deny your present existence and awareness. That is what you are, regardless of what the mind thinks or does not think. All doubts are in the mind. Awareness stands beyond, utterly certain and well-known at all times. That is what you are! Understand that all doubts and questions are really for the imagined 'I', not for awareness. Seek for that 'I' and see if you can find it! Then all questions are uprooted at the source.

Interpreting the Meaning of Experiences

Questioner: Periodically, out of the blue, there appears emotion, first tears for one minute, then the next minute, laughter and unbounded joy, then the next minute tears, crying, and then the next minute laughter, loud and joyous. Fortunately, this happens when I am alone, perhaps engrossed in some activity; and other times while just sitting quietly on the couch. The mind must have heard or read that this is the holy spirit making itself felt. Since the mind is not to be trusted much of the time, what do you make of it? Besides, what is the holy spirit?

John: I am not sure what to make of the expressions you are experiencing! I would say not to make too much of them, as they are just passing appearances, vibrations of energy, arising in this that you are, which is steady, clear and changeless. The mind may want to read all kinds of meanings into events, but any explanation is as good as any other. What is, is. What the mind describes is a mental representation, not the thing in itself. Based on conditioning or background, the words used to describe anything will be different. But the word is never the thing. So we do not need to get too hung up on either words or the mind's attempt to explain events. The mind, based on past conditioning, wants to look outward into the appearances and try to get some kind of confirmation or meaning. But the real peace and certainty comes from looking into the source of the knowing itself. Who or what is this? This is the center of the cyclone, the still, silent, empty space in which the universe of appearances arises and sets.

Most people are on a quest to answer various spiritual questions, but the real wisdom comes when you forget the questions and start to enquire who is asking. All questions depend on the one asking. Awareness-presence has no questions. It is self-evident and fully known. It is not a mind or

isolated entity in need of resolving intellectual doubts. So who or what has doubts or questions? That is a very interesting inquiry. Until that is resolved, various doubts and questions are bound to arise.

Anyway, do not forget that what is pointed out is the simple fact of existence and awareness, which is doubtless and clear right now. Of course, the mind or intellect will never know this – ever. Better just to give up the attempt! Awareness knows thoughts; thoughts can never know the awareness that you are.

If you avoid trying to run this through the mind, it is all straightforward and easy to understand. The difficulty comes when we try to employ thinking, which is always limited, instead of simple seeing, which is open, clear and direct. The mind uses words, labels and images, which are based on dualistic language. The mind is basically dead concepts. The living sense of knowing is coming in from awareness, not the mind. Wisdom, I would say, has more to do with looking straight out from awareness and seeing directly, rather than trying to reference experiences to the mind's labels and concepts.

I have no idea what 'holy spirit' means! There are lots of religious terms and labels used. If I were to take a crack at it, I would say that it is the light of life and presence in you that makes all knowing, feeling and thinking possible. As I see it, God, consciousness, presence, being, spirit, reality, life, love and so on are various concepts pointing to the one essence, that presence-awareness without which nothing can be.

What is the Value of a Teacher?

Questioner: What is the value of a teacher in all of this?

John: From what I gather, most of the so-called teachers who have pointed to this essential understanding never really viewed themselves as teachers at all. There is something artificial about turning all this into a formal relationship between a teacher and student, as if there are separate individual entities and something that the teacher has that the student needs to get.

Nevertheless, in practice, there are what appear to be teachers and students. If there is any such thing as a teacher, I would say that it is someone who has realized their true nature as presence-awareness and does not support any of the concepts and ideas that are based on the idea of the existence of a separate person. The best teachers point out that this understanding is immediate and available, here and now. They do not encourage the seeker to engage in protracted processes that subtly support the idea that understanding is in the future or the result of a practice. Your true nature is here and now, not in the future. And you do not need to practice to be what you are. Even talk of awakening and liberation is a diversion from the immediacy of what is being pointed to. Once the mind gets hold of the notions of awakening or liberation, there is invariably an attempt to turn this into some kind of goal, which the individual hopes to attain. This is the very opposite of what is being pointed out.

A good teacher (as defined above) can be immensely helpful in pointing out clearly what your true nature is in no uncertain terms. In classical Eastern spirituality, having a teacher is pretty much considered a prerequisite. Some current teachers downplay this aspect. But it cannot be denied that various traditions have been pointing to this type of understanding

and have a highly developed culture and history of teachings around it. This understanding has been breaking through for thousands of years all over the world. The whole process, if you can call it that, has been discussed, documented, debated, and experienced from just about every imaginable angle.

Oddly, though, recorded words and sayings do not seem to be enough to trigger the understanding in a direct way for most seekers. They give a hint or taste, but cannot fulfill the heart's deepest yearnings. Thus, for a lot of us, there arises the need for a living contact. I know there are cases of spontaneous understanding, but they do not seem to be all that common. On the other hand, there are hundreds, even thousands, of records of this understanding happening in the context of a teacher and student relationship. What is the key here? Well, I can talk from my experience with Bob Adamson. He knew what he was talking about. He lived the experience. Because of this understanding, he was able to focus on the key points and avoid all the irrelevancies. He had been guided to this by a superb teacher (Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj). Most importantly, there was a powerful presence or energy behind his words. I would not call it anything mystical, just a confidence and clarity born of knowing. It is hard to understand this until you actually experience it.

I keep saying in various ways that this understanding is not dependent on time, but rather on seeing what is true. Even my talking about understanding tends to make it sound like there is some such thing. There really isn't! It is hard to convey in words because the mind wants to read them and turn them into a goal, as if the understanding is not here, and then start trying to get it. It really is not like that, even though we imagine it to be. When I met Bob and talked to him, he 'blew me out of the water', as they say. I felt like a train hitting into the side of a granite mountain. Full stop. I am not implying it was a painful or dramatic experience, but rather the machinery of the mind just hit an impasse, due to the simplicity of what was being pointed to.

In various words, the essence came down to the following. What is pointed to is the very sense of presence and awareness that is here right now. It is fully present, fully realized

and fully known. The mind balks at this. It wants something tricky, mystical or subtle. The mind will never get this. Period. I may never have understood this had Bob not picked me up (metaphorically speaking) and thrown me headlong into it. The moment I tried to bring in my mind and questions, he would push me back into the fact of the immediacy of this present awareness. There was a back-and-forth momentum for a few talks with him, but he absolutely would not budge from this. All my escape routes were annihilated. All my excuses, like 'It can't be this', 'This is too easy', and all the doubts, questions and 'what ifs' just got blasted out from under me, even as I tried to formulate them.

This is why I have such a high regard for a good teacher. Of course, without that type of guidance, the seeking may go on ad infinitum. A waste of time, if you ask me!

In the last analysis, though, all that is being pointed to is the fact of your own being. Knowing your real nature is the essential point. So, whether you come to this knowing spontaneously or with the guidance of a teacher, ultimately does not matter. One way or another, you just need to see the essence for yourself.

Settle in with This and Everything Becomes Clear

Question: I have been reading the articles on your site for the past few days, and I wanted to say that they are extremely helpful. I gave up my spiritual search in my mid-twenties and threw myself wholeheartedly into the 'real world', mainly building and running businesses. Then about six months ago (about 10 years later), I began seeking again. Through some deep sense of longing, along with some synchronistic events, I found myself back on a spiritual path.

After a difficult struggle, it finally became clear (and when I was putting the least effort into it!). About a week ago, I was standing in my kitchen, not really thinking about anything, and the natural state was just there. It was nothing really mystical, but a kind of joy and release. It was like finally remembering the name of a song that was driving you crazy. Or one of those 3-D posters made up of dots, which you have to look at just right to see the 3-D image. I could finally name the tune, and see the picture.

Over the past week it has been a rollercoaster ride of trying to adjust. There is still an 'I' that creeps in. I can feel the flux back and forth between the ego-mind self and the true Self. Occasionally, I'll get caught up in the actor and not notice the stillness for a time. Then it is again noticed. I seem to shift attention. I'm also sensing more resistance from the mind, a lot of abstract thought trying to hook me.

I've been just trying to go about my life, as before, though it requires more effort. Trying to run a business and adjust to a new awareness is quite a balancing act. Aside from posting some basic questions in a forum I found, I haven't really talked about it with anyone, including my wife. People have definitely noticed something though. I get a lot of, 'Wow, you're in a good mood', or 'You seem very serene'. I can even see my outer self, or ego I guess, going about like nothing has changed. But it's like I'm in the background watching. I haven't even interfered, except in real tense or angry moments.

The information offered on your site has been a great help. I just wanted to say thanks, and see if there is any other insight you can offer.

John: Keep in mind that this is all actually very simple. Your true nature is simply that which is present and aware. Full stop. End of the road! There is no need for any balancing act, or difficulty, or managing of the understanding. As the Zen monk Bankei used to say, 'Everything is perfectly managed in the unborn Buddha-mind'. The unborn Buddha-mind is another name for the original presence-awareness within you. Anything that appears, appears in this that you are. It is simple, clear and natural. This understanding need not and does not impede any normal functioning. In fact, things go on smoother than before, because the false self is not interfering. The mind may have old ideas about what the understanding is supposed to be like. Anything it tries to anticipate is likely wrong. It is just imagination based on unexamined or partially examined ideas.

The body and mind can and will smoothly function in the light of awareness. You have always been this and always will be. Basically, don't imagine it to be dramatic or difficult. There is no person. There is only this natural, easy and clear awareness, and various appearances coming and going in it (you). As you settle in with this, everything will become clear. There is no one in the background watching, except awareness itself. There is no one there to get caught up or hooked in the mind. There is no outer self or ego. There is no one who can interfere or not. There is just this 'non-conceptual, self-shining, ever-fresh presence-awareness – just this and nothing else'.

So I would say, just relax and let things unfold naturally into the understanding of your ever-present being. This is so ordinary and simple that most people overlook it.

Questions and Doubts Drop Off of Themselves

Question: I hope to find that which I need to solidify the awareness. I know it's already here, but there are still doubts and a grey fog sometimes. I am still identifying with a separate 'I' at times, and this is frustrating. But as you suggest, I will continue to let things unfold naturally.

John: The doubts and questions are just remnants of the mind from the days before you knew your nature was here as presence-awareness. They will go on until you are absolutely clear that you have never been a separate 'I'. The awareness is always here. Nothing ever obscures it. We just did not notice it. The search is done. All the questions are answered because the questions were only for the separate one, and you are not that idea. You never were. All is settled in the radiant light of awareness which never comes and goes.

The coming and going and getting misidentified is never true, because you as this presence-awareness are always present and never affected by any appearances. Notice that everything appears in this light of being-awareness that never dims or gets covered over. Looking in this way, the questions and doubts will drop off of themselves. Let the functioning of the body and mind go on of their own accord as they always have. You can face each moment with clarity and lightness, knowing that whatever happens you are always home and at peace in your true being.

This is a wonderful discovery. It is a direct pointing to what is clear and obvious. Anything else is just a passing dream, an unfounded concept with no substance. The mind can never understand this. But you know always that you are present and aware. Know that, be that. You are that, even now. Frustration is just a result of trying to get this with the mind. Once you see that the mind can never get this, you just stop

looking for an answer there.

As this message sinks in, it will burn up all doubts and questions. Get ready for a life free of doubt and suffering, because as you get close to this understanding, the separate 'I' gets burnt up like a moth approaching a flame. This is just a poetic way of saying that you discover that you never were separate. Let this resonate.

What About Bliss?

Question: I would be interested to know what you have to say about bliss? I mean, what about sat-chit-ananda (being-consciousness-bliss)? There's supposed to be some bliss around in all this, isn't there? I don't feel I'm in desperate 'seeking something in the future' mode. But bliss would sure be nice!

John: It is good to start to see that this is not about practices, techniques and so on. It is about seeing directly what is true within you now. This removes the cause of ignorance and annihilates self-centered thought patterns (like doubt, suffering and confusion). With these out of the focus, we return to a spontaneous sense of clarity, joy, peace and certainty. This is the natural state that we are always in, except when dualistic thoughts based on the false ideas of being a separate self arise.

Bliss is too heavy a word and seems to imply an emotional state of ecstasy or something. All states, even high states, are impermanent. If you are looking for that to stay, you are in trouble. Awareness is inherently peaceful, clear and steady. It is more of an unshakeable peace or light joy, rather than some ecstatic state. Bliss is not really a good translation of 'ananda'. Some people prefer to use the term 'peace' instead. Imagine the state of deep sleep when you are at rest with no problems. Imagine your current life with all mental problems and confusing emotions removed. Imagine staying home from work and having no commitments with the whole day ahead to do only what you love to do. Those are better examples of what this is pointing to. You knew this as a child (and still do). It is just the simple joy of being alive.

Space-like Emptiness, Brightly Aware

Question: I'm working with the pointers and following them to what is clear and present within me.

John: Just stay with direct knowing and seeing, not thinking about it! Notice the difference between thinking about awareness and presence, and the direct, intuitive knowing that you are present and aware. This is key and makes all the difference. You know you are aware and present (or existing). This knowing presence must be there first before you can know anything. It is this that is pointed out, nothing else. Try to see how thought is utterly useless for the direct knowing of your existence.

Q: What I always seem to come up with is a sort of feeling, a sense of me-ness, that has a definite sense of familiarity and continuity to it. Other than that feeling of me-ness, there is the field of awareness, the perceptions of the outside world, and thoughts, feelings and images experienced as within.

John: The key is to see that what you are essentially is this field of awareness itself. Awareness is another name for you. That awareness is ever-present and bright, and yet it is no thing that the mind or senses can perceive. It appears to be a space-like emptiness, yet it is brightly aware. This is your nature. Everything else appears in and on this that you are.

Q: That is all I can find! It does seem that the more I focus on this looking at what I take to be myself, the more space-like, less solid, less serious, less identified with it all I seem to become.

John: Yes, this is right. We have imagined ourselves to be something tangible and solid, perhaps a person limited to a

body. But on investigation, we see this is not true. There is a spacious open presence. This is what we are.

Q: So there is a seeming progression. And I do (intellectually) realize the passage of time, and hence any sense of progression, is just that: a sense, a thought-feeling, which is occurring now.

John: Yes, just see that the open clarity of awareness is present now. There is no development in it. It is just seeing more clearly what is present now.

Awareness is Immediate and Clear

Question: I am now seeing what is meant by awareness. But my mind will not let go of this question, 'How do we know that awareness is definitely not just a product of the brain/body?' I recently asked another teacher this question and he said that he can't actually say but that it isn't actually relevant. But I think that it is, because if the brain creates and contains awareness, as opposed to awareness creating and containing the brain and everything else, then the whole picture is different. If the brain creates/contains awareness and then projects it outward as some scientists seem to believe, then that means that awareness is just another thing and is separate from other objects. Whereas, if awareness creates or contains the brain then that would mean that awareness is everything and the brain is just another thing within it. Hence, if the brain dies then so does awareness and thus awareness depends on something else for its existence. This means that it isn't the creator and isn't eternal. I know that I'm not really wording this very well, but I know that you'll understand where I'm coming from. It seems to be a last sticking point that my mind can't let go of.

John: A good way to start with this is to see the undeniable fact that you are present and aware. There is obviously a sense of existence and awareness. It is really the only certain thing that you know. Everything else is only an appearance within this. Everything appears as an object to this awareness.

