

Shining in Plain View

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John Wheeler

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Preface

I am happy that Julian Noyce of Non-Duality Press has agreed to bring out a second book of dialogues and articles as a follow up to my first book *'Awakening to the Natural State'*. I am pleased to see that growing numbers of people are resonating with the simple yet profound message which has come down to us through Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and his student 'Sailor' Bob Adamson. The good news is that there can be an end to doubts, suffering and seeking through a clear understanding of our true nature, that simple and undeniable presence of existence, awareness and love that is always present and shining at our centre. This is the ancient message of Advaita or non-duality presented in a contemporary form, a form that can be easily understood and experienced by people leading normal lives in the modern world.

The key point of this approach is that the truth we are seeking is already present as our own actual being. A little bit of investigation reveals that what we are is really that simple sense of presence that is both existing and brightly aware. All suffering, doubts and seeking arise from not clearly recognizing who we are. Clarifying this matter, which does not take time, but only clear seeing, completely resolves all questions and doubts. What remains is a sense of clarity, certitude, peace and well-being that cannot be touched by events or circumstances.

I often speak of two facets of this understanding. The first is the clear recognition of the truth of what we are. The second is the dismantling of any false ideas about ourselves. You come to see what is true about yourself and discard what is false. These are like two sides of a single coin. They appear as two different approaches but really come back to the same core point, which is simply bringing our real identity into clear view.

The material in this book expands on these points through selections from actual dialogues and correspondence I have had

with people who are deeply interested in discovering their own true nature. The reader will be delighted, as I am, to see how this understanding unfolds and becomes direct experience for those who apply themselves with earnestness, follow the pointers, and discover their own innate freedom and happiness. In the end, the words and teachings are least relevant. At best they can only point. The only one thing that matters and needs to be known, is the fact of your own being.

Since I returned from meeting ‘Sailor’ Bob Adamson in 2003, an increasing number of people have been able to understand the basics of what is being pointed to. Many of them are now sharing the message of freedom in their own way. It is very gratifying to see the message of freedom through self-knowledge alive and flourishing.

I want to extend my deep appreciation and thanks to Leslie Caren and Julian Noyce for their assistance in editing the book and preparing it for printing.

John Wheeler
Santa Cruz, California, 2005

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Things Happen Simply and Easily

Question: I wanted to write to tell you that since I last e-mailed, the personality still shows up but identifying with it has dropped away for the most part. The lack of identification has become most noticeable during what could be called problematic circumstances, when constriction or resistance arises.

There is an awareness of thoughts (about whatever the current circumstance is) appearing in the mind. However, belief in these thoughts wanes. These are usually thoughts which tell a story about how someone is wrong or hurtful or how circumstances ought to be different than they are appearing in that moment. But as a result of not investing belief in these arising thoughts, whatever action does arise feels appropriate. It is also noticeable that there is no premeditation. The responses arise naturally out of awareness. The first time I noticed this it made me laugh. It was so unexpected. The habit of premeditation, expectation and planning is really what creates the sense of time, isn't it?

Sometimes I can feel the tug to defend an identity, a 'me', but it is now more often seen as an empty and pointless habit and so it dissipates. Sometimes defense does come up, but then it is gone. In fact, aside from the thoughts that may arise out of habit, there is really only silence and present awareness in whatever is being experienced. This presence-awareness is raw and awesome. It is deeply satisfying.

Life seems to unfold effortlessly more often than not now. I can see there is no need to think about it. I can feel old habits fading somehow. Things are more peaceful. It turns out that it is really quite simple, isn't it!?

John: What you are expressing is wonderful. The understanding of your true nature unfolds spontaneously and naturally. The insights you are sharing show that the basics have registered. From

here, things do happen simply and easily. As you sit with this, the basics become clearer and the effects of peace and certainty continue to be felt. Then at some point along the way you realize that it is absolutely clear and beyond doubt. You know for certain that this peace is your natural and effortless experience. It was there all along, but overlooked. This is a very natural and organic process of understanding.

Planning for the future is fine, but it is just a relative activity. The key is that you see that the direct recognition of your nature is not some future event and it is not 'out there'. Until the basics are seen, the mind runs here, there and everywhere and thinks about the past, present and future, always hoping to find something to bring fulfillment. Then you see that what you are seeking is right here and now in the simple sense of presence in which all thoughts and experiences, including ideas of the future, arise. Then the seeking drops off because there is no need to seek what you already are. From here, any amount of activity and planning take place just fine. But there is a knowing that whatever is done or not done, you are right where you need to be. You are never apart from the reality that is shining at your core.

