

# Clear in Your Heart

The Radiant Mirror of Self-Shining Awareness

John Wheeler

With editorial assistance from John Strydom

Non-Duality Press

CLEAR IN YOUR HEART

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## Preface — Game Over

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

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

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

A frustrated spiritual seeker for over twenty years, I had tried everything from self-help books and lucid dreaming to Catholicism and Transcendental Meditation. There were dozens of experiences (a few of which were quite stunning). But

none of them led to self-knowledge, which was my primary focus. Then I bought a copy of John's first book, *Awakening to the Natural State*, which was published in 2004 and is already a non-dual classic. That purchase came about after I happened upon his sterling website while searching for contemporary non-duality writers and teachers in the United States. (Though I had been greatly moved by Nisargadatta's books, his translators were not always on the mark and ended up confusing things, including me.) But when I came across John's site and book, I was thoroughly impressed by the clearness of his expression. There was just this calm and immediate resonance with both his words and his manner.

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

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

There it was: my natural, non-conceptual state, in all of its peace and simplicity. I had no words to detail it, which was quite a quandary for someone who primarily considers himself a writer. But the words gradually began to form: What was transparently before me and as me was — at

once — sheer, hushed, beginningless, and so perfectly evident. And as I articulated later in a 2009 web article, there was ‘a vastness all around’. I waited nearly a week before e-mailing John. I wanted to be sure about this — though I knew, by then, that this was the genuine thing. And John confirmed it.

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

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

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

Because John speaks totally from the Source, his ‘same old, same old’ is ever-vital and ever-new. Indeed, what King Janaka uttered about his newly-discovered awareness in the

*Ashtavakra Gita* can precisely be said about the book you are holding at this very moment: ‘Oh, how wonderful it is...!’

Rodney Stevens  
*Columbia, South Carolina*

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## Consciousness, Presence and Your True Nature

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

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

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

When you look finely into this, you will see that conscious-

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

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

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

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## Bodily Needs and Oneness

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

Non-conceptual awareness, which is the source of consciousness and all else, is clearly not a separate 'you'... That is the absolute, unconditioned state. Everything else comes after that as an appearance. See it this way and the notion of being a limited, separate 'you' will be completely undermined and seen for the concept that it is.

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

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

One already is that aware principle. The question 'How does

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

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

All this theoretical talk is itself only conceptual activity arising and setting in the clear and doubtless nature that you are. Forget all the hypothetical cases and get to know this non-conceptual awareness you already are. It is already untouched

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

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

## How Can Awareness See Itself?

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

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

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

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

## Who Is Deciding?

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

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

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

*Presence-awareness is all that is. I am that. Yes! Home! The beauty of that realization is beyond words. It is as if the 'weight of the world' just got flushed. A laugh, a tear and a sigh. But there is also this body/mind organism called Mike that looks around and sees that it is apparently participating in some kind of Earth Dance. He has grown accustomed to three square meals a day and a roof over his head. He appears to have a simple choice: navigate or die. Surely you did not just wake up one morning where you live*

*and say, 'Seems nice. Guess I'll hang here for a while'. Didn't some thought, planning and decision-making result in your living where you do now? How did those decisions get made without some kind of a reference point? Is it a case of being in the illusion, but not of it? It appears we are on kind of tricky turf here.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## How Can an Illusion Persist?

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

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

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

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

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

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## Can Abiding as Who I Am Cause Illness?

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Q: This has persisted and resulted in all kinds of mental turmoil*

*and, in a sense, pulled me right out of that abiding as the natural state. Although I do know in real terms this is not possible!*

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

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

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

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

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

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

The teaching you mention leaves the concepts of the seeker,

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

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

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

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

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

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

You are simply looping around and around in conceptual thought and stressing yourself out. That, I would venture, is the source of your difficulties. To see your true nature as presence-awareness, or whatever you want to call it, brings no pain, suffering or stress whatsoever. Stress (suffering) is generated in the mind and based on the assumed reality of the 'I' notion. That generates other thoughts of and about that 'I', and the mind loops endlessly in such concepts. Even

the attempts to understand the basic points are then run through the perspective of the imaginary 'me' and that conceptual activity itself becomes just more suffering. Then the mind runs around looking for antidotes and teachings to 'fix' the problem, instead of seeing the real cause.

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## Knowing Who You Are and Who You Are Not

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

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

Even the notion that we are practicing self-inquiry is a concession or admission to the belief in the separate self. Reality needs no practice. Whatever word you use to point to what

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Next, you make reference to the ‘ego’. Once you start talking about the proverbial ego, you are on a slippery slope because, essentially, there is no such thing. The only real justified action with regard to the ego notion is to examine it

and see if it truly exists. In practical terms, all the suffering, questions and doubts are based on the assumed presence of the ego. What is the 'ego'? It is the notion that you exist as a separate person apart from reality. What is 'reality'? That is what you found out when you discovered your true nature. Any attempt to understand or examine the ego notion is not going to be fruitful if your basic identity is not clear first. The ego can also be looked at as an incorrect concept about your identity. How can you question that notion, if your identity is not clear in the first place? That is why I give precedence to clear self-knowledge as the first and most important part of the equation. The examination of the ego notion is simply a means to understand and resolve the conceptually-based doubts that may crop up *after* your true nature is clear and established. If we try to use self-inquiry to get to, attain or realize who we are, we have already fallen into the trap of believing in a false identity. The real self is already present. It may not be clearly known or we may be in doubt about what that is. If so, then the clarification of who we are is needed.

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

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

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

To talk of 'final understanding' plays into the ego's concept of a future state when 'I' will get something I do not have. It is all misconceived. You do not need a final understanding because you are already one with the reality. The real question is 'who' needs or wants that? It can only be the one who conceives of himself as separate and apart from reality, in other words, the ego notion. So, seeing that the whole issue is based on the assumed presence of that entity, the real response is to verify if it is real or not. This is the essence of self-inquiry, which is really the examination of the nature of the 'I' concept. Where is this presumed separate self? The very question you raise is predicated on the assumption of the separate self. If you look for it—the ego—and cannot find it, how can you believe in it? Then how can the questions that depend on it be taken seriously? They cannot. Therefore, the suffering ends conclusively.

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

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

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

is resolved. Absolutely nothing is attained, but the false and needless concepts are contradicted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Simple, Ordinary Awareness

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

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

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

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

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## How Can We Know What Is Before Consciousness?

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

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

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

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

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