Ultimately, you see that everything that you can know, including the world, the body, the mind and all else (if there is anything else!), is only a movement in this. Nothing ever exists in our direct experience, except as an object in awareness. To speak of a separately existing world or body or mind is not possible, if we go on direct evidence. This is simply a fact that you notice. You can verify it directly by investigating and looking at this.

The question, 'Is awareness a product of the body-mind or is it truly independent?' is troublesome to the mind no doubt. But the fact is that this question itself is created in thought and is an appearance in awareness. This is undeniable.

Thought is always changing and sometimes disappears altogether. And yet your existence, your presence, which is also that awareness, does not disappear just because thoughts change or even disappear completely. The mind cannot reason its way into the direct seeing or knowing that this awareness is present in spite of whatever appears and disappears. It is just a brute fact.

It is interesting to note that when the mind is not pinned into this conceptual dilemma and does not imagine or create a problem, there is a natural sense of peace and clarity that is unmistakable. The question as it is presented, is unresolvable at its own level, because the mind or thinking process is trying to make a determination about something that is completely beyond its realm. The mind, which is only an appearance in the awareness, is trying to make a judgment about the nature of the awareness. This is utterly futile. It is a wrong question, really, that ties the mind up in knots.

You can tackle this from another angle. That is to see that doubts, questions and problems are generated in thought. They are ultimately based on the idea of being a separate 'I' or person. Even if this question is answered, other questions will continue to plague us as long as there is some kind of assumption of individuality there. Questions only arise to him who imagines himself to be separate.

A good way to resolve all questions is to see if there is any such entity as an 'I'. Without that, who has a question or problem? This is not satisfying to the mind and seems to be a complete disregard for its cherished important questions. It is!

I have worked with several people who have migrated to this question as the seeming core dilemma. Just as a heads up: it never really gets answered by the mind, because the answer is not ever in the mind. It is better to see that the answer is not in the mind and save yourself a lot of mental turmoil! Just see that you are this awareness. Directly see that it never comes

and goes. Notice how all objects appear in this, and it does not change. This is a direct observation through looking and knowing without conceptualizing. See that the mind is trying to get an answer. That is all that is happening. It is creating a problem and suffering at some level. Yet the awareness itself looks on, and it is not disturbed in the least even as the mind ties itself up in knots.

When this is seen, there is an immense freedom and clarity. The confusion drops away, leaving a peace and serenity that is unmistakable. In that clarity, what is pointed out is extremely clear and known in a deep way that is not conceptual. So if this awareness is known and you have a sense of this, relax into it and feel the natural clarity and joy inherent in that. All the wisdom and answers you need will spontaneously arise for you without having to work it out in thinking.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Thanks so much for replying to my mail. I know what you are saying is the truth, and I am just going to let the silly mind do its thing with this question and hopefully it will disappear. After years of being told it's so simple and immediate, I think it is finally being recognized. I'm seeing exactly the same as before but realizing what the seeing is, if that makes sense. I feel like it is finally being seen but my mind is saying, 'But what's the big deal about this?' So now I am just relaxing and seeing what else moves in.

John: The old habits come up based on the mental grooves of the past. The whole approach for years was based on trying to get an answer in the mind. At some point, it starts to dawn that the mind is tying itself up in knots, and this is in fact generating the confusion. Once you start to see this, you simply do not go there. It is needless suffering, really. Still there is a dawning realization, as you are so clearly expressing, of something immediate and clear that is undeniable. It is not theoretical or 'what if'. It is an immediate sense of presence and clarity. There is a natural gravitating toward that. A lot of the pointers begin to strike home and there is deeper

knowing, without trying to run it through the old conceptual mechanism.

The bottom line is that you are present and aware. The background of presence and clarity is really a space-like awareness. It simply never comes and goes, as is discovered by direct looking and checking it out. All thoughts and perceptions arise in this. Interestingly, this can never be doubted or questioned, because the existence of the question presupposes presence-awareness to even cognize the question. At some point, this recognition begins to become more apparent and clear, often through getting this pointed out. Then there is a relaxing into that. It is very simple really. It helps when the realization strikes home that this is not a mental understanding but a direct seeing in immediate experience, without running things through a conceptual analysis about it. Anyway, I sense you are on to this.

All is Well Here

Question: I wanted to check in to say all is well here! Life is such a moment-to-moment celebration, the ever-present awareness where no one resides. This is so unbelievably simple. It is not even simple, but is as it is. What more to say but, 'Thank you'. Looking back, I am simply amazed how I kept missing the obvious. The search of over thirty years was like trying to pull myself up by my shoestrings. The only result was I kept falling. But being a persistent person I kept getting back up and trying again, using techniques galore, etc. The key is seeing that there is no person to pick up. How to pick up what I already am and will always be? Suddenly standing up is just natural! The rope is now seen as a rope and not a snake! It is so clear that any and all searching takes us away from what we are, the ever-present awareness. It is almost too simple and maybe that is why it is so easily overlooked. Now that shit-eating grin will not go away! Ha ha!

John: Always nice to hear from you! I am glad to hear there is no one there! Only the clear and obvious. What you are saying sounds right on. It is great to see how this has unfolded for you. I don't have much to add! Not much to add to that at all. The simplicity is the heart of it, really. Most people do not see this because it is too simple! It is exactly what we did not expect. That is the beauty of it.

Feel Your Way into the Actual Awareness Itself

Question: There seems a litany in my mind of this teaching that it (the mind) is trying to contend with, subjugate or find a way to identify with. It answers its own questions but often now without real investigation. It is almost as if it knows that it cannot contend with the truth that is being revealed, so it sustains its survival by attempting to convince itself that it understands, somehow converting (possibly occasionally genuine) insights into its service somehow. Then the mind dutifully asks itself, 'What is it that sees the mind doing this process?' And the answer is immediately delivered (by the mind?), 'Awareness'. And the question drops. But has it? It seems premature, a tactic to prevent further enquiry. There seems to be an obstruction somewhere.

John: There is a point with all of this where the reading and thinking about it become redundant and can take the focus off of the essence. The gist of it is that the mind cannot get this. There is no real need for thinking or practice at this level. The old grooves of the mind want to keep propelling us back into that old approach and there is a sense of dull repetition and no real clarity. The intellect can grab hold of these teachings, or at least the verbal statements, and try to turn them into some goal or attainment. The words are just pointers. The mind grabs onto the words thinking that they are important. But the truth is that the mind is totally incapable of understanding any of this!

It is all about a direct knowing of the principle of awareness. The word 'awareness' is not the actual livingness, the light that is illumining thoughts. Thoughts cannot get to this because they are only objects in the awareness itself. This is more of an intuitive recognition of something that is so present and clear that if we rely on thinking we totally miss it.

And yet if we relax and cease to effort about it and just let the pointing resonate, the essence can be known directly.

If people could have realized this through reading books and thinking about it, they would have done so already. This is why it is often useful to meet a living teacher. There is an energy or presence behind the words that cuts through the fog of the mind, and there is a resonance with what is being pointed to. If you are going it alone, it is sometimes hard to catch the drift of what is being pointed to. Because it is overlooked, we inevitably turn back to the mind as the guide or evaluator, which is destined to fail for the reasons stated above.

Don't think about this too much. You have all the intellectual understanding you need. You have all the exposure to words and teachings that you could possibly need. What you really need is the direct and living recognition of your true nature. This is the background of existence-presence which is here now and which is brightly aware and knowing. This has nothing at all to do with the mind. The quicker you see that the mind has no real role in all this, the better off you are – and the more directly the actual understanding opens up for you.

Forget the mind. Forget the doubts. Forget the questions. Look deeply into this that is present and aware. It is vital, luminous, alive, bright, spacious and clear. It is the empty clarity in which everything is appearing. There is nothing dull or repetitive about it. Feelings of dullness, doubt, repetitiveness and so on only indicate that you are looking more at the mind and not the reality or your true nature. Don't despair about this. Just use it as a chance to readjust the approach and bring it more into alignment with the non-conceptual seeing.

Don't emphasize the questions, doubts and problems, but, rather, emphasize that in you which is clear, beyond doubt and surely present. What in you can never be doubted? What must be present for the mind to exist? Can you sense and notice the awareness? If so, what can you say about it? What are its characteristics? Does it need practicing or inquiring? Is it an attainment?

You may be getting hung up due to old ideas about enquiry and practices. These are not really needed at this stage.

It is a direct, immediate knowing. Practice and thinking are redundant here and can just fall away.

You have a sense that awareness is the key. But there may be a sense of thinking about awareness as a concept or interesting idea. Really look at and intuitively feel your way into the actual awareness itself. It is here. Everything you are looking for is present in and as this awareness (which you are not separate from). Turn the mind around and look straight into the awareness itself. Without thinking, simply going by direct experience, see what it is. This totally short-circuits the mind and leaves you in an incredibly vast and free experience, which is the awareness itself. It is free, unbounded, and clear. There is no suffering or separation in it. There is no individual to practice or inquire or realize anything at all. The mind and its struggles are like motes of dust out on the distant horizon with no ability to impact or touch this awareness that you are. It is immensely clear and present and has a taste all its own, utterly unconnected with the imagined person and his problems. That is what you are, in truth. Know this and you will need no books, words or teachings. They are all only descriptions of your true nature.

To deeply recognize your real nature, without relying at all upon conceptual or intellectual thought, is the gateway to profound understanding. In the end, you discover that it is just this that is present and aware, but was overlooked due to our fixation on the thinking mind. When the focus goes off of the mind and returns to the awareness itself, things open up directly in our experience. If you catch yourself thinking about all this, just see that that is only thought appearing in the awareness itself. Don't think about awareness, but rather see it, feel it and sense it non-conceptually. When the seeing is immediate and not run through the mind, there is a sense of bright clarity and luminous peace. It is really going on all the time, but seems to come to the forefront when recognized.

You Are Actually in That State Right Now

Question: Thank you for your web site and postings. They have been enormously helpful to me and are the clearest writings that I have read. I find it increasingly easy to turn away from thought and return to existence-awareness. However, I have a lot of difficulty with seeing that there is no person. I see that there are lots of person-related thoughts that have no substance. But the source of my troubles appears to be a feeling of the body as a person and as being a lot more substantial than thoughts. Caring for that body/person seems to be a source of a lot of anxiety and worry.

Also, it seems easy to return to awareness because it is there, whereas the investigation into the non-existence of the person seems to get bogged down in confusion just because it is about non-existence. I guess I'm looking for some kind of pointer as to what it is like to see that there is no person. An example of the kind of pointer that I am thinking might be like what happens when you are on the verge of falling asleep. I know what that feels like. Thoughts, including all personal concerns, tend to disappear at that moment, and it is a relief. Is the seeing like that?

John: I would say the main thing is to get a feel for the awareness and feel that as your true nature. It is present, clear and bright. If you see that and relax with it, that should cover things pretty well! When you look from there, you see that there are sensations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences coming and going but no particular center or entity to whom they belong. They are just arising in the spacious clarity and presence that you are.

Before we see this, we often imagine ourselves as some limited person with attributes. We think things like:

- I am good
- I am bad

- I am John
- I am not 'enlightened'
- I am here and others are there
- I have problems
- I am a body or mind
and so on ...

The key to this is to see that all these concepts belong to an imagined person or entity that we take ourselves to be. Yet when we look, we cannot really find any tangible center, entity or person at all. It is a complete fiction, an assumption. And that is the source and beginning of our suffering and imagined bondage. The body is just a collection of elements, cells, chemicals, processes and so on. There is no particular center or 'I' in it, really.

So everything appears and goes on just as before, but there is seeing through the false idea of being a separate person or entity and a recognition of our true nature as awareness or presence itself. Life pretty much rolls on as before, but the core of separation and suffering is rooted out through the investigation and clear seeing. You are actually in that state right now. We always were, but just didn't realize it – till now!

Don't Look for Experiences or States

Question: I wanted to report that I seem to be experiencing a gradual awakening. (I'm not sure if those words are right, but I think you know what I mean.) A spiritual friend of mine says he has seen a noticeable difference in me. I think the changes in perception might be too gradual for me to notice.

John: There is no need to worry about where 'you' are at. It is not an attainment that you can measure or evaluate the progress of that way. That is just the mind wanting to be sure where 'you' are. This is just a vestige of the old habit of viewing oneself as an entity on the road to some goal. That is a fiction!

Q: This morning I was reading Bob Adamson's book and I had a momentary connection with the understanding that I am the presence-awareness. But it seemed to fade.

John: Well, did your actual presence or sense of being aware and alive fade? Who was there to register the idea that it was fading? See? Once we get off the track of evaluating and judging where we think we are, we see that what is being pointed to is just this present awareness. There is no 'connecting' to it, because you are it! I assure you that your existence did not fade between then and now. We just need to get a bit clearer on what it is that we are discovering. It is not a state that can come and go like that. We continue to view it that way for a while due to the old habits.

Q: In some way I know that I am that, regardless of what I may perceive at the moment. This is probably because I hear and read it often.

John: No! Give up the concept that whatever it is, is far away. Go by your own immediate investigation and looking. No one else can do it for you, and no teacher or book can provide it. Look into your own living sense of being and awareness. That is the whole approach in a nutshell. Once you realize that this is about self knowledge, you can give up the books, for they have done their job. Talk about your own looking into this that is present and aware.

Q: I've been 'doing' a tremendous amount of full stops, and bringing myself back into the present, and I think that has been contributing to a greater sense of calm and a lot less chatter from the mind.

John: That is good. Just see that this is not an attainment that appears as a result of doing anything; it is a recognition of something clear and steady within you, presently. Seeing this, the chatter of the mind inevitably dies down as a side of effect of the understanding. Don't seek a calm mind. Seek to know your true nature and all the 'benefits' are there automatically. But then again, you don't really care, because your true nature is inherently free of suffering anyway.

Q: I no longer have the anxiety that I'm not going to 'get' this, which has helped me to feel more peaceful.

John: Excellent that you see this. But take it further. There is not a 'me' that is sometimes confused and then peaceful. It is the concept of a 'me' that generates the confusion. You are peace itself. You discover this by looking deeply into what you are not thinking about what you are.

Q: I keep comparing my experiences with what I'm hearing others say about this.

John: This is a mistake and will cause a lot of needless grief. There is not a separate entity, much less two to compare! So this will trigger a lot of dualistic thinking and confusion. You discover what you are That is all that is needed.

Q: I haven't felt a shift in my center of being from my body to no place in particular. I don't feel an expansiveness that I've heard many people experience.

John: Good. Don't look for experiences or states or anything the mind can grab hold of and measure. Discover your own nature and everything else will follow without effort.

Q: It sounds like I'm still experiencing from the perspective of a separate individual. Although I have looked into the question of 'Who am I?' there doesn't seem to be a clear answer. I want to believe that I am pure awareness and not the body (in fact, I say to myself often that I am not the body), but it is not happening.

John: Awareness doesn't 'happen'. If you wait for it to 'happen', you will wait forever. This is so non-intellectual and simple that the thinking mind continually overlooks the obvious. You are aware now! Any doubts about that? Deeply realize that everything the mind thinks it is seeking is already here in this presence-awareness that you are.

Q: I'm really not frustrated with this like I was even a few days ago. I just wish that things would be clearer for me.

John: Things are always murky from the position of a me! But you are starting to question and abandon that concept. There is nothing 'you' can do to 'get' this. It just happens like a flower opening in the sun. You have stumbled across this through destiny or grace or whatever you may call it and it will do its work. Relax and enjoy the unfolding.