Can the Effects Remain?

Question: It seems that all that arises from presence-awareness is no different than presence-awareness. Fear, ideas, beliefs, the world and everything else arise as presence-awareness. Presence-awareness is one substance.

John: Yes! You have hit the nail on the head. But when you see this, the fears, doubts, and questions based on the belief in separation have no more foundation and subside. If there is no cause can the effects remain? Either way, it does not matter. All questions are resolved and you are home.

As Simple as 1 - 2 - 3

Question: John, am I on the right track?

John: Short answer: Yes!

Q: At various times during the day for the last few weeks I have been carrying out an ‘awareness inquiry’. This is difficult to describe. I do not regard it as a meditation practice, but when I am sitting waiting for a bus or train, or while out walking, or just sitting at home, or indeed at any time during the day, I look and relax inwards to see if I can recognize the awareness or presence that contains everything I perceive. Sometimes it is just a looking without questions. At other times, I ask ‘Who am I?’ or ‘What is it that has remained constant and unchanging through every moment of my life?’ I relax and look inward. Anything that arises in my awareness, such as outside phenomena, sensations in my body, thoughts or feelings, is recognized as not being ‘That’ and the looking continues.

John: Good! It is just a natural checking in to confirm what is being pointed to. Past a point, you discover that what you are seeing is ever-present. This occurs naturally. First things are pointed out. Then we verify them for ourselves. Then it all becomes our own experience. It is as simple as 1-2-3.

Q: Lately, I have been dimly sensing a kind of space or openness that is not a physical space or openness. Also, there has been a lessening of attachments to thoughts and emotions. It appears to be the beginning of a recognition that I am not my thoughts or feelings and that I have no control over them, that indeed there is no ‘I’ who can possibly have any measure of control whatsoever. While most people would find the notion that there is no

one doing anything to be very disturbing, I am beginning to find it liberating. Life is being lived just as before, but with a greater sense of freedom and a lessening of suffering. Fear and anxiety still arise (out of habit, I suspect), but they do not have the same grip they used to have.

John: These are excellent signs and show you are on track and that the pointing is registering.

Q: Actually, even asking ‘Am I on the right track?’ does not sound right because it suggests that I am on my way to somewhere that I am not already, which is clearly not the case, since it is here and now as I type this. But I hope you get the heart of my question.

John: Yes!

Q: Thanks, by the way, for the wonderful clarity of your teaching. Although the recognition is not deep yet, I am beginning to see how utterly and astoundingly simple it all is. It is so simple that saying or thinking anything about it at all complicates and obscures it.

John: Just keep in mind it is not really about depth or lack of depth. There are no levels of depth in awareness or the sense of existence. It is completely full and clear right from the start. There is no need to give any weight to the subtle concept that your recognition is not deep. When you turn to the recognition of your nature as present awareness, you see that it is really there in full from the get go. It is not a matter of progression. It is simply seeing the ever-present obvious that had been overlooked.

Whose Birthday?

Question: At the personality level, I have been in a funk since the holidays. Childhood patterns of guilt, shame and low self-esteem always seem to resurface during and after the holidays (family reunions).

John: It is just some old concepts and conditioning showing up. That is all that is going on. If you see it as such, it loses its charge. Whether that appears or not isn't the issue. The issue is what do you take yourself to be? Are you the limited, defective being the thoughts would have you believe? Or are you the simple sense of presence and awareness knowing the thoughts? When you believe in the thoughts as being true it feeds them. Settling in with the recognition of (and as) being-awareness has the effect of draining the life out of the conceptual mechanism.

Q: Today is my birthday, which brings forth feelings of sentiment and regret over the past and hope and fear for the future.

John: These are just more thoughts, along with a little belief in the reality of time for spice!

Q: Yet, I am aware that all these thoughts and feelings are happening within awareness, which remains untouched.

John: Yes. Continue to notice this and explore it.