Q: I don't know how you can help me with this at this point, because it appears I'm the one who needs to do it for myself.

John: There is no one there and nothing that needs to be done. That concept is generating a certain level of anxiety. Just come back to the basics. The reality is the natural sense of being-awareness. You are that. It is a dawning realization of something already present but overlooked.

Direct and Immediate Knowing

Question: It has been obvious to me for some time that awareness is always here now.

John: So far, so good!

Q: It has been with me all my life, when physically conscious, and it never changes.

John: It is also present in dreams, deep sleep, near death experiences and other altered states or non-states. The idea that awareness is linked to the physical presence of the body is, at this point, a working theory of yours, based on some initial enquiry and the common sense point of view.

Q: Awareness is an absence, a space, a void, a knowing in which everything (including the body/mind) appears.

John: This is direct and immediate knowing. It requires no proof and is known by immediate, non-conceptual recognition. We need to be willing to stay with this and probe into this a bit.

Q: The apparent void behind my eyes seems to be a fair approximation (although I realize awareness is not an object but contains all of them). This void or awareness is what I think the Hindus call 'Brahman'.

John: OK. This is moving out into labeling and conceptual thought. It is not a problem, but the focus can go into discursive thought and memory, etc. The comparing of terms, while it may have some merit, is a deviation from the direct enquiry into the awareness itself.

Q: As I recall in the Upanishads, that is Brahman (universal consciousness); and our consciousness, deriving from it, is Brahman also.

John: This may be (or not!). In direct evidence, there is no 'Brahman' or 'universal consciousness' versus 'our consciousness' and so on. These divisions are more conceptual and makeshift than anything really directly known. Can you see that?

Now you have a sense of the presence of awareness and some experience with how the mind tends to jump back to labeling and dividing using concepts. Stay with the awareness without labeling. See what you can sense or discover about awareness through immediate experience and direct looking. Awareness is here. It is not enhanced by calling it Brahman or whatever.

Get attuned to the difference between direct looking and what you can immediately verify in experience versus when the attention drifts into conceptual ideas. Try to say some things about awareness on direct evidence. If nothing else, this is a really good exercise to learn how much of our thinking is based on concepts and assumptions which are not given in immediate experience. If you need some pointers on how to approach this, I can give you some, but let us see what you come up with.

Q: I guess my response would be that, without conceptualizing, in experience everything appears as one in awareness. Objects appear as such only through the comparison of opposites and the labeling of the mind through programming throughout our lives. If everything appears as one, this would include our body/mind also, and if this is so, we as individuals cannot be separate from this all encompassing awareness. Awareness is a void in which everything seems to appear.

John: Our true nature is awareness itself. From the perspective of objectivity (sensing and thinking), it appears as an absence. But can you say that awareness is not present? Some call this 'cognizing emptiness' or 'space-like awareness'. The mind (which is an appearance in the awareness) has its

opinions, conclusions and perhaps doubts about the nature of this awareness. Yet thinking can never really give an adequate evaluation or judgment about awareness. It is utterly incapable of perceiving awareness; because awareness is not an object. Yet *you* (not the mind) are perfectly capable of knowing and exploring this.

So the best practical, hands-on approach is to directly and immediately explore this principle of awareness without relying on conceptual thought. Once that is done, you will be able to answer for yourself – through first-hand experience – as to what awareness is or isn't. So, continue to look deeply into this.

What is your relationship with this awareness? Is it touched by the appearance and disappearance of thoughts and sensations? What is the nature and quality of awareness itself? This is not a matter for thinking or cogitating about. Try to keep it to first-hand, direct experience.

I Don't See the Benefit of This

Question: Thank you so much for speaking with me. It felt very comfortable and reassuring and always seemed (at least to me) that we were 'on the same page' and 'spoke each other's language'. That is great for me after living my whole life surrounded by people who knew nothing about this and in an area where there are no groups or teachers or satsangs (Wisconsin!).

The awareness of awareness (for lack of a better phrase) has continued to become more and more accessible. My only complaint is that it doesn't seem to help in any way (if that makes sense). I mean, it doesn't bring me more peace or joy or health. I'm more aware, but I don't see the benefit of it. I don't see how I'm any better off than I was before I ever heard of or experienced any of this. I know that it is not something meant to benefit my ego or personal self, and I have stopped looking for fireworks or some amazing experience. But I thought it would have some effect on how I feel internally or on my life!

John: As the recognition aligns with this understanding, you begin to recognize the significance of this presence-awareness. You discover that it truly is what is real and you deeply understand your identity with that. With this knowing, a few things will happen naturally and spontaneously:

- The belief in separation and being a limited entity drops away.
- The doubts, conflicts, anxiety and suffering born of that viewpoint also begin to lose their grip because their roots are undercut.

This is nothing to sneeze at! It is very profound, yet subtle. The implications of this may take some time to become apparent. There is an inherent joy, solidity and clarity that unfolds with the deepening recognition of your true nature. A life free

of conflict, seeking, duality and suffering is the outcome. Life will reorient and unfold in many ways, but primarily, doubt and suffering are replaced with inner certitude and freedom from suffering born of ignorance.

There is no one who needs help, because the one who is looking for help and seeking to measure his progress does not exist and is the very problem itself! The fruits of this understanding are real (otherwise why talk about all this!), but the coarse mind fixated on appearances, events and yardsticks of progress is apt to overlook them.

Awareness, which you are, is not bland. It is vital, intense, alive, full of energy and inherently joyful. You, as a separate entity, do not experience these as some kind of measurable accomplishments. As the recognition of who you are deepens into certain knowing, these are spontaneously present without effort.

The 'Why am I not there?' 'What are the benefits for me?' ideas are subtle concepts built on the notion of separation. See them for what they are and let the emphasis return to what is clear, bright and present.

Always Now

Question: There appears to be some shift taking place. It is hard to characterize. Thoughts seemingly appear and disappear almost before any verbalization of them can occur. Whereas before a passing thought would be seized and then elaborated upon, explored, compared and analyzed there now seems to be an almost immediate falling away of the idea. It is as though the common thread among these passing images has been removed (perhaps the 'I'?). There is a sense of something continuing to churn but it seems more distant and beyond the range of my ability (or desire?) to articulate. The moment the effort begins to try to articulate something there seems nothing to hang it on and the effort is abandoned.

Even this e-mail seems kind of an effort to get through. In re-reading it to this point, it seems to refer to something gone, moments not present, imaginary. It is a strange experience, a sense of discontinuity and yet simultaneously, a new, different sense of continuity. Also, there was the experience last night of presence-awareness during sleep – something that I had heard spoken of but never understood. It was not like lucid-dreaming (which I've experienced before), but a seeing of the inactive mind!

Anyway, I remembered and re-read the article Unfolding, While Solidly Present and Aware and it gave me some help in relating to this new territory. So, I have no real questions or concerns. I just wanted to give you an update.

John: You are on to some really good seeing and understanding. Basically, what is pointed out begins to undercut the beliefs and reference points that the mind has habitually assumed to be the case, for example, the assumed validity of mental judgments and opinions about everything, especially who and what we are. Also, till now the focus has been almost exclusively on the content of awareness, with the belief that it is substantial, real and independently existing. Then the view

shifts and the recognition occurs of the background or space of awareness that you really are. It is clearly recognized (in direct seeing) to be a continuous background of clear, steady presence in which all thoughts and experiences rise and set. Whether thoughts appear or disappear, your essential nature remains present. It is very natural and almost ordinary, and yet fresh and new, because it is not in thought or in time. It is always now.

The Key Lies in What is Simple and Certain

Question: Yesterday I had a very simple series of thoughts: Awareness is all there is; I'm not this body that I think I am; yet I still know that I am. So there was an understanding that, by default, I am awareness. That perspective definitely had a different flavor. There was a directness and a clarity to it that I hadn't felt before. However, I seem to be coming from the angle that I'm awareness experiencing through a body.

John: Just keep coming back to non-conceptual, non-theoretical looking. In direct experience, the body and all else simply appear in awareness. The notions that awareness appears in the body, that it is produced by the body or that it is connected to the body are very conceptual in origin. They are simply not given in experience. They are added in at the level of commentary and language.

However, what you are seeing has an element of truth in it. We are awareness experiencing through a body. Just like in a dream, we are awareness experiencing through a dream body. That is fine; there is no suffering or limitation in that at all. Consciousness assumes or creates many forms, and yet it is not limited by any of them.

Q: Your pointing last Thursday to the fact that this is as simple as knowing that I am, was the first time it really got through that this is (or can be) simple.

John: That is great. I did sense a recognition of this on your part. And you don't need me to confirm it. That is your own seeing.

Q: This is echoed in a recent update on Bob Adamson's web page where he tells someone: 'Stay with the actuality that you cannot

escape from and that will reveal... Little insights will come up... the little revelations will come up and show you the lot'.

It is hard to conceive that the understanding of this is in my direct experience – that there is no mysticism in the revealing of it.

John: Hard to conceive for whom? Awareness is easy, natural, clear and well-known right now. We imagine it is something far away and mysterious. Remember, it is so simple and obvious that we overlook it. It takes a certain amount of maturity to recognize that the key lies in what is simple and certain.

Q: I just keep coming back to the fact of my own presence and look for anything that will expand my understanding.

John: No need to worry about 'expanding your understanding'. All the understanding you can possibly need (not to mention all the peace and clarity) are to be found in relaxing into this presence. There is no need to look for something else. This is one of those old habits or beliefs, that wisdom is something far away, difficult or exotic. This awareness that you are is subtle, but if you stay with it, you will discover a joy that is very profound.

Just remember this is all about self-knowledge. Not getting something far away or something that you don't have. All suffering comes from not knowing our true nature. Suffering and doubt come to an end when you clearly see who you are.

Q: So far it seems pretty flat.

John: Is the actual awareness flat or dull or lifeless? If you rely on old ideas and habits, then that can get flat and dull. But if you stay with the knowledge of the actual awareness, you will find it to be exciting and full of life.

Q: I'm not sure what the insights are or even could be.

John: Don't look for insights. Then you think they are not happening and you feel like you are not there yet. This is just a concept. See how you have moved into time and conceptual

thought. And – low and behold – a mild sense of suffering comes in.

Come back to what is clear and present, and the suffering and anxiety takes flight. You become rooted in the present and there is a sense of confidence and certainty because you are not dealing with 'what ifs' any longer, but solid facts that you see for yourself in immediate experience.

Q: Any additional pointers on this would be gladly accepted.

John: Well, see how those do!

Awareness Does Not Rise and Set

Question: The seeing is still present. The awareness arises quite often, and I'm able to just see what is. Of course this doesn't happen continually, but it seems to be the case much more frequently than, say, a year ago.

John: There is a slight confusion here. Be very clear (and see this for yourself): awareness does not rise and set. It is literally ever-present. This is simply a fact. It is a misconception that it comes and goes. If the experience is that it comes and goes, then look again at what it is that you are taking to be awareness. Once you see very clearly what is being pointed out, you will leave behind the experience of 'getting it and losing it'.

Q: I guess all 'I' can do is to trust and hope that what you say is the case and that the recognition of who I am will deepen, that it will spontaneously arise more and more often and the egoic structures (and the suffering they create) will drop away.

John: This sounds 'very appropriate' spiritually, but it is not really how this is. Awareness is fully present, absolutely clear and available now. There is no need for hope or trust. Nor is there any need for anything to fall away, not even 'egoic structures'. If you look at it this way, you are subtly assuming that bondage is real and that it will take time to get to some state that is not present. Really question this. Suffering goes on because we overlook the fact that we are not separate individuals at all and that we have never been bound. This seeing is the key, not waiting for stuff to fall away. If you take that approach, you will wait forever!

Q: I need to stop thinking that there is going to be some huge 'event' that will end any doubt and cause the awareness to remain every

moment. (I mean, I know it is present every moment, but my awareness of the awareness gets obscured.)

John: This is closer! But still not quite on target. You cannot be aware of awareness. You are awareness. You can never be anything other than awareness. Even when thoughts and concepts and ideas arise – no matter what they are – awareness is fully present, fully clear and fully known. Check this out for yourself. Are you present? Are you aware? Is there any problem with that?

Fear Only Comes in with the Concept of 'I'

Question: How to say what is the problem? As long as there is a resting in the vastness of void this side of the eyes, there is no one home to be troubled.

John: Who is resting? You are that. Do not fall for the subtle implication that this is a state that needs to be maintained, even by a 'non act' of resting. There is no one to rest or not. Just what is.

Q: But when thoughts arise ... ? (I am sure I don't ask for them, or do I?)

John: Thoughts spontaneously arise in the clear, empty awareness that you are. They never touch you in anyway, just like clouds never touch the sun. Who is this 'I' you are talking about? Have you ever been an 'I' apart from the presence-awareness that you are? This is where the confusion comes in. All questions, doubts and suffering begin here with this notion – and nowhere else.

Q: Most of the time it would seem I am out there in the world. Then I get to thinking: What will happen when the body draws it last breath? The brain will cease to function, so there will be no more seeing, either through the eyes or the mind. What then? What will it be like to have no senses working? Having come close to being without the next breath, the mind seems to want to think on such things. I am frightened of being without senses yet fully aware in the vast, dark void.

John: The body is simply an impersonal appearance in presence. Thoughts, emotions and fears are just mental states appearing in the presence. The sensation of fear only comes

in with concept of 'I' and the subsequent identification of that sense of 'I' with the body, mind and so on. Once you clear up the fundamentals, that is, once you see what you really are, these confusing thoughts and doubts just fall away, leaving a clarity and joy. If the body is there, let it be there. If it is time for the body to end, let it end. Neither the presence that you are, nor the body, is particularly concerned about it.

See the real source of fear to be the unexamined concept of separation and then you will not be plagued by these ideas. The thought of a vast, dark void is just an imaginary concept. The idea spooks the mind, but it is like being afraid of a ghost created in imagination. The reality that you are is warm, bright, sunny and full of life. Even now, whether the body is present or not, you are, most tangibly and beyond all doubt.

Back into the Advaita Trenches

Question: I like the direct approach. It resonates with me, but sometimes I feel like I am 'making it up', that I am fooling myself into feeling this blank aware energetic state and calling it an awakened state. Although, at other times, I know that is not the case.

John: Well, if you come back to the absolute fact of awareness, you will undercut all of this. All of these 'what ifs' are conceptual thoughts, musings and imaginings in – what? There is a big difference between thinking about awareness or the mind's evaluation of where we are and the immediate cognition of present awareness. Just see the difference and you step out of this kind of dilemma.

Q: I think that what confuses most people interested in advaita or non-dual teachings, including myself at times, is the idea that awakening or liberation is a 'big deal', an extraordinary event (even if subtle) resulting in losing your sense of 'I'.

John: The quicker you get over this the better! This is a concept that strings us along until we see it is false. There is simply no event called awakening. It is just a simple pointing out that what we are seeking is the actual awareness shining right now. See this much and the game is up – right now.

Q: From the descriptions of people like [specific teacher mentioned], who I am a fan of and whose books and tapes I have, there seemed to be an extraordinary 'non-happening', a 'dropping away of the personal identity' of some kind. Reading about this sets people up to wish for something similar as they struggle along (still very much affected by the ups and downs of their ego). They think, 'Gosh, I wish my ego would drop away like that so that I am not so af-

fectured by it, so that it becomes just background noise, as it has been described by these sages'.

John: Yes, just see how the mind takes these stories and turns them into a conceptual net that ties us up in knots.

Q: People have this idea that if teacher X were giving satsang and were being insulted, he or she would be so unidentified with the ego that it wouldn't bother him or her. But if it were to happen to us, we might in fact lose our temper, punch the perpetrator, get embarrassed, in short, be subject to any number of ego reactions that would not occur and be latched onto by an 'awakened' person. With us, these feelings might be in fact latched onto for a long time after the event actually occurred – in other words, identification with the vagaries of our ego conditioning. This, of course, would discredit us in the eyes of the participants and prove that we are not qualified to give satsang in the first place!

John: I don't know! We have all kinds of imaginings. None of them are particularly useful, because they take the focus off of the one thing that matters – what is clear and present within us. If we get this, we get everything of importance. All else is just speculation and is more confusing than clarifying.

Q: I think this is why people see themselves as different in some profound way from popular and well-known teachers.

John: Yes, this is an unfortunate by-product of not seeing the fundamentals of what is being pointed out. If you keep things very simple and basic, you will easily avoid this kind of thinking, though. All the thinking of what someone else would do emphasizes separation and the feeling of different individuals. If you stick with seeing things for yourself and go by direct experience, your understanding and actions will fall into place naturally. One thing that is clear is that we don't really have any idea about what we will do next, much less what some imagined great being would do!

Q: So many people in advaita circles see themselves as still more run

by their ego than in touch with the pure intelligent essence of their being as they imagine their teachers are.

John: Yes. This focus on teachers and different levels of understanding runs rampant, even in 'non-dual' circles. I eventually realized how much of what passes for so-called non-duality is not truly so. If there is any hint that the state you are seeking is not fully present or that the teacher is more awake than you, it could not possibly be non-duality.

As far as I am concerned, the essential point is the realization of your own being. All else is auxiliary. Even books and the greatest teachers do not hold a candle to that existence and awareness that you are. Without that, there could be no books or teachers. The good ones get themselves out of the way pretty quickly and leave you empty handed.

Q: Even though the seeker might have moments where he has disidentified with his conditioning, he feels like it still has a much stronger pull on his being on a day-to-day basis than someone who is clearly identified with the pure intelligent energy.

John: Yes, there is real confusion that gets perpetuated. Essentially, the basics have not been pointed out nor clearly seen. Simply put, separation and suffering are in full blossom, even when people are convinced that they have 'understood' or 'awakened'. Many do not recognize what is happening. But once you see what is going on, it is very clear – the sense of individuality has not been truly exposed.

Q: Then it gets even more confusing because these teachers say that, 'Everything is it, even your reactions are it. That is the whole meaning of the term non-dual, etc'.

John: Yes. It is often a non-dual veneer over a condition where the belief in a separate self is operating and not yet seen. 'All my suffering is part of the divine or part of what is', they say. Unfortunately, the roots of suffering are not really clearly understood. This is a slight area where even some well-known teachers are not 100% crisp. I don't really go in for the 'even

the suffering is part of the divine' approach. Although some people really resonate with it. However, it seems imprecise to me. And it does not jibe with my experience, nor how this was pointed out to me.

Q: This is where the students walk off scratching their heads!

John: Yes. Puzzlement reigns!

Q: Still, I just don't feel as though I am living it all the time.

John: This perpetuates the idea that you are one thing, it is something else and there are mystical moments when you align with it. This is really just conceptual if you look at it straight on. Can you find a moment – in direct experience – when you are separate from presence-awareness? See this and there will never be a time when you are not living it.

Words Only Point

Question: Is it really helpful to talk about an apparent something called 'mind'? I know that there is no such thing as 'mind', only the idea of thoughts or images. So, is it not misleading to make what is no thing into an apparent something? What is mind anyway? I think if you are going to use words or concepts, then they need to be clear, timeless and accurate; otherwise, they only serve to confuse and maintain the story.

John: All words are just symbols. None of them are 'clear, timeless and accurate', really. They only point. If you see what they are pointing to – the timeless, clear presence of your own being – then you are beyond the need for words.

Who is confused? Who has a story to maintain? Only the apparent 'I'. See if this is what you are and you are finished with the game.

Q: Thanks for that! I realize that I was just shooting off my mouth, so to speak, by even asking such a question. I would say that the words are not pointing to it, but that the words or symbols are it, itself. I suppose that as all there is, is oneness or presence, then the pointing is always happening presently. This suggests that it is pointless (excuse the pun) to point at all. When the pointlessness of the pointing in known (by no one), then it becomes obsolete.

John: You say, 'I suppose that as all there is, is oneness or presence'. Well, see it for yourself right now. You are present and aware. Any doubt about it? Do you have any knowledge of anything existing outside of this doubtless presence? Everything appears only within this presence that you are. Because it only ever appears in this, can it have a separate existence apart from it? The bottom line is that it is all only this. Don't suppose! Know this for certain. Know for certain

that you never existed as a separate individual apart from this presence-awareness, and the root of all questions, doubts and suffering is cut at one stroke. Beyond words and thoughts, you shine as THAT – even now.

We Are Never Apart from That

Question: Intellectually, it is clear that every perception – and that includes the image and feeling of being a separate entity – is arising moment-by-moment in awareness.

John: Well, there is no need to use the label 'intellectually'. Just see directly that everything is arising in awareness. It is simple. You can see it and know it for certain. Then you don't have to worry about intellectual versus non-intellectual. You are free of that dualism.

Q: With increasing frequency, this intellectual understanding seems to deepen, and when it deepens, attention turns toward its background.

John: This is good, but it is a bit clearer to simply see that you are the background. Full stop. Seeing is immediate. It is not really a result of deepening intellectual understanding. Don't rely on the mind. The kind of seeing we are talking about has nothing to do with the intellect or mind. Awareness, the fact of knowing, is completely unrelated to thought.

Q: Of course, the background is not perceived, but in a sense, it is felt; that is, every perception by its very existence calls attention to the background and is seen from the background and within the background.

John: Yes. The presence that you are (which is existent and brightly aware, yet completely devoid of any content) is unshakably and undoubtedly here. All appears within this. Once pointed out, the recognition of your true nature comes to the foreground, so to speak. We just notice what was overlooked.

Q: This feels very ordinary, but it also carries a subtle feeling of well-being and freedom.

John: Definitely. It is the gateway to a profound sense of ease and freedom, which is also very natural. You are very clear on this seeing.

Q: However, when a strong emotion arises, for example, sexual longing, or anger or fear, the sense of being the perceiving is absent. Obviously, awareness is still present, but experientially it is as if the emotion, the object, has taken over the seeing. But this makes no sense logically. How can awareness ever become lost in its own object? And yet this seems to be the case.

John: Well, can you say that your existence-awareness has literally disappeared at those moments? Absolutely not! The presence-awareness is brightly present and clear even during those moments. After all, who or what is knowing those appearances? All that is happening is that the focus is going onto the content of awareness, because of the belief that reality, happiness or identity is contained in those thoughts. The awareness is apparently overlooked; but a little looking reveals it has not changed one bit. Once you start to notice this, the focus on thought spontaneously subsides.

Q: In your experience, does the knowing that awareness is all there is continue even when strong emotions arise?

John: Emphatically yes. Once you see with clarity what this essential nature is, it is not something you lose. It is like the sun. It is not touched, no matter how many clouds cover the sky. It is in another dimension altogether.

Q: Does the knowing that awareness is all there is continue unbroken through every state?

John: There is just a simple but very real knowing that awareness continues as the background of all sensing, perceiving and knowing. That is going on for you right now. It has just

been overlooked.

We have been infatuated with thought because we have imagined ourselves to be a 'person' and posited our identity in the appearance. Once this concept got started, all kinds of identities and beliefs of who we are got tacked onto this. This network of ideas and beliefs is what grabs our attention and seems to draw the focus to the content of awareness. However, once the true position is pointed out, we began to notice the background of presence-awareness more and more. There is just a relaxing or resting in that. The concept of being a localized person or entity drops away. At some point, the simple recognition dawns that we are never apart from that. Then the seeking and worry ends, because you cannot lose that. You are home. In truth, you are home now; you just need to confirm it for yourself.

Life, Death, Ethics and Morality

Question: Thank you for your website. I've read every word on it at least once, and I am spending less time each day in the dream world of thought and progressively more in an effortless direct knowing.

John: Excellent!

Q: When I found your site, I realized that either the websites and texts I've somehow been directed to over the years have been progressively clearer in their communication of direct knowing, or else my 'filter' has become thinner. In either case, it appears as though when I was receptive the corresponding level of instruction appeared.

John: Most of us who have been involved in this kind of thing for a period of time find there is a natural progression from teaching to teaching as the inner discernment grows. Looking back, it appears to be pretty organic and natural, although we may not have been aware of the progression. Not that we are getting anywhere but there is a growing realization that what we are seeking is present and available within us.

Q: Before coming to your website, I had nearly abandoned the hope that any 'answers' would be found in either reading or thought. Although I sensed that some lack of clarity remained, your website seems to have illumined these blind spots for me.

John: That is how I felt when I came across Bob Adamson's teachings. Certain lingering questions started to get resolved because the pointing was so simple and clear. I am glad to return the favor!

Q: A single nagging question remains that I feel the need to bring to you. I have seen that there is seeing but no see-er.

John: Yes, the seeing is real, but the seer as some kind of separate entity is not present in seeing. It is a conceptual postulation. It is the same with the object seen. To speak of an object separate from the seeing is not really possible based on direct evidence.

Q: I also see that there are actions without an actor and hearing without a hearer.

John: A similar analysis applies to these as well.

Q: There was a moment when the fact that there is 'nobody home' became so clear to me at the level of experience that I had an extremely vivid dream that night of walking around in a world of people with no heads. The experience of this pathless path most certainly has a life and will that is completely unrelated to any decision-maker I may imagine to be 'me'.

The question that appears to keep a vacillation going is this: I can see that literally everything arises and disappears within the context of a bright, clear awareness ...

John: This is undoubtable.

Q: ... and the awareness itself is utterly unaffected by its contents. It is just that some of the contents I find troubling!

John: Ah, here is where it gets sticky! Be very clear that the 'I' you are speaking of here is entirely non-existent. Also, see that it is not the senses themselves that are troubled by what they are seeing; nor is it the pure awareness that you are that is troubled. The trouble arises strictly in thought, based on certain held beliefs which were picked up through habit and conditioning.

Q: Well, there is seeing, but this seeing includes the roadside bombing of American soldiers, the gruesome beheading of hostages, etc. Is this truly nothing more than a film playing out on the screen of awareness, a film in which what appears as human beings are in no way different than what appears as rocks and trees?

John: Ultimately, yes.

Q: But life and horribly gruesome death play out within the context of this unborn seemingly eternal awareness!

John: Forms appear and disappear in awareness. Bodies are born; bodies die. They die of natural causes, accidents, disease or harm caused by other people acting under gross delusion, egoism, hatred and so on.

Q: When you cross the line into continual effortless awareness, what is the response of your mind-body machine to something like the death of spouse or child?

John: It is good to be precise here. It is not that 'you' cross over into effortless awareness; rather, it is seen that you have never been apart from that. But getting back to what we were discussing, all I can say is that my own feelings toward the death and illness of the body have changed radically. Somehow I am more at peace with these kinds of issues and they don't really trouble me that much. You can see that all forms perish. You can also see that living beings commit all sorts of heinous acts under the sway of egoism and selfishness. This is very clear. This is not to say that one is not moved by pain or sorrow. All the emotions are still fully functional. Just because you have discovered a source of inner peace does not mean you are non-reactive or lack compassion or sympathy.

Q: Is there any sense of ethics or morality left?

John: Most ethics and morals are local and conditional. They are based on attitudes and beliefs that vary widely from time to time and place to place. These are makeshift and temporary. There is a deeper view of ethics and morality that stems from an understanding that actions born of egoism are false because they are based on a profound ignorance of what is true about ourselves.

John: Sure. All of the normal human responses are there in full play. The body-mind goes through all the normal human feelings and states. It is all part of the manifestation. Desires, preferences, pleasurable and painful experiences are there. From my experience, knowing who you are does not change this. However, the false idea of being a separate 'I' cut off from reality and all the consequent self-centered emotions and states that result from that idea naturally fall out of the picture, because they have no basis any longer.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Thank you for your prompt and thoughtful note. There was a gift for me, a gem hidden inside your words. You wrote:

'Yes, the seeing is real, but the seer as some kind of separate entity is not present in seeing. It is a conceptual postulation. It is the same with the object seen. To speak of an object separate from the seeing is not really possible based on direct evidence'.

Another blind spot illumined! Only reality can be known directly, and what it is known directly by is itself. Awareness is, and it is self-aware. It is the source of everything that arises and disappears within it. It alone is the same 'yesterday, today and forever'.

Thank you so much for your patience and kindness. This evening after reading your correspondence there was a weakening of the identification with this body-mind, a shift of sorts, a stepping back from the activity of this household, even the creation of this email, as if observing it from the outside.

John: Just stay with the basics, and everything naturally unfolds into the ever-present awareness that you can never lose.

Ideas Never Really Touch You at All

Question: I just wanted to give you an update. Things are going reasonably well I think. Seeing clearly seems simply to be a function of how seriously one takes the 'I' to be real. As this conviction loses hold and is found to be insubstantial, the 'I'-related concerns naturally fall into inexistence, or, rather, they are seen never to have existed.

John: Yes, in a certain sense. But look a bit deeper and notice that the seeing, the background of presence and awareness is going on constantly, independent of what we are thinking. Although, it is true that when the self-centered thoughts arise there can be a fascination with them, and we seemingly overlook the clarity of our real nature. But this is really an optical illusion, because our real nature hasn't gone anywhere. When you see this clearly, the game is up. You don't have to fight anything. Just see what is real, what is true, and things clarify naturally.

Q: Sunday it was seen clearly that I am not this discrete entity in its own right, but rather the experience of 'this'. Notions of time, self, enlightenment, attainment, spiritual, right and wrong appeared as being substantial only in terms of the personal self. With the actuality of no-self realized, no legitimacy could be granted to these appearances.

John: Yes. This is about as clear as you can get.

Q: But since Sunday the obviousness of this realization has gradually waned into more of a conviction held by the mind (versus the direct experience).

John: Seemingly. But can you say that your presence, your

being, the fact of being alive and aware has faded in any way? Realize that the mind's memories of words or what happened on Sunday are just concepts and images. That is not where the vividness, the clarity, lies. It is in you right now. It is bright, clear and present. Call it what you will. You called it 'this'. Whatever 'this' is, is here. Whenever you come back to the central point, the clarity is right there, because it has never gone anywhere.

Q: I'm not entirely concerned or panicked. There seems a level of background still recognized despite the seeming re-emergence of identification.

John: Yes, you are getting the hang of this now!

Q: From the level of appearances, there seems clearly to be an oscillation of this seeing/non-seeing here. However, even as I use these terms there is a level of doubt associated with them. What they refer to seems blurry and less tangible. But again, it is strange how the apparent 'peaks' of this seeing (and associated increasing level of conviction that there is no 'I') still alternates in some way with periods of a seeming clouding over (of that which was previously seen as not being able to be clouded over!).