Q: I have attempted to write you a couple times over the past weeks. But every time I started to write I became self-conscious that any question I had has already been answered in your articles, so I stop. In stopping, I had this instant of recognition that awareness has no questions. It is the answer! But this insight does

not appear to stick, and I slip right back into a funk of emotional and psychological suffering. Then while going about my daily routine there comes a recognition out of the blue that no one is here (me), no one is there (other people) and nothing has happened.

John: These are the valid and true insights that start to come up naturally. This is excellent.

Q: It appears that spiritual awakening is an inner fire that, once ignited, begins to take on a life of its own, burning its way through the fabric of the minds habitual thought-patterns.

John: That sounds good.

Q: Ever since I discovered your website last year, a light within, which I seem to have no control of, shines forth as spontaneous insights at the most unexpected times. Then they appear to leave as fast as they came, leaving only a trace of light in their passing.

John: You will see that the recognition continues to unfold naturally. This all gets introduced and you get a sense of what your real nature is. This was not clear previously. Still, the old ideas and habits to the contrary are in play. Often these arise in challenging situations or areas where we have invested a lot of our sense of identity. It could be work or relationships or whatever. But as the recognition of your true nature settles down, things resolve naturally. If you need guidance or some hands-on advice you can seek that out, like you are doing.

Q: Just now, as I was typing an inner voice asked, ‘What is aware of the coming and going of insights?’ Whose birthday?

John: Voila!

Trace the Root of Suffering

Question: I have enjoyed reading your articles, and things have begun to resonate. Reading them inspired me to purchase Bob Adamson's book and recently your own. If you do not mind, I wondered if you could help with the following. I find that when I am at home away from the routine of work and computers and there is no need to communicate and relate with people and friends, it is so much easier to become aware.

John: Well, if you look at this more finely, you discover that, as has been pointed out, awareness is ever-present. It does not become more present. As you begin to notice this fact, the wavering quality ends.

Q: At those times, I actually think, 'Hey, this is it. Yes, all is calm. The mind is quiet. I am aware, just aware. Oh, there goes a thought, oh, and another?'. There is more silence and warm consciousness. I can almost see the 'I' thought fading away.

John: Just see that all these thoughts and experiences are appearing and disappearing in the undeniable awareness. It continues even when you are not thinking about it.

Q: As soon as I get back to work, the old conditioning just comes flooding back. I am that person again who needs to behave in the manner that others are used to.

John: These are just the old concepts. The main thing now is to see them as concepts. That is a good approach to getting some space around the experience.

Q: In those moments, it feels unnatural to be any other way.

John: You need to really see if the concepts are natural. In fact, they are highly artificial. They are conditioned ideas that we picked in life before we knew any better.

Q: Sometimes I get very frustrated and instead of being relaxed and calm. I can display all kinds of behavioral patterns, from low moods, to sulking, to sudden desperation and anger towards others. I know people can also sense this. I think I am missing it somewhere and maybe even afraid of change. Although I somehow know life could flow so much more easily.

John: The real resolve on this is to trace the root of suffering and really see the mechanism of it. Otherwise, you are buffeted about without really having any solid ground to stand on. Here are some tips. Suffering is generated in the mind, in thinking. It does not exist anywhere else. The thoughts that create suffering are those that revolve around the sense of a separate self. This idea of being a limited separate being is the root driver of all self-centered experience. By inquiring into the validity of this core concept you can verify whether it is true or not. If it is seen to be false, then the basic cause is removed (through the seeing). This pulls the plug on the cause of suffering. The fact of present awareness that has been pointed out is seen to be simply the case. There is nothing to do or attain in terms of your true nature. Tackling the suffering through investigation has the effect of removing any camouflage from the clear and steady recognition of the ever-present and clear awareness. Still, regardless of what comes or not, or what is seen or not, you never move from your true nature.

Q: Any additional advice you can offer would be appreciated.

John: The bottom line is that this naturally becomes clear as the understanding settles in.

Do Not Fall for These Concepts!

Question: What you said last night about the ‘mystery person’ who attended your meeting struck a chord. He had been searching for decades and had only one question for you and then left, satisfied that his seeking was over. You said that his question was, ‘What am I?’

John: It all boils down to that. That is why things do not feel complete and why the thought ‘I am not there yet’ still arises.

Q: You said something to me once about possibly needing something to latch on to before completely letting go of the false beliefs. I do not think I have a foothold yet on the foundation of what I am. I know the teaching—that I am awareness, consciousness, the supreme reality, cognizing emptiness—but I do not think I truly identify as that.