John: Well, just continue the investigation to see if the space of knowing or the background of awareness is wavering. Presence-awareness is literally the constant background in which all appearances and possibilities arise. It has just been overlooked.

Q: There seems to be a negotiation going on between the conviction of what was known to be true and the competing illusion of someone observing and being able to do something.

John: Yes, there is some old idea hanging in about an entity that can or cannot 'get' this. Well, have a look and see if this is true. Is there any such entity there at all? Is there any doubt about awareness? And can you find yourself as something apart from that, even now? The ideas and concepts seem to

hang us up, but when we stop and look at our direct experience, we find the concepts are simply not true and have no basis in fact.

Q: Anyway, there is still some confusion apparently, but nothing like the despair of past weeks! I think something was realized this weekend to a degree not realized before.

John: Things register and they stay with you. Your words show me that a lot of the ideas that were nagging you have been undercut and you are not taking them to be substantial. That is good. That is really what it is about at this stage. You have been exposed to the fundamental pointers of what the reality is and your identity with that. There is literally nothing to get or attain. Still, the old ideas of separation may come up due to habits of thinking. When you look deeply into this you find that these ideas never really touch you at all. The presence-awareness that you are simply does not come and go and you never lose it. If it is not certain then check it out as often as needed until you are fully convinced!

Try to Find the Separate 'I'

The sense of separation or being a separate 'I' survives because it has not been investigated. It is really an imagined separation that appears to go on because we have not seen that it is false. There is nothing 'you' can do to eradicate this belief, because the 'you' that is trying to eradicate the belief is based on the very sense of separation itself. However, once it is clearly seen what is going on, the seeing is enough and the belief falls away naturally.

A life centered around a belief in a separate self does not feel 'right' because the belief is out of alignment with the facts. The belief can drop away directly with some investigation. It is not an arduous process. It more depends on the clarity of seeing. One time-honored approach is to try to find the separate 'I'. Have a good look for it and see if you can find it. On the other hand, the presence-awareness that you are is clearly evident, solid and beyond doubt.

All there is, is awareness, along with some thoughts, sensations and feelings appearing and disappearing in the awareness – nothing else! There is no separate person at all. Thus the root of all suffering is not really present, except as a mistaken assumption. Time is not a factor in clearing this up, just seeing the facts as they are.

Because thoughts, sensations and feeling arise and set in awareness and have no existence apart from awareness, they are ultimately only that. This is where non-duality comes in. It is not an attainment; just a statement of 'what is', even now.

Just see that you are that background of ever-present awareness. The idea of being a separate 'I' is not true, because no such entity can be found anywhere in direct experience. See this and you return home to that place that you have never left.

We Already Know This

Question: It seems apparent that I have a good grasp on what I am. Although it only seems to be at an intellectual level, I also realize that things wouldn't be resonating so strongly for me if that innate knowing wasn't involved. And I must be that knowing, if it is omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience.

John: Yes, it is funny that at some level we already know this. If the answer were not present within us, how could we have any inkling or affinity for this? It is as if the deeper knowing within us propels us to hear the message of what we are. It does not stop until we come across a pointing that is so simple, direct and unambiguous that our minds and hearts can no longer doubt. You are doing very well with all this. You can be sure that this realization is available and present. You have been touching it all along, because your real being, which is present and brightly aware, has been in full swing and right with you.

Q: However, I get a sense that there is more to this than I am currently realizing, more to it in the sense of seeing things as they really are.

John: As you sit with the realization that what you are seeking is the present and already attained awareness, various nuances and subtleties open up. But there is no real development in your real being. It is fully there. Time, development and progress only come in at the thought level. Nisargadatta Maharaj said that reality is like a solid, homogeneous block of pure cognition. That is you.

When you say, 'I get a sense that there is more to this than I am currently realizing', it is interesting to explore what that sense of 'I' is. I realize it is just a way of speaking (on one level), but it also subtly re-enforces the notion of some kind

of person who can or cannot realize something. Just look at that straight on. Awareness is. It is doubtlessly present, and you are that. It is the basis and source of all manifestation and appearance. It is also the source of joy, happiness and love. So is there anything that it needs to realize?

From this perspective, what we are really doing is resolving any remaining doubts or questions. We are challenging any residual belief that you are a separate individual apart from that. It is not that any new realization is brought in, but rather we are stripping away any last shreds of doubt and illusion.

Seeing this clearly means that there is a distinct feeling that all seeking is over. The potential for doubts and questions that trouble us are resolved because the very root of separation is exposed. Remember that all self-centered suffering, including doubts and questions about our real nature are effects of that fundamental belief of being something apart from the reality. Those ideas and beliefs come up for a while due to habits and years of thinking them to be real. However, once the basic understanding of what your real nature is has been pointed out and you begin to resonate with that, all of the questions start to get uprooted from the ground up. And this is surely going on in your case.

It is good that you are questioning and seeking answers. The seeking goes on until every possible shred of doubt and suffering is removed. Just be very clear that this in no way changes the fact that you are, even now, only that one reality that is beyond all question and doubt. I will keep hammering on this.

It is also important to see that questions and doubts appear in the mind. As long as there is any slight notion that our true nature might be something separate from reality or there is any remnant of belief in being a particular individual, the doubts will plague us. So we are not really focused on answering each question (although that can happen), we are really focusing on the root of the problem, the idea of separation. Because once that is firmly resolved, all possible questions, problems, doubts and personal suffering are taken care of.

So, don't get too wrapped up in the particular doubts and questions. Continue to come back to the basic issue. Awareness is the reality. Everything is just a manifestation within that. There is nothing beyond that. And can you find, in direct experience, that you are really ever separate from that?

Q: I had the distinct impression last Thursday when you were explaining something to a visitor that you stopped short of saying something. I'm wondering if you keep the discussion at a certain level, without going into specifics, so that we have the opportunity to watch things unfold for ourselves – sort of like not giving away the surprise. Is there any truth to this?

John: Not really. I am just trying to do my best to point to what is real, clear and present. There is nothing mystical about it. Sometimes the expression comes out clearer than other times.

Q: I had a realization tonight that things are just happening, and even my involvement isn't controlled by a 'me'. There is really nothing I can 'do' – it is just happening. At one point I remembered something I read that said that there is really nothing happening, and I sort of felt that, briefly. It is just about experiencing, not doing.

I want to thank you for your patience and your generous sharing. If it were not for your meetings, I might never have understood the teaching. There is also the realization that it is as it is.

John: Everything is unfolding well. Your seeing and understanding is good. Everything is as it needs to be. Your interest and earnestness is a sign that the understanding is becoming clear. It is a natural and organic process. Have faith and trust in life and your own deeper self. Follow the pointers that resonate most strongly with your deepest intuition. Everything comes out right when you approach it that way. You cannot go wrong, because what you are seeking is always right here in you and as you.

Just a Clarity about Who I Am

Question: This evening, things have come together. It is like those gestalt pictures in which the viewer first sees a vase and then must 'pop' into another perspective in order to see the duck. But in doing so the viewer loses the vase. In the gestalt pictures, it is possible to view one or the other, but not both.

I don't move. Nothing I am moves. What moves is not me but comes out of me. Because it is motionless it is hard to see, but once seen, it is there. This is all new. There is nothing else to say right now. I must wait to find out if it takes. I will keep you informed. Thank you immensely for your help.

John: Thank you for your notes. Keep me posted on any developments.

Presence, being, awareness, your true nature and so on, all refer to the same thing, which is no thing. Seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling and all else arise within or appear on this cognizing emptiness that you are. Under no circumstances can you doubt your own being. The mind cannot understand this, know this or sense this in any way, because the mind appears in this. Yet, it is intimately and clearly known at all times. It is going on all the time, but we miss it or overlook it because it is so clear and obvious.

There has never been any ego or person or separate entity. If you think there is, then look for it and try to find it. Other than passing thoughts, feelings and sensations, is there any substantial entity that you can call yourself? See this and your seeking is done.

Everything arises and appears within this presence that is your true being. As such, it is all made of the same substance, your true nature. It is all that, and you are that. So what do you need to attain or understand? Once this is pointed out, it simply sinks in and resonates. The result is that all questions,

doubts and suffering are resolved for good.

Question: Thanks very much for staying in touch. In your words below, this statement seems to have done it:

'... and all else arise within or appear on this cognizing emptiness that you are. Under no circumstances can you doubt your own being. The mind cannot understand this, know this or sense this in any way, because the mind appears in this. Yet, it is intimately and clearly known at all times. It is going on all the time, but we miss it or overlook it because it is so clear and obvious'.

Yes, it is obvious, certainly right now. I will get back to you, but don't want to use too many words at the present time. There are no bells, no whistles, no heavens opening – just a clarity about who I am.

John: Bingo!

Question: Please accept my deepest gratitude.

John:

Questions and answers arise.

No one asking and no one answering.

Simple clarity with no separation.

See this, know this, be this.

Gratitude beyond words.

Have You Ever Left Presence-Awareness?

Question: With respect to the natural state, I find it blossoming on more and more occasions. Yes, I know, the blossoming and the not-blossoming are in the awareness I am. When it seems to disappear, it is almost like amnesia sets in.

John: Just see that all that happens is that attention wanders onto thoughts. The thoughts present a story or image of us as being limited or having some anxiety or problem. After a while, you start to notice that even the thoughts of getting it and losing it are appearing in the awareness, as you are starting to see. It will grow on you as you consider this in different ways.

Q: Some situation comes up and bingo! I'm back in old duality again, without even realizing it.

John: It is important to see that it is only the conceptual thought mechanism arising and the focus going on that. Once you see very clearly the mechanism of what is going on, you are free, and it doesn't really grip you in the same way.

You say you are back in the old duality again, but have you really left presence-awareness? Who has left what? You need to see these subtle concepts and how they are not really true.

Q: Sometimes a considerable amount of time will go by before it dawns that I am no longer in the natural state.

John: Apparent time! For time is just a concept arising in the ever-present awareness itself. There is a belief here that you ought to investigate. If it appears that you are going in and out of your natural state, then what you are viewing as the

natural state is not the actual natural state. What is the natural state? What are its characteristics? And are you a being that can move in and out of it? Really have a good look into this.

Q: Well, once it dawns, then usually it doesn't take long for that bright radiant clarity to be shining again. Can you offer any advice?

John: Get clear on the basics of what is being pointed out here. Can you really ever say that awareness is not present and brightly aware? Just see that it never wavers and you are that, even now – fully completely that and only that.

All that ever happens is that a thought or perception appears in awareness. Nothing else ever really happens. It is all just a spontaneously appearing movement in awareness, in you. And yet awareness is never touched, clouded over, lost or separated. Once you see this for yourself, the game is up and the seeker can throw in the towel. But there isn't any seeker left to throw in the towel!

You Don't Need to See It, Because You are It

Question: In lieu of a personal one-on-one consultation, I am writing to you. As I type this, I am aware of the clearness and brightness. I am aware of an aliveness, a force greater than this life, and don't know where it will all take this phenomenon called me. However, I am not always aware of the clearness, only when I pause from thinking about what I want to say next.

John: The basic gist of this is good, but you can look at this more finely. 'You' are not aware of the clearness. You are the clearness. If you look at it in terms of an 'I' who is sometimes clear or not, then you seem to go in and out of it. You say that you are not always aware of clearness, etc. This is really not true. Whether you are thinking or not, existence and awareness are present. This is an undeniable fact that you come to notice through a little bit of investigation.

Who is this 'I' that gets it or not? You say '... when 'I' pause from thinking about what 'I' want to say ...' who or what are you talking about? You can see that the sense of being some kind of 'I' is hovering in the background. And this leads to the sense that the awareness is something apart and liable to be seen or not seen. When you look at this head on, you see that there is no 'I' at all and you are simply that presence of awareness, now and always. You never leave it. You don't need to see it, because you are it. Then – full stop.

You say '[I] don't know where it will all take this phenomenon called me'. That is just the point. There is no phenomenon called 'me'. Phenomena are just phenomena. Calling a phenomenon 'me' is the basic issue.

You have circled back to the core issues now. Continue to give it a bit of investigation, until you are certain that you are not separate from the principle of awareness. It is not seen, known or experienced as an event or state because you are it.

The habit of referring to ourselves as some kind of separate 'I' is the root of confusion. This is not something that 'you' get, because there is no 'you' there to get anything.

You may see all this already at some level, but it doesn't hurt to take a good look at the basics until you are absolutely clear on all this. When this sinks in, you will see that the 'you' I am talking to has never existed. Then the need for books and teachings and dialogues is done, because it is direct experience.

What Prevents This from Being Lived Now?

Questioner: Reading your last articles, the resonance was tremendous. They are the clearest pointers I have read. Thank god this site was found! Your sentence 'A life centered around a belief in a separate self does not feel 'right' because the belief is out of alignment with the facts' makes sense for the conflicts in 'my' life. Also, in one of the articles the following sentence of your questioner brought tears to my eyes: 'I don't move. Nothing I am moves. What moves is not me but comes out of me ...' Yes! I know this stillness. I have experienced it. But then what prevents this from being lived now? I know it is a paradox, but anyway the question comes to mind.

John: Nothing prevents this. It is going on now. You are that. The awareness functioning right now is all I am talking about. That is what you are. There is no separate person that needs to get anything. Just look deeply into the fact that this is what you are. Liberation (if there is any!) consists in discovering the fact that you have never been bound. It is here and now and ever.

Knowing Your Real Being is Simple

Question: Somehow things are not working out as yet. However, I have been in close touch with your second series of articles and they too are very helpful. Like so many others, I feel there is more understanding than before about awareness.

John: Your interest in all this is a sign that the understanding is there for you. Even if it appears as a glimmer, it is a significant thing to be interested in all this. Don't underestimate it!

Q: The question comes up often (in the mind of course!) ...

John: Before we get to the question, I want to say that this is a good insight. It is tremendous that you are able to see that the question is just appearing in the mind. Not everybody sees this easily, so count your self lucky!

Q: So the question is: Where is this brightness, this radiantly clear state that you are talking about?

John: It is simple. There is something in you that is knowing the thoughts, the feelings, the perceptions and experiences. That awareness is illuminating or knowing all those things. It is just that simple sense of knowingness that is with you right now. It is no big thing, but something very simple. It is so simple that we overlook it, thinking it must be something else.

Q: Well, I feel awareness. I keep coming back to it, but there is no radiant clarity? Do you have any suggestions?

John: If you feel or sense awareness that is enough. Come back to the fact of your own awareness, your own sense of

presence or beingness. Begin to explore it and sense it. You cannot miss because it is right with you all the time. Don't imagine it to be some great spiritual explosion that is far from you. Then you are off looking for something. It is just your own being. That cannot be too hard, can it? Don't worry about how others talk about it. Those words are just pointers. Find your own direct experience of your true nature. It is not about words, but direct knowing.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Thank you for your most illuminating letter. A great help indeed. That was what was happening. I first thought there had to be a distinct experience of a 'no me' state. There was and still is envy that that has not happened. This comes up when I read about the experiences of others. But what you say makes the most sense of all, that is, for me to find my own direct way into awareness. Any more pointers will be gratefully accepted. Thank you so very much.

John: Well, we have all been looking for something, some great state. We read about others and think, 'When will I attain that?' But we are not really sure what they are experiencing! We imagine it to be something amazing, something totally beyond us. We think we are not there and then become envious or frustrated. This is because we have not really appreciated fully what it is that this is all about. So the key is getting a sense of what this is.

It is all about the fact that this presence of awareness is the background of all experience. It is the underlying reality that makes all thoughts, feelings and perceptions possible. It is like a clear, formless light of knowing that is constantly going on. Everything is taking place in that – even right now for you and everyone else. It is not an attainment or goal or some new state! It is something so near and dear that we have overlooked it because we were looking for something different. Realize that no experience, state, thought, or event has anything to do with this. In fact, none of those can possibly be the ever-present background, simply because all those things are constantly changing. They are arising and setting in the

awareness, and yet we are constantly overlooking the vital element, the awareness itself.

The key is to notice what all experiences are arising within. You don't have to worry about 'getting that' because it is right within you. You don't have to worry about other people having something that you don't have. You can relax and forget all that.

Begin to notice that in you which is present and aware. It seems subtle at first, but then you recognize a certain glow and light about it. When you begin to recognize this more and more, the self-centered thinking and anxiety starts to fall away naturally. You don't make it go away. It just happens naturally when you clear up the basic point of your real nature as the background of ever-present awareness.

All the confusion and doubts came in because we didn't recognize our real being. So we imagined ourselves as something else and suffered. It is as simple as that. Knowing your real being is simple because it is obvious and clearly known at all times. We just didn't know where to look or what to look for. Once this is cleared up, it is all very easy!

Have full faith that this is available. Begin to explore it for yourself in your own way. You don't need anyone to do this for you. Nor do you need to worry about other peoples' descriptions of what it is like and whether or not you understand their words. Remember that all words, books and teachings are appearing right in your present awareness. That is the most important factor. If you get to know this, you will know the most important thing.

See Passing Moods for What They Are

Question: I am thankful for your generosity and that I have somebody to talk to about this. It was all so clear after your email last week, and is still here, but the clarity has diminished. This morning I awoke depressed, thinking that it was hopeless, despite being able to tap into the 'force'. The hopelessness went something like this: So Source is all – so what? There is still depression, wars, mayhem, cruelty, global warming and unimaginable suffering in the world.

John: Take these experiences and use them as fuel for the fire. You say you are depressed. Who is actually depressed? This is not semantic hair-splitting. Depression and hopelessness are emotional states or moods generated by held beliefs in the mind. Ultimately, you will see that these types of states are self-centered thinking, that is, they revolve around the idea that we are something separate, isolated, apart. With this view in play, the mind does its job to generate thoughts and feelings accordingly. It is very mechanical and there is a great freedom when you begin to see how it works. Once you see the mechanism of suffering, you are free of it.

Is it true that you are a separate self? Or are you the timeless, free, untouched, ever-shining awareness from which the entire universe emerges? Your true nature is being the heart of being, life and joy. So what is there to be depressed about, if you are the very heart of the universe from which everything arises? The mind, based on incomplete knowledge, is generating thoughts of separation and limitation. You have to see if these are true. We have taken them to be true without investigating them fully. That is all that is happening.

Once you see that the idea of separation (the cause) is false, then can the resulting self-centered states of mind (the effects) remain? Can there be an effect without a cause? A little clear looking will cut through these ideas like a hot knife through

butter. Don't passively succumb to these momentary moods. That is all they are. You are that awareness in which all ideas and moods appear. Look deeply into this that you are and you will discover that you are always free.

See passing moods and thoughts for what they are. Know for certain that without the presence of awareness illuminating them, they could never even appear. And you are that awareness. It is entirely free of the content of the mind at all times, just like the sun shining above the clouds. The sun is not affected by passing clouds, nor are you by the passing thoughts and appearances. Once you see this (and you can see this right now for yourself), you will discover a constant and unwavering sense of clarity and joy in the midst of your experience. And this does not leave you, because this presence (who you are) is always shining right at your core.

This freedom is very near. It just requires a bit of looking and investigating.

All of the Mind's Ideas about You are False

Question: I just wanted to give you an update. I'm still experiencing the clear seeing. Even though it was very subtle and ordinary at first, I kept coming back to it. The 'by-products' weren't there at first (that is, arising joy, etc.) but now come in often. There is more clarity in my interactions with others. I definitely see what I am, but I have a bit of a harder time with the underpinnings of 'me'. I can see that the body is an object in my awareness, and that the sensations that belong to the body are just objects in my awareness. I have a more difficult time with my identification with thought patterns, stories and beliefs. Could you speak to that?

John: Well, you weren't born with all the thought patterns and identities, so they are not intrinsic to you. They only came in later after the concept of being separate started. That concept was never true. But, through innocent ignorance, thought began to construct an identity around this imagined being we took ourselves to be.

All of the stories and identities are created and maintained in thought and memory. Without thought, those things have no real existence or substantial nature. Yet your being remains in both thinking and non-thinking. In other words, thoughts come and go, but there is a deeper presence and knowingness in you that is not connected with thought. Presence, clarity or awareness is your real nature. What you are is not something the mind can see or know. Therefore, all of its ideas about you are false, because the mind is speaking about something (you) that is completely beyond its range of knowing. All of the thoughts and stories are based on the idea that you are a limited, separate person existing in the appearance. This root assumption is not true; so all the identities are based on a false assumption and therefore cannot be true either. Identities are in thought, but you are not a thought. It is all

just mind stuff, imagination, memories. They are all shining in the light of your knowing, your presence. They cannot exist apart from that. So you are more real and substantial than passing thoughts.

Continue to put the emphasis on the direct recognition of your real nature and the focus will naturally be removed from the stories in thought. Then the stories may or may not go on (and do you choose them, anyway?). But it does not matter, because you are always abiding as the constant background of presence that is never affected by circumstances or thoughts passing in awareness.

You are fully and completely that right now. You are always free and never in the least touched by thoughts. Remember: you do not 'become' free; you simply discover your ever-present freedom. Look deeply into that which is present, clear and solid within you. Investigate for yourself and see if a passing thought ever really disturbs or obscures your presence.

Your experience with all this is very good.

(Follow up ...)

Q: Thank you. I can no longer say I don't have it. I can always stop and see it, even if the momentum is still playing itself out.

Smiling Inside

Question: That phone consultation was the best! The pointers you showed took me to a place I can only describe as no place at all. Nothing happened ... to no one. I am at a loss for words. I can only be grateful, and celebrate the nothing-that-I-am with the nothing-that-you-are. Knowing this is love.

I am smiling inside. The pointers were so sharp that the balloon of 'me' burst at last, seemingly from the inside out and the outside in, all at once. And I am that peace at last! The balloon deflated and what is left is a collapsed, impotent little thing that is seen as the impostor that it always was. (By the way, my friends would probably call that balloon one of the 'hot air' variety!)

Your metaphor of the always radiant sun had been heard many times, but it finally penetrated to the core. And as I note the 'me-ing' that sometimes still arises in this space, there is the awareness of that space-that-I-am and the fictional nature of this residue of 'me-ness'. I especially found helpful your mention that the thoughts that arise (like, 'Come on, this cannot be it', or 'This is too simple') are simply thoughts. They are really 'no big deal' at all. Lovely!

Thank you is way, way insufficient. But I know that you need no acknowledgement, since there ain't no you either! With absolute love ...

John: Your own earnestness, sincerity and desire to understand are the keys that opened the door to the beautiful insights you have shared. I am glad to have provided a few pointers as an excuse for you to activate your own seeing and knowing! The kind of understanding you are sharing does not leave you because it is a recognition of something inherent in you. You cannot lose your own being.

You Cannot Go Back to the Old View

Question: There seems to be an experience of increased equilibrium lately. I think I mentioned something before about clarity seeming to be a function of how strongly one experiences the 'I' to actually be an entity in its own right. Well, that conviction seems not to be very strong lately. Nowhere can I locate an 'owner' of this experience that can be found independent of the experience itself. Repeatedly it happens that I 'come to' and realize that there was a sort of inattentive swimming in experience (that is, some degree of identification). It seems that before I go too far into some state of confusion, questioning, or analysis, there is an automatic reflex to consider the experience in light of the principle of awareness. This awareness now seems more of the home base from which I occasionally swim into temporary identification. Realizing or remembering that I am not the owner/director of this experience seems to be the most helpful thing for me.

Thoughts continue to churn but they seem less about a 'me' than about the nature of this clarity. For example, I'm not as fretting or concerned about 'me' or where I am in relationship to 'awakening' or whatever, but I notice the mind regularly occupied in a dialogue or 'question and answer' about this subject. Often I am able to see it as just a passing show without relevance to a 'me'. At other times, there seems a greater frustration that the mind cannot articulate responses to spontaneously arising questions related to this subject - 'Oh, I don't know how to answer that question', 'I must not be there yet', and so on. Anyway, things seem to be going better. Thanks always for the pointers!

John: Without going into all the details, suffice it to say that the understanding you are sharing is clear and solid. Once the recognition of who you are starts to sink in, you start operating more and more from that recognition. The old habits come up for while, but then, as you are expressing, there is a

spontaneous arising of wisdom or clarity that starts to come up effortlessly. This is a good sign that this is really striking home for you.

Once you start to get a taste of this, you cannot go back to the old view with any real conviction. So just come back to the basics of what has been pointed out and what you have seen for yourself. The recognition of your true nature is something like a growing conviction in the truth of what you have already seen. At some point, naturally, the knowing of what is ever-present is utterly clear and solid.

Stay in touch if you like, if any questions come up, but also know that you can rely on your own inner seeing and wisdom, because you have understood the essentials of what needs to be understood. Don't worry too much about being able to answer questions at a mental level. Ultimately, that is not that important because the direct experience is not really an aspect of the mind. If you take the enquiry back to the basics of the non-existence of a separate 'I' all questions get uprooted.

The Mind Cannot Know Our Real Being

Question: I know I'm ready to really see what you're pointing to. Your articles are coming through loud and clear. I just cannot see exactly what you're pointing to.

John: Just remember that what is being pointed to is the fact that there is something present and knowing in you right now. It is always present and clearly known. This understanding is always available and it has been sinking in for you all along.

When we turn to the mind, the mind says, 'Where is it? Where is it?' That is because the mind cannot know our real being. The mind knows thoughts, but our present being is not a thought. It is that simple. That is the reason why you can never see this through the mind. So you just give up using the mind; it is the wrong instrument.

Don't make this too complicated. The subtle idea that the understanding is not present, that others have it and you don't, that it is difficult, etc., are just mistaken ideas. Unless these are challenged and investigated, the ideas keep you spinning. So don't worry about trying to get something. Put your energy into challenging the ideas, questioning them.

What is being pointed out is the fact of your own being, which is here and now and beyond question or doubt. So, can ideas like 'I don't have it', 'others have it', 'it is difficult' or 'I am not there yet' and so on, be true?

Reading too many books and visiting a lot of teachers will be self-defeating past a point, because it takes the focus off the essential understanding, which is within you.

Q: Thank you for the guidance. I think I realized something today about how simple and direct this is. If I'm not the body, then I must be what is seeing and hearing and being, because all of those things are happening in my direct experience. And if they're not happening

to a person, they must just be happening. I have to admit, though, that I still seem to associate myself with the body.

John: Just see that the body is one of the countless objects appearing in awareness. You cannot select one object out of the totality and say 'I am this'. They are all at the same level. Either you are none of them; or you are all of them. In truth, both the presence and absence of the whole manifestation rises and sets in your own knowingness. This is the source of the appearance of the body and of the world. That source is what you are. It is that simple sense of being and awareness which never leaves you at any time. Could there be a body or a world if you were not present and aware?

What Keeps Us Focused on Thoughts

Question: Since I composed these questions yesterday, I've been able to briefly see them as just thoughts, but they are definitely strong enough to re-appear as reality to a separate me.

John: The key to all this is deeper than seeing that 'everything is just thoughts'. You need to precede that with an understanding of something solid and positive within you. Telling a man with no sense of something greater available that 'everything is just thought' is pretty much useless. Even if he tries to detach from thought there is nothing really to take its place. So he is bound to continue to cling onto some other manifestation of the mind in the attempt to find some kind of peace or stability.

It is good to have a sense of something clear, steady and positive in the picture. Without this to anchor you and give you something as an alternative to the mind's concepts, there is not much chance of really letting go of the mind. We cling to the mind and thoughts out of a simple desire to find happiness, obtain security, know what is real, and so on. Attachment to the mind arises because we are not clear on the source of joy and happiness.

Not knowing our true nature, which is peace itself, we have turned to the mind for the answers. The mind has provided all kinds of ideas and concepts about who we are and what is the way to peace. It is through ignorance that the innate desire for happiness keeps us focused on thoughts. In discovering our true nature, there is a profound shift of experience because we tap directly into the source of peace, clarity and certitude. Then the focus on the mind naturally falls off because we see that it is not delivering the freedom, which is now our direct experience. Without this understanding, trying to get free of the mind is pretty much an exercise in futility.

So, I would ask: How are you doing with understanding your true nature? I am referring to that sense of your presence, which is steady and clear within you. It is also the awareness which is permeating all thoughts, feelings and sensations. It is inherently peaceful and free. As the recognition of this dawns, your experience shifts from spinning in the clouds of thought to a natural abidance in something light and clear in the middle of all your experiences and activities.

Attachments are Symptoms Only

Question: I have little trouble seeing that I've never existed, but my concern for my children keeps my mind locked in the game. Concern acts a bit like gravity, keeping images and emotions orbiting an entity I still see as 'Dad'. My mind is telling me, and quite convincingly I might add, that whatever I may think about me/not me, my children sure as hell exist. It is telling me, in effect, 'How can you be so selfish as to work on your own liberation, while they're being left behind?'

John: Being a parent and having kids is not a problem. Be a good Dad. Love your kids. Give them the best you can. There is nothing in any of that that brings in suffering. Remember, external events, people and situations never cause suffering. Suffering is an interior mental state being generated in thought due to self-centered thinking. This thinking revolves around a view of ourselves as being limited, isolated separate beings. This is false. It is totally out of step with your real state. The concepts based on this view generate a lot of mental turbulence that feels like suffering.

The kids are not a problem. The idea of 'my' kids is more problematic, because it relates the kids to our sense of self. Of course, there is nothing wrong with using the term 'my kids'. But at an inner level, if the kids are being seen in relation to some sense of identity of ourselves, that is not necessary. Basically, the kids are the kids and they are fine as is. We make them a problem by relating them somehow to our false sense of self.

If you don't free yourself by realizing your true nature, what are you going to pass along to your kids? Your suffering and misery? Your own freedom and happiness is the best thing you can share with your kids and anyone else. Being spiritually oriented is not a conflict with your work, family and responsibilities. Understanding this is not going to

detract from your responsibilities. No one is asking you to run away to a monastery or sit in meditation for eighteen hours a day. All of that is irrelevant to this understanding.

Q: Months ago, I addressed this same type of question to a spiritual teacher. She told me that what I'm experiencing is just thought. Obviously, this type of father and family-based thought has a deep taproot, because I continue to struggle with it. It is bundled together with thoughts of responsibility, dependability, stability and, ironically, selflessness.

John: Yes, we picked up all these ideas during the course of life, after we began to view ourselves as a separate person. There is nothing wrong with these traits, only that we use them as ways to measure and give value to ourselves (as the imagined separate person). You don't really need these as 'goals' to live up to. The inherent intelligence within you has the capacity for great wisdom, compassion, love and functioning. Those are all there for you without effort as the fundamental issue of your real being is cleared up. The separate 'ego' feels lacking and inferior and needs all kinds of definitions and attributes to paper over the sense of hollowness at its core. Your real being needs none of these.