This is probably the ‘stepless step’ that only I can do, even though I am not doing any of this. Am I trying to reach for something that does not need to be grasped? Are you familiar with the position I am in? And then the question arises, ‘Who is this “I” that needs to do something?’

If I am not that ‘I’ then what am I? I am present and aware. I am not a limited individual, nor am I the thoughts that arise, nor the mind from which they apparently arise. I am not anything that I can see or otherwise perceive. The thought that arises says, ‘You cannot see the space, nor can you describe it, but you know it is there’. But I do not seem to be able to identify with—or as—nothingness.

The trick seems to be that I cannot get it with the mind, but that I can possibly get it some other way. Then the thought arises that I should be able to realize it through direct experience. It is as though I need to disengage myself from this body and float out into the

room and realize that I am still seeing and hearing everything. But that is not my direct experience, as I currently perceive it. I seem to be sitting here in a chair, striking this keyboard and writing this e-mail to you. So, what is the shift that needs to take place?

John: All I can say is—do not fall for these concepts!

Your experience and understanding are unfolding very nicely, and there is absolutely nothing wrong or missing! There is no one who needs to do anything, nor is there anything to be done—except to continue to see the false notions as false.

There is no need to identify with ‘that’ because you are that. You cannot really get it with the mind because the mind cannot get that which is prior to the mind. Nor can you get it through some other means because getting it implies that you haven’t got it. But we are talking about your present awareness or sense of beingness, which is clear and undeniably here. So you can see that this is a useless conceptual loop based on some false premises.

There is no answer at the level you are trying to find it. It is a false dilemma. The best approach is to question the whole basis of the problem to see if it is true. It is a conceptual loop that will keep you spinning until you see it. Once you do, you will laugh! What are all these ideas and doubts arising in right now? As Bob Adamson says, ‘What is wrong with right now, if you’re not thinking about it?’

A shift implies getting something that is not present and that is presumed to exist in the future. Inquire into these concepts. If they are false, then the whole problem evaporates. Awareness is going on right now quite naturally. Things are being registered quite naturally. That is your direct experience. When your focus is not engaged in concepts generated in thinking, your experience is a natural peace and clarity. This is your direct experience. Do not discount your understanding or direct experience.

As you trust yourself and your direct experience more and more, all the steam goes out of taking the mind too seriously in these matters. You are left with simple presence-awareness, which is light and clear with no problems in sight. That is what you are.

Q: Thank you. Steady as s(he) goes!

The Ever-Present Obvious

Question: This morning I awoke, and there was boundless, spacious beingness. I was not identifying with anything solid. There were thoughts there, but they faded into the background. There was breathing, but I was even before that. There was stillness, and out of that stillness came movement. My leg, which was not even being perceived, moved and it temporarily brought me out of the feeling of pure beingness.

Then my eyes opened, and the world appeared, along with the body, and I began to connect myself with it. But there was a different flavor with that initially. It didn't seem real, not in an overwhelming sense, but much more subtle. Possibly with the comparison to what I now found to be real everything else lost its solidness. Again, it was very subtle. My senses seemed to be amplified, the opening of a door sounded like heavy metal on metal. I seemed to be watching the movements of the body, rather than causing them.

I know from reading some of your articles that other people experience the spaciousness, and then it apparently disappears (and you tell them that they cannot ever get out of awareness). But that is what happened to me. I lost it! The 'experience of being' seemed to last for just a few minutes, and I kept trying to recreate the 'space' I was in. But I could not reconnect with it. I have heard that if you get a glimpse of this it will continue to widen until it is the constant place in which you reside. Do you find that to be true?

John: What happens is that you begin to notice the ever-present awareness-presence that is being pointed out. It seems unfamiliar because we have not been paying attention to it. In truth, it does not come and go and you do not lose it. It comes into view, seemingly momentarily, and then the focus goes back on the mind

and the content of awareness because that is the habit. As you get familiar with this it seems to come to the forefront and become more clearly recognized. Even so, it is that simple and undeniable sense of beingness that is right with you. You are just becoming acquainted with the ever-present natural state. It is good that this is being recognized. It will come up and be seen more and more now that you have some sense of what is being pointed out.

It is actually where you are residing all the time. Do not interpret it in terms of an experience or event occurring in time. Events and time arise right within you. You just naturally settle in with the recognition of the ever-present obvious.