Who Watches the Coming and Going of Thoughts?

Question: I find it conceptually clear as a bell that I am whatever it is that is aware of all of the content of my senses and mental images. I see that anything I am aware of is by definition not me. I take it that what you recommend is to continuously bring your mental focus back to that basic fact.

John: No, this is a common misconception. It is more a pointing to the fact of your true nature as presence-awareness. The word used is irrelevant; it is that undeniable sense being or knowingness at your core. When this is pointed out, there is a registering of it. You can say that you come back to this seeing or recognition until it is simply seen to be the case. But you don't need to practice to be the awareness. And your awareness is going on regardless of the focusing of the mind. It is more of a dawning recognition of something ever-present. Practicing brings in all kinds of inappropriate connotations that subtly emphasize that there is something to obtain that is not present. If you want to practice, then come back to the understanding that what is present is going on whether you are practicing or not. It is just the recognition of the simple fact of being. This is not a mental appreciation (which is fine), but a non-conceptual, immediate recognition. It is unmistakable when this registers.

Q: Obviously I can do this anytime, anywhere, by realizing that I exist, but that anything I am aware of is not what I truly am.

John: This is not totally clear or maybe it is a semantic issue. You do not 'do' this. You are this. 'Anytime' and 'anywhere' are ideas appearing in the ever-present awareness. See this and then you are out of time and place. You simply are what you are.

Q: So far, so good. But here are my questions ...

John: Wait! There is no question about the fact of your own being. It is utterly beyond doubt at all times. Your own being is the one thing you can never doubt. All questions ultimately pertain to secondary issues. There is nothing wrong with them. But they really spring up in the mind, based on the root notion of separation. When that is taken care of, the questions are resolved, not at an intellectual level, but by taking care of the root issue driving all questions. All questions ultimately revolve around things like what is real, who am I, where is lasting happiness, and so on. These get resolved through a clear recognition of your true nature, so the questions don't really apply anymore.

Q: When you use words like 'bright', 'luminous', or 'absolutely radiant' to describe this basic awareness, it seems that you are back in the conceptual world with images created from our experience of light (as contrasted with darkness) along with the linguistic terms that we associate with these images. So I understand what you mean by the fact that my real nature is 'awareness', but when you use these words to describe it, it just conjures up mental images for me that are contained in that awareness.

John: Yes, but when you use the word 'awareness' you are falling into the same trap! Words are just words. All words conjure up mental images. The quicker you realize that all words are only pointers, the better. So give up the words and see where they are pointing. There are no better or worse words. You can try to be more and more precise at a linguistic level, but it can be an exercise in futility because a perfect map is not the territory.

Q: I observe that there are definitely cases when my awareness seems to go away....

John: You will need to really explore this. It is a profound enquiry. You say 'seems'. That is good. It means that the jury is still out. Mental functioning, feelings and perceptions

certainly come and go and even disappear in sleep. This is beyond doubt. But do you cease to exist in sleep because you have no objective experiences? And when the objects of awareness subside does awareness subside? Who knows that objects have subsided? Who watches the coming and going of thoughts, not just in sleep but in the waking state? These are just a few of the ways to begin to look into this.

Q: But I don't seem to be aware when I am asleep and not dreaming.

John: I touched on this above. It is far from certain that being and awareness are not present. It is better to say the thoughts and perceptions have ceased. But something remains. Just like right now. As thoughts and perceptions are appearing and disappearing, there is something present registering that. There is also something present in you registering the fact of dreamless sleep. After all, the moment a thought arises in sleep, there is an immediate knowing and registering of that. Who or what is registering it?

Q: Another case would be if I drank alcohol until such time that I passed out. A third case would be if I were struck on the head with enough force to render me unconscious. I realize that none of those cases can apply when I am asking the question. I also realize when I am in one of those states, I don't have any problems. But these facts seem to prevent me from assenting to the idea that I always have and always will be pure awareness.

John: Awareness is not an idea. The idea that 'I have always been and always will be pure awareness' is not the awareness. Recognition of the fact of awareness is not a matter of assenting to an idea, but a direct, non-conceptual recognition. Furthermore, the concepts of past and future times are appearing in the present awareness. All of these questions are being concocted in conceptual thought, which cannot even appear except upon the background awareness. Awareness is not eternal. Eternal usually means everlasting existence through all time. Awareness is primal. It is the undoubtable presence on which concepts, including the concept of 'eternal',

appear – right now. You cannot escape this.

Remember, this recognition is impossible to achieve through the mind. You cannot think your way into awareness. It is the wrong tool for the job. Once you realize that the mind cannot get this, you can relax the attempt. Then things start to strike home by a non-conceptual recognition.

Q: On a more practical note, how do you find yourself relating to your day-to-day involvement with your environment such as job, co-workers, friends, family, bills to pay? Is it really possible to rest in your original nature while telling your teen-age son that he cannot have the car tonight?

John: It is absolutely possible. In fact, it is impossible to move out of it. Can you get out of your own being? With the false concepts of separation and suffering disposed of, life goes on quite well, even smoother than before. But in any case, it does not matter. Things are as they are. You are as you are. Even the labels 'things' and 'you' are not applicable. It is just what is. It is the functioning of life outside of conceptual distinctions.

Q: I believe I am a 'serious' seeker, although I try to keep a sense of humor about it all. Indeed, I would have a hard time believing anyone was living in their natural state if they couldn't laugh at the arbitrary particulars of their apparent physical form and local environment.

John: People do not live in the natural state. It is more like the natural state is that presence or intelligence that is living the people. As long as there is a belief that I am separate and stand apart from that, there is endless trouble and suffering.

Love is the Non-conceptual Recognition of Oneness

Question: Am I free to drop my mental attachment to my children?

John: Of course. But to give it more than lip service, you need to investigate the deeper roots of the issue and see that this has nothing to do with your (innocent!) children. Attachment is a self-centered mind state based on the core concept of being a separate 'I'. Get that resolved and all the self-centered thoughts, including attachments, resolve and come to balance effortlessly. So, correct the view and the outer expressions take care of themselves. Without this, no attempts to get detached will ever work fully. Attachments are symptoms only. Don't treat the symptoms, but cure the disease. Real detachment comes through clear seeing, not as a volitional effort of a separate self.

Without a clear recognition of what is real, you cannot really hope to abandon the 'unreal', be it thoughts, memories or worries. The mind is hanging on to all this because it doesn't have a good replacement.

From the ultimate stand everything that has ever existed is just a passing, insubstantial appearance in the mind. True, but it makes a lot more sense and feels better when you have a clear recognition of the source of a deep love and rock solid presence of the reality behind the appearance. Another way to look at it is that everything that has ever appeared, including your family and kids, have all only been a manifestation or expression of that presence of love within. They have never existed as separate things apart from that source, which is also your source. Even when the forms and appearances change, the source, their true essence, never fades and always shines as the unchanging reality in your heart.

This idea about the unreality of the world is tricky. Perhaps a better way to see it, is to see that the world is unreal when

Don't Answer Questions, Uproot Them

Question: I am trying to be less involved with the thinking process and I am trying to be more aware of the present moment. When I am present in the instant and look inside myself and invite thoughts, nothing comes up. Is that being the awareness? In these few seconds, I can remain empty, yet pretty much myself just more aware of what is happening in me. Is that being the awareness?

What insight could you share with me to point out to me the unchanging awareness so that I can recognize it and put my attention on it instead of the thought process and the rest of this play of appearances.

John: Ideas like 'Where is it?' 'When will I attain it?' 'What to do I have to do?' 'Is this it?' are all simply thoughts. They are based on the false idea of reality not being here. This is the key to it, the open secret.

Can you say that awareness is not present, that you don't exist? Can you separate yourself from this presence-awareness? You tell me! If not, then all the questions are bogus out of the gate.

You don't answer the questions, you uproot them. When you do not go into the mind content and focus on that, you are simply left with what is, your own natural state. It might seem intangible and subtle at first, but then as you get acquainted with your natural state you discover a depth of serenity and clarity that is unmistakable. It is the simple joy in living that you had as a child, before the conceptual mind of duality solidified. You actually experience this anytime the attention turns away from self-centered thoughts and concepts.

You do not obtain anything that you don't have already. It is more like the obscurations are removed through clear seeing, and you are left with the recognition of the ever-present substratum.

viewed as something existing apart from the source. But as an expression of the source, it is the reality itself, ultimately. When viewed head on, the universe of appearances is just what is arising directly in your own awareness right now. Time is an idea. Others are appearances in your mind. The concept of separation is a concept. All questions and doubts are thoughts arising in present awareness.

Pull out the fact of awareness, your own presence, and nothing remains. It is the source and substance of everything. Realizing your nature as that, leaves you in a direct, non-conceptual recognition of oneness. The feeling or experience of that is what we usually call 'love', which is a profoundly felt sense of oneness.

Question: I apologize for these difficult questions, but maybe they're only difficult when viewed from inside the mind. I guess family issues have a much stronger hold on me than I realized. They seem so very real that I cannot seem to step away and view them as lifeless thoughts from the nonexistent past, floating through an arbitrary collection of images I incorrectly view as 'me', which is appearing on the featureless Void which is what is.

John: When you recognize your true nature, which is very easy because it is right with you as your own being, it is like waking up out of the dream of suffering. Just see that the 'featureless Void' (doesn't sound too inviting!) is bright, radiant, brimming with heart and full of love. It is the essence of oneness and compassion for all that was, is and will be. That is your heritage. That is what is being pointed to. That is what you unfailingly discover by understanding your real being.

Not Finding the 'I'

Question: I met Gangaji three years ago (after twenty years of searching, like so many others) and had a most beautiful awakening to presence itself. I have been caught in this 'love search' ever since and have sat with many other beautiful teachers. Life has changed radically and yet, somehow, there has still been a sense of something not right here. So called 'conditioning' continued to arise, even after knowing this fulfillment and peace of awareness itself. Self inquiry, which has been occurring on its own, would take over in moments of distress, discomfort, etc. and there would be a stopping and a return to attention on this. However, some states and very subtle belief systems seemed to be below the radar level and would continue to return again and again. I was beginning to feel that there would always be certain aspects of this form that would never be 'finished'.

Then I read your writings! The question, 'Have you ever been an 'I' apart from the presence-awareness that you are?' blew me away! Literally! Oh, my God!

Do you realize what this seeing does to all questions, all mind chatter? All problems, all suffering, all senses of not being 'this' are a result of still believing somehow that there is an 'I'! Where is this 'I' to be found? I couldn't find it anywhere! There is no such thing as conditioning, no such thing as being separate! There is only this! Only a separate 'I' could have a problem, could suffer, could think that there was more to do, to learn.

I don't know how, after so many satsangs, so much meditation, so much sitting, so much reading I missed this. I thought I had rooted out the 'I' as I thought I understood from Ramana's teachings, but I was ignorant. There was a simple, very simple misunderstanding. I still thought it, the 'I thought', the ego, was separate somehow from this! Such ignorance! I was looking for 'I' with the mind! Pretty silly! I never thought to look for it while the experiencing of this was here. As this presence, of course, this is all, all there is! I had

continued to 'leave' the experience of presence for the energy of the phantom 'I' that was still surging (apparently) and being believed. The 'aha!' of this seems so ancient, so utterly, unbelievably knowable! There is no 'I', no separate self, no one to whom things happen to, no one to change, no one to figure things out – just, just, innate joy, sweetness, simplicity, seeing, being, loving, welcoming!

Thank you, John. This one simple question pointed so directly to this truth. It is like the whole mountain is being seen, not just the lower half with clouds covering the peak. The unveiling. This is the first time I've written to a teacher. I had to, as the seeing is so profound. There is such warmth here now as I write to you. So much gratitude.

John: Thanks for the note. I am happy to hear your experience with all this. Your insights are beautifully expressed. It is very clear. There is little I can add. Actually nothing at all! Your own seeing is its own confirmation.

My Dog Cannot Comprehend Calculus

Question: I will try to pull back on the intellectualization, although I am still not clear on what is a legitimate use of the mind.

John: The mind is good for dealing with affairs in the objective world. It is the right tool for that. There is a certain amount of groundwork you can do by gaining an intellectual appreciation of some of the basics of all this. Past a point, the mind is the wrong instrument. The key is knowing yourself. You are not a thought. The mind knows thoughts or the mind is only thoughts. But you are not the mind. So the essential understanding is not possible by thinking. It is as simple as that.

Knowing is not a mental function at all. Even at a relative level this is true. Life is going on, the senses are functioning, actions are occurring and the vast majority of all this is not being run through the conceptual apparatus. Love, compassion, friendship – none of these are conceptual. Basically, we get locked into the conceptual thought process as if that is the main thing. It is just one small sliver of the picture. Your existence was there and life was functioning even before you had any concepts or ideas about yourself.

Q: Obviously you have to use your own mind to communicate with me or even to understand the verbal things I am saying.

John: Words are just symbols. The word 'apple' is not an actual apple. You cannot eat the word.

Q: I'm not sure I believe that all questions are bogus.

John: All questions stemming from a falsely assumed individual that never existed are bogus. They are based on a false premise and are insoluble until the contradiction is exposed.

Q: I do find that ultimate questions about personal identity, consciousness, free will or time dissolve into paradox when followed to their ultimate ends.

John: This means give them up! The answer is not in the mind, so stop looking for it there!

Q: To me, this just says that there are many aspects of the world that human minds cannot comprehend under any circumstances, just like my dog cannot comprehend calculus.

John: Very true. Trying to understand your true nature with the mind is like a dog trying to understand calculus.

Q: The sentence 'Reality is pointed out as that simple sense of being-awareness' has an intuitive ring of truth to me, but ...

John: That 'but' is the killer. It is stepping back into the mind. Let the pointing resonate and don't do anything with it. Don't even think of it. The resonating is happening beyond the mind. Instead of staying with the resonance, we go back into thought out of habit. Then the problems start up again.

Q: ... but, I take it that it's supposed to point something out that I have failed to notice, just like it was something that you had evidently failed to notice until after you visited 'Sailor' Bob. So, taking time in the mundane sense of meeting a friend for lunch when the clock says 1:00 P.M., there was a time (call it T1) when you had never met Bob Adamson and were in a somewhat similar position as myself at present. Then at time T2, after meeting with Bob, you had some sort of change of perception, recognition, awareness. Call it what you will. Something was different.

John: This is all mental speculation (the dog trying to understand calculus!). You are running down the tracks of conceptual thought looking for 'the answer', not realizing the essence of the pointing. The point is that here and now your very being-awareness is inherently free. You are what the conceptual

mind is attempting the find through its misguided attempts. Remember, time is a concept arising in present awareness. So, all speculation about time takes you away from the immediate recognition of present awareness.

Q: Can you convey to me in any way whatsoever, what that difference was for you? I don't believe you can legitimately say that 'nothing' has taken place, when you yourself describe it as a major turning point in your life. Isn't that a legitimate question for me to put to you?

John: In so many words, I imagined I was a separate being and failed to recognize our ever-present identity as the non-dual presence of awareness. There was an illusion of life lived in separation. All the suffering and doubts spun from that assumption. Then the true position was pointed out. The facts were seen by no one – just the natural recognition of awareness recognizing its natural condition. The 'I' that was imagined to be at the center was found to be absent. The seeking and questioning and suffering collapsed with that recognition. This is just words, so don't hang on to the words. Try to feel the resonance and see it for yourself.

It is just the recognition of the fact that what we are seeking is already present as that simple sense of presence-awareness shining timelessly at the center. And it is going on in your center right now. Just have a look.

Just Rest in the Natural State

Question: Thank you for sharing and responding. It is much appreciated. I have asked myself if the 'me' that I've taken myself to be really exists. I can clearly see that it has been conceptual. It is not at all even accurate compared to my actual experience. So I see that the character 'Peter' doesn't really exist. There doesn't seem to be an actual location either. The name is irrelevant. Any designation will do. Also, the attributes assigned to this person are inaccurate. They are points of view, references.

John: Very true and clearly seen.

Q: And yet, this sense of being here seems to be where the questioning is arising from. What is that? What do I call that? Maybe 'presence-awareness' will do. Can this presence-awareness be the same thing as this sense of being here? I know that I am. Awareness and aliveness are present, ever present, fresh, always now, .

John: Again very clearly expressed. Being, presence, awareness are pointers to the same wordless something – your real nature.

Q: This awareness or aliveness also just seems to be devoid of concrete personality or preferences. However, it is definitely unique in some way. There is a particular point of view here. What I mean to say is that this perspective seems to have a flavor, seemingly distinct from all that is being experienced by it.

John: Well, it is the life, the light, the reality itself. Everything else appears within it, but it remains in its own distinct essence. However, nothing that appears is separate from it either.

Q: When I ask myself if I'm ever separate from this natural and infinitely spontaneous sense of being and awareness, it is clear that I'm not always conscious of it.

John: Actually, it not something to be conscious of. It is consciousness itself, which is synonymous with your sense of being. Explore this a bit and you will find that it is ever present, even when the appearance is not.

Q: I do notice that when I look, it is immediate, instantly and obviously here, always here. It never moves from here, although 'here' doesn't feel enclosed. And it is always both the same and new somehow.

John: Very true. It is ancient and new. Actually, it is beyond time. Time appears within it. So, from the mind level, it appears as simultaneously old and new, because it is beyond opposites.

Q: Upon inquiring like this, I feel a stillness that is quite content with just sitting, doing nothing. In this stillness thinking is blended into all the other sense experiences – until some thing (for example, the experiencing of a person, or a thought, or hunger, or the phone ringing) comes along that seems to stimulate or motivate action. Then, at that point, there is a personality with activity, motivations, desires and even forgetfulness of that presence-awareness.

John: In truth, the presence of awareness never leaves. It is not an object to remember or forget. All that is happening is that the old thought patterns are coming up and there is focusing on them. But what are they appearing within? Can they even be there without presence-awareness? That is how you come to understand that presence-awareness never leaves at any time. We just imagined it did.

Q: It is as though the knowing of that awareness recedes or is forgotten. I cannot say that there is any separation, but there is an experience that there seems to be separation for a bit of time prior to remembering. Do you know what I mean? I'm not sure how useful

it is to keep asking myself these questions, because it just seems to engage the mind.

John: True. Just come back to the basics and verify them for yourself. Then you don't need to question any more. It is just what is.

Q: I must say that by virtue of these questions I have come to firmly and clearly recognize that the person and personality are fiction and are no place at all.

John: Very important!

Q: It is at this point in the inquiring that I often come to a stop. I cannot seem to go any further.

John: Who needs to go anywhere? You just said there is no person!

Q: I cannot imagine where or how to take the inquiry. It feels like too much effort.

John: Right. Just let it fall away. Presence and clarity are here now. There is nothing to get. So let the old dualistic beliefs fall away and rest in your natural state. That is it.

Q: It now feels a bit shocking to think that there is no concrete character here (although often it sure feels like there is!).

John: It is just an old habit that continues to come up for a while. But it falls away, because the energy is not going into it any more.

Q: I've come to a standstill. I cannot explain it, and don't know what to think of it. This being-awareness seems to be about experiencing only, without any particular purpose or any particular importance. And purpose and importance are really just concepts, only real as thought, experienced but with no meaning. Nonetheless, activity happens. Where to go from here? Give it all a rest and just enjoy the

John: Awareness does not have moments. Moments appear in awareness.

Just relax and rest in the natural state of simple presence. Since you have seen there is no person, then there is no one to do anything. There is no one to answer anything. There is no one to go anywhere. This seems new to the mind, because life used to be based on the concept of being separate and apart from the real. Now you have seen that you are the real. As you relax with this understanding, you will discover an immense source of peace, joy and clarity naturally shining more and more in your life. The old habits, suffering and confusion effortlessly fall away.

Your seeing in this is all very good and very clear. Everything unfolds naturally from the center of present awareness that you never, ever leave.

What Happens to Awareness When the Body Dies?

Question: Thanks for your website and insights. I am pretty much at the end of my seeking. I get it now. Sometimes I am blown away by how deliciously delicious it all is, and I have such gratitude to be able to be in this human body and have these rich and varied human experiences. And I do not freak out when I'm a little more contracted or irritable or whatever. I see that it is not happening to me, but within me.

John: It sounds like the basics are resonating well for you. Glad to hear it!

Q: I have been wondering about something, though. It occurs to me that all the thoughts, feelings and experiences that show up are perceived by the five senses.

John: Yes.

Q: My question is, when my body dies and my five senses are no longer acting as the radio receiver for sensations and my brain is not sputtering out thoughts, then what is the presence-awareness aware of?

John: Probably nothing! It is just the same as goes on now when the senses and mind are still and quite or you are in deep sleep.

Q: I guess we both will not really know until it happens, but I would be curious to get your thoughts.

John: Thinking about the future takes you into speculation and assumptions. But you can see that right now the perceptions, thoughts and feelings are constantly changing. They

are appearing and disappearing. But the background of your existence or presence, which is also awareness, is still there. This continues whether objects are present or absent. We normally do not sense this because we are habitually focused on objects. When objects disappear, we think there is just nothingness, but this not true. You remain as that background on which the objects appear and disappear. From this perspective, the appearance or disappearance of objects does not really affect your real being.

Once you start to understand this, the thoughts and concerns about the future demise of the body lose their sting. If you look closely, we are constantly losing all the objects and perceptions in each instant, and yet there is no fear or doubt, because we intuitively know that our presence is not really affected by the changes.

What is most interesting to see in all this is that when the mind imagines a future time and begins to think about what will happen to us, we are then not noticing the ever-present true nature that we are. That is not bound by time, because time appears as a concept in awareness. Awareness is outside of time and change, so the idea of death does not really apply to our true nature. If there is some identification with the body then fear comes in. Otherwise, we just remain in our natural state, unaffected by the appearances.

Is There any Reason to Take Moral Action?

Question: I have been reading your writings and they resonate with my own experiences of 'That,' for want of a better word. Your basic premise is: Our personality or ego structure seems to naturally arise out of impersonal consciousness (no one knows why) and we are deluded by our identification with our life story which causes our suffering. There is no moral value expressed in your position. Just realizing undifferentiated awareness is enough. The rest is no more relevant than a dream. Is that the gist?

John: That seems a pretty fair summary to me!

Q: Given this, is there any reason to live life in a moral way, such as helping to feed starving people? Or should one oppose genocide and so on? Why should we bother, as it is all a phenomenon of a mistaken state of consciousness? Good and evil are concepts. Starvation and mass murder are just fictions. Is there any reason for me not to hurt lots of other illusory people? Taking a moral action is just identifying with the illusion, isn't it? This is the problem for me at the heart of non-duality.

John: This problem is really more an issue for the one who takes himself to be a separate individual. All of those gross actions stem from ignorance, hatred, egoism and so forth. With those removed through understanding the foundation, the imagined 'I', to be non-existent, life still goes on. Awareness, intelligence and wisdom are still functioning quite well. The body acts, the mind thinks, decisions and appropriate action are taken. It is not an aloof, amoral state. That is an attempt to translate the understanding down to the action level or interpreting it in terms of how an individual would try to embody a non-dual perspective. But this is all wrong, because there is no individual, so there is no need to do or not do anything.

Like I said, life goes on quite well. There is a natural intelligence, love and compassion there. It is not coming from an individual, but it is just a spontaneous expression coming from your deepest essence. This can manifest as a tremendous sense of caring. It can express as a desire to communicate that a life free of suffering is possible. Take a look at the lives of people like Christ, Buddha or whomever. Take the case of saintly people such as Gandhi, Saint Francis, Mother Theresa and so on. They seemed to have made solid contributions to the greater good, even though there was much understanding of underlying oneness and lack of personal ego in play.

Q: How have you resolved this situation?

John: The best resolve is to discover that the separate 'you' was a total fiction all along. Life goes on without the imagined separation. Ignorance, hatred and selfishness are uprooted at the source.

My Problems Have Not Evaporated

Question: I read the following statement on your website: 'I do not exaggerate when I say that a lifetime of problems will evaporate.' I assume that this has happened for 'John'. However, I think that it is wrong to generalize this to other apparent people. Is this not a golden carrot on the end of an enlightenment stick? Well, for 'Mike' (me) the problems have not evaporated. They continue as before, including anxiety, desire and so on. The fan is unplugged, but the blades of the fan appear to continue to turn. How long will they continue? I have no idea, maybe the entire apparent life of this character. Maybe the blades will stop in the next instant. But, I think your words don't help, because the character thinks, 'When will my problems evaporate?' Thinking like that is just part of the problem.

John: Glad to hear you are probing into all this. For a lot of folks, the problems and suffering do simply disappear. Even if any such things continue out of momentum or habit, there is no longer anyone left to take delivery of them. They are just impersonal movements in the ever-steady and clear awareness that you are. Either way, there is no problem. As I say in the book, there is no need for anything to change in the appearance. Nor do I promote the idea of enlightenment for myself, you or other people anywhere.

The character which presumes itself to be Mike has never existed in any shape or form, except as an imagined concept. So there is no need to wait for problems to go away. Just see that the one who has them has never existed.

Thoughts of the Past Appear Presently

Question: Our phone conversation was very helpful. As I mentioned, it was the first time I wasn't able to immediately talk myself out of a new way of looking at things. It's nice to have the instant feedback. What I found (and find) especially useful was a minor point you stressed, which cleared up a major misconception on my part — that thinking takes a person somehow out of the moment. You were very insistent that it, in fact, doesn't. Thoughts of the past are appearing presently. I have read about this many times, but I heard it for the first time when you said it to me.

John: That is good seeing. When you look at it closely, you see that you never move away from the present. This kind of seeing really starts to dismantle the concepts of the mind. The concepts are glued together by certain assumptions, like the reality of time or separation. So as these are questioned, the underpinnings of the dualistic mind are exposed.

Q: In the two days since our talk, I've noticed that at times I'll become aware of the background of awareness, even while so much appears to be happening in front of me. The awareness is a bit spasmodic. It doesn't appear to stay for long, but it is happening.

John: Just continue to notice that awareness is not coming and going. It is not spasmodic. It is constantly shining and illuminating all experiences, good, bad or indifferent. We just did not notice it because the focus was all on the content.

Q: I feel a shift is taking place and that awareness is quitting its false vantage point somewhere inside my head. It is drifting behind the world in some way.

John: Well. it has always been there as that benevolent back-

ground of simple presence. It is like the continuous light of love silently radiating on all things. It was overlooked till now. Nothing really exists apart from that. That is your true nature.

Don't Create Unnecessary Problems

Question: Although you've pointed it out many times, I think that last night I may have really heard you for the first time. What I'm looking for is closer in. Instead of focusing on the various spiritual concepts (such as, I'm not the body, oneness, what is real versus what is not and so on), it would be more productive to discover what I am and allow the rest to reveal itself. That gives me a bit of relief that I don't have to realize all of those other things on my own.

John: This all sounds good. Just stay with the basics. It is not a matter of trying to figure something out or get it at a mental level. It is coming back to something simple and certain that you can verify in your own seeing.

Q: For some reason, when we meet, it is like my mind goes blank, and the questions that I had on my mind are not accessible.

John: That is all right. Whatever comes up, it keeps getting back to the same basic points.

Q: I have heard that all things personal are just appearances, and that letting go of those connections are paramount to realizing we are not the body. The idea of being the body is what is holding us back.

John: Now you start to get a bit conceptual. Where do all these ideas come in? Who or what is holding you back? Is there any problem with the direct recognition of what is simple and present? Just continue to look into that and the 'by-products' are there automatically. Like the old saying goes, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all will be added unto you'.

Q: I experience a bit of conflict with the idea of detachment.

John: Thoughts conflict with thoughts only. What appears, simply appears. There is no conflict, except in our own minds.

Q: A family member of mine is being treated for cancer. We had thought she stood a near perfect chance of recovery, but this week we found out it may have spread.

John: Sorry to hear that. I hope things go well for her.

Q: In some regards I do feel detached from it, but then I feel guilt and remorse that I could have such a cold attitude about something seemingly personal and tragic.

John: Where did you get this idea that 'you' need to be detached? This kind of concept is what comes in and mucks up the simplicity of things. Everything is all right until this kind of thinking based on a separate 'I' starts to take the field. Just notice how it works. There is nothing that 'you' need to do. Just be natural and the appropriate response will come up spontaneously. From everything I have seen, you are far from being a cold-hearted, unfeeling person! Don't create unnecessary problems where none existed before.

Remember, freedom is not attained, especially by some imagined 'I' trying get it. It is the recognition that what you are (as the undeniable sense of presence) has never been bound. Stick with the basics. Awareness is naturally detached because it is the unchanging background of all appearances. Yet it is certainly not aloof. It is the source and substance of everyone and everything in the manifestation.

Q: How can I reconcile this impersonal versus personal aspect of existence?

John: I don't know! This is more of a conceptual problem based on trying to understand things at a mental level. If you want to go to the root of it, the answer is that there is no separate 'I' at all. So who needs to reconcile anything, if you have never been apart from the real?

Q: The thought comes up that the teaching of non-duality says that I don't have parents, so how could I have a sister? Who is the one that has a sister? But this all still seems unreal to me.

John: These are all concepts! Continue to probe into what is the true 'I' or your real nature. Later, you can say what its characteristics are, based on direct experience.

Q: I seem to be experiencing a mix of emotions. Things are still sorting themselves out. I feel confused.

John: Well, the old tendency arises to keep trying to figure it out in the mind! The result is confusion! Welcome to the club that we have all been members of — until it starts to dawn that the answers are not in the mind. Confusion is a mental state based on viewing events through the lens of unexamined assumptions. The simplest approach is just to see what is happening. Once seen, you are done with it.

Your real nature is not cold and aloof. It is oneness, warmth, love and compassion. Live from that understanding, and then all your relationships will carry the fragrance of love. Best of all, in your daily life you will be utterly genuine and free from any pretense whatsoever!

In a Nutshell

Basically, there is nothing apart from the presence-awareness that you are right now. All seeking and understanding comes back to the seeing of this. Approaching this involves no time, path or practice. And, contrary to popular belief, there is no deepening or improving. Nor is there any need for awakening or embodying. What you are is fully present and awake now. Since there is no individual, as such, there is no one who needs to embody anything or bring the understanding into life. There is nothing to surrender or let go of because there is really no one or nothing present who can do any such thing. It is just a simple recognition of the obvious that was overlooked. That is about it in a nutshell.

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