The 'I' that is trying to create an experience or reconnect with it is just an empty thought. That is the false idea of separation. Do not fall for it! You are the space in which thought arises. There is nothing to do or not do from this position. You are the space of presence. What does the space of presence need to do to connect with the space of presence? Just recognize what is already the case!

What Is Perception?

Question: What is perception?

John: The question can be tackled in different ways. Basically, a perception is just a movement in awareness. Upon investigation, you find that actually there is no independent object apart from the perception itself, nor is there any subject apart from the perception. The perception or act of perceiving, in turn, has no independent existence apart from awareness. So, even when seeming perceptions occur, all there is is just awareness or non-duality. That awareness or non-duality is your true nature. From this viewpoint, perception is really just another name for your own existence. Even in the midst of perceptions, you never move away from oneness. The same applies to the arising of thoughts, feelings, sensations and any other experiences.

All Fear Is Not Normal or Necessary

Question: Perception seems to arise only with the manifestation of a perceiver.

John: The perception or act of perceiving is factual. Both the object and subject are postulated. But your being and awareness are always there beyond doubt.

Q: It seems that attention can be moved around.

John: By whom? All the inquiries into the nature of perception are somewhat problematic, as they are conducted by the mind looking at the mind. It may be all right as philosophy, but the resolution of fear and suffering lies in self-knowledge or a direct, non-conceptual realization of awareness or being itself. It is not a thing that can be grasped, but it can be realized. The mind is completely useless for this!

Q: The brain seems quieter than ever. But there still arises the residue of fear.

John: What is the fear? Unless you are referring to some natural bodily or animal fear, the fear can usually be traced to a particular concept which we have identified with our sense of self. This can be resolved through clear seeing and understanding.

Q: When looked at, it tells me that there is something that needs attending to.

John: Yes, unless it is based on a faulty, erroneous concept. Then, it needs to be exposed and seen for what it is. Without any more specifics on this, it is hard to say. If the fear is based upon the

belief in a separate self, then it is groundless. No amount of response to it would help much until the root is seen.

Q: It is almost like the brain demanding order. Awakening, if I may use that term, surely is not the end of past situations which have not been dealt with.

John: I have completely dropped the term ‘awakening’ from my vocabulary. There is no such thing. Time itself is concept, so you need to be sure you do not give too much weight to where your mind is leading you on this one! As far as situations which have not been dealt with—by whom?

You see, as you start into these kinds of apparently simple discussions you can get into muddy water. A lot of the assumptions upon which the thinking is predicated turn out to be very doubtful. Instead of resolving the mind’s dilemmas, it is more productive to question your premises.

Q: The right response seems to be the full-on doing of what needs doing as soon as possible.

John: I am not sure what you are referring to here.

Q: Fear is a useful warning system of present danger.

John: Sure, for real danger.

Q: If fear is arising it must be telling the system that something needs sorting out now.

John: Unless the fear is based on false premises. If you imagine a ghost in the closet, fear may arise. But it is not based on a valid cause. So all fear is not normal or necessary. If it is based on a faulty premise, it is better to get that resolved, rather than taking the fear to be legitimate and to trying to respond to it.

Q: The following metaphor has been used: It seems like the motor has been switched off, but the fan blades are still turning.

Gradually there seems to be less and less interest in this. However, I still feel the need to put some things right that can be put right.

John: This all sounds good. I am not really that keen on the revolving fan metaphor. Some people seem to use it to explain ongoing suffering that is not truly resolved. They have the idea that 'I am there' and explain away self-centered suffering as the winding down of the past momentum. That is all well and good if the basics are truly seen. A lot of times the root is not truly resolved and the explanation is just a gloss over the play of separation, which is in full swing. It takes a bit of honesty to look directly and see whether the belief in separation is in play. No amount of non-dual words will clear it up. But some sincere looking will.

In my experience, when the seeing of the non-existence of the separate 'I' registers, there is a decisive cutting of the root. There is not much room for having to deal with unresolved issues. Unresolved for whom? Questions themselves are an expression of the feeling that something is missing. Awareness does not need to answer any questions or resolve any issues. Still, if something comes up to act on or resolve, then that is the natural intelligence within you moving in that direction. Follow the promptings of your own heart and you cannot go wrong.